

CPA Progress Assessment

6 June 2005



Progress Assessment Report

Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council

Audit 2004/2005

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Progress assessments

- 1 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.
- 2 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'.
- 3 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.
- 4 The progress assessment will measure the impact and sustainability of the 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.
- 5 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

- 6 In April 2004, the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'weak'. The key strengths and weaknesses from this assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 7 This report presents an analysis of the Council's progress at the end of April 2005, 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

- 8 The Council is making only limited progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the corporate assessment report in 2004.
- 9 The Council was initially slow to react to the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) but now has adopted a one-year improvement plan with agreed delivery arrangements. The plan has five integrated themes, which clearly respond to the areas of weakness identified in the CPA Report.
- 10 Implementing the improvement plan started well as the Council had already established an officer improvement team. However, the Council has failed to achieve many of the 'milestones' within self-determined deadlines and momentum has slowed since the beginning of the year. Although some of these deadlines were challenging, there has been insufficient unity of purpose and commitment at political and management levels to the resourcing and delivery of the improvement plan. The consequence is a threat to the credibility of the Council's focus and stamina to achieve improvements.
- 11 In particular, there has been difficulty agreeing an overarching vision and priorities. Delay here has held up the delivery of related projects on priority-led budgeting, performance management and the review of the community strategy. Thus, although the Council is taking steps to address the issues raised in the CPA Report and has started work in a number of areas, progress overall has been slow.
- 12 The Council is now close to defining its ambitions through a new vision and priorities for the next five years. The Council has not determined what will not be the priorities. Once in place, the Council will have a framework to focus its resources but the need to make 'hard' decisions will remain.
- 13 Capacity issues are being addressed. The Council is developing priority-led forward financial budgeting. There has been increased joint working with other councils and agencies and the introduction of member and management training programmes. However, a workforce development strategy is now overdue and until the Council is more adept at prioritisation capacity will continue to be a problem.
- 14 Performance management is still weak and a system is not yet in place. A member of staff with specific responsibility for developing a system has been appointed recently.
- 15 The Council's performance is good in some service areas, housing benefits and housing management in particular, but the Council's services have not improved since 2002/03. For example, planning services showed a significant decline over the period and environmental health and waste management is still poor. There has been an increase in the use of hostels for homelessness. Sixty-eight per cent of 2003/04 national indicators show declining performance and 35 per cent are in the worst national quartile. Berwick, at 43 per cent, has the lowest level of resident satisfaction of all the Northumberland district councils.

16 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

- 17 Berwick upon Tweed is located in Northumberland and is the northern-most borough in England. The Borough is bordered to the north and west by Scotland and to the east by the North Sea and covers an area of 370 square miles.
- 18 The resident population is 26,132, making Berwick upon Tweed the second smallest local authority area (by population) in England. The Borough is mainly rural, with half the population living in the town of Berwick and no other settlement exceeding 2,000 people. The black and minority ethnic population is very low, standing at 1.4 per cent. Almost 25 per cent of the population are of pensionable age, compared with a UK average of 18 per cent.
- 19 During the summer months, an influx of visitors increases the Borough population to an estimated 100,000. Most visitors stay at holiday centres and camps located in the coastal areas. There has been a marked increase in second/holiday homes in the Borough. This usage accounts for 8.46 per cent of the total housing stock (comparison with Northumberland at 1.73 per cent and the UK at 0.64 per cent).
- 20 Unemployment in the Borough is 3.1 per cent, higher than the national average of 2.5 per cent but lower than the regional average of 3.3 per cent. The Borough is ranked 86th in the list of most deprived local authority areas in England and 47 per cent of the population lives within wards which are considered within the 25 per cent most deprived in the country. There have been no significant changes to the locality since 2002 that are relevant to the judgements in this report.

The Council

- 21 Since the CPA inspection the political composition of the Council has changed slightly, although there is still no group in overall control. The Council has 29 councillors split, 14 Conservative, 7 Liberal Democrat, 6 Independents, and 2 New Labour Independents. The governance structure adopted by the Council has a leader, two policy committees (Corporate Services, and Regeneration and Environment) and an Overview and Scrutiny Committee chaired by the Liberal Democrat Group. When necessary working groups are established by the policy committees to consider particular issues or services.
- 22 The Council employs 146 full-time and 28 part-time staff in three Directorates – Environment; Regeneration and Development, and Corporate Services. The Council's gross revenue budget for 2004/05 was £19.63 million and the capital programme £2.9 million.

