

CPA Progress Assessment

23 June 2005



CPA Progress Assessment

North Shropshire District Council

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Progress assessments

In 2002, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced at single tier and county councils (ST&CCs), and at district councils in 2003/04, as a way of supporting councils to deliver improvements in services to local people.

CPA brought together existing information on service performance in councils with a corporate assessment of each council's ability to improve. This was used to reach an overall conclusion about whether a council was 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'weak' or 'poor'.

Those councils classified as 'poorly performing'¹, were the subject of formal engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and were required to produce a recovery/improvement plan following their CPA. Through its network of relationship managers, the Commission worked closely with the lead officials assigned by the ODPM in developing an appropriate monitoring programme for the recovery/improvement plan.

The progress assessment will measure the impact and sustainability of Council's improvement activity. Where necessary, it will report on regress. The progress assessment is tailored to local circumstances, provides appropriate public assurance and contributes to improvement reporting. It will report an evidence-based judgement on progress against the original corporate assessment criteria, but it will not give a score.

The progress assessment is part of the Commission's commitment to helping councils ensure continuous improvement to services for local people. It does this in the context of its strategic regulation principles which look to minimise the burden of regulation at the same time as maximising its impact. We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators and the ODPM in this aim.

¹ 'Poorly performing' is defined as councils that were classified as 'poor' or 'weak' with a corporate assessment score of 1.

Introduction

- 1 In March 2004 the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of North Shropshire District Council. This assessment categorised the Council as poor. The key strengths and weaknesses from this assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 2 This report presents an analysis of the Council's progress to date based on the Council's implementation of its improvement and recovery plan and comparison with the baseline position of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Summary and recommendations

- 3 North Shropshire District Council has **made some progress** since it was categorised as a poor authority in 2004, particularly around improving its corporate structures and strategies, but this has only resulted in limited progress in improving service delivery and performance as the new structures and strategies are all relatively new.
- 4 The Council performance on improving service delivery and performance has been mixed, some services have improved whilst others have deteriorated.
- 5 It is progressing well towards:
 - changing its culture to have a greater focus on improvement;
 - putting the building blocks of a more effective Local Authority in place (new senior officers, new member and officer structures, new HR policies and new HR, Communication and Procurement strategies); and
 - delivering improvements in some priority front line services (eg Planning and Waste Management), although other areas are not yet improving (eg homelessness, access to services, waste minimisation).
- 6 The Council is now clearer about what it is trying to achieve through its new vision and priorities. It has also appreciated the reality of its financial position and demonstrated the capacity to make difficult decisions.
- 7 There has been a significant improvement in the way the Council sets about delivering its priorities at member level. The Executive and Scrutiny structure is developing into a real area of strength. Scrutiny members are enthusiastic, engaged, and working effectively with the Executive.
- 8 However, the Council has made only limited progress at embedding the new systems and structures it has developed. Many of the changes are recent as there was a hiatus following the original CPA judgement before interim management arrangements were put in place and recovery action began in earnest. Furthermore, the Council's corporate vision and priorities are likely to need refining in the medium-term as the Community Strategy is revised and future business planning cycles need to ensure that resources are more closely aligned to service priorities.
- 9 Further, the Council is falling behind in some areas, such as engagement with partners and local people. In particular, relationships within the LSP and with the regional development agency (Advantage West Midlands), county, town and parish councils are not fully effective. For example, having decided no longer to invest in the Market Towns Initiative, the Council faces challenges. It needs to develop its district-wide approach for engaging with partners, to ensure the inward investment necessary to deliver against its priority of greater economic regeneration and job opportunity.

- 10 The Council also needs to work harder at communicating key decisions so that the community understands the reasons why they are made, managing their impact, and working effectively with partners to identify and deliver shared solutions. This is particularly true regarding the Council's cessation of funding to Wem swimming pool.
- 11 It is recommended that the Council:
 - actively and promptly shares the findings of this progress assessment with staff;
 - takes it to an appropriate public committee meeting; and
 - uses the key findings as the basis for revising the recovery plan in conjunction with any direction from the Monitoring Board.

