

CPA Progress Assessment

23 June 2005



# Progress Assessment Report

**Teesdale 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'<sup>1</sup>, 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 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.

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.

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

## Introduction

- 1 In May 2004 the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Teesdale 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 recovery plan and comparison with the baseline position of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

## Summary and recommendations

- 3 Overall, Teesdale District Council has made limited progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last CPA inspection.
- 4 The Council is making progress in putting in place building blocks which are capable of supporting improvement, but it is only now beginning to make progress on developing its leadership role. As a consequence, it is not clear that the limited progress made to date is sustainable nor that the Council will be able to meet modernisation expectations. The Council has achieved improvements in some front-line services but overall performance of its services compared to other Councils declined in 2003/04, the latest year for which audited figures are available.
- 5 The Council is not clear about what the community wants or how it can best work to meet community needs. There are still no clear plans to develop broad and systematic community engagement. Without widely shared, community led ambitions, the Council is not able to know whether it is meeting community needs.
- 6 Councillors now recognise a need to make changes in the Council, and have recently agreed a new approach to political leadership and a draft corporate plan, both of which will help the Council to focus on improvement. However, councillors have found it difficult to develop a common understanding of the issues or solutions. Political leadership has been weak, has held back the decisions necessary to implement change and has also undermined the enthusiasm of officers to deliver that change. Additionally, the drive expected from a Chief Executive is lacking.
- 7 The Council has had some success in implementing its recovery plan projects. With extensive external input the Council has developed some managerial building blocks which give it the potential to change and progress. For the most part, Councillors and officers have engaged in these projects enthusiastically. The key activities have largely been delivered or are being delivered in line with plans.
- 8 The Council has continued to deliver some good services during the first part of its recovery period, and some services previously identified as poor have improved. However, the overall rate of improvement on key performance indicators is slow compared to that in other councils. A smaller proportion of Teesdale PIs were top quartile and more were bottom quartile in 2003/04 than in 2002/03.
- 9 The new draft corporate plan is a pragmatic response to the Council's current lack of strategic direction. Whilst the lack of corporate direction has long been recognised by corporate directors and some councillors, they have needed the drive and capacity provided by the Council's external support in order to develop the new plan. To implement the plan effectively requires managerial drive and political commitment from the top of the organisation which have not been

evident. Hence, the Council is approaching the future with a lot of good intentions, but few clear plans to deliver them.

**10** 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, (if one exists).

## Context

### The locality

- 11 The district of Teesdale is in the north east of England in the county of Durham. It covers 836 square kilometres and includes the middle and upper Tees valley. In area, it is the largest of the seven district councils in the county but has the lowest population. Because of this the Council has a relatively small level of resources to deliver services to a dispersed rural population. The district contains 50 parishes.
- 12 Three quarters of the population of 24,500 live in the rural area and one quarter in Barnard Castle. The population is spread thinly with only 29 people per square kilometre. There is a relatively high proportion of people aged over 65 and a relatively small ethnic minority population, (1.8 per cent compared to 3.6 per cent regionally). Fewer households contain persons with a limiting long-term illness (36 per cent compared to 41 per cent regionally.) Whilst overall deprivation is low, Teesdale has two wards in the worst 20 per cent nationally and has below national average levels of adult literacy and numeracy.
- 13 Unemployment is low (1.3 per cent compared to 3.1 per cent regionally and 2.4 per cent nationally<sup>1</sup>), but wage levels are low. The majority of the working population of Teesdale, 68 per cent, are involved in the service sector, particularly tourism. 24 per cent work in public administration, 21 per cent in manufacturing and 7 per cent in the farming sector.

