

Inspection report

April 2005



Comprehensive performance assessment

**Corporate Assessment Report
Middlesbrough Council**

Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of comprehensive performance assessment judgements	4
Context	6
The locality	6
The Council	6
What is the Council trying to achieve?	7
Ambition	7
Prioritisation	8
Focus	9
How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?	10
Capacity	10
Performance management	11
What has the Council achieved / not achieved to date?	13
Achievement of improvement	13
Investment	14
In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	16
Learning	16
Future plans	17
Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses	18
Framework for comprehensive performance assessment	22

Introduction

- 1 The local government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Service* encourages greater focus on improved services for local people. Better performing Councils are freed from central government controls and restrictions and poorer Councils receive better focused support for improvement. The first step in this process was to make an overall judgement, a comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), of where each Council stands.
- 2 In December 2002 the Audit Commission reported the results of the comprehensive performance assessment, for the first time, for each Council. This Council was categorised as good.
- 3 In December 2003 and 2004, new CPA information was published for each single tier and county council, based on reported changes in service performance and the Council was again categorised as good.
- 4 This report presents the results of a corporate assessment carried out in January and February 2005. The judgements are based on the Audit Commission's published key lines of enquiry, and include an update and analysis of your Council's progress against:
 - ◆ the strengths and weaknesses contained in the 2002 report; and
 - ◆ the Council's own priorities for improvement.

Summary of comprehensive performance assessment judgements

- 5 Middlesbrough Council has made progress in key areas since the 2002 corporate assessment was carried out. It has built on its strengths and made changes to address its weaknesses. The Council is clear about what it wants to achieve. With its partners it continues to have a strong and ambitious vision for Middlesbrough that is built on a good understanding of the local context including the needs and aspirations of local people. The ambition is owned by Council staff, councillors and partners and is underpinned by clear, priorities for improvement. The Council provides active, visible and effective leadership to local people. It has demonstrated an ability to focus on improving service delivery, cross cutting issues and its internal workings. The Council has effective mechanisms in place to enable it to maintain its focus on key issues
- 6 The Council has much of the capacity and skills it needs to achieve change and further improvement in services. However, the Council has some weaknesses such as the lack of an overarching workforce development strategy and high sickness absence levels. Political leadership is strong and there is a strong corporate management team. The Council has a history of providing socially inclusive services but implementation of its new diversity framework is mixed. ICT related capacity has improved and the Council continues to make good use of external funding. It has good financial capacity though the new procurement strategy has yet to be fully implemented.
- 7 The new performance management framework sets a minimum standard for departments but allows them flexibility in the way that they manage performance of their service areas. The framework has begun to drive improvement in some areas, data collection mechanisms have been improved and there is a strong link between service plans, ambitions and priorities. There are some systems in place to support a risk management culture, however these are not fully developed, embedded or universally applied. Council staff own the priorities that affect their work but some are not clear on how these fit with the wider picture.
- 8 The Council has developed a number of customer charters and service promises, but not all services are covered and existing standards contain variable quality of target setting. The promotion of standards is not consistent across services. A performance management system is in place for executive councillors who meet with the deputy Mayor regularly to review progress against targets. Financial management systems are effective and a range of mechanisms to establish whether parts of the Council are providing value for money are in place. This does not however, stretch to an authority wide assessment of whether or not the Council provides value for money
- 9 The Council has delivered improvements in its own services and has contributed to improvements in areas such as the crime rate, unemployment, smoking and teenage pregnancy. Performance measures show an improvement trend and more than half of the key performance measures are above the median. There is an improvement trend in some areas of educational attainment but comparatively the Council is still in the bottom quartile for many education indicators. Resident satisfaction is generally high.

