

Corporate Assessment Report

November 2006



Corporate Assessment

North Yorkshire County Council

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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

- sustainable communities and transport;
- safer and stronger communities;
- healthier communities;
- older people; and
- children and young people.

- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

- 4 The JAR covers all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report.

Executive summary

- 5 The Council is performing well, consistently above minimum requirements. Reliable systems, competent partnership working and inspiring leadership are delivering good outcomes for local people.
- 6 The Council has a good understanding of the challenges faced by the diverse communities that make up North Yorkshire. This informs clear ambitions and priorities to improve quality of life. Ambitions target the most vulnerable and isolated, with an emphasis on sustaining rural communities. Priorities link well to national priorities but are firmly rooted in the needs and aspirations of local people.
- 7 User focus is strong. Service users' views and feedback are routinely sought and acted upon. Engagement with older people is good. The needs and aspirations of young people are at the centre of planning for services. The Council provides a good range of opportunities for local people to have their say, consulting on its plans and engaging communities with its activities. It listens and responds.
- 8 The Council performs well in its priority areas. Working with its partners, it is improving community safety, health outcomes and opportunities and support for older people. The Council is boosting the rural economy and reducing rural isolation. Outcomes for children and young people are generally good although there is room for improvement. Children who are most at risk are appropriately identified but not all are consistently well protected.
- 9 Performance against national indicators is good when compared to similar councils. Latest figures show that 42 per cent of indicators are in the top band and 12 per cent in the worst performing band with 73 per cent improved overall. High-performing priority areas include education where virtually all indicators are above the national average. A less successful area is adult social care services.
- 10 There is a strong focus on value for money. A sophisticated approach to balancing cost and quality enables the Council to sustain its high level of service performance within comparatively low unit costs.
- 11 Partnerships are effective with enthusiasm and commitment for delivery of shared ambitions. The Council drives performance management in partnerships emphasising involvement of service users. Efforts to improve joint working with district and borough councils are paying off. Partnerships are delivering safer roads, stronger economies and high quality environments.
- 12 The Council provides good leadership for the North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership (NYSP). It is driving action to address weaknesses of the community strategy such as a lack of clarity about how ambitions translate into actions on the ground. The Council has used the opportunities presented by the negotiation of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) to integrate the aims of the LAA and the community strategy into clear action plans.

- 13 The Council is strengthening community ties and community development in the rural areas. It is connecting with the most vulnerable and potentially disadvantaged. The Supporting People Programme is rated as 'good' with 'promising prospects' for improvement. The Council reaches out to its black and minority ethnic communities. Responsive relationships are developing in the urban areas. However in remote areas there are small, dispersed groups living in predominantly white communities, and while the Council is making efforts to engage with these, more needs to be done to tackle their isolation. Work to translate understanding about the experience of black and minority ethnic groups into better services for them is at an early stage, and aims for improving their quality of life are not well articulated in Council ambitions.
- 14 An inclusive and open style of leadership inspires confidence and commitment from councillors and staff. There is a modern approach to managing people in line with best practice and national guidance. Workforce planning based on thorough analysis addresses known and anticipated recruitment and retention issues, and targets future capacity needs. Equality and diversity issues are integrated into policies, plans and employment practices although more needs to be done. The diversity of the workforce does not reflect the wider community and the Council efforts to address this have had limited impact.
- 15 Internal systems are largely reliable and support delivery of priorities. Financial management and risk management are good. Asset management is less robust and project management less consistent. Performance management is rigorous. Reliable and up-to-date knowledge about performance levels and customer experience is used to drive better outcomes and target resources efficiently.

Areas for improvement

- 16 The Council is making real efforts to build its knowledge and understanding of black and minority ethnic communities and service users. There is a need for better co-ordination of its approach and for the needs of minority ethnic groups to be more explicitly targeted in priorities and plans. In particular the Council should work more intensively with community representatives to identify routes to connect with small, isolated and dispersed groups in the rural areas.
- 17 The NYSP is on a better track to deliver shared ambitions and this is largely due to the Council's leadership. Its pragmatic approach to negotiating the LAA in combination with developing the aspirations of the community strategy into deliverable outcomes has been welcomed and valued by partners. It should use the confidence that it has gained through this to support the development of a more inclusive leadership for the NYSP so that it is less dominant, and drive a review of the community strategy to reflect a long term vision for the county.
- 18 Internal systems have been significantly strengthened in recent years, but there is more to be done. The Council should ensure that asset management is more resilient and project management more consistent. It should also resolve ICT issues, so that there is greater compatibility and technology better supports service delivery.
- 19 The Council needs to implement a more corporate response to customer complaints. Complaints are dealt with effectively at service level. However, customer satisfaction with complaint handling is low. Better co-ordination across the organisation would help to make sure that learning from complaints is consistently shared across service areas and increase opportunities for improvements in line with what service users want.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	3
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
Overall corporate assessment score**		3
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on 5 themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

