

Progress Assessment Report

March 2006



# Progress Assessment

**North Shropshire District Council**

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# Contents

<b>Progress assessments</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
Recommendations	7
<b>Context</b>	<b>8</b>
The locality	8
The Council	8
<b>What is the Council trying to achieve?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003/04</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment</b>	<b>21</b>

## 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 'underperforming' 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 March 2004, the Audit Commission published a CPA category for North Shropshire District Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'poor'. The key strengths and weaknesses from the corporate assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 2 The Council's progress since then was assessed in April 2005. The assessment concluded that the Council had made some progress, particularly around improving its corporate structures and strategies, but limited progress in service delivery and improvement.
- 3 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

- 4 The Council has only made limited progress during 2005 as a consequence of setbacks with poor financial management, dealing with the fall out from its 2005/06 budget and priority setting decisions and continued mixed performance in service delivery. However, the Council has made progress in other areas, particularly strategic planning, community and organisational leadership and is continuing to develop its political and management capacity.
- 5 Improved strategic planning has enabled the Council and its partners to be clear about what it aims to do. A draft community strategy has been developed and there are linkages between community aspirations and what the Council intends to deliver through its new corporate and service plans from 2006 onwards. It is clear how the new overarching vision and four priority themes have been informed through context data and consultation. The focus for the priority themes is outwardly looking and is people/community-focused; this represents a move away from places and traditional service delivery to a more challenging cross cutting agenda for change. Actions, however, are not sufficiently measurable and outcome-focused to act as a driver for change.
- 6 The Council is undergoing a systematic review of its strategic plans and policies to ensure that they are fit for purpose and align with the new corporate priorities for 2006 to 2009. Some work has yet to be completed, but improvements in policies such as the provision of affordable housing are already resulting in improvements in this priority area.
- 7 The Council is improving its profile as a community leader and organisational leadership is similarly improving. Political and management capacity continues to strengthen through a successful training programme and recruitment.
- 8 Re-building partnerships and relationships since the 2005/06 budget setting decisions were communicated in February/March 2005 has diverted the Council's capacity. Relationships with some partners especially those involved with the LSP have improved. However, some significant pockets of scepticism remain. The credibility and trust with all stakeholders has not been restored.
- 9 Overall, poor financial management and budgetary control is a key area of weakness and the Council has a limited understanding of value for money. Steps are being taken to address this and some improvements are starting to take effect, but a culture of good financial management is some way off. Weaknesses in this area hinder the Council's ability to properly resource services and improvements for the future.
- 10 The Council's performance management framework is new and not embedded. Regular performance monitoring and service challenge has been introduced, providing a building block for the future, but the performance management culture that the Council aspires to is not evident across the Council. Internally, the Council's capacity continues to be stretched by continuing high levels of staff sickness.

- 11 The Council's recovery plan prioritised the establishment of basic systems and processes, and therefore has been internally focused. As a consequence, the Council has only recently started to focus on the delivery of improvement in services. As a result, the Council's overall progress in 2004/05 as measured by BVPIs was mixed and did not show an improving picture. Progress with the Council's priority areas for the first half of 2005/06 is mixed although there are encouraging signs of improvement in recycling, planning and the delivery of affordable housing.

## Recommendations

- 12 The following recommendations are made to the Council.

<b><i>Recommendations</i></b>
<i>R1 The Council should actively and promptly shares the findings of this progress assessment with staff.</i>
<i>R2 The Council should take it to an appropriate public committee meeting.</i>
<i>R3 The Council should use the key findings as the basis for revising the recovery plan in conjunction with any direction from the Monitoring Board, (if one exists).</i>

## Context

### The locality

- 13 North Shropshire is a large, sparsely populated rural district with a population of 58,117. Half the population live in the small market towns of Wem, Ellesmere, Market Drayton and Whitchurch. Only 1.1 per cent of the population are from non-white communities.
- 14 Regeneration and economic development are key concerns as agriculture and traditional industries are declining. Unemployment is below regional and national averages, as are average wages. There are average levels of deprivation overall but two wards are among the most 30 per cent of deprived wards in England. Poor transport links, rural isolation and a low skills base in the resident population are acknowledged issues.
- 15 The district has slightly below average percentage of young people, and slightly above average of people over the age of retirement. House prices are high. This, and low average wages for the area, means that affordable housing is a significant issue for local people.

