

Progress Assessment Report

March 2006



# Progress Assessment

**Congleton Borough 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'.

Councils have prepared improvement plans following CPA and those councils classified as 'under-performing' have received annual progress assessments by the Audit Commission. Those cases giving most cause for concern have also been the subject of formal engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Through its network of relationship managers, the Commission worked closely with lead officials assigned by the ODPM in developing an appropriate monitoring programme.

Audit Commission progress assessment work has sought to measure the impact and sustainability of improvement activity. The progress assessment work has been tailored to local circumstances to provide appropriate public assurance and to contribute to improvement reporting. It involved an evidence-based judgement on progress against the original corporate assessment criteria, but without producing 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.

## Introduction

- 1 In November 2003, the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) category for Congleton Borough Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'weak'. The key strengths and weaknesses from the corporate assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 2 This report presents an analysis of the Council's progress to date, based on the Council's implementation of its improvement and recovery plan and comparison with the baseline position of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

## Summary

- 3 Overall, Congleton Borough Council has made progress over the last year. It has faced significant financial pressures during 2005 and has made good progress in addressing these. However, focus on financial pressures has meant that progress in other areas has been mixed. The Council now has clear priorities articulated in a new medium-term corporate plan, financial management and community engagement have improved and some building blocks have been put in place that will help deliver priorities. Most services remain good, with improvements in some of the Council's priority areas including housing benefits and recycling, however some services show less improvement, for example leisure services and affordable housing. Performance management, human resource management and community leadership remain key areas for improvement if the Council is to be successful in delivering its new priorities. Alongside this, sustained focus is needed on managing the Council's underlying financial position.
- 4 Good achievements have been made in addressing financial pressures, however, this is still an area of significant risk. As a result of more effective financial management and planning, significant budget gaps for future years were identified during 2005. A service efficiency review was undertaken to identify where savings could be made. Savings identified from this review, along with further efficiencies and some unexpected income gains has enabled a residual budget gap for 2005/06 to be bridged and the Council to set a balanced budget for 2006/07. However, delivery of the 2006/07 budget and future financial stability require sustained management focus and may also require members taking difficult decisions in relation to issues such as car parking charges and the future direction of leisure services.
- 5 The Council's capacity to deliver its priorities remains stretched. It has made some improvements through recruiting to new senior management posts which has had an impact, and is putting in place effective project management but lacks a framework of up-to-date human resource policies to guide its approach in this area. Performance monitoring has improved with systems in place to capture data, but performance management is less developed and a corporate approach to business planning is not in place.
- 6 The Council has some successes in working in partnership to deliver cross-cutting improvements but these are limited and have yet to have an impact in terms of improvements in wider community outcomes. The Council has worked to develop a strong relationship with the voluntary sector backed up by a compact that works well. There has also been progress in joint working with other councils, with partnerships agreed to deliver payroll and building control services. However, working with health partners is only just beginning to develop with limited partnership activity in place to improve the health of local people.

- 7 Overall, the Council delivers good quality services at low cost and is providing value for money, however achievement of improvement is variable. In 2004/05, performance improved for 51 per cent of performance indicators. Some key service areas have achieved good improvements, for example recycling and housing benefits. However, 26 per cent of indicators remain in the worst 25 per cent nationally and performance in planning services deteriorated. Leisure services which are high cost, with low usage and relatively low resident satisfaction, do not provide value for money (VFM).
- 8 The Council has put in place some building blocks that will deliver priorities. Progress has been made to review and restructure the local strategic partnership (LSP). The new structure with eight delivery partnerships, coupled with the development of a performance management framework provides a good basis for partnership work in the future. The recent restructure to align staff resources to corporate goals and the appointment of new managers also provides a good basis for delivering priorities.
- 9 The Council has well-advanced plans to improve customer access through the development of one stop shops and a customer contact centre. It is making good use of support from another council in this work. Resourced plans are also in place to improve the physical access of council buildings.
- 10 Strategies and plans are now in place to provide a good framework for delivering priorities. These include up-to-date capital and asset management plans that have been assessed as 'good' by government office and a 'fit for purpose' housing strategy. The challenge for the Council now it to sustain and build on the progress made, particularly during the last six months.

## Recommendations

- 11 It is recommended that the Council:
- actively and promptly shares the findings of this progress assessment with staff;
  - takes it to an appropriate public committee meeting; and
  - uses the key findings as the basis for revising the improvement plan in conjunction with any decisions from the regular CPA round table meetings.