Context

The locality

- 20 North Yorkshire is the largest county in England, covering around 3,103 square miles. It includes the urban areas of Harrogate and Scarborough, the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks, and numerous small towns and villages. There are seven district and borough councils - Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Selby and Scarborough. There are also 731 parishes with 588 parish councils. The county is a major tourist area attracting large numbers of visitors to the countryside and coastal resorts such as Whitby and Scarborough. It is the home of Catterick Garrison which has a military population of over 13,000. Government plans to significantly expand the garrison, which include substantial infrastructure development and a large increase in the garrison population, have major economic and social implications for the surrounding area.
- 21 Currently around 579,900 people live in the county. Only 21 per cent live in the main urban areas with the majority living in the small towns and villages. The population density is low - 73 schools have less than 50 pupils and 166 have less than 100. Public sector organisations face challenges in providing consistently good quality and accessible services to dispersed communities over such a wide geographical area.
- 22 The population is projected to grow by 1.8 per cent by 2010, with the main increase in people over the age of 65 years including a projected growth of 36.3 per cent in people over the age of 85 years. This growing elderly population places increasing pressures on delivery of social care services. There is a small but growing black minority ethnic population, making up 1.1 per cent of the total. There are significant groups in Scarborough and Skipton but also small and dispersed communities.
- 23 The quality of life in North Yorkshire is generally good but there are pockets of deprivation in Scarborough, Selby and Colburn and areas of rural poverty. Scarborough has seven Super Output Areas that fall within the worst 10 per cent of deprived areas nationally. Health indices are good with life expectancy high, but there are inequalities. For example life expectancy in Ryedale is 1.4 years longer than in Scarborough. House prices are high and there is significant demand for second homes leading to a significant lack of affordable housing.
- 24 Unemployment at 1.6 per cent is significantly below the national average of 2.7 per cent but wages are low. The main industries centre on tourism and agriculture. Small businesses dominate, with 85 per cent of businesses employing fewer than ten people, and there are high levels of self-employment. There is zero unemployment in some areas such as Northallerton where the main Council offices are located. Educational attainment is high. Young people remain in education longer and tend to move out of the county. This makes it difficult for the public sector to recruit and retain young staff.

- 25 The county is vulnerable to extreme weather events including flooding. Snow clearance is a problem in the rural uplands and there are problems with coastal erosion. This places demands on the Council and its partners in terms of emergency planning, highways engineering and winter maintenance of roads. Because of its largely rural environment and the increasing number of visitors to the County who may not be familiar with rural roads, the type of road accidents occurring in North Yorkshire differs in some respects from the national picture. They are often single vehicle, high-speed crashes resulting in serious injury. As a result, road casualties, including fatalities, are comparatively high.
- 26 Crime levels in North Yorkshire are comparatively low, with the majority of serious crime occurring in the more urban areas. Fear of crime is proportionately high, especially among rural communities and older people.

The Council

- 27 There are 72 county councillors made up of 42 Conservative, 18 Liberal Democrat, 9 Labour and 3 Independent. The executive consists of eight councillors covering four portfolio areas of adult and community services, children and young people's services, business and environmental services, and corporate services. There are nine scrutiny committees. The Chief Executive has been in post since June 2005 and leads a management board of four directors, two assistant chief executives and the head of Legal Services. The Council restructured in 2006 to deliver services via three directorates - children and young people, adult and community, and business and environmental services. It employs around 22,000 staff.
- 28 The Council is comparatively low cost except in areas where costs are high due to the local context, such as school transport and winter maintenance. Council tax is low when compared to similar councils at £899.47 for band D homes. In 2006/07 the Council has a net revenue budget of £280.1 million plus Dedicated Schools Grant of £287.2 million. The outturn general working balance in 2006 was £4.4 million and the outturn balance of earmarked reserves £38.5 million. The latest capital programme sets aside £254.5 million for 2006/07 to 2008/09.
- 29 There are seven area committees, chaired by local county councillors with representation from local district and parish councils. The committees have delegated decision making powers and an annual devolved budget of £390,000 to tackle local issues. A County Council director sits on each district council Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The North Yorkshire Local Strategic Partnership (NYSP) was formed in 2003 and produced its first community strategy in 2005. There are six thematic sub-partnerships focused on delivery of the community strategy aims and the Local Area Agreement (LAA), which is nearing completion.
- 30 North Yorkshire county and York city form a sub-region of the Yorkshire and Humberside region. The County Council and the City of York Council have formalised joint arrangements such as those to implement the Sub Regional Investment Plan, and work together in partnership on a number of fronts.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 31 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. There are clear, challenging ambitions founded on a well-developed understanding of North Yorkshire's communities. Good communication ensures that ambitions are understood and supported. Community leadership is strong and is improving the effectiveness of the NYSP. Ambitions for improving the quality of life of black and minority ethnic communities are not well articulated.
- 32 The Council has a good understanding of the diversity of the county. It shares with its partners a reliable picture of the social, economic and environmental challenges derived from data sharing, demographic analysis and consultation. This informs the Council's own ambitions and those set out the community strategy of the NYSP. Ambitions recognise that although the overall quality of life in North Yorkshire is good, there are pockets of deprivation and health inequality to be tackled, threats to the environment to be addressed, areas where the economy and skills base need strengthening, and that access needs improving.
- 33 The community strategy has a clearly expressed vision and ambitions. Its vision is of North Yorkshire as 'a place of equal opportunity where all can develop their full potential, participate in a flourishing economy, live and thrive in secure communities, see their high quality environment enhanced and receive effective support when they need it.' This translates into ambitions for a thriving economy; the opportunity for everyone to develop to their full potential; help people in need; inclusive, safe and sustainable communities; caring for heritage, landscape and environment; access to jobs and services; and emergency planning.
- 34 There are clear links between the community strategy and the work of existing partnerships and long term programmes such as the Sub Regional Investment Plan (SRIP) and the Vital Villages and Renaissance Market Towns initiatives. Success measures are based on the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Assembly's 'Advancing Together' quality of life indicators. However, the community strategy itself is short-term and lacks clear action plans to deliver the ambitions.
- 35 The Council is providing good leadership for the NYSP. It is using the opportunity presented by the negotiation of the LAA to restructure and strengthen the thematic sub-partnerships of the NYSP. It is addressing the weaknesses in the community strategy by integrating the aims of the LAA and the ambitions of the community strategy into clear, long term and task-focused action plans. These reflect and support the District councils' long-term community strategies. Through this leadership the Council has gained the trust and confidence of its partners.