Context

The locality

- 12 North Shropshire is a large, sparsely populated rural district, which covers an area of 262 square miles, and has a population of 58,117. It is north of Shrewsbury and borders Cheshire, Staffordshire and North Wales. The main centres are the small market towns of Wem, Ellesmere, Market Drayton and Whitchurch, and half the population live in villages and rural areas.
- 13 The rural economy is changing, with agriculture and related industries declining. Regeneration and economic development are key concerns of local people. Unemployment is below regional and national averages, as are average wages. There are average levels of deprivation with isolated pockets. Whitchurch West is among the 25 per cent most deprived wards in England.
- 14 The main transport links are the A41 and A49, which run north to south but east west links are mainly on more minor roads. There is a lack of public transport which creates problems of access to services and jobs, especially for those in rural areas. This is a key concern of local people.
- 15 The district has slightly below average numbers of young people, and slightly above average of people over the age of retirement. Only 2.5 per cent of the population are from non-white communities.
- 16 The district has seen a rise in the number of people moving to the area - many to retire there. House prices are high. This, and the below national average wages earned by people in the district, means that affordable housing is a significant issue for local people.

The Council

- 17 The Council has 40 councillors, with 18 councillors in an independent group including 1 Liberal Democrat, 16 Conservative, 4 Labour and 2 councillors not affiliated to a group. The Council on 31 August 2004 adopted an Executive Committee supported by 3 Overview and Scrutiny panels as its political structure. It has a Development Control Committee, a Licensing Committee and a Standards Committee. All political groups are represented on the Executive. The Chairman of the Council is not affiliated to a group and was elected as chairman in May 2003. The Vice Chair is from the Conservative group.
- 18 The Council has a workforce of 357, although this is set to fall in this and future years in line with the Council's budget. The Council, in its budget, is planning to maintain reserves and balances of £900,000, with a revenue budget of just under £7 million.

What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 19 The Council is now clearer about what it is trying to achieve.
- 20 The Council has made progress in defining its Ambitions. Following consultation, the Council has adopted a Vision for 'The provision of essential value for money high performing services that benefit the people in North Shropshire'. It has also adopted priority themes:
- affordable housing for local people in need;
 - greater economic regeneration and job opportunity through inward investment;
 - increased recycling and reduced waste;
 - cleaner and safer streets in our towns and villages; and
 - development of our staff and organisation to be customer-focused.

In addition, it has identified and clearly expressed its non-priorities.

- 21 The Council has developed a new Corporate Plan 2005/08 based on the priority themes and a revised Community Strategy for the district is being developed.
- 22 However, it is not entirely clear how achievement of the vision and priorities will be measured. The vision is not expressed in terms of measurable outcomes, and whilst the Corporate Plan does set out milestones and a range of outcome, performance and task related targets, progress against some of the priorities can be judged more easily (eg 52 new affordable homes during 2005/06, waste arising reduced to 400kg per household), than others (eg safer streets, greater economic regeneration).
- 23 Whilst there was formal consultation on the new priorities, significant statutory partners (eg county, parish and town councils) were not effectively engaged and it is unclear how demographic and performance data was used to inform the choice (eg evidence that streets are not currently clean, or safe). The Council's non-priorities have not been expressed in terms of their policy implications.
- 24 North Shropshire has prioritised other areas of its recovery ahead of facilitating revision of the local Community Strategy. Although work is underway, the revised Community Strategy is not yet in place to articulate a shared vision for the district, within which the Council's own priorities can sit. As well as the local impact of this at county-level, the district's impact will be diminished compared to other districts, as its community priorities will miss the deadline to feed into the Shropshire Integrated Community Strategy.