- 10 The Council is putting into place the building blocks that will enable it to deliver improvement in the future. However, some of these building blocks (for example, people management systems and risk) have only recently been introduced and have yet to become embedded and effective across the organisation. Communication has been improved and the organisation is open to internal and external challenge. There is a robust approach to medium term financial planning and good use is made of external funding.
- 11 The Council is clear about what it has achieved and what still remains to be done. It has a strong learning culture and has made a number of improvements following learning from others both internally and externally.
- 12 The Council has robust plans in place to tackle many of the issues that face Middlesbrough and these plans directly link to the ambition set for the town by the Council and the Middlesbrough partnership. Clear plans are in place to regenerate the town and there are plans in place to improve educational attainment. However, it has yet to develop a robust workforce development plan based on a sound analysis of the current workforce profile that will ensure it will have the right skills in the right places to deliver on its future plans.

Corporate Assessment Score

Key Question	Theme	2002 Final Weighted Score	2004 Un-Weighted Score	2004 Weighted Score
What is the Council trying to achieve?	Ambition	4	4	4
	Prioritisation	3	4	4
	Focus	3	4	4
How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	3	3	3
	Performance management	3	3	3
What has the Council achieved to date?	Achievement	9	3	9
	Investment	4	3	6
In light of what has been learnt, what does the Council plan to do next?	Learning	3	4	4
	Future Plans	3	3	3
TOTAL THEME SCORE		35		40

Context

The locality

- 13 Middlesbrough is situated on the northeast coast of England, with a population of 140,700, Middlesbrough is at the centre of the Tees Valley conurbation, which has a total population of 650,000, centred round the River Tees.
- 14 The area's economic strengths were built on iron and steel, shipbuilding, heavy engineering and chemicals. It retains strengths in several of these areas, but massive industrial restructuring has changed the face of the town's economy. The service sector is now the main economic driver and the town centre provides most of the town's employment.
- 15 Middlesbrough's population live in 55,164 households, making it the most densely populated borough in the Tees Valley. 7.65 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities making it a place which has the highest concentration of people from ethnic minorities in the north east. The population of the town is relatively younger than the average for England and Wales. This masks, however, a shorter life expectancy than for the country as a whole, and an increasing tendency for younger people to leave Middlesbrough to work elsewhere, a trend which is not compensated for by similar numbers migrating inwards. The population of Middlesbrough has declined in the past 30 years and is projected to continue to decline and to become relatively older.
- 16 Unemployment is a significant issue for Middlesbrough. In December 2004 Middlesbrough's unemployment rate was 4.3% compared to 2.2% nationally.
- 17 Middlesbrough has twenty-five wards, of which sixteen fall amongst the most deprived 10 per cent of wards in England. 53 per cent of Middlesbrough children live in households claiming Income Support, Family Credit or Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance.

The Council

- 18 The Council has 48 councillors and a modernised decision making structure with an elected mayor and a multi-party executive board. The executive board consists of eight executive members and the mayor and is advised by the overview and scrutiny board and the corporate management team.
- 19 There are 30 Labour councillors, seven Conservative, six Liberal Democrat and five independent.
- 20 The Council's revenue budget for 2004/05 is over £164 million with a capital budget of some £35 million. It has approximately 7,000 employees.
- 21 In 2001 the Council entered into a 10 year partnering arrangement with HBS who provide the Council's support services such as IT, the one stop shop, human resources, finance and revenues and benefits.