What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 23 Progress in this area has been limited. The Council has not addressed key weaknesses relating to the development of vision and priorities and the lack of focus and prioritisation linked to the absence of effective performance management arrangements and clear action plans.
- 24 The existing community strategy and corporate plan are aligned to drive the ambitions of the Council. However, in its improvement plan the Council recognised the need to develop urgently a new vision for itself and to develop firmer priorities by November 2004. The Improvement Board has had difficulty achieving the required level of consensus between parties however, and members not on the Improvement Board have remained detached from the improvement plan. A new vision and set of priorities for the Council have now been drafted but have not yet been approved by the Council nor have they been subjected to wider consultation. The consequence is that no detailed action plan or integrated resource plan to deliver the priorities can be put in place until this phase is completed.
- 25 Prioritisation consequently remains a weakness although there is a belief that the new set of priorities will enable the Council to prioritise the use of resources and make 'hard decisions' more easily. However, the proposed new vision has 15 priority actions and which of these will be lesser priorities for the Council is not clarified. The draft vision sets a five-year timescale for the delivery of the new priorities and has targets geared to strengthening the Council's strategic approach to economic and community development and regeneration; quality of life, and access to services.
- 26 The need to strengthen focus remains as exemplified by the progress with the improvement plan itself. Steps are being taken to improve performance in this area through refining the Council meeting processes and providing training for members of the scrutiny and overview committee but these actions have had little impact to date. The scrutiny and overview committee is scheduled to review progress with the implementation of the improvement plan in December 2005. The absence of a performance management system remains a gap in the mechanisms to maintain focus.
- 27 The delay in the commitment to an agreed vision with a limited number of key priorities, and by implication the identification of non-priorities, has meant delays in the introduction of full policy-based budgeting until 2006/07, in the development of the new corporate plan and the introduction of the performance management framework. Staff remain unclear about the Council's top priorities and are confused as to the importance of delivering the improvement plan priorities relative to other Council priorities.

How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 28 The Council has made limited progress in this area. The improvement plan identifies the need to address key CPA weaknesses relating to human resource strategy, performance monitoring and management framework and partnership working but little progress has been made in delivering the improvements proposed.
- 29 The Council was slow to put an improvement plan in place. The possibility of regional reorganisation was a significant issue which diverted staff during this period, however, a robust plan was agreed in November 2004. Delivery of the improvement plan was supported moreover by the existence of both an Improvement Board, including senior management and group leaders, and an improvement team. The plan is a one-year improvement programme with five themes – Leadership; Culture Change; Vision and Priorities; Getting Things Done; and Partnerships. The 27 actions within these themes can be clearly related to addressing the weaknesses listed in the CPA Report. Each action has a specific timescale, set by the Council, for completion. However, concern over the resources available to deliver the improvement plan, have been raised at full council, but the Council has not made a decision which resolves this issue.
- 30 The Council is taking steps to resolve the confusion between the roles of councillors and officers, and a training programme for both councillors and management level staff is underway. The leadership and strategic role of councillors is an important element of this training and is having an impact. However, the lack of commitment and engagement with the improvement process amongst some councillors has still to be overcome. The improvement plan recognises the confusion in roles and the respective roles of the Board and the Team are clearly defined.
- 31 The Council lacks an effective performance management framework despite this being an early objective in the improvement plan. Consistent procedures to collect data on progress with national performance indicators are weak and few local performance indicators are in place. The Council has set out how it intends to implement an annual planning and review process which links the corporate plans to the budget and to service plans. This process includes individual performance review meetings to link personal targets to broader service and corporate objectives. The absence of a performance management framework impacts on the Council's ability to monitor progress on corporate objectives and improvements to service.
- 32 Steps have been taken to address this important issue through the appointment of an officer to develop and introduce such as system. The focus so far however, has been on developing a progress monitoring system for the improvement plan and this is now in place.

