

Local government

National report

February 2007

 **audit**
commission



CPA – The Harder Test

Scores and analysis of performance in single tier and county councils 2006

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

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1

Key messages

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for 2006 represents the second year that a 'harder test' of council performance has been undertaken enabling year-on-year comparison, where possible, against performance in 2005.
 - Councils across the country continue to improve their overall performance. Seventy-nine per cent of councils achieve 3 or 4 star performance, a 9 per cent improvement from 2005.
 - For the first time since CPA began in 2002, no councils are in the bottom CPA category.
 - Three councils, Havering, North East Lincolnshire and Waltham Forest have moved up two star categories since last year. However, 7 councils have moved down a star category in 2006.
 - Seventy-seven per cent of councils are improving strongly or improving well in 2006.
 - Better performing councils continue to improve to a greater degree than those in lower categories. Lower performing councils will need to accelerate the pace of improvement to prevent the gap between high and low performance widening further over time.
 - How well councils are using their resources has improved significantly since 2005. Almost a third of councils have improved their use of resources score since last year and 10 per cent of councils achieve top performance compared to only 2 per cent in 2005. There are no councils delivering below minimum requirements for use of resources in 2006.
 - Almost all councils are achieving at or above minimum requirements for value for money and seven councils achieve top performance (scoring 4). However, value for money shows the least improvement of any use of resources theme in 2006.
 - Councils have continued their good start to addressing the new agenda for children's services. Children and young people performance has improved overall with 79 per cent of councils being rated as 3 or 4, an improvement of 4 per cent from the previous year.

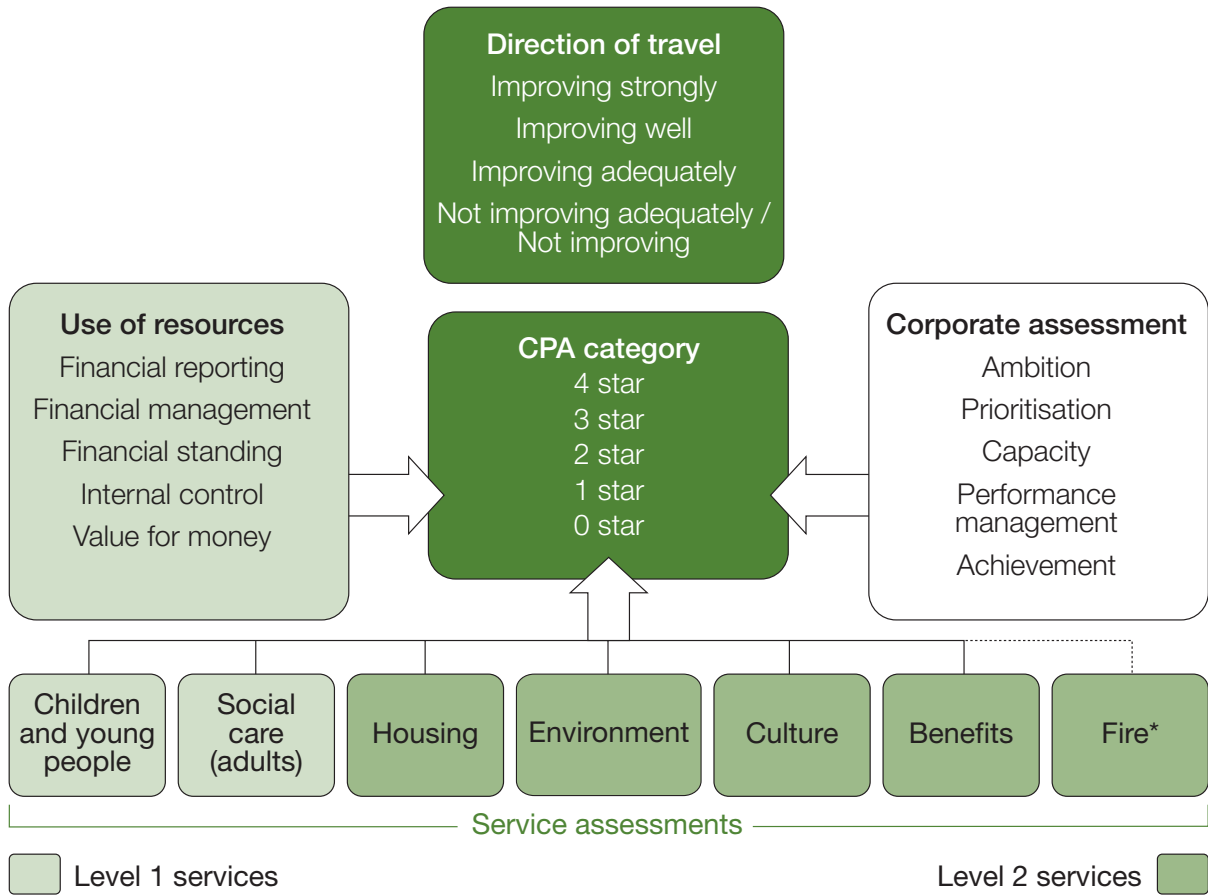
- Performance for social care (adults) also continues to improve. Seventy-nine per cent of councils are performing in the top two categories for social care (adults) and no councils are below minimum requirements.
- Performance in benefits service assessments remains strong with 90 per cent of single tier and county councils performing consistently or well above minimum requirements (scoring 3 or 4).
- Environment is the service area where councils have shown significant improvement since 2005. Eighty-four per cent of councils perform in the top two categories for environment compared to only 52 per cent in 2005. No councils are performing below minimum requirements for environment in 2006.
- Seventy-one per cent of councils with responsibility for housing are performing in the top two categories, an increase of 8 per cent from 2005.
- Performance in delivering culture services has declined since 2005. Fifty-six per cent of councils are performing in the top two categories in 2006 compared to 68 per cent in 2005.
- All councils with responsibility for fire and rescue services are performing at or above minimum requirements and two councils are performing at the highest level.

2

Background to CPA

- 2 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) measures how well councils are delivering services for local people and communities. It looks at performance from a range of perspectives and combines a set of judgements to provide both a simply understood rating and a more complete picture of how councils should focus activity to secure improvement. CPA has evolved over time and the current framework aims to reduce the overall regulatory burden on councils. It brings together information from other inspectorates and auditors to form an overall view of the performance of councils.
- 3 Since its introduction in 2002, council services have improved significantly, and CPA is acknowledged to be one of the catalysts for this. CPA has also been a lever for reducing inspection and regulation in better performing councils and focusing support on others.
- 4 The Audit Commission introduced a new framework for CPA in single tier and county councils from 2005 to 2008, *CPA – The Harder Test*, which is further reducing the regulatory burden on councils in line with our principles of strategic regulation. This followed extensive consultation with local government and other key stakeholders, including several formal consultations undertaken since January 2004.
- 5 The overall CPA framework for single tier and county councils (**Figure 1**) comprises:
 - direction of travel assessments, showing progress over the last year, reported by the Audit Commission;
 - annual use of resources assessments by the Audit Commission, based on the work of its appointed auditors;
 - annual service assessments by the Audit Commission (environment, housing, culture, fire and rescue), or provided to the Audit Commission by the Office for Standards in Education (children and young people), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (children and young people and adult social care) and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (benefits); and
 - periodic (once in three years) corporate assessments by the Audit Commission measuring how effectively the council is working corporately, and with its partners, to improve services and deliver improved outcomes for local people.

Figure 1
The 2006 CPA framework for single tier and county councils



***Note:** Fire and Rescue service assessment – applicable to those 16 councils with responsibility for fire and rescue.

Source: Audit Commission

- 6 The assessment scores for use of resources, service assessments and the corporate assessment element are brought together by the Audit Commission, using a set of rules, to categorise councils according to their performance (see Table 8). The rules ensure that councils must demonstrate consistently strong performance across each element of CPA to achieve a higher star categorisation. The labels attached to the five overall categories are 4 star (reflecting the highest category of performance), 3 star, 2 star, 1 star and 0 star. Further information on the CPA framework is set out in the Audit Commission document *CPA – The Harder Test: Framework for 2006*, available on our website: www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/stcc.
- 7 The individual CPA scores for all single tier and county councils in 2006 are detailed in this document together with year-on-year comparison, where possible, against performance in 2005.¹ This report compares CPA scores for 2006 for single tier and county councils against scores as reported in December 2005. At the time of publication in December 2005, some scores for a small number of councils were subject to review which prevented a full picture of performance to be published at that time. These reviews were resolved shortly after publication and it is this complete picture that has been used for comparison within this report. This enables an analysis of year-on-year change to be incorporated into this report. It also provides analysis of progress being made towards achieving improvement through direction of travel assessments. These make a judgement about how well councils are complying with the duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement.
- 8 As part of CPA, direction of travel, showing the direction and strength of improvement in councils, is reported alongside star categories, showing current performance. It is important to recognise the different but complementary role these two elements play in providing a well-rounded view about services provided now, and their capacity to enable improvement in the future.

¹ In this report we have rounded percentages to the nearest percentage point. This means, in a small number of cases, that where we have combined scores in the text the total may vary by 1 per cent from the sum of the individually listed percentages in graphs.

3

CPA scores for 2006

- 9 The new CPA framework formally categorises both whether or not a council is improving and how well it is performing overall.
- 10 Full details of each council's direction of travel, CPA category and score for each element of the assessment for 2006 are provided in the table at the back of this document. A small number of direction of travel assessments and CPA star categories are currently subject to review and this is indicated in the table where appropriate. As a result, the analysis of scores is not based upon a complete view of performance in all 150 councils.¹ The Commission will publish CPA scores for councils on its website quarterly following conclusion of individual reviews.

Direction of travel

- 11 Direction of travel assessments provide public assurance on an annual basis about whether councils are complying with their duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. In particular, direction of travel:
 - assesses the track record of achievement of outcomes during the last year and assesses the robustness and delivery of the council's improvement plans to sustain future improvement;
 - helps maintain momentum and focus in delivering improvement priorities;
 - signals further support and improvement work to be discussed;
 - informs audit and assessment programmes to ensure that they are targeted on the right areas; and
 - provides learning about good and poor practice to inform improvement planning.
- 12 Improvement takes time and, as a result, the outcomes of improvement can also take time to demonstrate change that would be recognised within CPA category. Direction of travel assessments indicate how likely the council is to improve in the near future based

¹ The Isles of Scilly are exempt from a star rating in 2006. The Audit Commission has agreed this with the Department for Communities and Local Government based on the applicability of the methodology to the island's circumstances. We have not published an environment or culture service assessment score for the Isles of Scilly in 2006. The star rating for Buckinghamshire is subject to review at the time of publication.