What is the Council trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 22 The Council in conjunction with its partners continues to have a strong and ambitious vision for the future of Middlesbrough. This is an area of strength.
- 23 The ambition is built on a good understanding of the current context of Middlesbrough and reflects the needs and aspirations of local people. The views of local people, including those of specific groups such as the black and minority ethnic community and young people have influenced the ambition. The Mayor and the executive councillors have worked closely together to shape the ambition, sharing a common purpose of improving Middlesbrough and raising the aspirations of local people. The Mayor is at the forefront of promoting the ambition of the town, the Council and its partners on the local, regional and national stages.
- 24 The overarching ambition for Middlesbrough is set out in the Middlesbrough Partnership's current Community Strategy 2002, and the draft Community Strategy 2005. The ambition is supported by the Mayor's "Raising Hope" agenda. This is built on what the Council calls the "four pillars":
- ◆ A clean, safe environment in which people can go about their business without fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
 - ◆ Physical regeneration of the town's run-down sites and buildings
 - ◆ A business-friendly enterprise culture which welcomes would-be investors
 - ◆ A transport network which can meet the needs of the town on its way up
- 25 The Council states that the foundation of the pillars is the education and care of children and young people and support for vulnerable people in Middlesbrough. The ambition is about improving the quality of life of Middlesbrough's residents and is supported by quality of life indicators and other success measures. The Council is clear about what Middlesbrough should be like in 10-15 years time.
- 26 The ambition for Middlesbrough is owned by Council staff, councillors and partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors. There is a wide understanding of how each organisation makes a contribution to delivering the ambition and a developing partnership culture in the town which enables organisations to work together to deliver.
- 27 The Council has active, visible and effective leadership and this is recognised by partners and local people. Councillors and the Mayor fulfil their community leadership role well, with the Mayor taking a lead on handling the implications of tough decisions such as the clearance of homes for regeneration schemes, and executive councillors leading publicly on issues such as changes to the way that social care is delivered. Councillors, the Mayor and Council staff play an active role in working with communities.

Prioritisation

- 28 The Council has set clear priorities for improvement that underpin the ambition for Middlesbrough. This is an area of strength.
- 29 The Council's priorities and those of the Middlesbrough Partnership (as outlined in the draft 2005 Community Strategy) are directly linked with national and regional priorities and policies. The Council has interpreted these priorities in the local context through its corporate plan. For example, the priorities for the Council under the "Promoting the economic vitality of Middlesbrough", "creating safer and stronger communities" and "transforming our local environment" themes include:
- ◆ Regenerate key economic locations in the town
 - ◆ Ensure local people, particularly those from the most disadvantaged communities, have the skills and opportunities to compete for jobs successfully
 - ◆ Promote regeneration through culture, arts and learning
 - ◆ Combat anti-social behaviour and reduce fear of crime
 - ◆ Reduce house burglary
 - ◆ Reduce vehicle crime
 - ◆ Improve street cleanliness
 - ◆ Increase recycling
- 30 Priorities, plans and delivery are influenced by the views of local people (canvassed formally and informally) and it is clear that the Council knows what the issues are across the borough. The Council has made decisions about what are not priorities such as the decision in social care to provide direct services only to the most vulnerable in line with its priority of "improve social care for vulnerable adults".
- 31 Local people, partners and Council staff together with councillors, understand what the priorities for improvement are. Council staff own the priorities that affect their work but some are not clear on how these fit with the wider picture.
- 32 The Council's medium term financial plan and capital strategy ensure that resources are targeted to priorities. For example the Council has prioritised the mainstreaming of the community warden scheme, providing funding for it to continue. It has also moved money to street scene services to improve the local environment. Both of these examples have contributed to improvements in performance.

Focus

- 33 The Council is strong in this area.
- 34 Middlesbrough Council has demonstrated its ability to focus on improving its performance in priority areas and addressing key issues that will enable it to move forward. For example, it has managed the large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) of its housing stock, following an options appraisal and a realisation that it could not meet the Decent Homes Standard through its own resources. In education, as well as managing a structural change (creating the Children Families and Learning department) the Council has focused its energies on putting in place measures to improve educational attainment and attendance levels, tackled surplus places, and introduced two city academies. In environment it has made significant improvements to service delivery resulting in cleaner streets, better parks and improvements in the handling of planning applications.
- 35 It has made significant progress on unified terms and conditions for manual and non-manual staff. This has required a concerted effort including building a constructive relationship with the trades unions. It has built a stronger partnership with HBS following a difficult start to the partnership and this has resulted in better support services and is enabling a focused, more outcome related re-negotiation of the specification for the second half of the contract's term.
- 36 The Council has not been distracted from the difficult tasks that have faced it since 2002. It has effective mechanisms in place to enable it to maintain its focus on key issues. These include regular meetings between the Mayor and the chief executive and between executive councillors and directors that monitor progress against action plans and the use of scrutiny to focus on key issues. The structure of the Council, both political and managerial, reflects the priorities of the organisation.
- 37 The Council has paid some attention to developing and partially implementing a number of supporting processes such as risk management. The Council recognises that further progress needs to be made to ensure effectiveness.