### The Council

- 14 No political group has had overall control of the Council for a number of years. The Labour party has nine seats and the Conservatives three, the Teesdale Independent Group has twelve seats and the remaining eight seats are held by non-aligned members. In May 2004, following its 'poor' Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) result, and in an effort to improve political leadership, agenda management and decision-making, the Council reviewed its Constitution. It reduced the number of policy committees from three to two; three overview and scrutiny committees were reduced to one; planning and licensing committees were reduced from two each to one each; the Joint Consultative and Health and Safety Committees were combined; and the politically balanced Corporate Strategy Group (CSG), which gave overall strategic direction, was refined and given decision-making powers as the Corporate Strategy Committee.
- 15 The Council employs 172 staff, based on five sites with the main offices being in Barnard Castle. The gross budget for services 2005/06 is £10.25 million. The capital programme for 2005/06 is £1.18 million.

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<sup>1</sup> Total JSA claimant count February 2005 National Statistics (NOMIS).

- 16 In December 2004 in response to its 'poor' CPA rating, the Council produced a four-phase Recovery Plan, entitled 'New Horizons'. It is currently engaged in the first, 'recovery' phase of the plan (the remaining phases are 'recovery into improvement', 'improvement' and 'core business'). This focuses on five key projects: member development and constitutional change; organisational development and communication; strategic financial management; management of performance and corporate planning; and project management. ODPM has engaged external consultants until June 2005 to increase the Council's capacity to deliver the Recovery Plan. Their role is to provide both challenge and support to the Council and to transfer skills which will enable the Council to progress the improvement agenda. The Council has also received input from IDeA to assist member development.
- 17 The Council is a partner in the new West Durham Rural Pathfinder, which seeks to develop simpler and more effective local delivery of services through a shared delivery plan.

## What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 18 The Council has made little progress in this area since CPA in 2003, although there are some very recent indications that the Council is clarifying its ambitions and priorities and taking steps to improve political leadership.
- 19 The Council's ambition is to achieve 'excellent' CPA status, but it is still unclear about what it is trying to achieve for the community and why. It is in the process of trying to clarify its ambitions and priorities, but has struggled to do this because of some fundamental weaknesses, particularly a lack of political and managerial leadership which has impacted on the pace of change achievable.
- 20 The Council does not provide leadership to its staff or the community. Community leadership is not well understood or practised by the Council and although there are good working relations with partners, there is a reluctance, by councillors, to engage systematically with the community and an inability to focus decision-making on community priorities.
- 21 Teesdale Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP's) community strategy has recently been published. Despite a long post-consultation hiatus, it still lacks explicit aims, clear outcomes and targets on which partners can focus. However, the partnership now has an additional resource to address these issues; the new LSP manager, employed by the Council and accommodated by Durham and Darlington Police Authority, is tasked with developing the partnership so that these are clarified.
- 22 The Council is beginning to formalise its ambitions and priorities and make links to the community strategy in a new corporate plan which is being drafted with the help of external input. The Council is actively participating in this development, prompted by the external support which the Council is receiving. The corporate plan is being developed using new internal consultation but it has used only existing external consultation from a range of sources undertaken for a variety of purposes over the last two years including for the community strategy. Whilst this is a pragmatic response to an immediate need for community views, it is not likely to ensure a fully inclusive approach and currently there are no clear plans to achieve this.
- 23 The Council has set some priorities but these have not had any significant impact on its activities or focus. The Council views this year as transitional in terms of planning. It is putting a systematic planning framework in place, but in the current year started its planning cycle without the benefit of an overarching corporate plan. The first plans to be developed under the new framework and guidance were service plans. It plans to realign these to the new corporate plan, once in place.

- 24 The Council reviewed the constitution in May 2004 with the aim of improving decision-making, and established a corporate strategy committee to meet this aim. The Council recognised that it had more to do to improve political leadership and decision-making and agreed further changes to the constitution in spring 2005. As a result, it has been able very recently to take some steps to resolve the issues relating to weaknesses in leadership and decision-making by identifying a Leader and Deputy Leader, and a shared understanding as to how political leadership will work is beginning to emerge.
- 25 The Council has focused on delivering the individual projects which make up the first phase of recovery. However, some of the outcomes, particularly relating to member development, have not been met. The failure of some members to engage positively and constructively in these development activities has hindered their ability to focus properly and to make the difficult decisions necessary to remove barriers to progress. The failure to develop effective internal and community leadership has been one consequence of this.