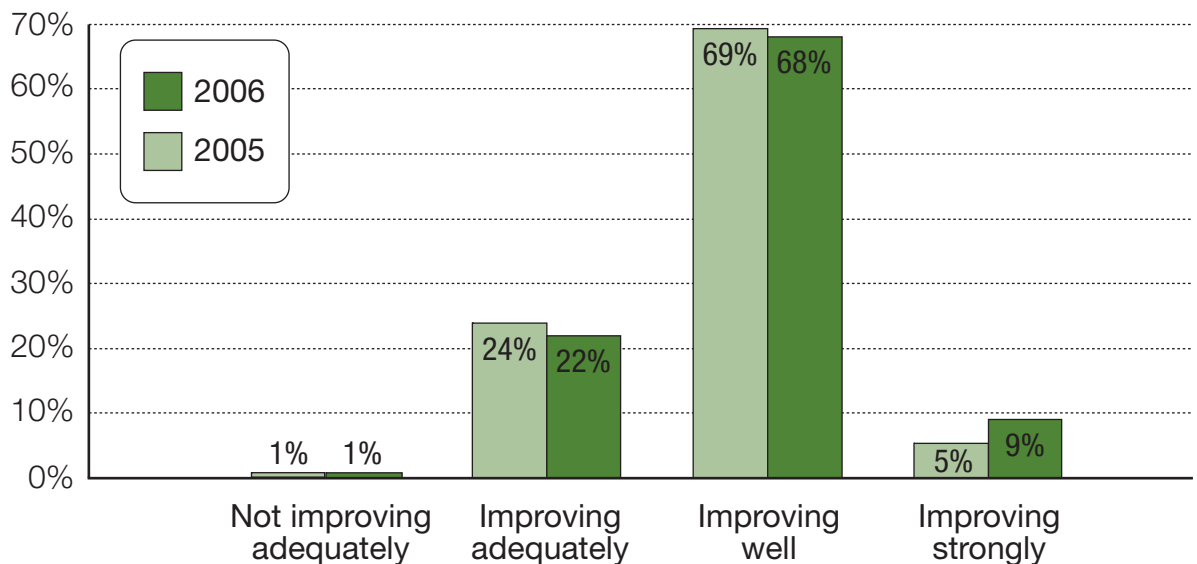
on current information that may not otherwise be identified within service or corporate assessments. Direction of travel is therefore not intended or designed to be a direct predictor of current or future CPA categories overall or individual elements of the framework. This is particularly notable for corporate issues, where a corporate assessment for a council may not be carried out until later in the CPA programme and therefore may not show a significant impact on overall performance until that time.

- 13 Direction of travel assessments use clear labels that indicate the progress being made, or otherwise, to achieve improvement over the last year. The four labels are:
- improving strongly;
 - improving well;
 - improving adequately; and
 - not improving adequately (or not improving).
- 14 Improvement is widespread and most councils across the country are continuing to improve the services they are providing to local people. Nine per cent of councils are improving strongly compared to 5 per cent in 2005 (**Figure 2**). There are 12 councils improving strongly, 90 improving well, 29 improving adequately and one not improving adequately. Eighteen are subject to review. Councils improving strongly are also performing well overall. Ten of 12 councils that are improving strongly are 4 star councils and the other two are categorised as 3 star.
- 15 Our analysis of direction of travel assessments for councils that are improving strongly identifies some common characteristics. Consistent and sustained improvements in priority areas alongside a strong focus on users and improving satisfaction can be seen across those councils most likely to improve. A clear emphasis on working in partnership to enhance capacity to deliver further improvements and enhance value for money can also be identified. Good progress following investment where weaknesses or underperformance is identified and in addressing local priorities also contributes to strong improvement. Strong and effective leadership and governance alongside performance and financial management arrangements are key characteristics to deliver sustained and demonstrable improvement where they are most needed.

Figure 2
Direction of travel¹

Seventy-seven per cent of single tier and county councils are improving strongly or improving well in 2006 compared to 75 per cent in 2005.

Percentage of councils



Source: Audit Commission

- 16** Direction of travel assessments for 18 councils are currently subject to review which are one 4 star council, thirteen 3 star councils, two 2 star councils and one 1 star council and one council with its star rating subject to review.
- 17** There are no councils judged to be not improving and only one council which is not improving adequately – Stoke-on-Trent, a 1 star council. This represents a decrease of one council from 2005. Both councils judged to be not improving adequately in 2005 are improving to a greater degree in 2006 with Isles of Scilly now improving adequately and North East Lincolnshire now improving well.

¹ There are 18 councils currently with direction of travel judgements subject to review. These have been excluded from this analysis.

Table 1
Councils improving strongly

Councils across all CPA star categories are demonstrating improvement. However, only 12 councils are improving strongly in 2006. Kensington and Chelsea, Kent, Shropshire and Wandsworth all maintained their improving strongly assessment from 2005.

Councils improving strongly	Star category
Camden	4 star
City of London	4 star
Kensington and Chelsea	4 star
Kent	4 star
Shropshire	4 star
South Tyneside	4 star
Stockton-on-Tees	4 star
Tameside	4 star
Wandsworth	4 star
Westminster	4 star
Blackpool	3 star
Tower Hamlets	3 star

Source: Audit Commission

Case study 1

South Tyneside is one of two councils, alongside Blackpool, that have improved their star rating in 2006 and are improving strongly.

South Tyneside

Services are improving in priority areas and service satisfaction is high and increasing. Satisfaction with the Council overall increased to 61 per cent, among the highest levels of performance nationally, and 73 per cent of key performance indicators (PIs) improved during 2005/06, well above the average for unitary authorities.

Services for older people and for children and young people are good and improving. Exam results continued to improve and the gap between local and national averages is closing significantly, with A-level results above the national average for the first

time. Adult social care is increasing the opportunity for independence through a wider range of support, and the Council was second best in the country for tackling delayed transfer to care.

Environmental services are good and continued to improve. Recycling targets have been met. The levels of waste collected reduced by over 6 per cent in 2005/06 and the cleanliness of the Borough improved, with national awards for the service and community campaigns such as 'Blitz it' and 'Do your bit'. Cultural facility improvements have contributed to increased usage and satisfaction. During 2005/06 leisure facility attendance in the Borough exceeded one million for the first time and attendance at sports development programmes increased by 55 per cent.

Regeneration schemes are increasing employment opportunities, with significant external funding secured to transform the economy. Low crime levels continued to fall, although anti-social behaviour remains an issue. The Council is improving public sector housing services and satisfaction with the service increased, but the number of non-decent homes remains high.

The Council is improving value for money through targeting high-cost services, improving access to services and increasing community engagement. The number of services available at the customer service centre has doubled in the last year. The Council continues to work well with communities through improved consultation to develop future plans and is piloting neighbourhood management, involving minority groups.

Management arrangements are strong and financial management has improved. There is a focus on delivering improvements to priority and underperforming services through annual programmes of projects for actions in priority areas. The 2006/07 '3 Star Plus' programme is delivering significant improvement in ten areas including responding to improve poor performance in benefit claims administration.

Source: Audit Commission

Direction of travel by council type

- 18 Table 2** shows direction of travel by type of council. London councils are improving best with 91 per cent either improving strongly or improving well. There is widespread improvement across all types of council, with similar proportions of councils improving strongly or improving well across county councils, with 65 per cent, metropolitan councils, with 61 per cent and unitary councils, with 60 per cent.

Table 2

Direction of travel by council type

	Number of councils	Improving strongly	Improving well	Improving adequately	Not improving adequately	Subject to review
County	34	2	20	5	0	7
London	33	6	24	1	0	2
Metropolitan	36	2	20	10	0	4
Unitary	47	2	26	13	1	5
Total	150	12	90	29	1	18

Source: Audit Commission

Direction of travel by government region

- 19 Table 3** shows the direction of travel by government office region. Councils across all regions demonstrate improvement, and at least half of the councils in every region are either improving strongly or improving well. London, the North West and the North East contain the largest proportion of councils that are either improving strongly or improving well. However, the East of England, East Midlands, South West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions contain no councils that are improving strongly.

Table 3
Direction of travel by government region

	Number of councils	Improving strongly	Improving well	Improving adequately	Not improving adequately	Subject to review
East Midlands	9	0	4	2	0	3
East of England	10	0	7	3	0	0
London	33	6	24	1	0	2
North East	12	2	7	1	0	2
North West	22	2	15	4	0	1
South East	19	1	11	4	0	3
South West	16	0	10	4	0	2
West Midlands	14	1	5	5	1	2
Yorks and Humber	15	0	7	5	0	3
Total	150	12	90	29	1	18

Source: Audit Commission

Case study 2

Performing well and improving strongly.

Shropshire County Council

The Council is improving outcomes for local people. Performance is improving in most areas. The number of PIs shown as improving is significantly better than other councils. In 2004/05, 49 per cent of PIs were in the best quartile nationally. In 2005/06 this increased to 73 per cent. Public satisfaction with the Council has also risen to 56 per cent in 2006/07 compared to 52 per cent in 2003/04, representing the top quartile of performance.

There is a strong improvement in the services identified by the Council as priorities. For example, 65 per cent of local public service agreement (LPSA) stretch targets have been achieved and the Council has been awarded beacon status for improving rural services and for early intervention for children at risk.

The Council has a strong track record of making an effective contribution to wider community outcomes. The Switched on Shropshire scheme is giving rural

communities access to services via the internet, while developing closer links in communities. Local crime and disorder reduction partnerships have delivered measurable improvements in community safety. For example, working with partners the Council has helped to halve the number of alcohol related violent and anti-social behaviour incidents in Shropshire market towns over the 2005 Christmas period compared with the previous year.

The Council scored 4 for services for children and young people, and 3 for social care (adults). These are both maintained from 2005. In particular, the rate of improvement in key stage two results between 2005 and 2006 has been more than twice that found nationally and Shropshire is in the top 5 per cent nationally for the greatest year-on-year improvement. The speed of response and number of assessments completed by the Older People and Physical Disability Teams has increased, and more older people are being enabled to stay in their own homes through moving resources from the provision of lower level dependency residential placements towards domiciliary care services.

The Council has also set up a Joint Benefits Team with the Department for Work and Pensions, Bridgnorth District Council and the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide comprehensive advice to the people of Bridgnorth. This has increased benefits take-up by £300,000 in Bridgnorth alone.

The Council's improvement plans are being well implemented. In 2005/06 77 per cent of corporate plan indicators met or exceeded targets. As a result of this focus, efficiency gains of £5.8 million were made in 2004/05 and 2005/06, against a target of £4.2 million.

There is a strong track record of delivering low cost, high-quality services in response to local needs. There is also a comprehensive set of plans for the future, including the Corporate Plan, the Community Strategy (2006-2010) and the Strategic Improvement Plan.