How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity

- 38 The Council has much of the capacity and skills that it needs to achieve change and further improvement in services. Its strengths outweigh its weaknesses in this area.
- 39 The Council has strong political leadership, particularly from the elected Mayor and there is a strong corporate management team. The Mayor, councillors, and senior managers are clear on their respective roles and responsibilities and working arrangements are effective. The Mayor selected his deputy and the executive councillors for their skills and abilities, resulting in an all party executive made up of councillors who support the ambition for Middlesbrough and have the skills to contribute to delivering it. The Mayor delegates the “business management” of the Council to his deputy who plays a key role in the management and development of councillors.
- 40 It has improved its ICT related capacity and working practices across the Council since 2002 through the introduction of in house IT officers (previously all IT staff had been within HBS) and developments in e-government. In 2003/04, 66 per cent of interactions with the public were capable of electronic service delivery (BVPI 157) compared with 34 per cent in the previous year.
- 41 The Council’s financial capacity is good and the Council makes good use of the external funding that is available to it to deliver against priorities. A new procurement strategy has been introduced but although this is a good strategy it has yet to be fully implemented so the Council has yet to realise the full benefits. The Council has an open approach to exploring alternative methods of service delivery including its partnership with HBS and the use of partnerships to provide services in areas such as social care and community safety.
- 42 The Council lacks an overarching approach to workforce development. Although training is available to Council staff this is not within an overarching development framework that enables the Council to ensure that its staff are trained in a timely manner meeting the needs of local people and the organisation.
- 43 The Council has become aware that its sickness levels are very high at 15.2 days per employee (2003/04), having previously lacked a robust system for collecting such information. Systems to improve sickness absence levels and analyse the reasons for the high levels have been introduced but it is too early to assess whether they will have a sustained impact on sickness absence levels.
- 44 In terms of its workforce profile (2003/04) the Council performs well in indicators that measure the proportion of women who are amongst its higher paid employees but less well on the indicators that measure black and minority ethnic highly paid employees and proportion of staff from black and minority ethnic communities. It also performs less well in the indicator that measures the percentage of staff employed who have disabilities.

Performance management

- 45 Currently strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Since 2002 the Council has made significant changes to its performance management framework. The new framework sets a minimum standard for departments but allows them flexibility in the way that they manage performance of their service areas. The framework has begun to drive improvement. There is a positive attitude to performance management within the Council but it has yet to develop a strong performance management culture based on fully effective systems.
- 46 There were clear links between the community strategy, corporate plan and service plans for 2004/05. This ensured that the ambition for Middlesbrough and the Council's priorities were aligned with service improvement. Through monitoring performance against service plans councillors and managers were also monitoring against the higher level ambition and priorities. This was complemented by the development of quality of life measures which enable the Council to measure the outcomes of its actions. Service plans for 2005/06 are still being developed.
- 47 The Council makes good use of performance and budget clinics where councillors and officers examine performance and identify areas that need to be addressed. Councillors and managers have a range of information to enable them to track progress against performance indicators and action plans that contribute to the achievement of the ambition for Middlesbrough. Both managers and executive councillors have a good grasp of performance issues within their portfolios. A performance management system is in place for executive councillors who meet with the deputy Mayor regularly to review progress against targets. Backbench councillors are involved in scrutiny and contribute to managing performance in the Council through this.
- 48 Although performance appraisals are in place for some departments, a new minimum standard for staff appraisal has recently been introduced and is in the process of being rolled out. At present the Council has an inconsistent approach to appraisal and the new system does not make it clear how individual's objectives link to the Council's priorities.
- 49 The Council has improved the robustness of its data collection mechanisms in areas such as sickness absence, and the number of staff who have disabilities or are from black and minority communities. This will give it a clearer picture both of its own performance and its performance in comparison with other councils. In the re-negotiations around the partnership with HBS, more meaningful quality based measures are being introduced. This will enable the Council to monitor the performance of HBS more easily.
- 50 Financial management systems are effective and a range of mechanisms to establish whether parts of the Council are providing value for money are in place with a rolling programme of assessment. This does not however, stretch to an authority wide assessment of whether or not the Council provides value for money.
- 51 Understanding of corporate performance issues by senior managers and councillors such as potential reasons for high levels of sickness absence is weaker than the understanding of service performance issues. As a result managers and councillors lack an understanding of some of the future risks the Council may be exposed to.