- 36** Consultation is thorough and effective. The Council has a good range of reliable mechanisms to find out about the things that are important to local people and to test out the Council's ambitions. There are effective forums such as those for older people, and dialogue with specific groups such as travellers. Consultation on the Local Transport Plan was extensive and supplemented by local discussions about Traffic Management Strategies. The Council involves the voluntary sector in designing its plans, seeking their views on strategic and operational issues. In this way the Council gains commitment and support for its plans and ambitions.
- 37** The Council listens and responds. Service users influence plans and service delivery. Engagement with young people is good and there are many examples of their voices being heard. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) was developed through extensive consultation with young people and their carers and clearly reflects their views. The Council changes decisions following feedback - for example revising plans to change bus routes. This means that local people and service users can be confident about expressing their views and the Council can be confident that it targets the right things.
- 38** The specific needs and aspirations of the black and minority ethnic communities are not well articulated in the Council's ambitions. It is engaging with larger groups in the urban areas, for example through the Scarborough BME Forum. In Skipton, community cohesion officers work with Connecting Communities staff to provide a voice for local groups. Residents in remote areas are more isolated in largely white communities. The Council is reaching out to them by supporting their children in schools and through effective community development work. It has reconstituted its citizens' panel to significantly boost black and minority ethnic representation. These approaches are building understanding and have driven local initiatives but they are not yet feeding through to a clear strategic response.
- 39** The Council anticipates and plans well for changing needs. The expansion of Catterick Garrison over the next 15 years will have a significant impact on the local environment and economy. The Council is working with the Ministry of Defence and Richmondshire District Council in areas such as highways, planning and, economic development. It is assessing the potential demand for services to make sure that they can keep pace and to maximise the benefits for the local area.

14 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 40 Community leadership is strong. The Council guides partnerships towards achievement of challenging targets based on sound research and analysis, for example through joint strategies to reduce road casualties and doorstep crime. Relationships between the district/borough councils and the County Council have been tense in recent years due largely to the perceived threats and opportunities of potential local government reform. The Council has significantly improved relationships, securing commitment to joint working on improving access, waste management and transport. Through its health scrutiny role it influences service provision and helps service users to have a stronger voice. It provides strong leadership for the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and around important issues such as affordable housing, economic development and opportunities and services for older people. As a result, joint working contributes effectively to defining and delivering ambitions.
- 41 Local community leadership is effective. County councillors have good relations with parish and town councils which helps them to keep up-to-date with local issues. They secure good involvement of district and parish councillors in area committees which offer opportunities for local people to voice concerns and request services. However, attendance by the public is variable and opportunities to foster public participation and promote the Council's wider ambitions are not fully exploited.

Prioritisation

- 42 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Council priorities are based on good understanding of local challenges and analysis of needs. They flow from its vision and ambitions, and incorporate national priorities. Well-integrated business and financial planning supports delivery and is starting to address equality and diversity issues. There is a clear rationale for resource allocation. The Council is prepared to change priorities in the light of consultation and when more urgent needs emerge, and to take difficult decisions to strengthen efforts in priority areas.
- 43 There are good links between the Council's vision and the ambitions of the county and local community strategies. Its vision is of 'a county which provides opportunity, independence and security for all' with objectives of 'security for all, growing up prepared for the future, independence, keeping us on the move, strengthening our economy, looking after our heritage and environment, and keeping in touch'. Focusing on these areas it is delivering improvements in the rural economy, safer roads, good outcomes for young people, and a high quality environment for residents and visitors to enjoy.

- 44 The objectives are translated into clear priorities. The priorities for 2006/09 are: safer and stronger communities; excellent services for children and young people; making roads better and safer; supporting those who need it; a strong economy; waste disposal; easier access to services; delivering the LAA; and securing value for money. These are underpinned by organisational values which emphasise the needs of customers, equality and inclusion. The Council Plan identifies the capacity and systems needed to support delivery, including the role of shared delivery arrangements and partnerships. This creates confidence that priorities will be delivered.
- 45 Priorities take into account national priority areas and are also firmly rooted in what matters most to local people. For example, the Council has a strong focus on tackling exclusion and improving access which addresses both national targets for e-government and local needs for a wide choice of access routes. The '95 alive' strategy clearly addresses national and local priorities for road safety and links well to the strategic plans of partners such as police.
- 46 Staff and councillors understand what the Council is trying to achieve. Internally, there is strong political consensus around the priority areas. *County Talk*, the internal newsletter, is an effective method of communicating key corporate messages. The Council's staff survey 2005 showed that 69 per cent of staff understand the corporate priorities and 96 per cent understand what is expected of them in their role. The website is up-to-date and accessible. *The Reporter* is a well-presented and informative community magazine. Partners understand and support the priorities and know how joint planning helps to achieve them. This is evident in the Highways North Yorkshire partnership, the affordable homes agreement and the extra care housing programme, which all have agreed delivery frameworks and clear accountabilities.
- 47 Service and financial planning are well-integrated and support delivery of priorities. The Council Plan is translated into directorate and service plans, which link well with each other and also with cross cutting strategies such as the Public Access Strategy. The Council is committed to setting challenging targets. This is difficult in some of its high performing areas such as education but it uses rigorous analysis of performance to balance high standards with what is realistically achievable. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) explicitly links to the priority areas and objectives. Quarterly Performance and Budget Monitoring Reports bring together performance, financial and personnel information. They show the links between plans to meet the Council's priorities and resource allocations highlighting possible adjustments to spending plans and remedial actions to improve delivery of priorities. This supports clear, well informed decisions.
- 48 Plans reflect the needs of service users and residents, and take into account some potentially disadvantaged or excluded groups. For example, the priorities of the Social Inclusion Strategy recognise the different needs of rural and urban communities. Service plans incorporate consultation and customer feedback and are starting to address equality and diversity. This approach is leading to some good achievements in local and national priority areas.