- 25 The Authority has appreciated the reality of its financial position and demonstrated the capacity to make difficult decisions. The Council had to make significant revenue savings in order to set a budget for 2005/06 that maintained adequate balances whilst keeping council tax increases within capping limits. Budgetary decisions were informed by the emerging priorities and to a greater extent the non-priorities, which were themselves clear expressions of areas for disinvestment. A full business and financial planning cycle, in which all service areas plan towards delivery of corporate priorities is yet to take place.
- 26 Whilst the Council is making progress by determining non-priorities (and recognises the need to secure savings), it needs to work harder at communicating key decisions so that the community understands the reasons why they are made, bringing them along with decisions, managing their impact, and working effectively with partners to identify and deliver shared solutions. This is particularly true regarding the Council's cessation of funding to Wem swimming pool.
- 27 In relation to its priority of greater economic regeneration and job opportunity through inward investment, the Council faces challenges, and needs to develop its district-wide approach to engaging with partners, to ensure the inward investment necessary. Whilst involved in a range of regeneration activity through the Shropshire Investment Bureau, the Rural Regeneration Zone, use of its own land holdings and planning policy, the Council has ceased funding for the Market Towns Initiative. Partners in this regeneration scheme (including the regional development agency Advantage West Midlands, county and town councils) have not been effectively engaged in the decision and the Council has been unclear in explaining its reasoning and future intentions. The Council acknowledges that it rushed decisions without giving appropriate time for contingency plans to be worked out.
- 28 The Authority has invested in developing its own ability to deliver more effectively in future (training and development, new posts and structures). However, as a small Authority with limited resources it needs to work effectively in partnership with other agencies and the local community. The Council is not yet providing visible and corporate leadership to some of its key partnerships. The North Shropshire LSP is ineffective and partners feel that partnership working is not given sufficient force and priority in the Corporate Plan. Relations with partners have been damaged by the way the Council has realigned its budget. The Council is putting effort into reviewing partnerships and engaging actively with its partners, not least on improving the effectiveness of the North Shropshire LSP. However, the Council's review of partnerships, which is central to establishing its future direction in this area, has fallen behind schedule: It now plans to review significant partnerships from June onwards (after the Integrated Countywide Community Strategy is produced). The Authority does not have a clear policy on the personal responsibilities of its members and officers when representing the Authority on constituted partnerships (eg Companies limited by guarantee).

- 29 The Council needs to decide how to engage better with local communities in future, particularly hard to reach groups. There is some consideration of Area Forums, although there are no firm plans and other options are also being considered.
- 30 The focus for the organisation in recent months has been internal, as various building blocks for corporate recovery have been developed (new policies, strategies, structures etc). In particular there has been clear focus on delivering against the recovery plan. Adoption of PRINCE II project management techniques have helped maintain this. Senior members and officers are strongly committed to organisational recovery, and are working hard to ensure it continues.
- 31 Members are now taking more of a leading role in the Authority, with the adoption of an Executive and Scrutiny model. Political Leadership is much improved, as is the focus of Corporate Management Team.
- 32 The Authority is increasingly approaching service delivery from a district-wide perspective, rather than seeking to replicate services in all market towns and thus spreading limited resources too thinly (eg rationalisation of swimming pool provision). However, with the exception of the decision on the swimming pools, which was informed by analysis of demand, accessibility of facilities and running costs, there has been no systematic analysis of the needs of the diverse community (in particular young people and those in rural areas) to inform service changes.

How has Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 33 The Council has taken a number of steps to increase its capacity and make more effective use of existing resources within its budgetary constraints but this has had mixed success.
- 34 Significant improvement has been made in member development. The Executive and Scrutiny structure is developing into a real area of strength. Scrutiny members are enthusiastic, engaged, and working effectively with the Executive. Scrutiny is challenging the Executive Committee on decisions as well as helping to develop council policy, by undertaking effective, well-researched investigations (eg on lettings and street cleansing).
- 35 The Council is seeking to strengthen officer capacity. An organisational restructure has been started, with the intention of decreasing silo working, increasing customer focus, creating business units and enabling a cross-cutting culture. An Organisational Development team has been created to draw together policy, HR, training and development and performance management. Two additional posts, a Scrutiny Officer and a Customer and IT Services Manager who leads on communication, have strengthened the corporate centre of the organisation. Interim management has brought new ideas, direction, and energy to bolster the Council's recovery. The new structure provides a framework for the incoming Chief Executive to take forward. Layers below service manager have not yet been restructured.
- 36 A skills audit has been carried out resulting in a training and development programme for officers and members. The Authority has adopted the WMLGA training charter and plans to achieve level 1 by July 2005. Attendance at training to date has been good and feedback positive. In addition, the Authority has been successful in obtaining £135,000 of capacity building funds to further develop and target the programme.
- 37 An Employee Development Scheme (EDS) has been introduced, but because it predated the new Corporate Priorities, it has yet to prove an effective tool for translating policy from corporate to individual level. Whilst some work has been done by senior officers to identify blockages in the current officer structure, middle management competence and capacity has not been formally assessed. There has not yet been a systematic evaluation of whether the Council has got people with the right skills in the right places to deliver its priorities. The Employee Development Reviews have the potential to identify gaps in competence and we recognise that the Council plans to use these over the coming twelve months to review this. The focus to date has been on staff skills and training to deliver improved performance.