## Context

### The locality

- 12 Congleton Borough Council in Cheshire covers an area of just over 81 square miles. It includes the towns of Congleton, Sandbach, Alsager, Middlewich and Holmes Chapel and a number of rural villages. The population of the borough is 91,800, with 2.7 per cent from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest minority ethnic community is white Irish, accounting for 0.6 per cent of the population.
- 13 The area is the 60<sup>th</sup> most affluent district of 354 in England. Unemployment at 1.3 per cent is below national and regional averages and car ownership is high. Average house prices are higher than the regional average and incomes lower than the regional average. Consequently, the provision of affordable housing is a priority for local people. Despite relatively low crime levels, fear of crime is a concern in the borough.

### The Council

- 14 The Conservative Party controls the Council with 26 of 48 seats. The largest opposition party is the Liberal Democrats with 14 seats. The business of the Council is governed by an Executive of seven councillors including the Leader. Scrutiny arrangements have been revised in the past year to align with the new goals of the Council.
- 15 The net revenue budget for 2005/06 is £11.3 million. The recent efficiency review has seen a reduction in the total number of staff the Council employs by approximately 10 per cent from 440 staff. An office centralisation project is underway with the aim of centralising all council offices in Sandbach by the end of 2007.

## What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 16 The Council has made good progress in establishing its priorities and is beginning to demonstrate community leadership though this is still at an early stage. Community engagement and internal communication have both improved this year. Good progress has been made in addressing financial pressures although this is still an area of risk.
- 17 The Council has clear ambitions for the borough which are based on an understanding of local needs. These ambitions are articulated in the Council's newly developed medium-term corporate strategy (MTCS) covering the period 2006 to 2010. This has three outward facing goals; a prosperous borough, a healthy borough, and a safe borough. The MTCS also includes a goal to be a high-performing council. The goals are supported by objectives with targets in place for most of these. There are 11 priorities for improvement, all of which are explicitly linked to the Council's four goals. The Council has broadly aligned the budget to reflect its priority areas but recognises that it needs to do more work to achieve clearer links between the medium-term financial strategy and priorities.
- 18 In determining its priorities the Council has taken account of national and local drivers and the concerns of local people gathered through the Customer 500 panel. It is prioritising the reduction of the fear of crime, the promotion of better activities for young people and improving the affordability of homes all of which have been identified as top priorities by local people. Priorities are also grounded in up-to-date research and information; the Council has a detailed community profile and housing needs survey and has used this information in determining its priorities.
- 19 The Council's objectives broadly reflect the aims of community plan, though this lacks clear targets to provide a framework for joint working. The Council recognises this and the community plan is currently subject to review, with consultation events planned for the summer and the launch of a revised plan in September 2006.
- 20 Community leadership is beginning to develop but is still limited. Council representation on the LSP is seen as supportive and there is some councillor involvement on national local government groupings. Councillors are providing community leadership to a project to develop an action plan in Alsager and have led some large and difficult public meetings. However, the Council has only recently taken a strategic lead in other cross-cutting areas including community safety and health.

- 21** In the past year, the Council has had a strong focus on resolving financial pressures. As a result of more effective financial management and planning, significant budget gaps for 2005/06 and 2006/07 were identified during 2005. In response, a service efficiency review was undertaken to identify where savings could be made. Savings identified from this review, along with further efficiencies and some unexpected income gains has enabled a residual budget gap for 2005/06 to be bridged and the Council to set a balanced budget for 2006/07. This is a good achievement. However, although the Council's financial management and financial position is now much stronger, financial pressures are still a significant risk facing the Council.
- 22** As part of its efficiency review, the Council has also identified service areas where it is disinvesting. It has adopted a logical approach to determining these, considering its statutory duties and alternative private sector provision for services. However, in determining efficiencies the Council has not fully considered the impact of its decisions on all communities. It has reduced the availability of concessions at leisure facilities but has not researched the potential impact of this decision on usage or the quality of life of residents on low incomes.
- 23** Although the efficiency review has meant that the Council has confronted some difficult issues and taken some hard decisions about services and staff resources, there are other instances where it has deferred potentially difficult issues that would have an impact on resources. For example, it has not made a decision about whether or not to charge for car parking in the borough, this remains a sensitive and unresolved issue.
- 24** The Council's approach to engaging with communities has improved. The community compact includes consultation timescales to improve the ability of voluntary and community organisations to respond to consultation exercises. It has also carried out some consultation with young people, for example about parks refurbishment with some success. A play area in Congleton was designed by local school children with the result that the area has been subject to less vandalism. Mechanisms for broader community engagement are in place through four area forums. The Council acknowledges that it needs to review these, both to improve effectiveness and to align engagement processes with those of partner agencies.
- 25** The Council has improved internal communication through the introduction of a monthly team brief. This gives performance information in a way that staff find accessible, focused around the goals of the MTCS. Better cross-departmental working has also helped staff communication. The Council plans to build on this with further enhancements to communications in 2006.