52 The Council has developed a number of customer charters and service promises, but not all services are covered and existing standards contain variable quality of target setting. The promotion of standards is not consistent across services.

What has the Council achieved / not achieved to date?

Achievement of improvement

- 53 Strengths continue to outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Council has delivered improvements in the priority areas set out in the corporate plan and community strategy. For example it has contributed to improvements in employment levels which have improved by 1.1 per cent, the overall crime rate which has dropped by 31 per 1000 population, and people in Middlesbrough now have a higher life expectancy. In addition, the percentage of the population who smoke has been reduced by 5 per cent and conception rates in under 18s have fallen by 11 per 1000 population.
- 54 In terms of improvements in services, of the measures used in corporate assessment 57 per cent have improved since the last assessment. 52 per cent of measures are above the median and 34 per cent in the top quartile.
- 55 Against the priority area of supporting children and learning the Council has made progress on key issues. The Council made progress in addressing absence levels (at more than twice the national average for improvement), exclusions and preparing statements for children with special educational needs. It has addressed its priority of reducing surplus secondary school places through closing schools and supporting the development of two City Academies.
- 56 Social care for children continues to perform well overall with the exception of the measures that focus on educational attainment and training of children looked after. In terms of educational attainment overall, there are some important areas that are improving (pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, pupils achieving level five or above in Key Stage 3 mathematics, and pupils achieving level four or above in Key Stage 2 mathematics) with key stage 2 results showing a level of improvement above the national average. However, performance is still comparatively low. In some areas no improvement is being shown (pupils achieving five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to G, or in pupils achieving level five or above in key stage 3 English and science).
- 57 Progress has also been made against the priority of promoting healthier communities and effective social care for adults. Improvements in adult care services such as rapid response and residential rehabilitation have helped to reverse the trend of admission from hospital into long term residential care. However, the number of people over 65 who are helped to live at home has reduced.
- 58 The Council has made many improvements in areas that contribute to promoting the economic vitality of Middlesbrough. For example it has cut considerably the amount of time homeless people spend in bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation. Prior to the transfer of its housing stock, the Council improved its re-let time for Council housing and made its repairs service more responsive. Improvements have also been made to processing times for housing benefit claims. A variety of initiatives and schemes for small and medium enterprises, business start ups and unemployed residents have been successful. In addition, usage of the town's museums and libraries and children's participation in arts activities have both improved.

- 59 Progress has been made in transforming the local environment. Middlesbrough's streets are cleaner as a result of action taken following a best value review with only 28 per cent of streets now classified as "unclean"; recycling services are improving, and Albert Park has been redeveloped as have other green spaces. The Council is much faster at dealing with major planning applications and improvements have been made to traffic controls on sensitive roads, pedestrian crossings with facilities for people with disabilities and easy to use footpaths.
- 60 Key areas that have not improved include the proportion of homes that meet the decent homes standard, the amount of waste collected per head of population, condition of principal roads, and recovery of overpaid benefit.
- 61 Service improvements have been highlighted in a range of service inspections including cultural services and access to services both judged to be good services with promising prospects for improvement. Inspections of both children's and adult social care have resulted in judgements of serving most people well with promising prospects for improvement. The Council has not had an inspection of its Local Education Authority function since 2001.
- 62 Resident satisfaction (which takes into account the link between resident satisfaction and deprivation) with the Council overall is in the top 25 per cent at 57 per cent. Satisfaction with key services (taking into account deprivation where appropriate) is generally positive. Resident satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities, parks and open spaces, libraries, waste collection, tenant participation and satisfaction with overall service from the landlord is in the top 25 per cent; satisfaction with public transport information and public transport, standards of cleanliness in the area, and civic amenity sites is in the second quartile; and resident satisfaction with recycling facilities is in the bottom 25 per cent.