Source: Audit Commission

CPA star categories

- 20 The introduction of *CPA – The Harder Test* in 2005, established a more stringent test with more emphasis on outcomes for local people and value for money. Our methodologies for assessing user focus have also been strengthened and include, for example within corporate assessments, explicit statements on this. Because the framework has changed, specific comparisons of either overall ratings or individual elements of CPA were

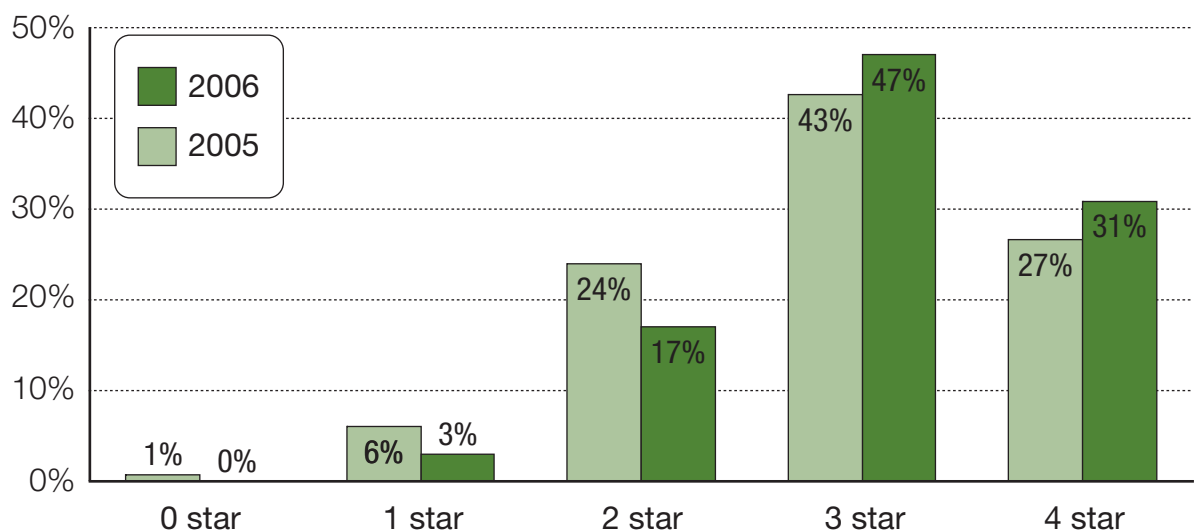
not possible in 2005. This report therefore provides a new opportunity to compare overall performance over a two-year period or by council.

- 21 Councils are continuing to perform well and CPA scores have improved from last year. Seventy-nine per cent of councils are performing in the top two CPA categories, up from 69 per cent in 2005 (**Figure 3**). This demonstrates strong performance in all elements of CPA. There are 14 more 3 star and 4 star councils in 2006 than there were in 2005. Forty-seven per cent of councils are 3 star. Thirty-one per cent of councils are performing at the highest level (4 star) while no councils are categorised as 0 star. Only 3 per cent of councils are 1 star in 2006, a reduction from 7 per cent of councils that were either 0 star or 1 star councils in 2005.

Figure 3 Star categories

There are seventy-one 3 star councils in 2006, an increase of seven councils from 2005. There are no 0 star councils in 2006 compared to one council, North East Lincolnshire, in 2005.

Percentage of councils



Source: Audit Commission

Changes in CPA category

- 22 Improvement in CPA categories has been positive with over four times as many councils moving up a category than those moving down between 2005 and 2006. A total of 29 councils have gone up 1 category in 2006 while 7 councils have dropped a category from 2005 (Table 4). Three councils, Havering, North East Lincolnshire and Waltham Forest, have moved up two categories this year. Seventy-four per cent, 109 councils, have maintained their star category from last year. No councils have dropped two star categories between 2005 and 2006.

Table 4

Changes in CPA category 2005 to 2006

Most of the improvement in CPA categories has been upwards – 32 councils have moved up 1 or more categories between 2005 and 2006 and 7 have moved down.

Category	2005	Moving up more than one category	Moving up one category	Moving down one category	2006	Net change
4 star	40			4	47	7
3 star	64		12		71	7
2 star	36		13		25	-11
1 star	9	1	4	3	5	-4
0 star	1	2			0	-1
Subject to review	0				1	1
Total	150	3	29	7	149	

Source: Audit Commission

- 23 The overall number of 4 star councils has increased by seven from 2005. Four councils have moved down a category from 4 star in 2005 while 12 councils have moved up a category to achieve 4 star status in 2006. Most movement has been upward into the 3 star category, where 15 councils have moved into this category in 2006. Three councils have dropped one category to 1 star. There are five councils scoring 1 star overall. These are Bristol, Lambeth, Rutland, Sandwell and Stoke on Trent.

Case study 3

Only three councils have improved by two star categories from 2005 to 2006 demonstrating rapid improvement. North East Lincolnshire has improved its CPA star rating from 0 star in 2005 to 2 star in 2006.

North East Lincolnshire

The Council has made significant improvements in the way it delivers services during the past year. There has been an improvement in outcomes for children and young people and in many areas of adult social care and housing services. The Council has worked well in partnership with other agencies to address community safety and health inequality. Environmental improvement initiatives have been successful and are reflected in higher public satisfaction.

Stable political and managerial leadership together with stronger arrangements for financial and performance management provide a sound basis for the Council's continued improvement, but substantial challenges remain. Further work is required to consolidate the changes which have been put in place. The Council recognises the need to improve adult social care and strategic housing further and to increase educational attainment at secondary level. It knows it must also make clearer to the public the standards of service which they can expect. Additionally the Council needs to enable local people to become more fully involved in decision making and to improve its community leadership role.

Source: Audit Commission

Star rating by council type

- 24 All types of council achieve 4 star performance (**Table 5, overleaf**) and 79 per cent of all types of council achieve either 3 or 4 star categorisation, although London councils are most likely to perform in the top two categories. Eighty-five per cent of London councils are rated as 3 or 4 star councils with a quarter achieving the top category. County councils also perform well with 82 per cent achieving 3 or 4 star performance. With the exception of county councils, all types of council contain 1 star councils. However, three of the five 1 star councils are unitary councils.

Table 5
Star category by council type

	Number of councils	4 star	3 star	2 star	1 star	0 star	Subject to review
County	34	19	9	5	0	0	1
London	33	8	20	4	1	0	0
Metropolitan	36	10	19	6	1	0	0
Unitary	46	10	23	10	3	0	0
Total	149	47	71	25	5	0	1

Source: Audit Commission

Star category by government region

- 25 Table 6** shows star categories by government office region. Although there is wide variation in performance, all regions contain 4 star councils. The North East region performs best overall with over 90 per cent of councils achieving 3 or 4 star performance. London, South East and the North West also perform strongly overall with over 80 per cent of councils categorised as 3 or 4 star councils. The South West and Yorkshire and the Humber contain only two 4 star councils in each region, the lowest number across any region. Two out of five 1 star councils are in the West Midlands.

Table 6
Star category by government region

	Number of councils	4 star	3 star	2 star	1 star	0 star	Subject to review
East Midlands	9	4	1	3	1	0	0
East of England	10	4	3	3	0	0	0
London	33	8	20	4	1	0	0
North East	12	9	2	1	0	0	0
North West	22	11	7	4	0	0	0
South East	19	4	13	1	0	0	1
South West	15	2	8	4	1	0	0
West Midlands	14	3	7	2	2	0	0
Yorks and Humber	15	2	10	3	0	0	0
Total	149	47	71	25	5	0	1

Source: Audit Commission

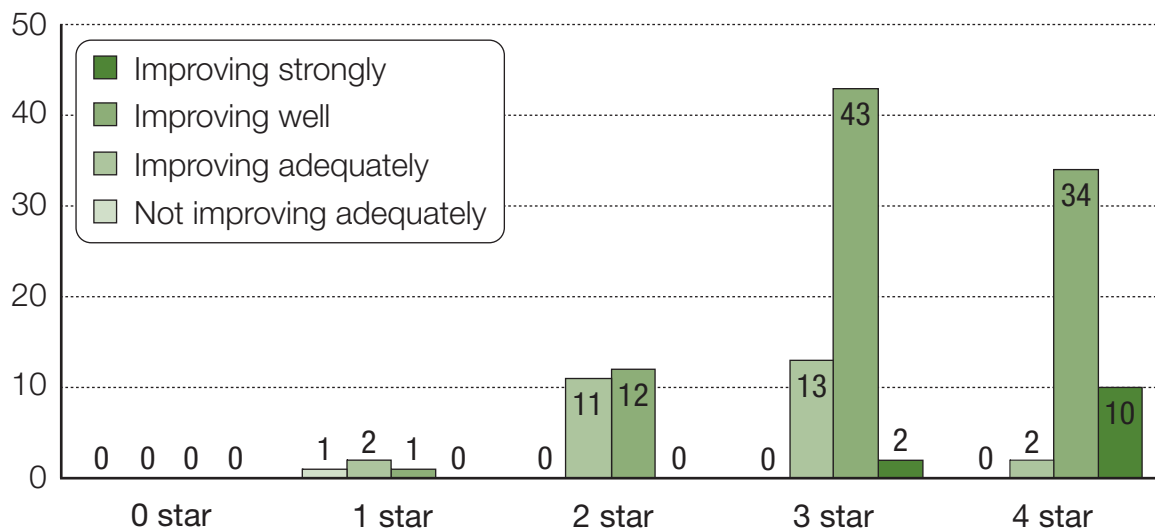
Improvement by CPA star category

- 26 Top-performing councils are improving the most (**Figure 4, overleaf**). Ninety-four per cent of 4 star councils are improving strongly or improving well. Three star councils are also more likely to be improving, with 63 per cent improving strongly or improving well. Three star and 4 star councils are the only councils to be improving strongly. All 4 star councils are sustaining or accelerating their pace of improvement with no 4 star councils not improving adequately. Better performing councils are improving to a greater degree than those in lower categories. One star and 2 star councils are most likely to be improving adequately although 43 per cent are improving well. As a result, and as was found in the 2005 analysis of CPA scores, there is the continued potential for the gap between high and low performance to widen in future years. Lower performing councils will need to accelerate the pace of improvement to avoid this happening.
- 27 Direction of travel statements for 18 councils are currently subject to review.

Figure 4
Improvement by CPA star category

Better performing councils tend to be improving at a greater rate than those in lower categories.