### The Council

- 16 The Council has 40 councillors, with 17 in an independent group (including one Liberal Democrat), 17 Conservative, 4 Labour and 2 councillors not affiliated to a group. The Council is governed under interim arrangements implemented in August 2004 by an executive committee supported by three overview and scrutiny committees, a development control committee, a licensing committee and a standards committee. All political groups are represented on the Executive.
- 17 In 2005/06, the Council's net revenue budget was £8.5 million, the capital budget £6 million and had £3.1 million revenue balances. Spend per head of population is £143, higher than the regional and national average, and average Band D council tax is in the most expensive 25 per cent of English councils at £187.13.
- 18 A new management team has been in place since the arrival of a new Chief Executive in July 2005. Overall, the Council employs 357 people, not all full-time, and this is set to fall in this and future years in line with the Council's budget.

## What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 19 The Council and its partners have made good progress in developing new strategic plans and are now clear about the long-term aspirations for the area. The new community strategy has been developed through a robust consultation process which takes account of context data and the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including some hard to reach groups. The process has been managed to ensure that the emerging community strategy for 2006 to 2010 is aligned with the Shropshire integrated community strategy and developing local area agreements. The overarching vision is underpinned by four priority themes:
- a sustainable community;
  - a safer and stronger community;
  - a community with children and young people at the heart; and
  - a healthier community and healthy independent older people.
- 20 Strategic and financial planning is improving. The Council has recognised the weaknesses in the corporate plan 2005 to 2008 and has focused on the development of a new corporate vision, aims and priorities set out in a draft plan 2006 to 2009. The new vision is more outwardly looking, *'working together to deliver services to improve the quality of life for our community'*. The Council has adopted the community strategy themes outlined above and is proposing seven priority outcomes based around activities for young people, improving health, increasing jobs and businesses, affordable housing, reducing waste/increasing recycling, improving street cleanliness and reducing the fear of crime. Work is underway to ensure that service planning and resources are focused on the delivery of the priority outcomes for 2006/07. This approach is clarifying the linkages between high level plans and service delivery; focusing the Council's activities to deliver what it sets out to do.
- 21 Consultation is improving but not all stakeholders are fully engaged. The Council's business and financial planning for 2005/06 was rushed and resulted in damage to stakeholder relationships, adverse publicity and a period of uncertainty for partners. The Council acknowledges that its corporate plan 2005 to 2008 and spending decisions were based upon limited consultation and poor financial information. As a consequence, this year, the Council has spent a lot of time repairing relationships and re-evaluating its finances. Partners have been more involved in developing the Council's priorities and non-priorities, however, many feel that consultation is not always timely or meaningful and they are not kept informed about what has happened as a result. Communication and consultation has not fully restored the Council's credibility and trust with all its stakeholders.

- 22 The Council is starting to demonstrate community leadership. The Council is clearer about its role in leading the community and the part it plays in key partnerships. For example, providing a more visible and effective 'North Shropshire' presence in developing a county-wide approach to affordable housing. Organisational leadership, previously lacking, is now evident at senior level. There is a new corporate management team that has brought a new focus and drive to improve. However, whilst there has been a noticeable change at senior level, there is not a 'can do' culture throughout the whole organisation. For example, there are inconsistencies in the responsiveness of services across the Council. The new management team is realistic about the current organisational issues and is working systematically to address these and change the culture to become more customer-focused. The lack of an embedded customer-focused culture puts the Council's ability to deliver significant improvement at risk.