Investment

- 63 The Council's strengths now outweigh its weaknesses in this area. The Council is putting into place the building blocks that will enable it to deliver improvement in the future. However, some of these building blocks have only recently been introduced and have yet to demonstrate an impact across the organisation.
- 64 The Council continues to invest in a number of outward facing initiatives such as the new £19 million arts gallery and public square and the Stockton / Middlesbrough initiative which will provide major development for the town centre and the riverside areas.
- 65 The Council has improved its communication mechanisms though some issues around communicating with part time lower paid staff remain.
- 66 The organisation is open to challenge particularly from the Mayor and scrutiny function and there are examples of the Council inviting external challenge and making changes as a result.
- 67 ICT investment has also taken place in a number of specific areas such as the one stop shop, the consultation database and in financial management. The introduction of a new financial management system (SAP) by the Council and HBS is enabling further improvements to processes.

- 68 The Council has a robust approach to medium term financial planning including making provisions for the introduction of equal pay amongst employees. It makes use of a range of external funding to deliver projects that link to the Council's priorities, and has around £143 million of external funding to spend between 2004 and 2007.
- 69 A strong procurement strategy has been developed and progress is being made on its implementation. The implementation of the strategy was delayed as key staff were diverted to work on the large scale voluntary transfer of housing stock, however these staff are now back in place and good progress is being made in rolling out planned activities, although some slippage remains. The Council is taking action to embed the strategy into everyday activities within the Council as well as within major projects. There is a clear focus on value for money and providing effective support to services.
- 70 Access to Council services is generally good. For example there is high public satisfaction with the one stop shop, a young people's multi agency one stop shop has been established and outreach services have been developed with the NHS to bring services to local community leisure centres. However the Council has not fully addressed the access requirements set out in the Disability Discrimination Act. Although there is a resourced plan in place to improve the position, this investment will only take the Council to 43.37% compliance by 2008.
- 71 In Human Resources key investments have been made to address the high levels of sickness absence through improved monitoring, targeting specific action and developing a manager's toolkit. The Council has also made significant progress in addressing single status. However many other developments require further investment before they will be secure enough to ensure an impact on capacity in the future. For example:
- ◆ Although councillor development is a key element of the People Strategy and would enable councillors to identify development needs and have them met through both internal and external development opportunities, only 8 councillors have taken up the offer of a personal development plan.
 - ◆ The Council has not yet conducted an employee survey that measures morale, satisfaction with the Council as an employer, satisfaction with career progression, management or pay. This makes it hard for the Council to establish how effectively it is managing its workforce and where further development is needed.
- 72 The Council has raised awareness of risk and the need to address it, but has not invested sufficiently in ensuring that the Council is properly equipped to be able to identify, assess and manage risk. Development to date has been ad hoc and the technical training which is needed to underpin the strategy has not been undertaken. The drive and continuity expected from the risk forum has not materialised because key staff have left the organisation.