Number of councils



Source: Audit Commission

4

Use of resources

- 28 A use of resources assessment is carried out annually, as part of each council's external audit and covers five themes. These are financial reporting, financial management, financial standing, internal control and value for money. The use of resources assessment focuses on financial management but links to the strategic management of the council. It looks at how financial management is integrated with the council's strategy and corporate management, supports its priorities and delivers value for money. In February 2006 we consulted on some changes to the assessment to reflect the experience and feedback from its first year of operation. As a result we revised the key lines of enquiry for 2006 and 2007 in light of the consultation responses.^I
- 29 In August 2006 the Audit Commission published *Learning from CPA in 2005/06*^{II} which drew together findings from 388 use of resources assessments, across single tier and county and district councils, undertaken over the last year. The report was accompanied by an interactive web tool and is available from www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/stcc/stcclearning.asp. The report found that councils performing well in this area have set in place the building blocks for proper stewardship and accountability. Those with effective financial management are better able to understand the relationship between performance and costs and, in turn, through active benchmarking, seek out opportunities to improve value for money. These councils had made progress in a number of areas:
- internal control, including risk management, is becoming more fully embedded throughout the council;
 - good quality financial reporting is seen as an essential part of accountability to local people;
 - financial planning is linked effectively to business planning within the context of integrated medium-term planning and asset management; and
 - financial and performance information is monitored and acted upon.

I As a result of changes to key lines of enquiry for use of resources, the 2006 scores are not directly comparable with 2005 and some modifications to wording may have led to improved performance.

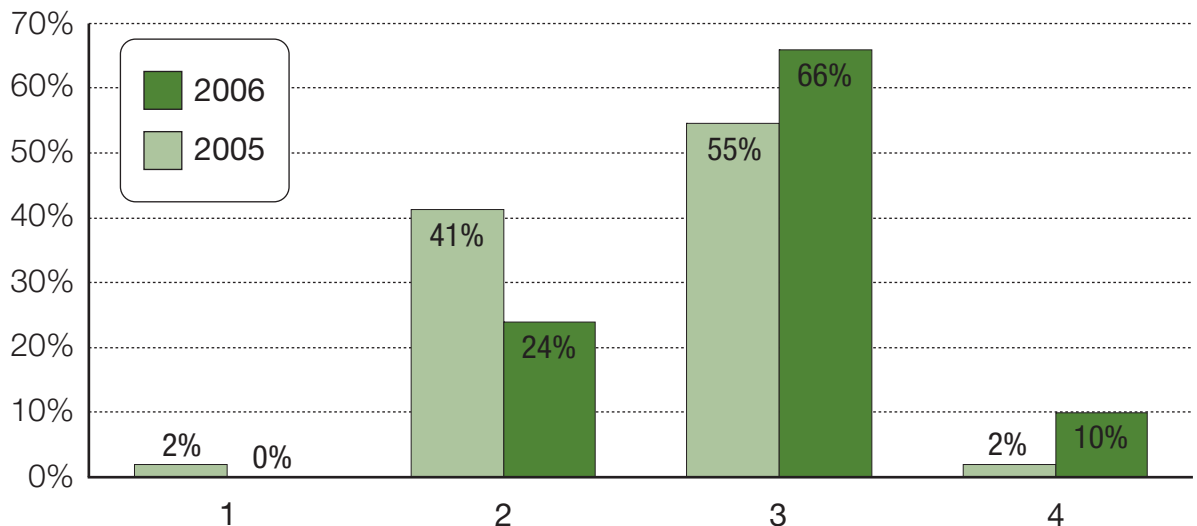
II Available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/stcc

- 30 Furthermore, councils that manage their finances well have a good understanding of their current costs and performance, are able to identify and achieve efficiency gains, and drive improvements in value for money. Councils making the most progress in this area:
- have developed a better understanding of the relationship between service performance (both in terms of service outputs and their impact on users) and associated costs;
 - have improved the quality of information on both performance and costs, which has helped them to identify opportunities to improve value for money;
 - understand their local context and circumstances but actively benchmark costs and performance against others; and
 - follow through the results of reviews and benchmarking and implement changes so that they can demonstrate a track record of value for money improvements.
- 31 Overall, how single tier and county councils are using their resources has improved in 2006 across all types of council. Almost a third of councils achieved a higher use of resources score than in 2005 while only two councils show a reduction in their overall score. Improvement can also be seen across all use of resources themes with approximately an 80 per cent reduction in themes scores identified as not meeting minimum requirements.
- 32 Seventy-six per cent of councils performed consistently above or well above minimum requirements for use of resources, compared to 57 per cent in 2005, showing an improvement of 19 per cent (**Figure 5**). Ten per cent of councils performed well above minimum requirements (scoring 4) compared to only 2 per cent in 2005. Sixty-six per cent of councils scored 3, consistently above minimum requirements, representing an 11 per cent increase from 2006. Furthermore, all councils are now meeting minimum requirements compared to three councils not meeting minimum requirements in 2005.

Figure 5**Use of resources**

Ninety per cent of single tier and county councils are performing at or above minimum requirements for use of resources, with the remaining 10 per cent performing well above minimum requirements.

Percentage of councils



Source: Audit Commission

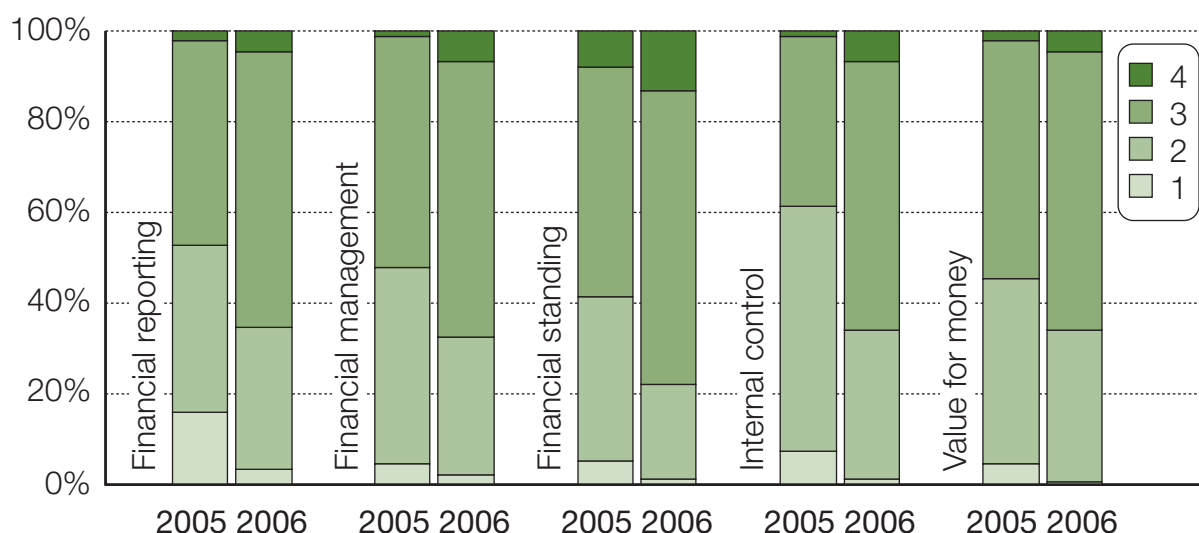
- 33** All types of single tier and county councils scored 4 overall, well above minimum requirements, for use of resources whereas in 2005 no counties or metropolitan boroughs scored 4. All councils performing well above minimum requirements (scoring 4) in 2005 maintained their overall score in 2006. Councils performing well above minimum requirements (scoring 4) by council type are:
- Five London councils (15 per cent) up from two in 2005. These are: the City of London; Kensington and Chelsea; Newham; Wandsworth; and Westminster.
 - Four Metropolitan councils (11 per cent) up from none in 2005. These are: Rotherham; St Helens; Sunderland; and Wigan.
 - Three county councils (9 per cent) up from none in 2005. These are: Kent; Shropshire; and Worcestershire.
 - Three unitary councils (6 per cent) up from one council in 2005. These are: East Riding of Yorkshire; Stockton on Tees; and Wokingham.

- 34 East Riding of Yorkshire, a unitary council, is the only council to score well above minimum requirements (scoring 4) for all use of resources themes. Other notably high-performing councils include Kent, St Helens and Wandsworth.

Figure 6
Use of resources – theme scores

Internal control has shown the greatest improvement since 2005 while financial standing is the strongest performing theme overall.

Percentage of councils



Source: Audit Commission

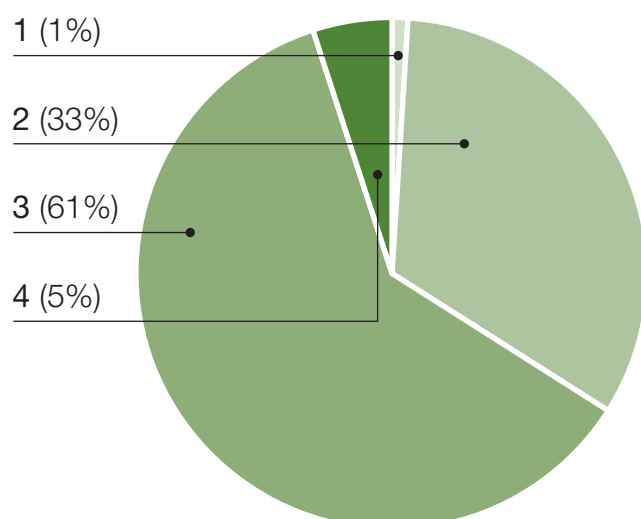
- 35 The financial position of councils is being well managed. Financial standing, assessing how well a council manages its spending within available resources, is the best performing theme within use of resources assessments. Seventy-eight per cent of councils achieve a score of 3 or 4 and this theme also shows the highest number of councils in the top category. London boroughs perform best in their financial standing with 91 per cent scoring 3 or 4, up from 67 per cent in 2005. Counties also perform well with 88 per cent achieving a score of 3 or 4. Unitary councils perform least well with 62 per cent scoring consistently or well above minimum requirements (scoring 3 or 4). Only two councils are below minimum requirements (scoring 1) for financial standing (Harrow and Liverpool).