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- 49** Resources are targeted towards priority areas. Councillors make challenging budget decisions based on clear information. Annual budget seminars focused around the Council's priorities set out the spending options and the impact on council tax levels and Council balances, and the area committees carry out budget consultations with the public. This approach allows the Council to share and openly explore difficult issues, and achieve commitment for budget proposals.
- 50** There is a clear, explicit approach to priorities and non-priorities. The Council is open about areas where performance is to be maintained rather than strengthened, and about areas that are no longer priorities because a sufficiently high standard has been achieved and sustained. This led to reductions in highway maintenance and removal of countryside access as a priority.
- 51** The Council takes difficult decisions to make sure that priorities are delivered. These include closing residential homes in support of its priority for promoting greater independence through community based provision and re-focusing capital investment in schools towards improving existing accommodation rather than building new schools. In making such decisions it effectively balances need and risk, and involves residents and service users to manage their expectations.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity

- 52 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Political and managerial leadership is effective. There is a strong and sustained focus on value for money. Internal systems are largely robust although asset management is not rigorous enough and project management is inconsistent. People management and workforce planning are sound. Equality and diversity issues are built into policy development and employment practices, but the workforce does not reflect the diversity of the community.
- 53 Decision-making is transparent, based on reliable information and focused on action to deliver priorities. There is a comprehensive approach to assessing and managing financial and operational risk. Reports to the executive are clear and accessible. The level of debate is mature and largely consensual although not without challenge, and there is a firm focus on priorities. Roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers are clear and working relationships are productive. Scrutiny arrangements support delivery of improved outcomes. The Management Board is a good forum for problem solving with managers working together to tackle issues across directorates. This drives a strong focus on results.
- 54 An inclusive and open style of leadership inspires confidence and creates a good working environment in which councillors and staff can openly express their views. Staff satisfaction is high, as shown by the 2005 staff survey - 85 per cent think the Council is a good place to work and 75 per cent feel well supported by managers and colleagues. Staff are well informed about planned changes and the rationale for them. Cross-directorate working groups spread knowledge and information. Regular focus groups and e-mail consultation give staff a voice. As a result confidence in the leadership is high and staff are motivated to do a good job.
- 55 The ethical framework is based on high standards of probity and integrity. The Council takes action to maintain this. For example, an external ethical audit showed that councillors' awareness is higher than officers and training is underway to address this. Codes of conduct are clear and founded on good practice.
- 56 Financial management is sound. The Council has the capacity to deliver its plans although current balances are below the MTFS target of 1 per cent of net service expenditure, which limits flexibility for changing circumstances. The MTFS is targeting financial resources to priorities. Financial information is appropriately reported and systems for financial control are effective.

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- 57** There is a sustained focus on value for money. Efficiency savings are balanced with maintaining service quality. Improved employment practices are delivering savings - a firmer focus on sickness absence saved around £773,000. Integrated reporting of performance and costs supports decisions about value for money. There is good use of benchmarking to compare unit costs. The Council is comparatively low cost and, where costs are higher, can demonstrate that this is due to local factors such as rurality or investment in priorities.
- 58** There is a robust strategic approach to procurement and commissioning. The Council seizes opportunities to gain economic advantage. It supports local business appropriately, and equality clauses are included in contracts. Partnering arrangements, such as those for highways services, deliver savings and increase investment. There are collaborative procurement arrangements via the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation and the Northern Procurement Group. Joint commissioning is in place in some areas, for example the Learning Partnership and the Continuing Care Panel. The Council makes good use of voluntary and private sector providers. Effective working agreements have brought stability to the social care market.
- 59** The Council promotes good governance arrangements in partnerships although formal arrangements such as agreed protocols and procedures for dispute resolution are not in place for all joint working. Good examples are the CYPSP, the Yorwaste partnership with York City Council and the highways partnership. The Council supports the participation of voluntary organisations in joint work. It has negotiated a compact for partnership working with voluntary agencies. However, some codes of practice have yet to be developed and the principles are not consistently applied which reduces its potential effectiveness.
- 60** The Council is successfully addressing recruitment and retention challenges. Annual turnover is comparatively high and young people under 24 years make up less than 4 per cent of the workforce, problems which it shares with public sector partners. They are working together to find solutions. The Council chairs the North Yorkshire Recruiting Group; there is a joint recruitment internet portal; and efforts to attract young people through joint recruitment campaigns and support for trainee posts. The Council has agreements with partners to provide trainee positions to young people leaving care, employment for people with learning disabilities and training for ex-offenders to support entry to work. This is increasing opportunities.
- 61** The approach to people management is good. A comprehensive people management and workforce development strategy integrates all aspects with action plans for filling current and projected skills gaps. There are clear links to Council priorities and a strong user focus based on securing better outcomes for customers, by enhancing the skills and behaviours of staff and councillors. This approach is fairly new but is showing results. New apprenticeships are in place and remodelling of professional roles into trainee positions is alleviating recruitment difficulties. Capacity is increasing in areas such as social work and the youth service. Staff turnover reduced by 1.3 per cent in 2005/06.