## How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 26 The Council has made limited progress in increasing its capacity to deliver improvement. It has established mechanisms with the potential to help plan and manage performance, but these are recent developments which are not refined or embedded.
- 27 The Council is small and has limited capacity to deliver a wide and challenging agenda. It has established some partnership arrangements to gain additional or shared staff resources and expertise, but it is not taking a planned approach to maximising its capacity through good use of resources, effective structures and a modern approach to delivering services through partnerships and procurement.
- 28 The two Directors have sought to drive modernisation in the Council in conjunction with external input. But the capacity and drive which would be expected from the Chief Executive has not been forthcoming and consequently the pace of recovery has been slow. The external support which has been provided to the Council has been a vital source of drive, capacity and expertise. This external support will cease at the end of June 2005.
- 29 The constitutional review of May 2004 started to increase capacity by streamlining the committee arrangements and focussing strategic decision-making within the corporate strategy committee. But the Council recognised in its further review that the way in which the changes were implemented did not maximise the potential and in May 2005 agreed changes to improve the effectiveness of its democratic arrangements, including the immediate introduction of leader and deputy leader roles.
- 30 There remains a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities amongst some councillors. The constitutional review highlights the lack of understanding of member roles by councillors. There has been some improvement in councillor/officer relationships but this is not universal and there are still instances where staff are treated disrespectfully by members.
- 31 Recovery projects have made a number of councillor development opportunities available and where these have been taken up, councillors are generally positive about the benefits. However, not all opportunities have not been taken up and some of those which have, have not delivered the intended outcomes. Some senior councillors have rejected learning opportunities; this is indicative of an unwillingness to change, as is the defensive reaction to some very valid criticisms made in an external review of overview and scrutiny workings carried out as part of the recovery programme.

- 32 The Council still does not communicate well either internally or externally. It has tried to address this as part of recovery and has increased the level and variety of internal communications. More information is being disseminated and more opportunities exist for feedback, but although the quantity of communications has increased the quality and appropriateness to prospective audiences have not been fully addressed. External communication and in particular media relations are still weak, resulting in a negative portrayal of the Council locally. Opportunities to highlight positives are missed and this adversely impacts on staff morale.
- 33 The Council has made some progress in improving its financial management and reporting arrangements, but significant issues remain. Information to monitor and manage is accessible to budget holders and significant variances are highlighted, but these are not always investigated and managed by budget holders. Because budget information is sometimes inaccurate and monitoring is weak the Council's limited reserves are vulnerable. The Council still lacks a strategic and risk-based approach to managing its finances and assets. It is likely to face further pressures in the near future, and members and officers recognise the vulnerability of the Council's current position. The Council has recently established a partnership arrangement with a neighbouring authority to develop strategic financial management; this includes developing a medium-term financial plan, and the development of information and decision-making skills.
- 34 A detailed Organisational Development (OD) diagnostic, undertaken as part of a recovery project, has helped highlight issues to be tackled to make the organisation fit for purpose. These issues are being tackled enthusiastically and officers are developing good systems, procedures and policies to enhance capacity. The appraisal system is being rolled out, formal training and in-house development is taking place. Better use is being made of networks and partnership arrangements to bolster capacity and to bring good practice from other organisations. However, there is no top-level leadership on OD issues to ensure the sustainability and overall cohesion of these initiatives.
- 35 Significant progress has been made in developing a planning and performance management framework to provide a systematic approach from the community strategy level to the individual. The Council has just completed its first round of service planning under the new arrangements. This has resulted in a more consistent and systematic approach to service planning, but at the time these plans were being written, they lacked a clear corporate context. Once the new corporate plan is finalised, service plans will be aligned with it. The Council accepts and understands the need to develop from a position of having a framework to actually making it work to deliver improvements. Service standards for users have still not been developed.
- 36 Project planning and management is much improved as a result of the project management recovery project. Staff are being trained and are actively using the approach to deliver recovery projects. A cross-service team approach has been used in implementing projects which has enhanced capacity and encouraged shared learning.