- 36** Internal control, which assesses whether a council maintains a sound system of checks and controls, manages its risks and has effective arrangements to ensure proper use of public funds, shows the most significant improvement overall with 66 per cent of councils performing consistently or well above minimum requirements (39 per cent in 2005) demonstrating an improvement of 27 per cent. Counties perform strongest in internal control and demonstrate an increase of 35 per cent performing consistently or well above minimum requirements (scoring 3 or 4) from 47 per cent in 2005 to 82 per cent in 2006. London boroughs also perform strongly with 76 per cent scoring 3 or 4, an increase of 39 per cent from 2005. Unitary councils scored least well with 51 per cent scoring 3 or 4. However, this did represent an increase of 23 per cent from 2005.
- 37** Financial reporting is generally good and has improved since 2005. Sixty-five per cent of councils perform consistently or well above minimum requirements (scoring 3 or 4) for financial reporting, representing an increase of 18 per cent from 2005. Financial reporting is the third highest performing theme. Financial reporting shows the most significant reduction in those performing below minimum requirements (scoring 1). In 2006, only 3 per cent (five councils) are below minimum requirements, compared to 16 per cent (24 councils) in 2005. The five councils performing below minimum requirements for financial reporting in 2006 are Bedfordshire, Isles of Scilly, Kingston upon Hull, Oldham and Sandwell councils.
- 38** Sixty-seven per cent of councils perform consistently or well above minimum requirements (scoring 3 or 4) for financial management, up from 52 per cent in 2006, representing a 15 per cent improvement. London councils perform strongest in financial management, with 82 per cent (27 councils) scoring 3 or 4 (up from 73 per cent in 2005). Metropolitan and county councils also perform well, while unitary councils generally perform less well with 51 per cent achieving 3 and 4.
- 39** Use of resources contains an explicit value for money judgement, focusing on whether councils currently achieve value for money, and how they manage and improve value for money. Almost all councils are achieving at or above minimum requirements for value for money (scoring 2 or above) (**Figure 7, overleaf**). Sixty-six per cent of councils perform consistently or well above minimum requirements (scoring 3 or 4) for value for money, up from 55 per cent in 2005. However, this theme shows least improvement for those scoring 3 and 4 between 2005 and 2006. Only one council (Stoke-on-Trent) is below minimum requirements for value for money (scoring 1). Stoke-on-Trent is also one of only two

councils, alongside Cornwall, that has scored lower for value for money in 2006 than in 2005. All seven councils that were below minimum requirements for value for money in 2005 have improved their performance in achieving value for money in 2006. These are Bedfordshire, Bristol, Liverpool, North East Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Sandwell and Swindon.

- 40 Seven councils perform well above minimum requirements (scoring 4) for value for money. No metropolitan councils score 4 for value for money while one unitary, three London councils and three county councils achieve a 4 for value for money. The councils achieving well above minimum requirements for value for money were East Riding of Yorkshire, Kent, Richmond-upon-Thames, Shropshire, Wandsworth, Westminster and Worcestershire councils.
- 41 Counties are the best performers with 76 per cent performing consistently or well above minimum requirements for value for money, compared to 71 per cent in 2005. London councils also tend to perform well for value for money.

Figure 7
Value for money judgement



Source: Audit Commission

Case study 4

Making the most of available resources.

East Riding of Yorkshire

Use of resources at East Riding of Yorkshire Council is outstanding. The Council has consistently made improvements identified in 2005 and is the first council to achieve top ratings for all five elements of use of resources to score 4, performing well above minimum requirements, overall. The Council is highly self-aware and ensures that resources are applied to take account of local conditions impacting on costs, such as rurality and low population density, particularly for environmental services, highways, adult social services and home-school transport costs. It benchmarks and compares financial performance to ensure that high-quality and improving services are being delivered at comparatively low cost and satisfaction with services is high.

There is a comprehensive and robust performance management system which fully integrates financial management at all levels with monthly monitoring reports to the corporate management team and members. Once again the 2005/06 accounts were produced on time, complied with all the relevant standards and were supported by exemplary working papers. Strong service planning and performance management processes assess performance against targets, key success factors and benchmark data. The member 'critical friends' scrutiny process challenges officers through regular reviews of service and performance plans. An effective overview and scrutiny process is in place overall.

Net expenditure on continuing operations has been within the approved budget in each of the last four years and the planned contribution to reserves was achieved in each of those four years. A detailed review of reserves and balances is undertaken annually, the results of which form part of the financial plan.

The Council has a good track record of achieving its targets. Seventy per cent of LPSA stretch targets have been met, securing a performance reward grant of £5.4 million. Robust arrangements are in place to achieve Gershon efficiency targets of 2.75 per cent for each of the three years from 2004/05 to 2006/07. The Council has exceeded the government's and its own targets, with cumulative savings equating to 6.73 per cent.

Planning for efficiencies is integrated with financial and service planning with clear ownership at the highest levels. The Council has undertaken a number of initiatives, including an efficiency conference to increase awareness and knowledge of the

efficiency agenda among staff and members. The Value for Money Programme Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and efficiency considerations are integrated in the service and financial planning process. A procurement partnership with North Lincolnshire Council has also led to savings through economies of scale.

For further information please contact: Ann Woodward – telephone: 01482 391420

Source: Audit Commission

Case study 5

Focusing on efficiency and value for money.

Westminster City Council

Westminster has an established track record of driving out efficiencies and has seen significant improvements in both cost and service quality in recent years. Strong leadership from members and an embedded performance culture among staff continues to drive improvement in quality and cost to provide even better value for money.

The Council has a comprehensive understanding of external risks and assesses them in its robust service planning process. It has excellent performance management arrangements including high-quality contractor and service monitoring. Executive members and scrutiny committees review the value for money the contracts represent. One recent contract award identified savings over ten years estimated at £36.6 million.

The annual business planning process re-allocates resources for emerging priorities but also includes efficiency targets over a three-year rolling period. Savings of £8 million were achieved in 2004/05 and £15.5 million Gershon eligible efficiencies have been identified for 2005/06.

A number of recent projects delivered by the Council emphasise its strong focus on improving efficiency and value for money, without compromising quality:

- The Council has delivered significant service improvements in its licensing process achieving a 53 per cent cut in processing time, equating to £1 million per annum in cost avoidance savings.
- The review of parking service policies and practices has dramatically improved customer service, has cut costs and increased revenue recovery rates. Previously, the Council issued 16,000 penalty charge notices per week, but 30 per cent were being challenged. The re-designed parking process cut the number of steps from 43 to 19 and financial benefits are now starting to be realised. Ticket numbers

issued have reduced, but better processes have led to an increased payment rate and a 9 per cent increase in customer satisfaction.

- The Council is rolling out e-invoicing and aims to reduce the cost of processing invoices by at least 50 per cent; reduce the number of invoices processed by 5 per cent; and to increase the number paid within 30 days to over 90 per cent. Considerable savings will be realised. The Council has already dramatically reduced 18,000 mobile phone invoices a year to just 12, which has achieved a £200,000 per annum saving.

Westminster has an even more ambitious agenda for improvement going forward through its Worksmart programme which will deliver further overhead savings over the next three years.

For further information please contact: Martin Mitchell – email: mmitchell1@westminster.gov.uk, telephone: 0207 6412697

Source: Audit Commission

5

Service assessments

- 42 This section describes performance in seven service areas: children and young people, social care (adults), housing, environment, culture, benefits and fire and rescue. Housing, environment, culture and fire and rescue are produced by the Audit Commission. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) make judgements in relation to children and young people, based either on an annual performance assessment or, in relevant years, a Joint Area Review (JAR). Judgements in relation to social care for adults and benefits are provided by CSCI and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) respectively. Councils are assessed on the relevant services and components of those services depending on their council type.¹
- 43 Children and young people and social care (adults) services, along with use of resources, are level 1 assessments and carry greater weight in determining the overall score within the current framework. Individual service assessment scores, alongside star categories and direction of travel labels, for all councils are shown in the table at the end of this document. **Figures 8 to 11** show scores for each of the Audit Commission service assessments while **Figures 12 to 14** show scores for service assessments provided by other inspectorates.

Audit Commission service assessments

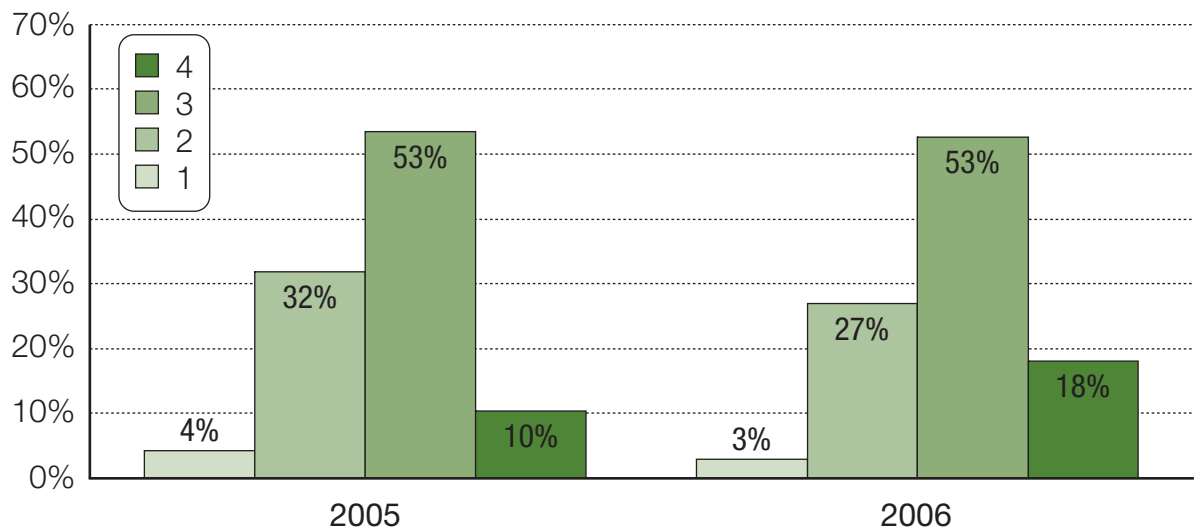
- 44 Over two-thirds of councils with responsibility for housing are performing consistently above or well above minimum requirements. The number of councils performing well above minimum requirements (scoring 4) has improved from 12 in 2005 to 21 in 2006. Three councils, 3 per cent, are performing below minimum requirements (scoring 1).
- 45 The councils performing below minimum requirements for housing services are Liverpool, Rutland and Southend-on-sea.

¹ Housing and benefits services are provided by all single tier councils. In county council areas housing and benefits services are provided by district councils and are therefore not included in this analysis. Fire and rescue services are provided by 16 county councils. In all other areas, fire and rescue services are provided by fire and rescue authorities.

Figure 8 Housing

Housing services have generally improved between 2005 and 2006. Seventy-one per cent of councils with responsibility for housing are performing in the top two categories, an increase of 8 per cent from 2005. However, three councils are performing below minimum requirements for housing services, a decrease of two from 2005.