- 62 Councillors play an active role in the work of the Council at every level. There is an emphasis on their development and an improved Member Development Strategy is being implemented. The North Yorkshire Improvement Partnership with district councils and York City Council has secured funds to develop councillors' community leadership skills across the region. Internally regular training days and seminars are provided, but attendance is low. More innovative approaches have had greater impact, such as using a theatre group to deliver diversity training.
- 63 There is good integration of quality and diversity issues into employment practice and policy development. The corporate equality group challenges new policies and strategies to ensure compliance with legislation and best practice, and monitors performance in relation to targets for engagement with minority groups. Equality action plans are included in service performance plans. Training for staff and councillors has increased confidence. The Council achieved level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and aims to achieve level 3 in March 2007.
- 64 The workforce is not representative of communities. The Council closely monitors its workforce profile and it is improving but 2005/06 targets were not achieved. The proportion of staff with a declared disability is 1.6 per cent compared to 12.4 per cent in the population. Ethnic minority representation is increasing but is currently 0.8 per cent compared to 1.12 per cent in the population. Of the top earners, 41.3 per cent are women compared to the county council average of 41.9, and Council figures for 2005/06 show a reduction in the percentage of women recruited overall.
- 65 Some internal systems are not sufficiently robust. The Asset Management Strategy is aligned to the Council Plan priorities but includes actions which have yet to be completed or implemented. There are good examples of project management in delivery of major contracts, but there has been significant slippage in managing the capital programme with regular underspends. Problems of older, outlying office accommodation for dispersed staff groups are addressed in the Council's 'transformation' project but currently some staff have poor facilities and inadequate access to appropriate technology to support their work.

Performance management

- 66 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Good understanding of performance drives improvements with good use of scrutiny to target weaker areas. Performance management in partnerships is developing well. Learning from complaints could be better co-ordinated across the Council. There are pockets of inconsistent application of the performance management framework. However, the strength of the Council's approach is demonstrated by year-on-year improvements in performance indicators.

20 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 67 Councillors and managers have a reliable, up-to-date picture of performance based on a rigorous and effective performance management framework. Quarterly performance reports provide clear analysis and include outcomes of consultation and budget outturns. Directors work well together to tackle stubborn areas. Councillors' understanding and knowledge about performance is good and their confidence enables them to challenge officers constructively. This drives a culture of mature debate around performance and costs.
- 68 The Council is open about its performance. It publishes performance information in a coherent and accessible way to keep service users, communities, and partners in touch with how it is doing. The Council Plan contains a good analysis of progress including areas where the Council did not reach its targets, identifying the reasons and explaining how it will do better. The Council makes extensive use of benchmarking to improve costs and performance in line with the best. It is a member of the County Council Performance Benchmarking Club which compares all 34 county councils against national indicators.
- 69 The performance management culture is not fully integrated throughout the organisation. Performance management at team level is generally effective, but there are pockets of inconsistencies of approach in children's social care where a lack of quality assurance and timely information impacts on service outcomes.
- 70 The Council drives performance management in partnerships, emphasising views of service users. It is building systems for evaluating the LAA and there are sound structures for the CYPP which draw on the views of young people's parents and carers about what success should look like. Established systems are in place for partnerships such as '95 alive' and Highways North Yorkshire. The supporting people programme has a good performance framework for the commissioning body which is used to inform departmental and corporate performance systems, the Partnership Group and the Member Steering Group. Performance of the programme is widely known and understood¹. Analysing performance against agreed outcomes helps to maintain individual and joint accountability.
- 71 The work of scrutiny committees is improving outcomes. Scrutiny reviews are comprehensive, target priority areas from the user perspective, and involve partners and service users well. Improvement plans link to corporate priorities and are regularly and rigorously monitored. Reviews have had measurable impact in areas such as vocational training in schools, services for children with special educational needs, intermediate care facilities, and countryside services.

¹ Supporting People Inspection 2006

- 72 The experience of customers is used to target improvements. The Council responds to user satisfaction surveys with remedial action. Investment in recycling sites has improved previously low levels of satisfaction and responses to feedback from Friends of Libraries groups led to improvements in facilities. Service users were involved in setting service standards for community resource centres. Feedback from young people has improved youth work and foster care. Overall satisfaction with the Council is high at 64 per cent compared to other councils. The Council is exploring the differing levels of satisfaction in particular communities through for example boosting minority ethnic representation on its citizens' panel.
- 73 Although complaints are dealt with effectively at service level, customer satisfaction with complaint handling is low. Complaints and responses are included in the quarterly performance report and collated centrally. However, a lack of co-ordination means that learning from this is not consistently shared, which could result in missed opportunities for cross-departmental improvement.

What has been achieved?

- 74** The Council is performing well, consistently above minimum requirements. Council priorities link well to national shared priorities. Priorities such as improving access and strengthening communities cut across service areas and agency boundaries. The Council is performing well in priority areas of community safety, transport and preparation for emergencies. Health outcomes are improving, and there is a good approach to meeting the needs and aspirations of older people. There are good outcomes for children and young people.
- 75** The Council has risen to the challenge of delivering quality services in a sparsely populated, largely rural county. Service performance is improving year on year and achievements against national indicators are good when compared to similar councils. Latest figures² show that 42 per cent of indicators are in the top band with 12 per cent in the worst performing band, and that 73 per cent improved overall in the last year. High performing priority areas include education and transport, with top performance in the numbers of care leavers in education and training. Less successful areas include adult social care and the diversity of the workforce.
- 76** The Council delivers improvements for the vulnerable and isolated communities and user groups, including vulnerable children and young people. A good range of initiatives are building community ties and supporting community development in rural areas. Crime levels are low and the Council is working with partners to tackle fear of crime. It is focusing on support for vulnerable victims.
- 77** Productive work with business partners, neighbouring councils and Yorkshire Forward is driving inward investment for economic development. The Council is supporting business start-up and expansion in rural areas. It uses innovative approaches to increasing affordable housing. It is improving the safety and reliability of transport systems.
- 78** Improvements in access are based on a sound understanding of the preferences of local people. The action plans of the Public Access Strategy are being pursued enthusiastically and vigorously. The Council has met e-government targets in full. Through effective lobbying it has driven up the availability of broadband access in the county, including areas regarded as unviable by telecoms companies. Young people, including those in more rural areas and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, have good access to sport and recreation. A successful programme of refurbishing libraries into community resource centres is improving access to information and includes joint provision with district councils in some areas.
- 79** The Council has a good awareness of the areas where it could achieve more including tackling alcohol misuse, improving services for children at risk and reporting of racial incidents. It is taking action to improve adult social care services which are patchy across the county and insufficiently robust in some service areas such as those for people with physical disabilities.