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

- 26 The Council has made good progress in improving financial management. However, this has impacted on its progress in other key areas. Limited progress has been made in performance management and the Council lacks up-to-date policies and procedures to provide a framework for its human resource management. Some progress has been made in increasing capacity through recruitment to new senior management posts and developing project management.
- 27 Significant progress has been made to improve financial management and reporting. In 2004, financial management and internal reporting tools were unreliable and there were major financial control weaknesses. In their recent use of resources work, the Council's external auditors have now judged the Council as meeting minimum requirements in financial management and reporting and acknowledged the considerable progress made in this area during the last two years. This view was supported by service managers involved in this assessment who consistently reported that the quality of financial information has significantly improved. For example, they are now provided with up-to-date and regular financial monitoring information. This enables them to clearly understand budget variances and so improves budget management.
- 28 Performance management within the Council has seen some improvements but its effectiveness is still limited. Processes are in place for collecting performance data through the PIMS system and monitoring information brings together financial and service performance information in one report. Reports are presented to the management team and executive and scrutiny committees on a regular basis. However, a culture of using monitoring information systematically to improve services is not embedded across the Council.
- 29 The Council does not have a consistent approach to business planning. Business plans are in place in some operational service areas but not others. This absence of an overarching strategic approach to business planning means that the Council lacks a structured approach to planning, managing and improving services.
- 30 Service standards are not in place across the Council and so people who use council services do not have information about the level of service they can expect. A complaints system is in place but responses to complaints are not centrally collated. This means the Council does not know whether information from complaints is being used to drive service improvement.
- 31 The Council's approach to risk management is not effective. There has been limited progress with the development of a risk management strategy and risk register with some examples of risks being considered in decision making. However, the identification and mitigation of risks are areas where more work is needed and the Council's external auditors have assessed the Council as not meeting minimum requirements in this area.

- 32** Human resource management is an area of weakness. The Council has a medium-term workforce strategy appended to the MTCS. While this provides a strategic framework for the Council's approach it is not supported by an action plan to show how it will be implemented. Its effectiveness in providing a framework for human resource management is, therefore, limited. The Council also lacks up-to-date human resources policies and procedures. Workforce planning is not in place and the Council does not know at a corporate level what skills gaps exist below manager level. The Council is not on target to meet the deadline of 2007 for the implementation of single status.
- 33** The Council has an employee development and review (EDR) process in place but this does not cover all staff and is not consistently applied, some services use this to set targets, others focus on training. Its value in providing a corporate framework for staff development is, therefore, limited.
- 34** Sickness absence is improving through a more focused approach to managing sickness and through initiatives such as the introduction of wellbeing sessions delivered monthly by an occupational health nurse. The Council is confident that it will reduce sickness this year and will meet its target of nine days average sickness per employee this year.
- 35** The Council has made some progress in putting in place building blocks that will enable improvements in the future. It has revised its corporate management team and created a staff structure that is closely aligned to MTCS goals to increase its capacity to deliver these. New senior management in human resources has a clear focus on the key priorities to be addressed in this area and is putting plans in place to tackle the weaknesses there. Scrutiny arrangements have been revised with committees in place that also align with the goals of the MTCS and a separate performance monitoring scrutiny committee. These have had some impact on policy, for example in relation to dog fouling, but are not fully effective in challenging Executive decisions or contributing to service improvement.
- 36** The Council has worked to develop relationships with partners, however, some partnerships are underdeveloped. It has strong relationships with the voluntary sector and town councils. Joint working with other district councils is developing well; the Council has a joint procurement unit and is delivering some services jointly with an adjoining council to increase capacity. However, joint working with health partners is at an early stage with limited joint activity to improve the health of local people.
- 37** Some progress has been made in developing project management. The Council is now using a formal project management methodology. This means that it now has processes in place to consistently manage projects to time, budget and quality requirements. An early example of this being used is the Council's e-government programme and projects to improve customer access to services.