- 38 Capacity however remains stretched and this potentially presents a risk both to corporate recovery and improvement of front line services (eg leisure, homelessness). This is exacerbated by the levels of staff absence. Average sickness of more than 12.88 days to end Februar 2005 is very high, and marks an increase from 11.9 in 2003/04 and a failure to hit the target of ten days. A new Managing Attendance Policy has recently been introduced.
- 39 Performance management remains weak. Although a performance management process linked to a new management information system is being introduced, the Council cannot yet demonstrate the discipline and culture that will be required to make this truly effective. Implementation has been delayed by production of the Corporate Plan, restructuring and the impact of budget cuts all requiring revisions to service plans. Although there is some performance monitoring and reporting at service level and to management team, routine quarterly performance reporting to give senior managers an overview of corporate performance is not yet in place. The performance management framework is not yet fully integrated into an annual service and financial planning cycle.
- 40 All service plans are underpinned by action plans and a new general ledger system is also being introduced which will enable better financial monitoring linked to performance. However, some of the targets in the corporate plan are not challenging, and it is unclear how progress against some of the Corporate Priorities will be assessed (eg cleaner, safer streets, greater economic regeneration). In some cases key PIs are not collected (eg BVPI 199 the percentage of relevant land that is littered to a significant or heavy extent, which links directly to the priority to have cleaner and safer streets).
- 41 A Corporate Communications Framework and Strategy, Human Resources and Learning Strategy and Procurement Strategy were recently adopted. All focus on putting in place the right building blocks at an operational level rather than being a strategic analysis of the organisation's engagement with its stakeholders, HR needs or future procurement direction, and will probably need to be revisited in the medium-term.
- 42 Forty per cent of services are now e-enabled with plans to increase this to 100 per cent by December 2005. The Council has secured £500,000 external funding over two years to support delivery of the IEG agenda. This re-engineering and e-enabling of services will be crucial to successful implementation of the new Customer Service Centre, and as such, presents a significant strategic risk to the Authority which it will need to manage over the coming months.
- 43 The Council should be able to do this effectively as there is a growing integration of risk management into the way the Authority is managed. A risk management strategy backed by strategic, corporate and service-based risk logs are in place and used.
- 44 Communication with staff has improved although it is perceived as mostly top down and staff working outside Edinburgh House feel less connected and involved than those at the centre.

What has Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 45 The Council performance on improving service delivery and performance has been mixed, some services have improved whilst others have deteriorated.
- 46 The direction of travel of the performance indicators in 2003/04 when compared to 2002/03 is detailed below. Some 36 per cent of indicators improved but 32 per cent worsened.

Table 1 Direction of travel

Performance	Number	%
Improving	19	36
Worsening	17	32
No change	17	32
Total	53	100

- 47 In respect of indicators which saw performance decline to 2003/04, the most significant changes where the decrease was over 15 per cent were:
- accuracy of recovering overpayments of housing benefit and council tax benefit - 24 per cent;
 - cost of household waste collection per household - 47 per cent, reflecting the Council introducing wheeled bins and a green waste collection service; and
 - cost of planning per head of population - up 33 per cent in 2003/04 but with initial figures for 2004/05 showing it back down to 3 per cent above 2002/03 levels.
- 48 Performance against initial figures for best value performance indicators (BVPIs) in 2004/05 is mixed. Several PI's have consistently been in the best (eg average council house re-let time, percentage of council tax collected, domestic burglary) and worst quartiles (eg average working days lost to sickness, public interactions capable of electronic service delivery) over the past three years. Performance on benefits PIs has been an area of improvement that has been commended by the Department for Work and Pensions. It is pleasing that the time taken to process benefit claims has reduced significantly placing the Council's performance in the top 25 per cent of all authorities.
- 49 Three services in particular were singled out in the CPA report published in 2004 as areas for improvement: Planning, Waste Management and Housing.