² Performance Indicator Analysis September 2006

Sustainable communities and transport

- 80 The national shared priorities for sustainable communities and transport are reflected in the Council's priorities for a strong economy, better and safer roads, waste management and easier access to services.
- 81 The Council is strengthening the rural economy. In remote upland areas it is providing workspace via the Property Grant Scheme, supporting new businesses through the Supporting Innovation Scheme and expanding existing businesses via the Business Development Fund. It funds Chrysalis Arts, an independent organisation which develops creative industries in rural areas. SRB funding supports the Local Produce Project to help the county's farmers and growers to develop new markets.
- 82 The Council is driving inward investment. It makes sure that its ambitions for communities are reflected in sub regional plans. In the urban areas it is working in partnership to deliver initiatives such as the 'Selby Renaissance Strategy' with Yorkshire Forward and Selby District Council. It has a key role in the York and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit which include businesses, councils, and voluntary and public sector bodies. The unit produces 'Progress in York and North Yorkshire', an annual report assessing economic development performance and predicting, trends based on the projected impact of national policies. The partners have agreed the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Spatial Strategy and Sub Regional Investment Plan. These clearly integrate the Council's priorities for North Yorkshire and support their delivery.
- 83 The Council is achieving its objective of keeping people on the move. Its three-year programme targets over £22 million to national and local transport priorities. There was good progress in implementing the Local Transport Plan 2001/05. Over 200 School Travel Plans have been completed, with DfES awarding over £1 million to implement them - the second largest award in England. The local strategies of the integrated transport unit are reducing congestion in market towns by improved parking arrangements and increased pedestrian-only areas. Changes are agreed following thorough consultation with local people, and so are generally welcomed.
- 84 The Council promotes and sustains public transport. It supports community transport initiatives to address differing local needs and provide more demand-led services, including the Harrogate 'Little Red Bus' scheme and the Ripon Roweller Service. It has improved public transport use in targeted areas, but overall use of buses has fallen in the last five years in line with national trends. The Council is developing a bus strategy with public transport operators to address this and has set a new target to increase passengers by 6 per cent by 2011.
- 85 Highways and roads are well-maintained. The Highways North Yorkshire partnership brings efficiency savings and offers a cohesive local service through area offices based on district council boundaries. Knowledge of a local area and its issues creates a good understanding between staff and the public, and is supported by good local consultation. Winter maintenance is a real challenge but the Council has a good record of keeping routes open.

- 86 The Council is achieving most of its targets for waste management although volumes of waste are high. An Audit Commission inspection of waste management in 2005 found that the Council's approach was 'good' with 'promising prospects for improvement'. The Council is driving a county-wide approach to achieve more consistent performance in recycling at district level and has ambitious plans for long-term solutions to waste minimisation and disposal.
- 87 Public spaces in North Yorkshire are attractive and well-maintained. The Council delivers good direct services and works with others such as the national parks and district councils to sustain a high quality environment, balancing issues such as preservation of heritage landscapes and the impact of tourism. Through its investment in countryside services it achieved significant improvements in public rights of way, exceeding its LPSA target. It is working with parish councils to prioritise future projects to be delivered by its countryside volunteers. The network of footpaths and bridleways is an important draw for tourists so better access not only benefits residents but helps to strengthen local economies.
- 88 The Council is taking an innovative approach to increase affordable housing. In 2004/05 it received £2.1 million in council tax income from second homes. It used £1.7 million to support the strategic partnerships allocating 20 per cent to the NYSP and the remainder to the district LSPs. The LSPs used the funds to support community strategy priorities with resources targeted to social inclusion, homelessness and community transport. The Council used the remaining income to finance a £4 million investment programme for affordable housing. With match funding from the Housing Corporation, free or discounted land from the county and district councils and private funding from registered social landlords, this initiative represents a joint capital investment in affordable housing of £15 million. The Council has been commended by the Commission for Rural Communities and the first phase is to provide 156 affordable homes.
- 89 The Council is actively reducing its own environmental impact. It has secured government designation of a new secondary school as a sustainability demonstration project, enabling it to install systems such as super insulation and ground source heat pumps. It is reducing carbon emissions by using renewable energy sources and better insulation in its buildings and it is using energy reduction measures in street lighting and capture of landfill gases to generate electricity.

Safer and stronger communities

- 90** National priorities are reflected in the Council's priorities for safe and strong communities, making roads safer and providing support to those who need it.
- 91** The Council and its partners are effectively tackling crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. Crime is comparatively low and most crimes areas are reducing - 2004/05 figures show all crime down by 13.5 per cent, burglary down by 29.9 per cent and vehicle crime down by 32 per cent. Violence is increasing in line with national trends. Targeted efforts have reduced fear of crime to below the national average but audits show it remains an important local issue. Reporting of racial incidents is low even though consultation shows that minority ethnic communities are affected by abuse and harassment.
- 92** The needs of vulnerable victims are successfully targeted. Domestic violence services for black and minority ethnic communities are incorporated into the Supporting People Strategy. A joint anti-bullying website launched in 2004 has led to increased calls to the bullying helpline and helped target successful campaigns. In response to concerns from older people the Council has prioritised reduction in doorstep crime which is prevalent in rural areas. Excellent partnership work driven by the trading standards department reduced doorstep crime by 21 per cent between 2002/05, against a target of 10 per cent. The Council is building reassurance in communities by setting up 'no cold calling' zones. Efforts have reduced cold calls by 48 per cent.
- 93** The North Yorkshire Drug Action Team (DAT) is achieving most of its targets. The average wait for treatment is good at 2.46 weeks and 81 per cent of predicted drug users are in treatment. Provision of structured day services increased in 2005/06 although gaps in provision of in-patient detoxification remain. There is insufficient involvement of users and carers in the planning, commissioning and review of treatment services. A lack of clarity and openness about allocating DAT resources reduces the confidence of some partners.
- 94** The approach to tackling alcohol related problems is under developed. There is no agreement to share data across agencies and so reliable countywide statistics are not available. There is some good practice at district level but this is patchy. This lack of co-ordination means that there are weak links with related strategies for domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. The Council is showing leadership in this area. With its partners, it commissioned external research to assess the issues and then convened a county wide conference. This is driving the development of a county-wide alcohol misuse strategy to be incorporated into the LAA.
- 95** The performance of the Youth Offending Team is mixed. Intensive intervention is reducing the frequency and seriousness of re-offending but overall re-offending rates rose in 2005/06. Internal staffing problems have affected performance and these are being resolved by strengthening capacity.