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

- 38** The Council has had a strong focus on making efficiencies in the past year as a result of its financial pressures. It has good knowledge about the pressures on its budget and understands the areas where a focus is needed in order to achieve value for money, for example in leisure services and in rationalising management arrangements for civic halls. However, the Council's approach to managing and improving value for money is not embedded and the Council needs to be more proactive in driving out VFM.

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

- 39 Most services remain good and are delivered at low cost and overall the Council is delivering value for money. There have been improvements in some of the Council's priority areas including housing benefits and recycling. However, some services show less improvement, for example leisure services and affordable housing and improvements in wider community outcomes are limited. The Council has made some investments to support future improvement and access to services has improved.
- 40 The most recent best value indicator for overall resident satisfaction with the Council (for 2003/04) showed satisfaction at 54 per cent, which is above average. Satisfaction with housing benefit services is high; satisfaction with recycling and waste collection and planning services are above average. However, resident satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities is below average and satisfaction with parks and open spaces is amongst the worst in the country. The Council's own information, though not directly comparable, is more favourable with 77 per cent of residents satisfied with parks and open spaces in February 2006.
- 41 Overall, the Council's performance on 51 per cent of best value indicators has improved since 2002/03. However, only 44 per cent of its indicators are above the average for the country, and 26 per cent of indicators remain in the worst 25 per cent nationally.
- 42 These statistics reflect a mixed picture of achievement in services. In environment, recycling is an area of strength with performance that is among the best in the country. As waste collection costs are also low, good value for money is provided in this area. Housing benefit services have improved with the exception of the percentage of cases processed correctly. The percentage of council tax collected has improved significantly and the Council's performance is now among the best in the country.
- 43 However, some services have not improved. In planning, performance in processing planning applications has worsened and for minor applications in 2004/05 was among the worst in the country. This is contrary to a national trend for improvement in this indicator. However, recent recruitment in planning during 2005 is now beginning to have an impact and performance is now improving in this area.
- 44 Leisure services also remain an area of relatively poor performance. They do not provide value for money being high cost, with relatively low usage and low resident satisfaction. The Council has engaged consultants to improve marketing of the service but has not taken a decision about the longer-term rationalisation and provision of leisure services.

- 45 The Council has some successes in working in partnership to deliver cross-cutting improvements but these are limited and have yet to have an impact in terms of improvements in wider community outcomes. It has achieved the restoration of a major park in the borough with funding from a range of sources including contributions from the voluntary sector. As part of the refurbishment, the Council has opened a restaurant with the creation of 14 jobs for local people. However, it has less success in addressing the fear of crime through use of developer contributions and has been slow to respond to partners in some instances, for example in relation to resolving a local community nuisance issue.
- 46 Access to services has improved and plans are in place to make further improvements. The quality of the Council's website has improved considerably as a result of a recent review and now provides good services for the public including the ability to search for facilities online, for example doctors surgeries. The percentage of interactions with the public that can be delivered electronically has improved but remains below average. Physical access to Council buildings is limited with only 9 per cent of council buildings open to the public accessible by disabled people in 2004/05. Resourced plans are in place to address this with £1.29 million allocated for this and other buildings alteration work, for example to improve access to leisure and parks facilities and public toilets.
- 47 The Council has well-developed plans to improve customer access through developing one-stop shops and a customer contact centre. Staff training is planned for March to develop a more focused customer approach and the intention is that services will be available through the contact centre from April 2006. The Council recognises that it does not have the skills in house to develop this project alone and has secured support from another council to help develop its approach. Sensibly it has purchased a customer relationship management system in partnership with the County Council enabling it to more easily integrate systems and processes across both councils. It is using robust project management processes to manage this project.
- 48 The Council is investing to support future improvements. In housing, it is improving its approach to homelessness through appointing a visiting officer and taking a proactive approach to preventing homelessness by providing advice and support to private sector residents. The Council's own information shows a reduction in homelessness as a result of these new initiatives. It is also seeking to improve the number of affordable homes in the borough. One of its approaches is to increase the number of empty homes for rent. Through cross-departmental working the Council is identifying owners of empty properties and writing to these to encourage them to rent their properties. It has also invested in streetscape services. For example, new software has been introduced into the service to support better redeployment of resources and the Council has also invested in equipment to support delivery of the priority for improving street cleanliness.
- 49 A joint procurement with a neighbouring council is in place and this is now beginning to deliver efficiencies, for example in stationery and the recruitment of temporary staff. Other investment in joint working includes partnerships to deliver payroll and building control services.