Percentage of councils



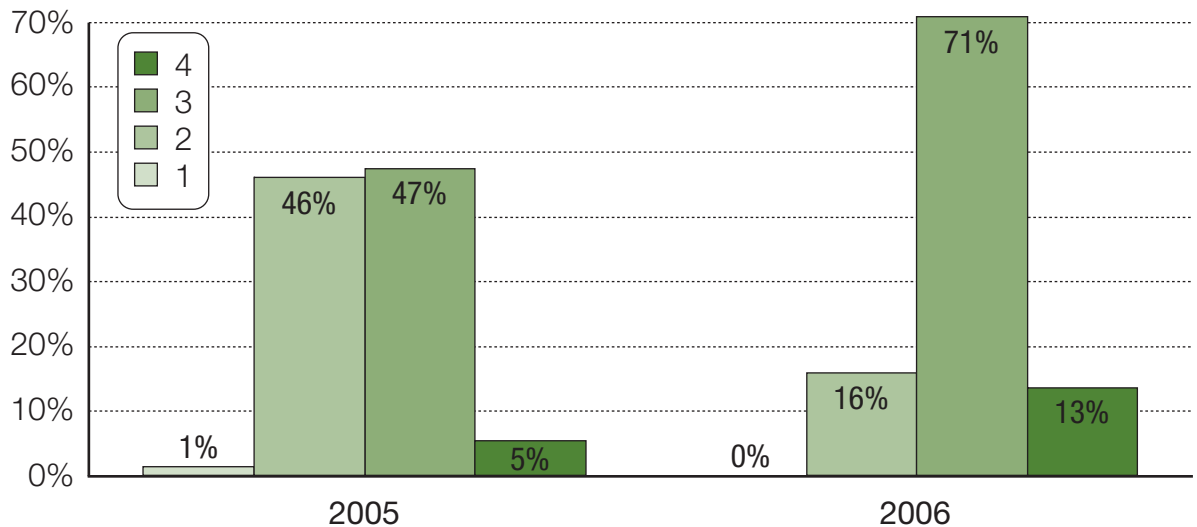
Source: Audit Commission

- 46 Two councils, Middlesbrough and Swindon have improved their scores for housing services by two categories since 2005, both from a score of 2 to 4. However, three councils, Herefordshire, Manchester and Rutland have dropped their housing services assessment score by two since last year. Herefordshire and Manchester have dropped from a score of 4 to 2 while Rutland has gone from a score of 3 to 1 between 2005 and 2006. In total, 54 councils show a change in their housing score from last year. Thirty-seven councils have improved their housing service assessment score from 2005 by one or more while 17 councils show a reduction of one or more from last year.
- 47 The proportion of councils performing below minimum requirements in housing is greater than in any other service assessment area. Two of the three councils that are delivering housing services that are below minimum requirements are unitary councils while London councils tend to perform more strongly.

Figure 9 Environment

Environment services have widely improved since 2005. Eighty-four per cent of councils perform in the top two categories for environment compared to only 52 per cent in 2005. Twenty councils achieve the top score for environment in 2006 compared to only eight councils in 2005.

Percentage of councils



Source: Audit Commission

- 48 Environment is the service area where councils have shown significant improvement since 2005. Eighty-four per cent of councils are performing consistently or well above minimum requirements for environment (scoring 3 or 4) compared to only just over half of councils in 2005. Furthermore, no councils are performing below minimum requirements for environment in 2006. The Isles of Scilly, which scored 1 for environment in 2005, does not have an environment score in 2006 and Cumbria, the only other council to perform below minimum requirements for environment in 2005, has improved its performance in this area and has achieved an environment score of 3 in 2006.
- 49 Five councils, Cumbria, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire and Wokingham have improved their environment score by 2 since 2005 while a further 59 councils have improved their score by 1. Performance in delivering environment services has declined

for ten councils since 2005. These are Bexley, Derby, Kingston-upon-Hull, North Tyneside, Nottinghamshire, Richmond-upon-Thames, Salford, St Helens, Stockton-on-Tees and Suffolk.

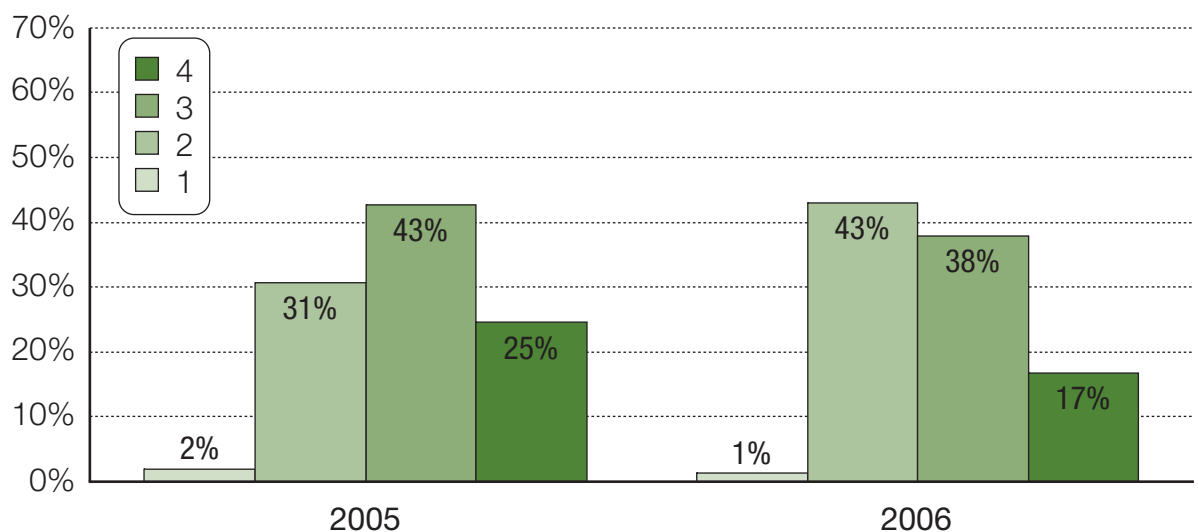
- 50 County councils perform particularly well in their delivery of environment services. Only one county council, Suffolk, scores at minimum requirements (scoring 2) for environment with all other county councils scoring 3 or 4. Metropolitan and unitary councils also perform well with 86 and 83 per cent of councils, respectively, performing in the top two categories compared with only 70 per cent of London councils. However, London councils have improved significantly from last year. The London and the South West regions generally perform least well overall while the East of England region is the only region that does not contain a council that is performing well above minimum requirements, scoring 4, for environment in 2006.

Figure 10

Culture

Generally, performance in delivering culture services has declined since 2005. Fifty-six per cent of councils are performing in the top two categories in 2006 compared to 68 per cent in 2005.

Percentage of councils



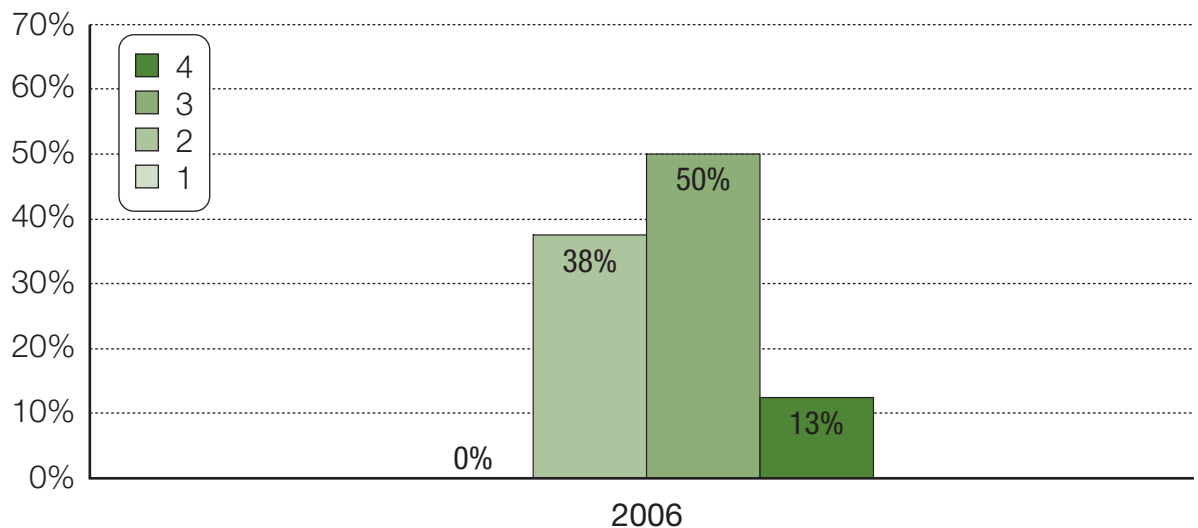
Source: Audit Commission

- 51 Culture services show the greatest reduction in scores and the weakest performance across any service assessment. Twenty-six councils, 17 per cent, achieve top performance, scoring 4, for culture services in 2006. A further 38 per cent of councils are performing consistently above minimum requirements for culture services.
- 52 All three councils, Bristol, Hackney and Waltham Forest, that scored 1 (below minimum requirements), for culture services in 2005 have improved their performance and are at minimum requirements in 2006, scoring 2. In total, 25 councils improved their culture score from 2005 with two councils, Halton and Kent, improving their score by two to achieve top ratings for culture in 2006. Seventy-two councils have maintained their culture score between 2005 and 2006. Two councils, Lambeth and Hammersmith and Fulham, are performing below minimum requirements for culture.
- 53 Over 90 per cent of councils in the North East are achieving the highest scores in culture services, scoring 3 or 4. However, 73 per cent of councils in Yorkshire and the Humber, over 70 per cent of councils in London and 57 per cent in the West Midlands have scores at or below minimum requirements for culture. County councils tend to show much higher scores than other types of council with 91 per cent in the top two categories. London councils are the only type of council to score below minimum requirements for culture services.

Figure 11**Fire and rescue**

Councils with responsibility for fire and rescue services are all performing at or above minimum requirements.

Percentage of councils



Source: Audit Commission

- 54** Sixteen councils provide fire and rescue services for their communities. A comprehensive analysis of fire and rescue service assessments for all 47 fire and rescue authorities will be published by the Audit Commission in April 2007. However, fire and rescue represents an important element of the services provided by councils with responsibility for them and has therefore been included as an element of CPA for those councils in 2006. This is the first year that a fire and rescue service assessment has been produced. Two councils, Cumbria and Northumberland, are performing well above minimum requirements, scoring 4, for fire and rescue services and a total of eight councils, accounting for 50 per cent of those councils with responsibility for fire and rescue are performing above minimum requirements (scoring 3). Only six councils, Cornwall, Isle of Wight, Isles of Scilly, Lincolnshire, Surrey and Warwickshire, are performing at minimum requirements (scoring 2) and there are no councils performing below minimum requirements for fire and rescue services in 2006.