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

- 23** Progress in this area has been limited. The Council has continued to take steps to improve its capacity and performance management to ensure that it uses its resources effectively, but progress has been hindered by poor financial management, and having to re-build stakeholder relationships.
- 24** Financial management is a key area of weakness which has only recently been identified as an area for immediate attention. Historically, councillors and service managers did not fully understand the Council's finances. Budget monitoring and control was poor and as a consequence, there was little active management of spend, costs or value for money. Prior to 2005, service budgets have had limited challenge, underspends have been allowed to roll forward whilst base budgets have grown year-on-year. In planning for the 2005/06 financial year and beyond, the Council reacted to a perceived budget shortfall by cutting £500,000 from the revenue budget; £350,000 targeted at staff reductions with savings also from disinvestment in some facilities and services. However, by July 2005, it became apparent that the 2004/05 budget had been under spent by £660,000 and the finalised accounts showed the Council had £3.1 million revenue balances; most councillors and officers were not aware of this until then. The Council's 2005/06 budget continues to show an underspend, as of 30 November 2005 this amounted to £285,000 and the capital budget is forecast to be underspent by £1.4 million by 31 March 2006. The absence of good financial management and tight budgetary control is hindering the Council's ability to plan and deliver improving services.
- 25** The Council has responded to the improved clarity of its financial position and has started to focus on improving its financial management and budgetary control systems. CIPFA training for members/officers is underway to improve the level of financial understanding. Measures to improve budgetary control have been introduced including monthly expenditure profile reports for managers to take account of seasonal and other variations in spending patterns. A new plans and budget alignment process has been introduced which aims to link budgets with strategic and service planning, performance and financial management. Some changes have already taken place, for example, budget underspends are not allowed to be rolled forward and service budgets have been re-baselined for the forthcoming financial year. However managers have yet to be trained on the Council's new financial management system. The Council's relatively new focus on developing a culture of good financial management is a building block for sound corporate governance.

## 12 Progress Assessment | How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 26 Corporate performance monitoring has only recently started and is not embedded, performance management is embryonic. The Council's performance management framework is developing; there is a range of mechanisms to monitor performance and spend and provide challenge to address areas of underperformance. This has provided a focus for officers and members and they are starting to get to grips with managing performance. However, systems are new; the first quarterly performance report (April to June 2005) was produced in July 2005. Robust data for performance and costs is not available across all services yet, for example, there was no data for BVPI199 (the percentage of relevant land littered to a heavy/significant extent) in the first two quarterly reports for 2005/06. The system for managing the delivery of the Council's recovery plan via a traffic light report is not an effective tool for improvement or learning. The Council is not tracking progress against their baseline plans, and as a result, progress reporting does not accurately depict slippage or changes along the way. There is more benchmarking taking place but this is still limited and there is little comparison with others on costs. The concept of value for money is not well understood, thus limiting the Council's current effectiveness at challenging services.
- 27 Partnership working is not significantly contributing to increasing the Council's capacity for service delivery. The Council has had to put a lot of resources into repairing the damage to stakeholder relations caused by the way it communicated its budget re-alignment and disinvestment in facilities in February/March 2005, and in this respect has diverted capacity. There is a significant success story with the local strategic partnership (LSP) where a draft community strategy for 2006 to 2010 has been delivered to time and the LSP partners are optimistic about the future. However, these plans have yet to be turned into actions. Relationships with other key stakeholders and partners are not consistently adding capacity and some significant pockets of scepticism remain. Partners cite issues over the lack of clarity about what the Council intends to do, poor decision-making and poor/late delivery by North Shropshire DC. Although well placed for the delivery of the community strategy in the future, other partnerships are more fragile.
- 28 The Council's political capacity continues to strengthen. A challenging member development programme is being delivered with good attendance at training sessions. Members are demonstrating new skills and as a result decision-making and challenge is better informed. The Council's aim to move away from focusing on the district's four market towns to develop a 'North Shropshire' approach is starting to show through improving political management.
- 29 The Council's resources continue to be stretched and present a significant risk to the delivery of improvement. Levels of staff sickness continue to be very high. In 2004/05, this was equivalent to 12.7 days per employee, up from the previous year and bucking the national trend of decreasing sickness levels. Figures for the first half of 2005/06 (unaudited) show a further increase in sickness levels despite a new managing absence policy being implemented. Following a forensic analysis of the data, the Council is now pursuing a more proactive campaign to address this situation. It has taken action to resolve a significant proportion of the long-term sickness cases – though this is not yet showing in the figures.