- 96 Emergency arrangements are fit for purpose. They comply with the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act. The Council leads the Local Resilience Forum. The forum is effective, with good learning from scenario training and reliable risk mapping. Emergency plans have been tested in major local flooding incidents and events such as the Selby rail crash. The Council undertakes regular exercises to validate its own emergency plans. However, business continuity plans, including an IT recovery strategy, are not finalised which leaves the Council exposed to risk.
- 97 A good range of initiatives and sound joint approaches are reducing road casualties faster than the national average rate. By the end of 2004 the Council and its partners were over three quarters of the way towards achieving the 2010 target for reducing numbers killed or seriously injured. Numbers of slight casualties are also falling. In line with the national picture serious injuries are reducing at a much faster rate than fatalities. The '95 alive' partnership aims to reduce the number of fatalities by one third by the end of 2010 - a saving of 95 lives. It is delivering a good range of projects and already achieving successful outcomes.
- 98 The Council is strengthening its more isolated communities. It is using external funding for community capacity building securing a larger share of Yorkshire Forward's 'Single Pot' funding for 2006/07 and a DEFRA Rural Social Community Programme worth £1 million. Community development work is effective. The Council works with community representatives to improve services for potentially excluded groups. For example it provides good education schemes for traveller's children supplemented by initiatives to help family learning, including access to ICT. Sensitive involvement of the Disabled Children's Team with Skipton's Kashmiri community led to the setting up of a group of short term carers to provide respite care within their own community.
- 99 The Council has good intelligence about community cohesion issues and acts upon it. Specific issues were identified from consultation with communities in Skipton including increased racial abuse towards Asian taxi drivers, tensions between youth groups and insufficient activities for young Asian people. The Council has responded with practical improvements such as better street lighting and CCTV coverage. It has strengthened support in schools through better monitoring of racial incidents and increased levels of detached youth work. In the rural areas the Council is promoting inclusion through initiatives such as Faithworks which involves speakers from black and minority ethnic communities going into predominantly white schools in the dales to raise awareness. The impact of these improvements has not been fully evaluated but in a citizens' panel survey in 2005, 89 per cent of respondents agreed that their local area is 'a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together'.

Healthier communities

- 100** National priorities for healthier communities link to Council priorities for supporting those that need it; increasing independence and easier access to services.
- 101** The Council and its partners understand the county's health inequalities and are tackling them. Generally health is good, but in the more deprived areas such as Scarborough and Selby indices such as life expectancy are worse than the rest of the county. The Council and its partners have targeted initiatives in these areas with some success - mortality rates in Selby are for the first time now lower than the national average. Joint prevention projects are also having impact. For example, smoking rates are falling as a result of targeted campaigns. Teenage pregnancies are low and falling faster than the national average.
- 102** The Council promotes healthy lifestyles for young people but has had only partial success in delivering improvements. The number of schools participating in the healthy schools initiative is above the national average and increasing. There are good programmes of drug, alcohol and sex education delivered in imaginative ways in schools and communities. The Council did not achieve the 2005/06 target to increase take up of school meals by 5 per cent but has improved the quality. It is increasing opportunities for young people to take healthy exercise. In 2006, 70 per cent of school aged children took part in at least two hours of physical education, but this was under the target of 75 per cent.
- 103** The Council is improving health care provision and promoting choice. The health scrutiny committee makes sure that patients', residents' and partners' voices are heard when change in service provision is proposed. Its role in the debate over closure of Skipton hospital's Physical Rehabilitation Unit included well-attended public meetings. It was unable to persuade the Acute Trust to change its plans but its work led to a more integrated way forward than originally proposed, driving improvements in community and intermediate care facilities and the speedy appointment of a consultant in rehabilitation care. The committee helped Scarborough hospital communicate with the community about its long-term position and the future of orthopaedic services. It also helped to facilitate communication within the health sector and local communities about the GP out-of-hours service.
- 104** Access to health care and support is improving for vulnerable residents. For example, the Council has developed individual health action plans and health passports so that people with a learning disability can have their health needs met. Pooled budgets and joint commissioning are improving mental health services. The Council and its partners have clear priorities to move away from hospital-based intervention to community-based services. This includes better support for carers. The Council provides financial support from the adult and community services core budget and through the Carers Grant.
- 105** Provision of intensive home care has risen by 50 per cent in the past three years but is still insufficient particularly for people with physical disabilities. Overall this group are not well served by the Council.