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

- 50 The Council has made some progress in putting together structures, strategies and plans to support further improvement. Although it is self-aware it does not have a systematic approach to sharing learning across the organisation.
- 51 The Council has put in place some strategies and plans that provide a good framework for delivering its priorities. It has up-to-date capital and asset management plans that have been assessed as 'good' by government office and a housing strategy that has been assessed as 'fit for purpose'. As part of its efficiency review, it has revised the capital programme and schemes are now well-linked to key priorities. The medium-term financial strategy provides a good framework for future financial management. This includes key future budget pressures such as an assessment of financial implications of new legislation. An economic planning strategy is in development and plans are in place to review and update human resource policies.
- 52 The Council is beginning to develop structures that will enable it to align its work more closely to that of partners. It has reviewed the LSP and has a structure that enables a better focus on delivering strategic priorities with eight delivery partnerships in place facilitated by partners as well as council officers. A partnership agreement has been developed and a performance monitoring framework is in place. These developments are new and untested but provide a good basis for future partnership work. The recent restructure to align staff resources to corporate goals and the appointment of new managers also provides a good basis for delivering priorities.
- 53 Cross-cutting themes are beginning to be addressed. The Council was engaged in a recent conference on alcohol abuse together with partners and is now developing initiatives that can be jointly delivered in the future. Work is to commence in spring 2006 on a new business park in Sandbach with financial support from the North West Regional Development Agency.
- 54 There is not a systematic approach to sharing learning across the Council. The Council's self-assessment shows a good level of self-awareness about what is working well and what still needs to be achieved. The Council takes advantage of learning opportunities including visits to other councils but is less successful in sharing learning internally and a systematic approach is not yet in place.

## Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003

Table 1

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New corporate strategies more realistic.</li> <li>• More stable political leadership.</li> <li>• Good economic planning strategy.</li> <li>• Good involvement of opposition parties.</li> <li>• LSP and community plan now making better progress.</li> <li>• Draft community plan reflected in new corporate strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate goals expressed in very broad terms.</li> <li>• Some confusion between vision, goals, objectives and core values.</li> <li>• Strategies not all supported by action plans.</li> <li>• Links to resources.</li> <li>• Focus on short-term issues.</li> <li>• Minority groups given low priority.</li> <li>• LSP undeveloped.</li> <li>• Community plan not yet established.</li> <li>• Local needs not yet analysed.</li> </ul>

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Prioritisation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of priorities has been reduced.</li> <li>• Clear priorities for streetscape, housing, recycling, community safety.</li> <li>• Priorities reflect local concerns.</li> <li>• Good match of local and national priorities in joint drugs team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation inconsistent, lacks systematic approach.</li> <li>• More research and analysis needed.</li> <li>• Area, town and parish councils not effectively used.</li> <li>• Staff unclear about new generic working arrangements.</li> <li>• Difficulties in engaging young people.</li> <li>• Difficult decision needed about priorities in order to balance budget.</li> </ul>
Focus	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable political climate.</li> <li>• New political structure working well.</li> <li>• Priorities reviewed and reduced.</li> <li>• More regular performance information available.</li> <li>• Good scrutiny function.</li> <li>• New management structure.</li> <li>• Clear focus on streetscape and housing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of systems to support focus.</li> <li>• Officer leadership still in transition.</li> <li>• Staff need to be more empowered.</li> <li>• Recent improvements needs to be sustained.</li> </ul>

**20 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political structures effective.</li> <li>• Committed to training and development.</li> <li>• Better use of EDRs.</li> <li>• ICT platforms now replaced.</li> <li>• 24-hour call centre established.</li> <li>• Some good examples of joint working.</li> <li>• Pragmatic approach to local government reorganisation.</li> <li>• Confidence in Chief Executive designate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable to loss or absence of key staff.</li> <li>• Staff morale recovering but still low in some areas.</li> <li>• Councillor training attendance poor.</li> <li>• Revenue budget not yet sustainable.</li> <li>• Poor financial management information for councillors.</li> <li>• Medium-term financial plan in development.</li> <li>• E-government slow to develop.</li> <li>• Partnership working undeveloped.</li> <li>• Senior management team yet to develop strategic focus.</li> </ul>

Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003 **21**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Performance management	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New IT system to provide more regular information.</li> <li>• EDRs now focus more clearly on performance issues.</li> <li>• Staff and councillors becoming more engaged in performance issues.</li> <li>• New customer charter established.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of continuous improvement not established.</li> <li>• Impact on customers yet to be demonstrated.</li> <li>• Complaints and customer feedback not used systematically to drive service improvements.</li> <li>• Low profile for staff panel.</li> <li>• Suggestion scheme failed to engage staff.</li> <li>• Financial information not provided regularly.</li> <li>• Performance measures for priority services yet to be developed.</li> </ul>

**22 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good range of services, few weaknesses.</li> <li>• 70 per cent residents satisfied with services.</li> <li>• 30 per cent services in top quartile.</li> <li>• Good fit between priorities and quality.</li> <li>• Economic activity high.</li> <li>• Affordable housing targets being met.</li> <li>• Good support for private rented sector.</li> <li>• Planning gain used to support sustainable transport.</li> <li>• Community safety.</li> <li>• Refuse collection.</li> <li>• High levels of recycling.</li> <li>• Good use of brown field sites.</li> <li>• Very low crime levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service delivery suffers from weak corporate structures.</li> <li>• Council slow to publicise successes.</li> <li>• Marketing and external communications.</li> <li>• Cross-cutting areas – social inclusion and young people’s services – slow to develop.</li> <li>• Management of public expectations.</li> </ul>

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements in priority areas.</li> <li>• User satisfaction surveys.</li> <li>• Over half of PIs improving.</li> <li>• Good use of planning agreements.</li> <li>• Care and repair service.</li> <li>• Social housing units.</li> <li>• Leisure centre facilities.</li> <li>• Middlewich boat and folk festival.</li> <li>• New sweepers and reuse vehicles.</li> <li>• Recycling increased.</li> <li>• Car thefts reduced.</li> <li>• Improved services in revenues and benefits.</li> <li>• BVRs show good improvement judgements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress has been slow compared to other boroughs.</li> <li>• Fear of crime is still high.</li> <li>• Need to measure better the impact of community safety work.</li> <li>• Poor partnership working has led to slower progress in cross-cutting areas.</li> <li>• Satisfaction with parks and open spaces.</li> <li>• Tourism generally undeveloped.</li> <li>• Burglaries increasing.</li> </ul>

**24 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Investment	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment decisions broadly follow priorities.</li> <li>• External inspections generally find good prospects for improvement.</li> <li>• Approach to RDA for enterprise centre funding.</li> <li>• Improved ICT infrastructure.</li> <li>• Performance management being developed.</li> <li>• Challenging scrutiny process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies not clearly connected to resource allocation.</li> <li>• Incremental approach to budgeting.</li> <li>• Further income streams need to be developed.</li> <li>• Procurement opportunities not yet developed.</li> <li>• Risk management not yet systematically applied.</li> <li>• HR strategy.</li> <li>• Management development.</li> <li>• Vacant posts in key areas.</li> </ul>
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive approach to inspection and audit.</li> <li>• Learnt from internal difficulties.</li> <li>• Responsive to public concerns.</li> <li>• Customer Charter.</li> <li>• Staff more engaged recently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievements not well-publicised.</li> <li>• Learning not shared within the Council.</li> <li>• Weak baseline performance information.</li> <li>• Limited use of best practice.</li> <li>• Area Forums, town and parish councils not effectively used.</li> <li>• Limited analysis of service delivery options.</li> <li>• Staff knowledge underused.</li> <li>• Council too inward looking.</li> </ul>

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Future plans	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing more robust and realistic plans.</li> <li>• Strategies now better fit corporate goals.</li> <li>• Strategic management reviews identified weak areas.</li> <li>• Government office assessments show that plans have improved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans not sufficiently well-developed to direct current and future activities.</li> <li>• Strategies not all supported by action plans.</li> <li>• Not linked closely enough to resources.</li> <li>• Resources strategy still in development.</li> <li>• Community plan not in place.</li> <li>• LSP slow to develop.</li> <li>• Partner engagement inconsistent.</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

- 1 The original Comprehensive Performance Assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2003/04.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 This progress monitoring report for Congleton Borough Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from July 2003 to January 2006.
- 5 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 the Council's CPA round table meeting and updating the Council's improvement plan.