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

Learning

- 73 This is an area of strength. The Council is clear about what it has achieved and what still remains to be done in terms of improving the quality of life of local people. It has a solid understanding of the current context of Middlesbrough and of what needs to be done either by the Council or in conjunction with partners. There is a strong learning culture. The Council demonstrates an emphasis on sharing learning both across the organisation and with others.
- 74 The Council reviews its initiatives for effectiveness and impact, and makes changes as a result. For example:
- ◆ The number of house burglaries, motor vehicle thefts and deliberate car fires were significantly reduced through the development of the active intelligence mapping system (AIM) into a mini AIM process which targeted partnership activity in a particular ward.
 - ◆ The Council's work to improve its relationship with HBS has helped it with its negotiations around the specification for the second half of the contract (2005-2010) which is making improvements to the effectiveness of performance measures.
- 75 Improvements are also being made to services as a result of learning through visits to other organisations and benchmarking activities. For example,
- ◆ The council learned from other authorities in developing different approaches to consultation such as fun days and using existing events such as Music Live to obtain feedback.
 - ◆ The Council learned from other councils and sought support from the Improvement and Development Agency and Employers Organisation when developing its People Strategy.
- 76 Services have also improved as a result of the Council sharing learning internally such as between departments, and through scrutiny activities. For example
- ◆ The Council has improved access to Council jobs following a visit by the regeneration service to the local job centre. Following discussions between departments the Council's recruitment processes were amended and jobs more widely advertised.
 - ◆ Access to services has been improved following an issue raised through a community cluster which was addressed through the introduction of multi lingual information leaflets where street scene staff learnt from an approach used by social care.
- 77 The council has a systematic approach to learning. There are a number of internal and external officer working groups which share good practice and knowledge between staff in addition to structured systems such as performance and budget

clinics which link under performing services to high performing services where services can be improved.

Future plans

- 78 The Council has robust plans in place to tackle many of the issues that face Middlesbrough and strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area.
- 79 The Council's future plans include some that have been developed in partnership with other bodies through the Middlesbrough Partnership. The plans directly link with the ambition set for the town by the Council and the Partnership. Staff, partners and local people are signed up to plans to improve Middlesbrough. Plans and strategies have been reviewed in light of changes in local, regional and national context, including actual and predicted changes in demographics.
- 80 Clear plans are in place for the regeneration of Middlesbrough some of which will be delivered in partnership with a neighbouring local authority and are targeted at capitalising on the potential of the riverside. In addition, the Council has plans in place to address key areas such as educational attainment. Plans to integrate children's services are progressing well.
- 81 Comprehensive plans are not in place in all areas to drive future improvement. The people strategy is not currently based on a robust analysis of the workforce profile. Until the Council develops its workforce development plan it cannot be sure that it will have the right skills in the right places to deliver on its future plans.
- 82 Council service plans link back to the Council Plan and the Community Strategy. However the corporate minimum standard for service plans has not been rigorously applied. For example not all service plans in 2004/05 included risk or a consideration of the cross cutting issues. 2005/06 service plans are not yet complete but a review of a sample of the draft plans showed that plans did not comply fully with the standard.
- 83 The Council has a track record of ensuring that its front line services are socially inclusive and has introduced a sound diversity framework. However, implementation of the framework is mixed with diversity action plans that are not consistently robust and that do not make it clear how Council activity and objectives around diversity will help to achieve the priorities as set out in the community strategy.

Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	4	<p>Council and partners have a strong and ambitious vision for Middlesbrough</p> <p>Vision is built on a good understanding of the local context including the needs and aspirations of local people</p> <p>Ambition is supported by quality of life indicators and other success measures and there is clarity of what Middlesbrough will look like in 10 - 15 years</p> <p>Ambition is owned by Council staff, councillors and partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.</p> <p>Council provides active, visible and effective leadership to local people</p>	
Prioritisation	4	<p>Clear priorities for improvement that underpin the ambition for Middlesbrough.</p> <p>Priorities, plans and delivery are influenced by the views of local people and Council's good understanding of issues in Middlesbrough</p> <p>Decisions about what are not priorities have been made</p> <p>Priorities are directly linked with national and regional priorities and policies</p> <p>Local people, partners and Council staff together with councillors, understand and own priorities for improvement</p> <p>Medium term financial plan and capital strategy ensure that resources are targeted to priorities</p>	
Focus	4	<p>Demonstrated ability to focus on improving service delivery, cross cutting issues and its internal workings.</p> <p>Has not been distracted from difficult tasks</p>	