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

- 30 The Council's progress to date is only just starting to be translated into some service improvement; overall performance continues to be mixed. Apart from a recent change on recycling facilities, the majority of North Shropshire's residents would not be able to identify many tangible improvements to services in the past year.
- 31 The 2004/05 BVPI performance data indicated that service performance remained mixed and the delivery of improvement weak. Sixty per cent of key indicators did not improve compared with 2002/03. A number of indicators were either qualified or the Council was unable to provide the data. The best performing services, revenues and benefits, are not council priority areas. Satisfaction overall is below the median and declining, service costs are generally above the median and not providing value for money. However, a drive to deliver improvement in the Council's 2005/06 priority areas and previously poorly performing services has resulted in some progress since April 2005.
- 32 The provision of affordable homes, the Council's top priority, is improving. Three were completed in 2003/04, 27 in 2004/05, 20 have been built during the first half of 2005/06 and the target of 52 for the year should be met. This is a good improvement as an average of only 200/250 new homes is built in the district each year. However, this still falls short of the 127 units identified as required in the housing needs survey.
- 33 Recycling performance is improving, but the waste stream continues to grow. In September 2005, the Council reconfigured its waste collection service, introducing alternate weekly collections of dry/green recyclates and residual waste. This has resulted in a much increased recycling/composting rate – predicted to be the equivalent of well over 40 per cent over a full year. However, the Council is not proactively addressing waste minimization and costs of the service remain comparatively very high. The weight of waste collected has risen for the past three years and is now 488 kilograms per head of population and worst quartile nationally, up from 382 kilograms per head of population in 2002/03 when it was in the best quartile nationally. Therefore, the Council's priority of increased recycling and reduced waste is only being delivered in part.
- 34 There has been little visible progress with the street cleansing service, a key component of the council priority for cleaner and safer streets. The Council has only recently started to measure performance data against the BVPI for the percentage of land littered to a significant/heavy extent. Satisfaction with cleanliness has declined and is a concern of key stakeholders.

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

- 35 It is unclear what has been achieved on the Council priority for economic regeneration; there is little evidence of tangible outcomes that local people would notice. The performance reports for the first two quarters of 2005/06 did not have data for the number of new businesses created or performance for the Council's markets. The impact of the 2005/06 budget decision not to put council funding into the market towns programmes is unclear as work to complete projects underway has continued throughout 2005 as planned.
- 36 The Council has made slow progress with delivering on its priority to develop a customer-focused organisation. The building work for the Council's new customer contact centre is due to be completed in February 2006, behind schedule, but within the revised budget. This will also improve the accessibility of the Council's main office in Wem for people with disabilities, but does not allow full access to other parts of the building for staff with disabilities, nor does it easily cater for people with transport difficulties. Comprehensive plans to fully implement the customer services strategy including 'front office' services whilst re-engineering and streamlining back office processes have still to be fully worked through. Therefore, the delivery of the Council's customer access strategy continues to present a significant risk for the Council to manage in the forthcoming months.
- 37 Planning, previously highlighted as a poorly performing service is an improving area but improved performance may not be embedded. There has been a significant improvement in the speed of processing planning applications. Performance for major, minor and other applications was all within government targets for the first half of 2005/06. However, performance slipped during the second quarter so it is difficult to predict the year-end outcome. Capacity is stretched due to staff turnover and sickness. In other areas performance is mixed; there is an up to date local plan and progress is being made in the delivery of a local development framework in line with government expectations. Of concern is the numbers of planning applications overturned on appeal – over 40 per cent in the first half of 2005/06. The Council's investment in the service has yet to translate into improvement in all areas.
- 38 There continues to be a mixed picture in housing. The Council is progressing the potential transfer of its housing stock to planned timescales. However, operational performance in housing management continues to fluctuate. There is a track record of high levels of rent collection and low levels of arrears but performance dipped for the first half of 2005/06. The percentage of planned versus responsive repairs is good at 84 per cent in 2004/05 but average spend per property on responsive repairs is comparatively very high. Therefore, there is no sustained track record of improvement.