- 33 Weaknesses remain in the Council's human resources procedures. The Council still does not have a workforce development strategy in place and although listed as an improvement plan action the deadline has not been met. There is a staff appraisal system in place but this is inconsistently applied to be fully effective in developing staff. Training and development opportunities for staff identified through the system are limited and lead to lost opportunities to develop skills in the Council staff. The impact is a lack of effective support to managers in relation to human resource issues and frustration over career progression within the Council on the part of staff.
- 34 As a small district, the Council has limited financial resources. Expenditure of agreed and existing budgets is effectively controlled. The Council is moving toward a system of policy-led budgeting as part of the implementation of its overall annual planning framework. This will not be fully in place until the 2006/07 financial year however, and the current year is one of transition. The policy-led budgeting process also links to service planning, as it depends on initial decisions on priorities and resource allocations being made at service level. The Council recently agreed a new format for service plans and new service plans are on target for completion by the end of April 2005.
- 35 The Council recognises that its capacity can be increased by working in partnership both on a regional basis with other local authorities and agencies, and locally with stakeholders in the economy and community. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) development has been slow and partner engagement hindered by structural and operational issues resulting in a dip in strategic and delivery activity. The LSP now has formal structures agreed, the Community Plan is in draft and when approved delivery of the priorities will be driven forward through Sector Boards and Working Groups. Concerns over the future of the LSP remain however, as funding for the co-ordinator post March 2006 has not been confirmed.
- 36 The Council participates in a wide range of other partnerships but is unclear about how this participation should contribute to the achievement of community objectives. The improvement plan identifies the need to review the Council's approach to partnership working and to make it more effective. The Council has completed its review of partnership working within the timescale set out in the improvement plan but further progress on the issue is pending receipt of the auditor's report on partnership arrangements.
- 37 The pace of joint working is showing an increase in practice however. The Council has already carried out joint research with neighbouring authorities into housing needs and the developed its website using external funding to improve electronic access to services. The Berwick Borough Strategic Partnership recently put its revised formal structures in place and recently agreed the new community plan after a period when progress was slow. It is too early for these changes to have had an impact.

What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 38 The Council's services have not improved since 2002/03. Some services continue to be delivered to a high standard (for example, most housing and housing benefit services) but service performance has deteriorated in a limited number of areas which were seen as strengths in the CPA report in 2004.
- 39 Residents' satisfaction with the Council has declined and is the lowest of the Northumberland districts at 43 per cent. Recent analysis of audited national performance indicators shows that 68 per cent have deteriorated since 2002/03 and 35 per cent of indicators are in the worst quartile nationally.
- 40 The Council's performance on benefits was fair to good and performance indicators showed the maintenance of a high level of performance in 2003/04. In relation to housing the Council performance is mixed. Progress is being made on the housing stock options appraisal. Two options – stock transfer and stock retention, are being subjected to further appraisal and tenant consultation with final recommendations being presented to the full council in June, thus meeting the government timetable of signing off the preferred option by July 2005. The proportion of non-decent local authority homes in 2003/04 is very low. The Council deals with voids quickly although repairs response times have fallen in 2003/04. The use of hostels for homeless families rose substantially however.
- 41 Although retaining best quartile status, there was a marginal deterioration in three out of five community safety indicators. A significant decline occurred in the planning service with performance being in the bottom quartile nationally on most indicators. The Council has taken action to remedy this performance although this may not produce improvement until 2005/06. There was no improvement in the percentage of council buildings accessible to people with disabilities. The Council did improve its performance in environmental health enforcement best practice, including increasing the number of health and safety inspections, but standards remain in the bottom quartile here.
- 42 Areas of improvement include waste collection and recycling, but performance is still in the worst 25 per cent nationally. Furthermore, the January 2005 waste management inspection judged the service as only 'fair' with 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. The Council is making good progress in the public interactions capable of electronic delivery. The Council did retain best quartile status in the community safety indicators.
- 43 The Council's performance in investment to achieve improvement in areas of corporate weakness is mixed. Significant elements of the improvement plan have not been delivered, including culture change workshops to embed improvement into the organisation, the introduction of a risk management strategy and establishing user related service standards consistently into all services.

- 44** External resources have been secured to implement some elements of the improvement plan, eg training programmes. However, after an encouraging start, the Council has lost momentum in the delivery of the improvement plan. The Council has found the setting of a new vision and targets a particularly difficult process and this has had an impact on other aspects of the improvement plan. The Council defined a timescale for each action in the plan but has failed to deliver 18 of the 27 actions within the set timescale.
- 45** There have been a number of areas of progress however, in addition to those reported previously. A Communications Strategy and Action Plan are in place and are being implemented to strengthen the engagement of members and staff with the Plan and its implementation progress. The new corporate template for service plans has been used in the 2006/07 council planning cycle, linking corporate and service plans and setting service activities within council priorities.