		<p>Effective mechanisms in place to enable it to maintain its focus on key issues.</p> <p>Political and managerial structures reflect the priorities of the organisation</p>	
Capacity	3	<p>Strong political leadership and strong corporate management team</p> <p>Clear roles and responsibilities with effective working arrangements</p> <p>Track record for socially inclusive services</p> <p>High proportion of women in top 5% of earners</p> <p>Good financial capacity and good use of external funding for priorities</p> <p>ICT systems improved working practices and 66% of services capable of electronic delivery</p> <p>Open approach to partnership and alternative methods of service delivery</p>	<p>No overarching workforce development strategy</p> <p>High levels of sickness</p> <p>Poor performance on indicators around the proportion of staff from black and minority ethnic communities or with disabilities</p> <p>Procurement strategy not fully implemented</p>
Performance management	3	<p>Clear and effective links between ambition and priorities and service plans enabling monitoring of achievement</p> <p>Some outcomes for communities are being measured</p> <p>Data collection mechanisms for some BVPIs improved and now more robust</p> <p>Effective financial management systems and a range of mechanisms to establish whether parts of the Council are providing value for money.</p> <p>Managers and executive councillors have a good grasp of performance issues within their portfolios</p> <p>Staff own the priorities of the Council that affect their work but some are not clear on how these fit with the wider picture</p> <p>A performance management system is in place for executive</p>	<p>Inconsistent approach to appraisal</p> <p>Understanding of corporate performance issues such as potential reasons for high levels of sickness absence is limited</p> <p>A number of customer charters and service promises are in place but not all services are covered and existing standards contain variable quality of target setting. The promotion of standards is not consistent across services.</p>

		councillors.	
Achievement	3	<p>Improvements delivered in priority areas such as unemployment, overall crime rate, smoking and conception rates in under 18s</p> <p>Service improvements have been highlighted in service inspections</p> <p>57 per cent of key performance indicators have improved since 2002</p> <p>Resident satisfaction with the Council overall is in the top 25 per cent and satisfaction with key services is above average</p>	<p>Performance against some key indicators has not improved e.g. homes meeting the decent homes standard, waste collection per head of population and recovery of overpaid benefit</p> <p>Educational attainment is mixed and coming from a comparatively low base</p> <p>Resident satisfaction with recycling facilities is in the bottom quartile</p>
Investment	3	<p>Improved internal communication</p> <p>Open to challenge both internal and external</p> <p>Robust approach to medium term financial planning and makes good use of external funding</p> <p>Strong progress on procurement</p> <p>Continued investment in regeneration</p>	<p>HR developments are yet to be embedded</p> <p>Systems in place to support risk management are not fully developed, embedded or universally applied.</p>
Learning	4	<p>Clear about what it has achieved and what still remains to be done in terms of improving the quality of life of local people</p> <p>Learning culture in place which demonstrates an emphasis on sharing learning both across the organisation and with others</p> <p>Range of examples of improvements to services as a result of learning</p> <p>Reviews its initiatives and improvements for effectiveness and impact and makes changes as a result.</p>	
Future Plans	3	<p>The Council has robust plans in place to deliver the ambition for Middlesbrough</p> <p>Service plans link to Council plan and community strategy</p> <p>Staff, partners and local people are signed up to plans to improve Middlesbrough.</p> <p>Plans and strategies have been reviewed in light of changes in</p>	<p>Workforce development is not currently based on a robust analysis of the workforce profile.</p> <p>Some service plans and action plans not sufficiently robust</p>

		<p>local, regional and national context, including actual and predicted changes in demographics.</p> <p>Clear plans are in place for the regeneration of Middlesbrough</p> <p>Difficult decisions regarding future service delivery made</p> <p>Finances in place to deliver its plans.</p>	
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Framework for comprehensive performance assessment

84 This comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003. This section imposes a duty on the Audit Commission to, from time to time, produce a report of its findings in relation to the performance of local authorities in the exercise of their functions. This report must categorise local authorities as to their performance.

85 The main elements of the assessment were:

- ◆ a self-assessment completed by the Council;
- ◆ the Council's improvement plan;
- ◆ the Audit Commission's qualitative assessment of continuous improvement;
- ◆ updated performance indicators;
- ◆ inspection findings; and
- ◆ the 2002 corporate assessment and supporting documentary evidence.

86 The assessment for Middlesbrough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 31st January to 3rd February 2005.

87 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 improvement planning by the Council.

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