- 50 Planning will be integral to delivering the Council's affordable homes and regeneration priorities. There have been some significant recent improvements and investments in the service, which are already visible to the public. A pre-application service is now available, a more appropriate scheme of delegation is in place which in turn has speeded up applications. There has been training for committee members and a new Head of Service has brought better management.
- 51 Recycling, waste minimisation and street cleansing have been confirmed as priority themes for the Council and again there have been improvements. The proportion of waste composted and recycled increased in 2003/04 to 16 per cent, exceeding the Council's target of 10 per cent and the percentage of waste composted increased further to 21 per cent in 2004/05 with the introduction of green waste bins. However, kerbside collection of dry recyclables has been delayed and the percentage of waste recycled dropped in 2004/05 (from 6.57 per cent to 6 per cent) due to a significant increase in the total amount of waste collected (up from 399kg to 479kg), due to the huge success of the green waste service. The Council has set a target of bringing this back down to 400kg for 2005/06, but although engaged in waste minimisation schemes, there are no robust plans to achieve such a significant reduction. There is low satisfaction with street cleansing
- 52 There is a similarly mixed picture in housing. A stock condition survey has been completed and a thirty-year business plan is in place. Milestones have been hit on the Stock Options Appraisal, and LSVT has emerged from work with tenants as the preferred option. Allocations policy has changed following a scrutiny report and rent arrears have improved. However, complaints about the homelessness service are high and capacity is stretched, the empty property strategy was not fully delivered and there has been some slippage of void performance. Affordable housing is now a priority with a target of 52 additional homes per year. None were delivered in 2003/04, whilst in 2004/05, 27 had been delivered by January.

In the light of what Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?

- 53 The Council has developed a number of ambitious plans and strategies. But because these are all in the early stages of implementation, it may be some time before these are integrated together and embedded within the organisation to impact on service delivery and performance.
- 54 The Council has developed a number of plans and strategies recently which focus on putting in place the right building blocks at an operational level. As these plans and strategies are relatively new they will no doubt require refining in future years, but are a good base to build from. Due to the timescale for revision of the Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan 2005/08 had to be drawn up first and will, therefore need refining as part of the business planning cycle in the autumn, once the new Community Strategy is in place. In addition, key partners were not effectively engaged in the consultation on the current vision and priorities in the Corporate Plan and not all of the priorities have quantifiable outcome targets set against them to measure performance. The alignment of the budget to service priorities also needs more refinement.
- 55 Members and senior officers are now much more self-aware, due in part to the recent introduction of skills training and the new Employee Development Scheme. There has also been a culture change at the top of the organisation which has engendered a much more open and inclusive approach.
- 56 The Council is becoming more user-focused, and has a Customer Service Centre at the heart of its customers first agenda. Building work starts in July, although a single reception is already operating.
- 57 The Corporate Communications Strategy seeks to increase understanding of the Council's Vision and Priorities. Linked to this, the Framework for Communications and Consultation shows the Council bringing together the Corporate Communication and Consultation Strategy, the IEG Strategy, the Council's ICT Strategy, other procedure documents, guidance for staff and members, and compacts with its stakeholders. However, integration of these strands is at an early stage of development.
- 58 The Council is trying to improve communication with stakeholders. This implies the need to measure performance, review the strategy and learn from experiences. Externally, the Council has produced more press releases, but positive external communication remains a difficulty.
- 59 Future plans are focused around the Recovery Plan, the Corporate Plan 2005/08 and the emerging Community Strategy, currently being revised. The Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan were rated as good by central government.

- 60 The Council has identified various indicators and targets in its Corporate Plan 2005/08. Some of these are outcome-focused (eg the provision of 100 new jobs per year), however many are process-orientated, (eg the targets for sustainable transport relate to funding and identifying options). The Council will therefore find it difficult to judge whether it is making a real difference.
- 61 The lack of a comprehensive staff survey since changes began to be implemented means that there is no baseline of staff attitudes, views and perceptions which could be used to track improvement against the organisational development agenda. There are indications that staff morale is variable across the organisation.
- 62 Learning and evaluation is still at an early stage. A large number of changes have had to be introduced rapidly in recent months, and understandably the Authority has not yet had the opportunity to reflect on the operation and impact of these changes fully.

Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signed up to challenging county LPSA targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term vision and ambitions are vague and weak. Community strategy and corporate plan not sufficiently outcome-focused. Poor engagement with community and partners. Poor leadership within the organisation and in partnerships.
Focus	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus has been maintained on priority area of keeping council tax low. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of sustained focus on priorities. Inadequate focus on rural communities. Scrutiny work plans are not linked to priorities. Corporate plans not focused on local priorities. Poor agendas and decision making impede focus.