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

- 46 The Council has made limited progress in this area. The Council acknowledges the need to improve corporately and the community strategy and corporate plan will need to be reviewed once the vision and priorities have been approved. A new Community Safety Strategy will be put in place for the 2005/08 period and the Council is concluding its review of options for the future provision of local housing. The Council is less convinced that its services are in need of significant improvement however, even though there is evidence that the quality of services has been declining recently. It is actively seeking to learn but slow progress on the development of the vision and priorities has inhibited the development of more robust plans across service areas and corporately.
- 47 The Council recognises that it has lost momentum on the delivery of the improvement plan. It is using the lessons developed from a rigorous project management approach to identify slippage and draw members' attention to steps needed to make further progress. Themes and responsibilities were restated in the form of project initiation documents for each theme after the first six months and there is a risk log maintained.
- 48 The Council's use of external sources to import learning is improving. Contact with other local authorities has led to gaining knowledge on how to improve performance management and to challenge negative cultures, whilst agencies such as ODPM and IDeA have been used in the improvement planning process. External consultants have been used to assess the overall culture of the Council.
- 49 The Council is improving its consultation processes. The Communications Strategy Action Plan provides a framework for future consultation and for increasing the Council's level of engagement with local residents. A range of methods are being deployed to reach stakeholders, residents and service users.
- 50 Negotiations are proceeding to expand areas of joint working with neighbouring local authorities to improve their capacity and secure a greater level of expertise. At present, areas such as joint tourism promotion activity, are being explored with Alnwick District Council, and the opportunities for shared resources in human resources, environmental health and internal audit are recognised. Furthermore, the Council has committed additional resources to the regional capacity building group. This process extends beyond the public sector, with the leisure centres already being operated by a private sector company and the waste management contract now awarded to an international company.

- 51** The Council's has not yet applied learning to drive the improvement plan and service improvement generally further forward. Despite the improvement team reporting slippage, the Council has not taken firm steps to address the issues identified. The external report on the Council's culture contained significant findings but there is no corporate action plan designed to address the problems it identified.
- 52** The Council's approach to prioritisation is weak. Councillors and staff are aware of this and realise now that if their resources are to be used to the best effect for residents then hard decisions will have to be taken. However, clarification of priorities and the development of firmer plans as a consequence, still awaits the completion of the development of the vision and priorities. The importance which the Council places on the delivery of the improvement plan is still not clear amongst councillors or staff. This is impacting on the delivery of services and the overall improvement work being undertaken by the Council. The improvement work is not embedded in the culture of the Council nor is it embraced by some councillors and staff.
- 53** The Council has still to address key issues affecting the achievement of the improvement plan. The delay in agreeing vision and priorities has impacted on the production of a new corporate plan and review of the community strategy. In particular, the issue of resources and priority given to the plan are key factors in the serious slippage in timescale within the plan's one-year delivery period. It is not clear what the Council intend to do next to resolve these issues.

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

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate vision supported by 5 to 10-year corporate strategy and 15-year mission statement. • Activity is clearly focused on regeneration and economic development. • Some good examples of encouraging local provision of services and democracy. • Takes an enabling role across the Borough, eg transport in Berwick and lobbying for A1 improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community strategy not yet in place, hence there is not a clear shared and communicated vision for Berwick. • Vision and ambitions have not been subject to public consultation. • Realism of long-term vision is hindered by broad, aspirational and not specific priorities. • Many strategies are only recently in place (or being developed), and are not yet supported by clear action planning and prioritisation. • Councillors are not operating strategically and are focusing on operational and ward-based issues. • Local strategic partnership slow to develop and a formal structure not yet in place.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff restructure has improved the focus on priority areas. • Some examples of long-term regeneration of areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of evidence of focus on strategic or long-term issues. • Impact of Overview and Scrutiny and Policy committees are unclear. • Staff often distracted by competing priorities. • Undeveloped planning and performance management arrangements restrict ability to focus.
Prioritisation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three ranked priorities of regeneration; quality of life; access to services. • Bringing together the corporate priorities with those of the new administration. • Some positive service and issue-based examples of consultation. • Positive examples of shifting resources to meet priorities including capital and revenue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities not supported by clear action plans, specific targets, or indication of the resources needed to achieve them. • There is no citizen panel or co-ordinated approach to engagement with the broader community or young people. • Community engagement largely focused on the views of members. • Non-priorities are not clear – outsourced services do not appear to be a priority. • Tourism not explicitly part of the Council's priorities. • Budget and financial planning are not systematically linked to priorities or service planning.