## **14 Progress Assessment Report | How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?**

- 37** Despite the internal focus of the Council during the recovery period, it continues to enjoy good working relationships with partners. However, there has still been no clear assessment of the costs to the Council and the benefits to the community of these arrangements. Consequently, the Council cannot determine the extent to which partnership working provides good value for money for local people.

## What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 38 The Council has made some progress in addressing CPA weaknesses in this area, but the rate of progress is relatively slow.
- 39 The Council continues to provide some good services to local people and has made some improvements since 2003. However, overall performance relative to other Councils declined in 2003/04 (the latest available data). In 2002/03, 53 per cent of the Council's best value performance indicators (BVPIs) were above average performance but in 2003/04 the Council had 54 per cent of BVPIs below average. A smaller proportion of PIs were top quartile and more were bottom quartile in 2003/04 than in 2002/03. Some top quartile performance areas improved and some aspects of services declined, including some already in the worst quartile. This means that although half of Teesdale's BVPIs showed some improvement in 2003/04, the Council's services overall were improving more slowly than those of other councils.
- 40 The Council has progressed in some areas which were weak at the time of the CPA inspection in 2003. A significantly increased proportion of the population now has access to kerbside recycling and this improvement was sufficient to move the Council from the worst to second top quartile of performance in 2003/04. There have been significant improvements to the benefits service provided by the Council: the huge backlog in processing new claims, which resulted in bottom quartile performance in 2003/04 has been reduced significantly and indications are that it reached an acceptable level during 2004/05. Council tax collection improved between 2002/03 and 2003/04 and was within the second quartile for performance. NNDR collection remained at bottom quartile performance in 2003/04.
- 41 The Council has improved other front line services. It has gained QUEST quality accreditation for Leisure Services, improved telephone access to the Council, and implemented planning on-line to a high standard, particularly important for access to services in a rural area.
- 42 BVPIs indicate a lack of improvement in some areas. Housing services remained poor against most indicators in 2003/04, although some indicators are skewed by the small numbers involved. BVPIs for the score against a checklist of environmental health best practice (BVPI 166a) and early retirements as a percentage of total staff (BVPI 14) were also bottom quartile and not improving.
- 43 The Council has made progress in implementing a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, although it recognises that further development work is needed to fully realise the potential benefits.

## 16 Progress Assessment Report | What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 44 Although progress has been made on developing a number of policies and strategies, many are in the very early stages of implementation; others of those identified in the last CPA inspection, such as social inclusion and consultation, are yet to be developed as the Council progresses its recovery. Risk management remains rudimentary and the Council is not making progress in developing its approach to procurement: it has decided to defer progress on this until later in 2005.
- 45 In developing its skills, the Council has benefited from the significant external input to the recovery projects. The individual projects have been project managed and joint councillor and officer project teams have focused on completing the project tasks, with one of the Directors acting as overall Recovery Manager. The activities in the first phases of the Recovery Plan have now either been largely completed or are progressing as planned. These are significant achievements for all involved, but there is some concern amongst staff that work on these projects has detracted from service delivery. Nevertheless, these projects have provided foundations on which improvement can be built, given the required political and managerial leadership.