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004 19

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Prioritisation	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional resources provided to ensure wheeled bins priority is successfully introduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority not clearly linked to community needs and strategy. • No non-priorities identified. • Basic, poor intelligence hinders effective prioritisation. • Poor communication of vision, aims and priorities internally and externally. • Resources not consistently targeted to deliver priorities.
Capacity	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards board established. • Debt-free status and adequate financial standing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors have not driven change, but now beginning to address some issues. • Management team strategic capacity is weak. • Overview and scrutiny is ineffective. • HR policies and practice weak. • Alternative service delivery options not considered. • Little partnership working with LSP to increase capacity.

20 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Performance management	1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms are not in place to manage performance. • Service planning does not systematically contribute to corporate objectives. • No systematic risk assessment. • Service standards and performance are not publicised. • Poor assessment of value for money.
Achievement in quality of service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good performance on revenue collection. • Council houses are in reasonable condition. • Good range of sports and some art activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to provide consistently high quality services. • Low overall satisfaction with council services. • Fifty-one per cent of performance indicators below average, with twenty per cent in bottom twenty-five per cent of all councils. • Some aspects of housing management are poor and local housing needs are not being addressed. • Inadequate child protection measures. • Limited access for the public.

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004 **21**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling performance significantly improved. • Good performance on reducing non-decent homes. • Market town enhancements. • Support for work-based learning. • Recent improvements in benefits processing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services are not being consistently improved with 63 per cent of comparable BVPIs worse and some key LPSA targets not being met. • Overall satisfaction with council services and street cleanliness has declined. • Poor performance on balancing housing markets and delivering affordable homes. • Few benefits from community strategy. • Sports development, skate park and youth pods but overall few facilities for young people across the district.

22 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Investment	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some success in gaining external funding, eg capacity building. • Capacity increased to improve e-government, performance management system and development control deficiencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited and inefficient community engagement. • Systems and processes to drive performance management and continuous improvement not in place. • Little effective joint working with LSP partners with little impact. • No systematic approach to training of councillors and staff. • Budget not linked to corporate plan priorities and resources. • Capacity to deliver decent homes standard not maximised. • Slow and limited improvement from internal and external challenge. • No modern procurement strategy or approaches. • Best value reviews lack customer focus.

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004 23

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Learning	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior councillors aware of the need for change. • Using good practice to address identified problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable self-awareness among councillors and senior officers slows progress. • Failure to address known ineffective scrutiny arrangements. • Learning and development not systematically addressed. • Internal learning culture is underdeveloped. • Few effective processes so learning is not systematically shared throughout the Council.
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior councillors seeking to align resources and priorities. • Planning to introduce performance management framework in October 2004. • Working towards integrated waste management in partnership. • Draft replacement local plan links with community strategy and local priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall plans for improvement and change are not robust. • Quality of statutory plans is mixed and variable. • Plans for equality are underdeveloped. • No specific plans to improve community and user engagement. • Slow progress on plans to improve communication. • No approved plans to address skills and capacity.

24 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004

Scoring key:

- 1 - Weak
- 2 - Weaknesses outweigh strengths
- 3 - Strengths outweigh weaknesses
- 4 - Strong

Appendix 2 - Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 63 The original comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2004.
- 64 Under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 ('the Act'), best value authorities have a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions, having regard to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By virtue of sections 10 and 13 of the Act, the Audit Commission may carry out inspection activity to ensure that a best value authority is complying with this duty, and may issue a report as to its findings. This progress monitoring activity and reporting to assess improvement falls within sections 3, 10 and 13.
- 65 The main elements of this progress monitoring report were collation and analysis of evidence from:
- self-assessments of progress made, completed by the Council;
 - appointed auditor evidence from performance and financial audit activity;
 - audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments;
 - reviews of key corporate documents including performance reports, committee papers and management reports; and
 - observations, interviews and focus groups with managers, staff, customers and partner organisations.
- 66 This progress monitoring report for North Shropshire District Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from July 2004 to April 2005.
- 67 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for reporting progress to any Monitoring Board and updating and improving any Improvement/Recovery Plan as appropriate.