Service assessments provided by other inspectorates

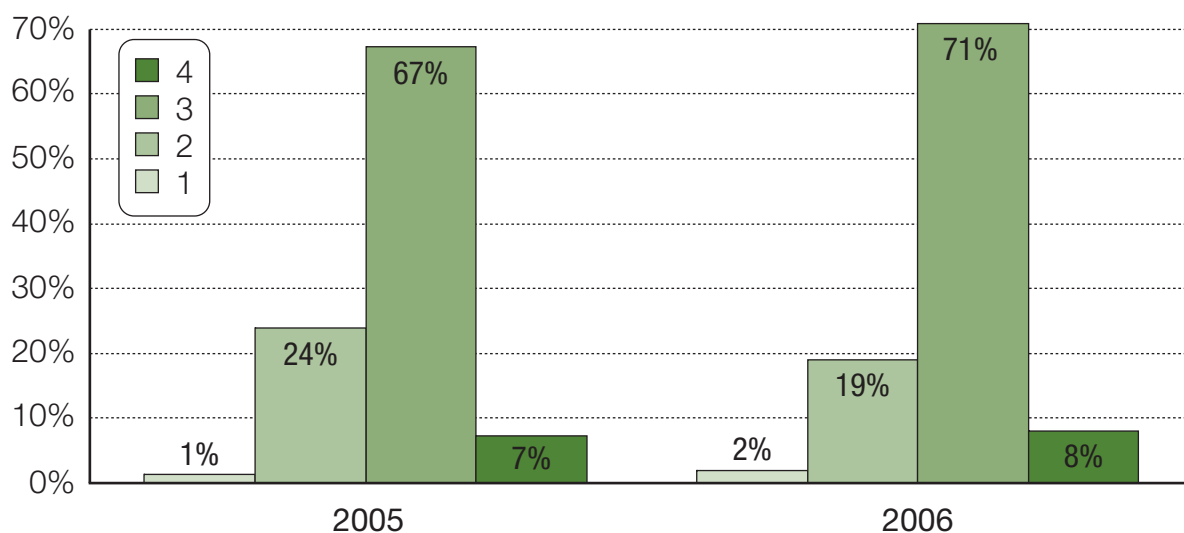
- 55 Outcomes from the second year of Annual Performance Assessment (APA) and the findings of 40 JARs show that in the majority of cases services for children and young people are improving. However in most areas of provision it is too early to see the impact on the well-being and attainment of children and young people. The picture provided at this stage is therefore one of work in progress towards providing better integrated services and improving outcomes for all children and young people. In 2006 OFSTED judged a large majority of children's services to be above or well above minimum requirements. The biggest challenge continues to be narrowing the gap in opportunities and outcomes for the most vulnerable.

Figure 12

Children and young people

Children and young people performance has improved overall and 12 councils are now performing at the highest level, scoring 4.

Percentage of councils



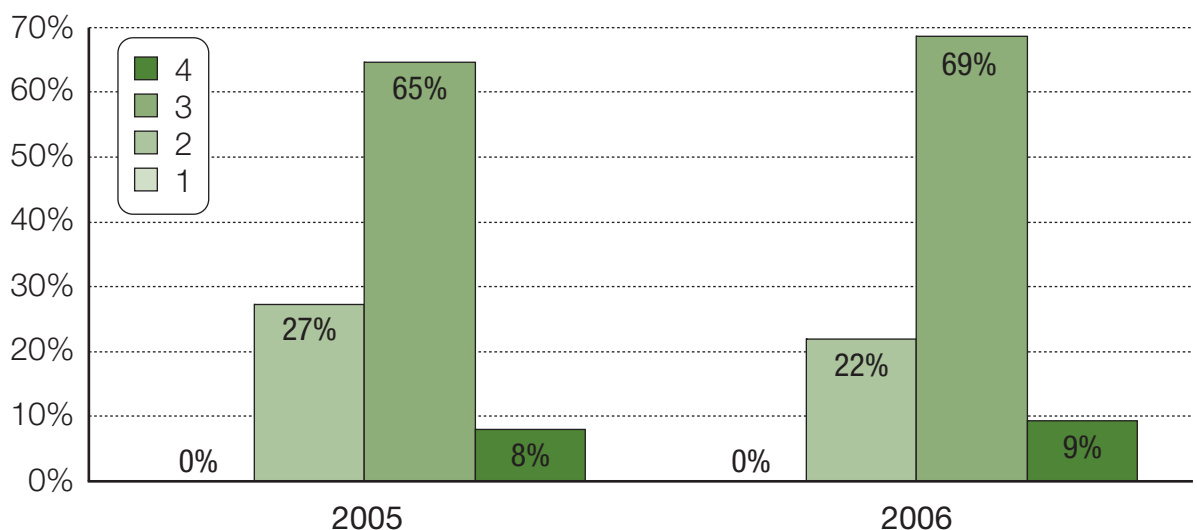
Source: OFSTED and GSCI

- 56 The combined assessment of the overall performance of services for children and young people has resulted in 79 per cent of councils being rated as 3 or 4, an improvement of 4 per cent from the previous year. Councils have continued their good start to addressing the new agenda for children's services. Many however are only just establishing their children's services directorates and moving towards joint working procedures and practices. In 2006, children and young people scores improved for 15 councils (10 per cent) and deteriorated for 10 councils (7 per cent). Two councils' performance for children and young people, Bristol and Stoke-on-Trent, has deteriorated from a score of 2, at minimum requirements, to a score of 1, below minimum requirements, in 2006. Only one other council, Sandwell, currently performs below minimum requirements.
- 57 London councils tend to perform strongest overall in their performance for children and young people with over 94 per cent performing in the top two categories followed by metropolitan and county councils with 83 per cent and 79 per cent respectively. Unitary councils tend to perform least well overall with only 64 per cent performing above or well above minimum requirements and two councils performing below minimum requirements. Councils in London and the North East perform strongest in providing children and young people's services while councils in the East of England and South West tend to perform less well with 40 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively, performing in the bottom two categories.
- 58 Social care (adults) scores summarise CSCI's judgements of performance across all social services. Adults' social care performance judgements and ratings are designed to help councils understand their current performance and assist them in moving to a new system that is focused more clearly on outcomes for people who use care services. Adults' social care services are judged against a set of standards and criteria which are adjusted to reflect increasing expectations. Many councils have improved their annual scores for adults' social care services. Three councils, Hammersmith and Fulham, Knowsley and Southwark, have improved their performance sufficiently to now be awarded top ratings in 2006. This represents a continuing trend of improvement on previous years.

Figure 13**Social care (adults)**

Performance for social care (adults) continues to improve. Fourteen councils are performing at the highest level for social care (adults) and no councils are below minimum requirements.

Percentage of councils



Source: Commission for Social Care Inspection

- 59** Social care services for adults have improved for the fourth successive year but the rate of improvement is slowing down. In 2006, the scores improved for 18 councils (12 per cent) and deteriorated for 7 councils (5 per cent). There are now 32 councils (22 per cent) performing at minimum requirements, with a score of 2, 103 (69 per cent) scoring 3 and 14 (9 per cent) scoring 4. The best performing councils for social care (adults) services are Barnsley, Bexley, Bolton, Camden, City of London, Derbyshire, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kirklees, Knowsley, Redbridge, Salford, Somerset, Southwark, and Tower Hamlets.
- 60** Metropolitan councils perform strongest for social care (adults) with 89 per cent of councils performing above or well above minimum requirements followed by London boroughs with 85 per cent. County and unitary councils perform similarly well with 73 per cent and 70 per cent respectively achieving a score of 3 or 4 for social care (adults); however, half of the 14 best performing councils, scoring 4, are in London. No

unitary councils perform well above minimum requirements for social care (adults) services. Councils in the South West and West Midlands tend to perform least well for social care (adults) with 50 per cent and 43 per cent respectively performing only at minimum requirements while performance tends to be stronger in the North West and the East Midlands where only one council in each region scores 2 for social care (adults). There are no councils in the East of England, North East, South East and West Midlands regions that perform well above minimum requirements for social care (adults).

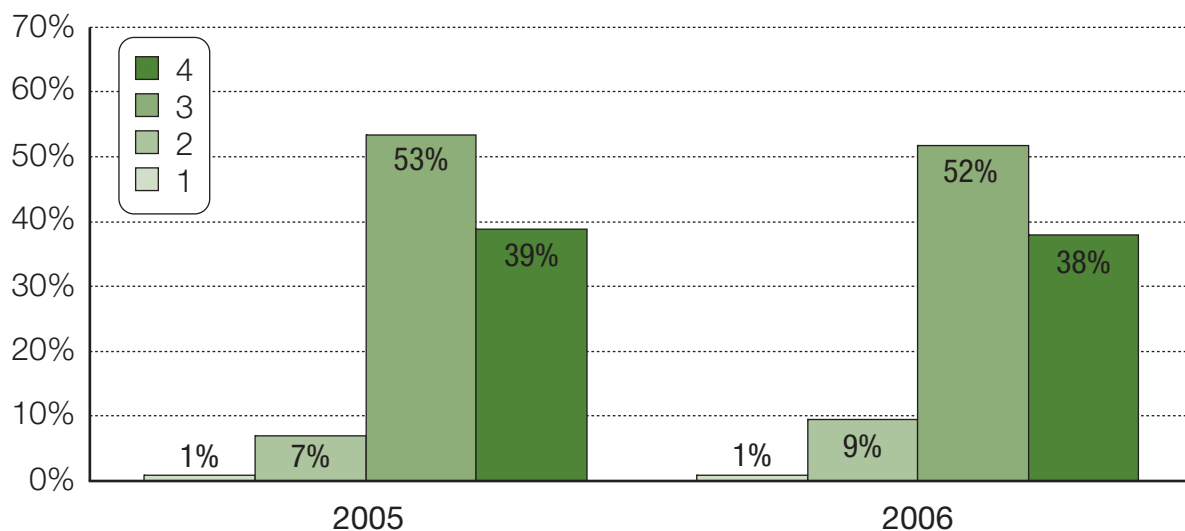
- 61 Even where councils generally perform well there is room for improvement or there are pockets of poor performance that need to be addressed. Using a range of evidence CSCI identified a number of particular challenges that are core to the modernisation required of councils by the Department of Health's White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*, if they are to improve social care services for adults. These include:
- providing timely, convenient and responsive arrangements for referral, care planning and review;
 - making sure quality assurance systems are in place and service quality is consistent;
 - providing a range of services to support and encourage all carers;
 - providing services that are broad and varied to meet needs, offering choices to many, and taking account of individual preferences; and
 - demonstrating improved efficiency across all aspects of social services operations.
- 62 The key issues to be addressed are set out in further detail by CSCI in their publication *Performance Ratings for Adults' Social Services in England – November 2006*.
- 63 Benefits remains the strongest performing service assessment theme overall. Ninety per cent of councils perform in the top two categories for benefits services with 38 per cent achieving top ratings. While performance has fallen slightly between 2005 and 2006, from 92 per cent in 2005, more than one-third of councils achieved the highest score for their provision of benefit services and a further half of councils are performing consistently above minimum requirements. Only 10 per cent of councils are in the bottom two categories for benefits, an increase of 2 per cent from 2005, but the gap between the worst and best performers remains significant. Although the overall percentages have changed little, performance has not been static across councils. Eleven councils have improved their performance since 2005 and 15 councils demonstrate deteriorating performance for benefits services. Benefits services are not

provided by county councils, where these are delivered by district councils. Councils of all types and across all regions perform at the highest level for their delivery of benefits services. However, unitary councils and councils in the West Midlands, South East and East Midlands tend to perform least well. Only one council, Stoke-on-Trent, is performing below minimum requirements for benefits in 2006.