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

- 46 The Council has made little progress in addressing the weaknesses identified by CPA in this area.
- 47 The next steps for the Council remain unclear. The Council's self-assessment completed in March 2005 explicitly states that there continues to be a lack of purpose and direction: it recognises a number of weaknesses and records intentions, but there are few clear plans. However, there has been some recent activity to identify plans for the future in the shape of the draft corporate plan.
- 48 The Council's awareness of its weaknesses has increased since the last CPA inspection, but there are still some councillors and officers who do not recognise the fundamental weaknesses in the organisation, particularly in relation to community and Council leadership. Even where the need for change is acknowledged the Council has found it difficult to make the decisions needed to make change a reality. However, there are indications that the Council is now beginning to tackle the weaknesses in political leadership which were evident at the time of the CPA inspection.
- 49 There is some evidence of cross-council learning being developed through project work and workshops. There are indications that good services, such as leisure, are sharing their expertise and are finding it easier to engage with the organisation as a whole to work on improvement. This encourages a more corporate approach which will benefit others. The Council intends to capitalise on the successes of its recovery project delivery by using a project team approach to work on future tasks.
- 50 The Council has very recently begun to identify some plans for the future. The draft corporate plan indicates a challenging and ambitious future for the Council under five strategic priorities: A Well Managed and Efficient Council; Homes for Teesdale; Care and Maintenance of Our Environment; Teesdale a Place to Visit Work and Stay; and Accessibility for All. It commits the Council to achieving national and local priorities as well as external accreditation, which is seen by managers as a way of achieving improvement, recognising success and raising staff morale and pride. The plan indicates a number of key themes, actions timescales and targets. It is however still at draft stage and the Council is only now beginning to use a corporate planning framework based on a corporate plan to guide its activities and drive improvement.
- 51 Senior councillors are now beginning to understand the significance of the corporate plan for Teesdale, but the extent to which the plan is genuinely owned by the Council is not clear. Councillors and officers have been involved in the plan's production, but the drive to develop the plan came from the Directors with the aid of external input, rather than from the Chief Executive or political leaders.

**18 Progress Assessment Report | In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?**

- 52** Future plans for the housing service are uncertain. The Council is progressing plans to improve housing for local people by transferring the stock to a housing association and expects to ballot tenants on this proposal in the coming months. However, the financial case for the transfer is marginal, and there is no contingency plan for the future of the Council's housing stock if tenants vote against the proposal. Should the ballot not be successful the Council will have little choice but to repeat the exercise from a position of greater weakness.
- 53** The project and performance management recovery projects have delivered mechanisms which the Council can use to develop better future plans and have demonstrated that at a project level, where there is clear focus and commitment, the Council can make progress. But the recovery activities are not well integrated into the day-to-day work of the Council; they are viewed as separate from it. There is a mixture of intentions and plans to build on this first corporate and service planning round. For example, the draft HR strategy is already being aligned with the corporate plan and there is an action plan to align service plans with the corporate plan, but these developments are taking place in the absence of a culture of continuous improvement based on performance management and the Council still has no plans for regular and systematic consultation to enable it to base plans and activities on the needs and priorities of local communities.
- 54** In June a significant amount of external support and input to recovery will end and it is not clear how the Council will drive change beyond then. The transition from 'recovery' to 'improvement' is now beginning to be planned but some outcomes sought in the original projects have not been achieved and not all have revised project plans to ensure that they are.
- 55** Change of the magnitude needed to move the Council from its current position to its stated ambition of CPA 'excellence' cannot be achieved without a great deal of commitment and willingness to change the status quo. The Council is currently developing the precise nature of the new Leader and Deputy Leader roles and intends to identify lead councillors for the themes of the draft corporate plan. Similarly, the Council is actively considering changes to senior managerial leadership. Without the clarity and focus of good leadership there is potential for the momentum for improvement which has been built up to deliver the recovery projects to disappear.