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

- 39 Overall, the Council has made progress in terms of learning and planning for the future. It is applying an enthusiastic approach to learning through new systems and is systematically reviewing and revising its plans to deliver its newly clarified ambitions.
- 40 The Council is improving as a learning organisation, but there is still a way to go to embed this across the whole organisation. Councillors and staff are enthusiastic and open to learning, there is more benchmarking underway, new tools such as corporate learning logs have been introduced and are starting to be used. For example, the Council used learning from previously poorly implemented waste schemes and from other councils to successfully implement their kerbside recycling scheme in September 2005. However, the Council is not using learning to develop its understanding on comparative costs and value for money across the organisation. This will restrict the level of improvement in service efficiency.
- 41 The Council is demonstrating that it is willing to learn from the public and service users to develop its improvement plans. It has commissioned annual public satisfaction surveys to supplement the BVPI satisfaction survey that takes place every three years. This provides more sensitive tracking data from which to measure the Council's progress and public concerns.
- 42 Strategic planning and the integration of strategic plans are improving. This has meant that the Council has started from first principles this year to ensure that its corporate plan 2006 to 2009 is aligned with the emerging community strategy. This has resulted in a better overall integration of draft strategic plans for 2006/07 onwards, including service plans with the resources to deliver council priorities.
- 43 The Council has improved and clarified its plans for other areas including the following.
- the waste strategy – by enthusiastically signing up to the Shropshire Waste Partnership, and meeting the 'Shropshire standard' to facilitate the commencement of county wide arrangements in 2007.
  - The procurements strategy – which targets over £100,000 savings in 2006/07 from e-procurement of goods and services.
  - A challenging target for the provision of affordable housing through a new S106 policy.
  - Further improvements to develop the Council's performance management framework – to better integrate financial information, trends and forecasting.

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

- 44** The Council intends to move from its interim political arrangements introduced in 2004 to a leader/cabinet system in April 2006. This, together with the member development programme already underway, enables the Council to build upon the improvements to its strategic and political decision-making processes already evident.
- 45** The Council is clear about what plans need to be revised and updated. In the light of the Council's true financial position becoming clearer and the new community/corporate strategies emerging, some council plans, such as the medium-term financial plan and the Gershon strategy are not fit for purpose. The Council is pursuing a systematic review of such plans to ensure that there is clarity and cohesion about what it intends to do next.
- 46** The new corporate priority actions and some service plan actions planned for 2006/07 are not sufficiently outcome-focused. For example, the priority for young people has actions that are mainly inputs such as setting up a youth council and asking the youth council to investigate the provision of youth pods. Service plans are comprehensive but complex. They include the detailed processes and conclusions involved in arriving at proposed actions. This is seen as a necessary learning process and the Council intends to simplify the content as the organisation matures.

## Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003/04

**Table 1**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signed up to challenging county LPSA targets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term vision and ambitions are vague and weak.</li> <li>Community strategy and corporate plan not sufficiently outcome-focused.</li> <li>Poor engagement with community and partners.</li> <li>Poor leadership within the organisation and in partnerships.</li> </ul>
Focus	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus has been maintained on priority area of keeping council tax low.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of sustained focus on priorities.</li> <li>Inadequate focus on rural communities.</li> <li>Scrutiny work plans are not prioritised.</li> <li>Corporate plans not focused on local priorities.</li> <li>Poor agendas and decision-making impede focus.</li> </ul>
Prioritisation	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional resources provided to ensure wheeled bins priority successfully introduced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Priority not clearly linked to community needs and strategy.</li> <li>No non-priorities identified.</li> <li>Basic poor intelligence hinders effective prioritisation.</li> <li>Poor communication, vision, aims and priorities internally and externally.</li> <li>Resources not consistently targeted to deliver priorities.</li> </ul>