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Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed and loyal staff, low sickness levels and staff turnover. • Financial standing generally sound with some strengths. • Some positive examples of partnership working, development trusts and outsourcing. • Procurement strategy in place. Partnering approach with Berwickshire Housing Association. • Appraisal system, now more consistent. • Early stages in risk management, some training for councillors and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff morale is low, but improving. • No work force plan or long-term human resource strategy. • Senior posts not operating strategically due to operational pressures. • Outsourcing to improve capacity, but not managing their performance. • Procurement strategy is not comprehensive or up-to-date and does not reflect recent guidance. • Recruitment and retention difficulties in professional areas. • Not taking a sufficient supporting role in partnerships. Success hindered by communication shortfalls. • Many councillors are new and inexperienced. Overview and scrutiny are not working effectively.

Progress Assessment Report | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in April 2004 **19**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Performance management	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some strengths in financial management – budget forecasting. • Recent improvements in performance monitoring and reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No performance management framework. • Service planning inconsistently used and is not driving improvement. • Lack of action planning. • Inconsistent performance reporting. • Limited local indicators. • Performance management of partnerships and other external links is not developed. • Not assessed or managing risks in services. • Limited service standards.

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Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement in quality of service	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fifty per cent of PIs in upper two quartiles, with 36 per cent in top quartile (2002/03). • Low crime levels, reducing disorder. • Strong housing benefit performance with high satisfaction levels. • Good quality natural and built environment. • Facilitating community events, strong parish links. • Good range of facilities for tourists. • Public spaces are generally clean and tidy. High parish satisfaction. • Positive economic and business development. • Reasonable tenants satisfaction with planned maintenance. • Good for re-letting of council houses; rent collection and speed of dealing with planning applications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty-six per cent of PIs in low quartile (2002/03). • Low user satisfaction with sports and leisure, parks and open spaces and cleanliness (2000/01). • Weak performance in some environmental PIs. • Some weaknesses in customer care. • Weaker performance for responsive repairs. • Recycling levels are low and waste volume levels are high. • Not fulfilled responsibilities under DDA.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued roll-out of recycling bins to increase recycling levels. • Actively encouraging economic development. • Leading role in regeneration and improvement initiatives. • Benefits performance is improving. • Effectively tackling youth nuisance with partners. • Holding council meetings across the Borough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance levels have deteriorated in 2002/03 – corporate PIs; housing revenues and benefits. • Only 35 per cent of PIs improved in 2002/03.
Investment	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving staff capacity through new posts, restructuring, and management development. • Improving the skills of new and existing members. • Developing business opportunities and incubator services. • Investment in OCT to improve access to services. • Improving internal and external communication. • Using significant external funding to increase capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No clear plans how the Council will improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - performance management; - service planning; - procurement; and - consultation. • Unclear as to how the impact of partnership activity will be improved. • Slow progress in developing risk management. • Slow response to the FSA report and improving asset management plan. • Still major gaps in management capacity, eg planning and environmental health.

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Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-aware about capacity and the implications of the local context. • Learnt form past experiences to develop a more positive and open culture. • Some examples of learning from partners, users and other councils. • Starting to learn from its own experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not clear how the Council uses knowledge to drive improvement. • Cross-service communication is weak. • No systematic method of sharing and using learning to drive improvements.
Future Plans	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong willing ness/desire to improve prosperity. • Draft strategies/plans to support priorities are being developed, eg community strategy, retail impact survey, and town centre assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness and clarity of long-terms ambitions limited by weaknesses/lack of key strategies. • No overall strategy for increasing medium-term workforce capacity. • Effectiveness of strategies are hindered due to gaps in action planning. • Strategies have not been directing progress, eg regeneration strategy, culture strategy. • Gaps in consultation and community engagement risk the ability of future plans to maintain user focus. • No clear future planning for promoting diversity. • No child protection policy.

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

- 54 The original comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2003/2004.
- 55 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.
- 56 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.
- 57 This progress monitoring report for Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from April 2004 to April 2005.
- 58 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.