## 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"> <li>• Led recovery from foot and mouth disease outbreak.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making is ineffective.</li> <li>• Objectives of the corporate plan lack long-term outcomes.</li> <li>• Objectives are not widely understand or owned.</li> <li>• Consultation is not systematic and is not used effectively to set ambitions established.</li> </ul>
Focus	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management teams are starting to become more focused on priorities.</li> <li>• Improved focus on ICT issue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of focus on tackling critical issues such as leadership.</li> <li>• Council meetings are lengthy and not focused on priorities.</li> <li>• Weak focus because of lack of priorities.</li> <li>• Decision-making not focused on important issues.</li> <li>• Inadequate financial monitoring.</li> </ul>

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

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Prioritisation	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision to dispose of Teesdale training.</li> <li>• Recent resources shifted to cleansing and benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No clear priorities.</li> <li>• Council reacts and does not plan ahead.</li> <li>• Insufficient research to guide the Council's activities.</li> <li>• Consultation is not systematic and is not used effectively to drive service improvements.</li> </ul>

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

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective partnerships in community safety and economic development.</li> <li>• Good examples of joint working with other councils.</li> <li>• New senior officer posts established.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership capacity is ineffective and the weaknesses have not been addressed.</li> <li>• No attempt to assess value and cost of extensive partnership working.</li> <li>• No systematic training for councillors or staff.</li> <li>• No effective standards committee.</li> <li>• Lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Human resources policies and processes are inadequate.</li> <li>• Financial reserves at the lowest prudent level.</li> <li>• Procurement strategy is out-of-date and few options for delivering services differently being explored.</li> </ul>

**22 Progress Assessment Report | 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"> <li>• IIP accreditation gained and retained.</li> <li>• New performance management plan in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service planning is weak and not systematic.</li> <li>• No agreed performance management system.</li> <li>• No performance management culture.</li> <li>• No service standards for customers.</li> <li>• Inadequate management of complaints.</li> <li>• Project planning and risk management is weak.</li> <li>• Ineffective management of Council finances leading to big slippages in the capital programme.</li> </ul>

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

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement in quality of service	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirty-seven per cent of performance indicators in the best quartile.</li> <li>• Clean and tidy area with high public satisfaction with cleanliness and refuse collection.</li> <li>• Good performance of the planning service.</li> <li>• High tenant satisfaction with the housing service.</li> <li>• Low crime levels.</li> <li>• Beacon status for the Market Town Initiative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low levels of recycling and composting.</li> <li>• Poor benefits service.</li> <li>• More than half the houses owned by the Council do not meet the Government's decent homes standard.</li> </ul>
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recycling performance is starting to improve.</li> <li>• Planning delegation rates have improved.</li> <li>• Partnership working and Council decisions have contributed to new business start-ups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sixty-one per cent of performance indicators had failed to improve.</li> <li>• Poor performance in collecting Council tax and business rates.</li> <li>• Benefits service has not improved.</li> <li>• Little improvement in the proportion of decent homes.</li> </ul>

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

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Investment	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investing in the right building blocks such as human resources.</li> <li>Officers recruited to key posts.</li> <li>Reductions in energy costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No agreement for investment in the remaining modernisation proposals.</li> <li>Capital programme is under spent.</li> <li>Council house transfer plans have not been risk assessed.</li> <li>Overview and scrutiny is not well developed.</li> <li>No medium-term financial plan.</li> </ul>
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented external recommendations on changing the officer structure.</li> <li>Becoming more self-aware.</li> <li>Encouraging ideas from staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little action on addressing the fundamental weaknesses highlighted by external challenge.</li> <li>Few examples of learning from best performing councils.</li> <li>No systematic sharing of good practice in the Council.</li> </ul>

Progress Assessment Report | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/ weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004 **25**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Future plans	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans 1.</li> <li>• Quality of some plans has improved.</li> <li>• More inclusive process for producing the community plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No plans to address fundamental weaknesses in leadership. Some key strategies missing.</li> <li>• Existing plans are not clear.</li> <li>• Resource implications of plans have not been thoroughly assessed.</li> <li>• Strengths outweigh weaknesses.</li> </ul>

**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

- 56 The original comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2004.
- 57 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.
- 58 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.
- 59 This progress monitoring report for Teesdale District Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from May 2004 to April 2005.
- 60 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.