**18 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003/04**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Capacity	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards board established.</li> <li>Debt free status and adequate financial standing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councillors have not driven change but now beginning to address some issues.</li> <li>Management team strategic capacity weak.</li> <li>Overview and scrutiny is ineffective.</li> <li>HR policies and practice weak.</li> <li>Alternative delivery options not considered.</li> <li>Little partnership working with LSP to increase capacity.</li> </ul>
Performance management	1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mechanisms are not in place to manage performance.</li> <li>Service planning does not systematically contribute to corporate objectives.</li> <li>No systematic risk assessment.</li> <li>Service standards and performance are not published.</li> <li>Poor assessment of value for money.</li> </ul>
Achievement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good performance on revenue collection.</li> <li>Council houses in reasonable condition.</li> <li>Good range of sports and some art activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failing to provide consistently high quality services.</li> <li>Low overall satisfaction with council services.</li> <li>Fifty-one per cent of performance indicators below average with 25 per cent in bottom 25 per cent of all councils.</li> <li>Some aspects of housing management are poor and local housing needs are not being addressed.</li> <li>Inadequate child protection measures.</li> <li>Limited access for the public.</li> </ul>

Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003/04 **19**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recycling performance significantly improved.</li> <li>Good performance on reducing non-decent homes.</li> <li>Market town enhancements.</li> <li>Support for work-based learning.</li> <li>Recent improvements in benefits processing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services are not being consistently improved with 63 per cent of comparable BVPIs worse and some key LPSDA targets not being met.</li> <li>Overall satisfaction with council services and street cleanliness has declined.</li> <li>Poor performance on balancing housing markets and delivering affordable homes.</li> <li>Few benefits from the community strategy.</li> <li>Sports development skate-park and youth pods but overall few facilities for young people across the district.</li> </ul>
Investment	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some success in gaining external funding e.g. capacity building.</li> <li>Capacity increased to improve e-government performance management system and development control activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited and insufficient community engagement.</li> <li>Systems and processes to drive performance management and continuous improvement not in place.</li> <li>Little effective joint working with LSP partners and little impact.</li> <li>No systematic approach to training of councillors and staff.</li> <li>Budget not linked to corporate plan priorities and resources.</li> <li>Capacity to deliver decent homes standard not maximised.</li> <li>Slow and limited improvement from internal and external challenge.</li> <li>No modern procurement strategy or approaches.</li> <li>Best value reviews lack customer focus.</li> </ul>

**20 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003/04**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Learning	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior councillors aware of the need to change.</li> <li>• Using good practices to address identified problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variable self-awareness among councillors and senior officers slows progress.</li> <li>• Failure to address known ineffective scrutiny arrangements.</li> <li>• Learning and development not systematically addressed.</li> <li>• Internal learning culture is underdeveloped.</li> <li>• Few effective processes so learning is not systematically shared throughout the Council.</li> </ul>
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior councillors seeking to align resources and priorities.</li> <li>• Planning to introduce performance management framework in October 2004.</li> <li>• Working towards integrated waste management in partnership.</li> <li>• Draft replacement local plan links with community strategy and local priorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall plans for improvement and change are not robust.</li> <li>• Quality of statutory plans is mixed and variable.</li> <li>• Plans for equality are underdeveloped.</li> <li>• No specific plans to improve community and user engagement.</li> <li>• Slow progress on plans to improve communication.</li> <li>• No approved plans to address skills and capacity.</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 with managers, staff, customers and partner organisations.
- 4 This progress monitoring report for North Shropshire District Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from April 2005 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 any Monitoring Board and updating and improving any improvement/recovery plan as appropriate.