Older people

- 106 National priorities for older people are integrated into the Council's priority of promoting independence. There is good corporate leadership and the older people's champion has proved to be a successful role.
- 107 The Council provides a good range of opportunities and services for older people outside of traditional health and social care models. A comprehensive multi-agency strategy, *Planning for Older Age*, meets national requirements and covers the seven dimensions of independence. The strategy is well-focused on current and future needs as a result of good input from local people. The Council is linking the needs and aspirations of older people into planning and service delivery. Older people are represented on the Our Future Lives working group which is developing a corporate approach.
- 108 The Council engages well with older people. They are well represented on planning groups. The POPP programme has older people on the programme board and steering groups, as community researchers and as co-workers to help evaluate projects. It works with agencies such as Age Concern who undertake specific consultation and research on its behalf. The older people's strategy calls for positive action by all agencies to identify the requirements of, and responses to minority groups. However there has not been a rigorous appraisal of needs or good involvement of older people from minority ethnic communities and this reduces the potential for successful outcomes for them.
- 109 Council Departments increasingly consider the impact of their activities for older people. Mobile libraries are being enhanced through the 'Super Mobiles' programme to provide better access, and a wider range of services including schemes to help older residents to libraries or deliver books to their homes. The economic development unit has secured external funding specifically to facilitate community based projects for older people.
- 110 A range of joint initiatives are improving the general well being of older citizens. These include walking for health groups, falls prevention and steps to active rehabilitation. The Council funds local agencies to provide services such as home companions, luncheon clubs and mobility classes. It promotes take-up of benefits by older people through support for benefits advice agencies to help older people to access services and work with the district councils to streamline benefits application and verification processes. This is increasing the income of more vulnerable older residents.

- 111** The Council and its partners are reducing hospital admissions and lengths of stay, in line with its priority to increase independence. Delayed transfers from hospital are low. The Rapid Response Intensive Care Scheme provides packages of multi-agency support based on individual care plans and a strong focus on rehabilitation and independence. The Promoting Older People Project (POPP) works across public and voluntary sectors to create a long-term shift from acute to community care via strengthened preventative services which reduce crisis episodes and improve access to services and support. The Council and its partners are at the forefront of the provision of extra care housing to replace traditional care homes. The programme commenced in 2004 and is planned to be completed in 2008. These approaches enable the Council to provide facilities and services that are valued by older people and their families and help older people to maintain their independence for as long as possible.

Children and young people

- 112** The Council's performance in this area is good with individual services ranging from adequate to excellent. Outcomes for children and young people are good overall. Most children and young people appear safe. Children who are most at risk in the community are appropriately identified but not all are consistently well protected by the agencies supporting them. The youth offending service is performing adequately.
- 113** The management of services for children and young people is good. There are clear and challenging ambitions for the area, which are based on a shared understanding of local needs and on extensive consultation with children and young people, parents and carers. Prioritisation is good. Partners have developed a shared vision and strategy. This is set out in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), which clearly outlines what needs to be done and the targets for achievement. There is a strong focus on the most vulnerable children and young people, with emphasis on prevention and inclusion. There is a strong commitment to diversity issues, though impact has been variable.
- 114** Capacity is good. The Children and Young People's Partnership Board is well established. Members have a good understanding of their roles and discharge these well. The Council delivers good value for money; costs are generally low and service performance and outcomes strong. There is tight budget monitoring and scrutiny. Performance management is adequate overall. There is a rigorous approach to performance management strategically at corporate and directorate levels. It is similarly rigorous in relation to school performance. However, performance management in children's social care is inconsistent, with deficiencies in relation to availability and analysis of data and quality assurance.
- 115** Capacity to improve is good. Performance of most services is good and improving, as is value for money. Action is taken where improvement is most needed. There is a record of delivering high quality and improving services at a reasonable cost.

- 116 The impact of the Council in securing the health of children and young people is good. The Council takes a strong lead in focusing partnership working on securing improved health outcomes for children and young people. Universal and targeted multi-agency services support parents and carers well in keeping children healthy. A well co-ordinated approach to promoting healthy lifestyles for school children and young people is effective, leading to good outcomes. Health care for looked after children is generally good.
- 117 The impact of services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Satisfactory processes and systems identify children most at risk. Most child protection enquiries are appropriately completed with good sharing of inter-agency information at a local level. All children on the CPR are allocated to qualified social workers. However, there are significant delays in completing initial assessments and a lack of child focus in assessments and planning. For a growing number of children child protection plans are not proving to be effective in ensuring longer-term safety. Family support offers skilled and effective help to many families and contributes effectively to preventing children becoming looked after. Services to achieve permanence through fostering or adoption for looked after children are good. The range and number of services for disabled children and their families is variable.
- 118 The impact of the Council in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is very good. Attainment of pupils exceeds the national average at virtually all levels. Good levels of support, information and advice are provided to parents and carers. The quality of educational provision is very good and is supported by strong leadership and good partnership working. The educational attainment of looked after children is improving year on year and is above the national average. Levels of school attendance are very good. Support for schools where some children underachieve, or have lower than expected attainment, is exemplary. Positive efforts are made to include children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) in mainstream provision.
- 119 The impact of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. The range of support for children, young people and their families is good with effective targeted support for many vulnerable young people. There are examples of very good consultation with children and young people and good examples of young people participating in aspects of service planning and delivery. Too few looked after children and young people participate in their reviews. Young people, including those in more rural areas, and those with LDD, have good access to youth provision, sport and recreation.

- 120** The impact of services in helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being is good. Very high numbers of young people are engaged in education, employment and training due to effective collaboration between local strategic partners. The pace of partnership working is good in developing broader provision for 14–19 year olds but work-based providers are insufficiently involved at a strategic level. Access to affordable childcare for people on low incomes is limited. Strategies to support the transition of looked after children and young people into adult life are good. The authority and its partners have developed and implemented a very good homelessness prevention strategy. Overall the provision for young people with LDD is adequate but planning and monitoring is underdeveloped.

Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for North Yorkshire County Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 4 to 15 September 2006.
- 4 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.