Figure 14 Benefits

Performance for benefits services is good and broadly the same as in 2005. Ninety per cent of single tier and county councils providing benefits services perform consistently or well above minimum requirements.

Percentage of councils



Source: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

6

Corporate assessments

- 64 *CPA – The Harder Test* has strengthened the methodology for corporate assessments. They now test more fully how well councils understand their local communities and provide community leadership; how this understanding of local people and places translates into councils' ambitions and priorities; and what, in practice, councils are achieving. Corporate assessments report, as one of their five achievement themes, on the contribution of the council to the quality of outcomes for children and young people. This assessment is based on a JAR undertaken by the Commission with other inspectorates (led by OFSTED and CSCI) and feeds the children and young people service assessment score discussed earlier in this report. Fifty-two new-style corporate assessments have been reported to date.
- 65 During the corporate assessment, the Audit Commission talks to a number of partners, officers and members. We have developed a tool to help shape our work by gathering the views of a wider range of key stakeholders. We are doing this through a confidential online survey. This aims to inform and complement the interview process, to help focus the interviews and provide a 'can-opener' for issues.
- 66 In August 2006, we published *Learning from CPA in 2005/06* which drew together findings from assessments undertaken during that year, including 17 corporate assessments. Alongside the learning from CPA report, an interactive web tool has been developed to share the experiences and learning from councils. It is designed to stimulate thinking about how councils can tackle similar issues and help aid improvement. Most examples featured in this tool expand on positive findings from corporate assessment reports for single tier and county councils. The current programme started in late 2005, and this collection will grow as more reports are published in the period up to the end of 2008.¹

¹ The report and web tool can be found at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/stcc/lfcpa/. We intend to publish another learning from CPA report this year which will cover all assessments published in 2006/07.

Case study 6

Developing strong partnerships to support improvement.

Rotherham

Rotherham Council is performing well across all areas and the quality and speed of its recent improvement have been notable. The improvements have been driven by strong managerial and political leadership and positive relationships with partners. There is an effective LSP, which has been further strengthened by a recent shift to a more devolved model. Scrutiny committees have been used well to call partners and other bodies to account, for example the Environment Agency on flooding issues.

A new community strategy was adopted in 2005, setting out a vision for the borough to 2020, with targets to 2010. The five strategic and cross-cutting themes in the community strategy form a solid framework and each priority area contains nine key partnership priorities, all with SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-based) indicators and targets and naming an accountable body within the LSP. The Council's performance management is sharp, effective and leads to change and is now sharing its own expertise in this area across the LSP. The introduction of a networked model of LSP working was accompanied by an overhaul of performance management arrangements. Indicators focused on strategic themes are reviewed by the partnership board twice yearly, with more intensive monitoring within theme groups themselves. There is a mature and open approach to sharing data between partners; for example, safer neighbourhood teams have been set up in two localities, sharing local intelligence to identify liveability hotspots. Strong partnership working is starting to deliver a number of other outcomes; for example, re-offending rates reduced from 63 to 51 per cent between 2003 and 2005 and there has been a 14 per cent reduction in anti-social behaviour over the past three years. There has also been progress in reducing teenage pregnancies with one area achieving a 30 per cent reduction.

The LSP's range of representation has also helped the Council increase its capacity; for example strong private sector involvement has assisted economic regeneration initiatives, such as business start-ups, and the voluntary sector is engaged with service delivery areas such as social daycare. Capacity has also been increased by the Council's innovative strategic partnership with BT. For example, information and communications technology capacity has been significantly enhanced through an investment of £16 million in equipment and new business practices. This has also delivered procurement savings of over £2.6 million over the last two years.

For further information please contact: Matthew Gladstone – telephone: 01709 822 791

Source: Audit Commission

User focus and diversity

- 67 The revised corporate assessment methodology places a key emphasis on how well councils engage with their service users and wider communities and what difference this engagement makes in practice. This will continue to be an important emphasis in the delivery and assessment of local services as councils move towards delivering the duty to secure the participation of citizens and to inform, consult, involve and devolve, set out in the Local Government White Paper and Bill.
- 68 Corporate assessments carried out since 2005 indicate that council approaches to consultation and engagement are at different stages of development. Better performing councils have a well-coordinated approach to consultation, with established corporate consultation strategies and a range of regular consultation mechanisms that continually inform councils' understanding of local needs. They also work with partners to share information. However, councils still need to do more to encourage greater involvement of users in the planning and evaluation of services.¹

Case study 7

Focusing on and engaging with citizens and users.

Kensington and Chelsea

There is an excellent culture of consultation throughout the Council, which is shared by partners. The *Statement of Principles and Guidelines for Consulting the Public* promotes best practice standards for staff and partners undertaking consultation. An imaginative, diverse and well planned and coordinated range of strategies is deployed to capture the views of the community. Resident Reviewers is one of the Council's key initiatives to gather detailed feedback on key front line services. Over the past 2 years 80 local residents and 10 young people have participated in 17 mystery shopping exercises to test the quality of council services. Feedback from Reviewers has helped inform the development of services including parking, noise and nuisance and public conveniences. The results of consultation are shared widely, for example, via the Vital Messages database available online to partners and the public and the Reviewers' Digest.

The Council is effective at developing services that are relevant to diverse communities and enhancing community consultation to hard-to-reach groups including travellers, sex workers and young carers. Members of minority groups feel

¹ *Learning from CPA in 2005/2006*, Audit Commission, 2006

consultation and engagement is meaningful and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are positive about the Council's approach to diversity. Service provision for older people in BME communities across the borough has, for example, been tailored to respond to their complex needs identified through the consultation process including, for example, additional support for carers.

As part of the consultation for the Community Strategy, the Council's Responding to Residents budget specifically allocated £15,000 to community groups to enable them to devise more imaginative ways of getting their views known. This was part of the strategy to get to the hardest to reach members of the community and there is significant work to make the Council itself less hard to reach.

Source: Audit Commission

- 69 Engaging and supporting diverse communities is generally less well developed than user focus. Action to address diversity issues tends to be focused on ethnic diversity and there is more limited progress in relation to engaging and addressing the needs of other groups such as disabled people, faith communities, travellers, migrant workers and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities who tend to be the least considered. While better performing councils have well coordinated approaches to consultation and share information with partners, participation and involvement is often less well developed than consultation. Assessments of councils show that while efforts are made to engage, it is less clear that local peoples' views directly influence policy decisions and service delivery. While there has been progress in achieving the equality standard for local government in England, only five councils currently meet level 4 or 5 of the standard (Newham, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets, Kensington and Chelsea and Croydon), all of which are in London. More than 20 per cent of councils are yet to achieve level 2.
- 70 Engagement with BME communities is effective in most assessed councils. As well as their general statutory duty to promote race equality, councils have a specific duty to publish a Race Equality Scheme to explain how they will meet their obligations under section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act. Race equality schemes are developing in most, but not all, councils and 95 per cent of councils are achieving more than 50 per cent of their duty to promote race equality and more than half of councils are achieving 75 per cent.
- 71 Promoting community cohesion is a key objective for many councils and their partners but there is a general lack of community intelligence to anticipate and alleviate tensions, and more could be done to share information with partners. Where councils are making

progress, community cohesion is seen to be integral to the decisions made by the council, there is strong dialogue with communities and attention is paid to celebrating differences in the community.

- 72 Engagement with older people, and to a lesser degree children and young people, is effective in some councils with good use of a range of consultation methods that have led to services being designed and delivered in ways that better meet their needs. But in some councils consultation lacks coordination to ensure that its impact is maximised and some are also struggling to engage with those from hard-to-reach groups.
- 73 The Audit Commission has developed the Knowing Your Communities user focus and diversity toolkit, published in April 2006, to support councils' development of approaches to putting service users and citizens at the heart of public service improvement. The toolkit includes ten web-based self-assessment tools covering: community engagement; customer focus; disability; gender; human rights; older people; race; religion; sexuality; and young people and is available on the Audit Commission's website.¹

Case study 8

Understanding and working closely with diverse communities.

Slough

Slough is an effective community leader and has a good understanding of the needs of all local communities. Together with partners it uses this knowledge to build a clear local vision and ambition for Slough. Local people and partners recognise the role the Council plays in meeting the significant local challenges in terms of social cohesion, deprivation and inequalities. Slough is a multi-cultural town with 37 per cent of its population from a BME background. It has the highest percentage of Muslim and Hindu residents in the South East and the highest percentage of Sikh residents in the country. One-third of the population was born outside of the UK and one-fifth from outside the EU. However, the Council engages well with its residents to provide services which take account of different ethnic, faith and age needs. Diversity, user focus and human rights considerations routinely underpin decisions made about service delivery.

The Council undertakes extensive engagement with local communities, businesses and voluntary services, although it has plans to make it even better, for example by working more closely with LSP partners. There is a clear commitment to recognising

¹ www.audit-commission.gov.uk

diversity and building stronger communities. The community strategy states that ‘Slough will be a place where all people whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or faith, can meet their full potential as individuals and as members of their communities’.

The Council is aware of the need to build capacity within the local communities to help to ensure that bespoke services are provided where necessary. For example, the Council is training members of different faiths, as mental health advocates, to work with their communities to provide support to people with mental health problems. The Council has improved the representation from BME groups on its partnership boards and in the take-up of services, for example direct payments. The Council is also building capacity within local communities so that others can take a more active role. For example, the development of the new Faith Forum brings in a faith community view from people who would not normally work closely with the Council or other such organisations. Performance in managing diversity overall is good and the Council has reached level 3 of the Equality Standard and has achieved 84 per cent of its duty to promote race equality.

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Source: Audit Commission

- 74 In 2006/07 councils undertook a number of nationally determined surveys¹ of residents and service users in each area to ascertain their views about the area, the council, local priorities and the services they are provided with. The results of this survey provide an invaluable tool in understanding how well councils are performing and inform service improvements locally. A number of the findings of these surveys feature within CPA service assessments. Working with the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Audit Commission will be analysing and publishing the findings of the surveys in detail over the coming months to identify trends and provide a greater understanding of how services are perceived across the country. As the surveys have been undertaken every three years since 2000/01, the results provide an opportunity to track perceptions of local services over time. Some key findings from the general survey for all single tier and county councils are summarised below.

¹ Five Best Value surveys were undertaken by councils in 2006/07 covering general issues, housing (tenants), libraries, planning and benefits. The findings set out in this report refer to results for single tier and county councils only.

- 75 Overall satisfaction with single tier and county councils has continued to decline although the rate is slowing. In 2000/01 satisfaction with councils was 61 per cent falling to 53 per cent in 2003/04 and 51 per cent in 2006/07. Twenty per cent of residents felt that the way that their (single tier and county) council runs things has improved in the last three years; while 54 per cent believe that the council is efficient and well run; and 43 per cent feel that it provides value for money.
- 76 Satisfaction with the local area as a place to live is comparatively high with over 71 per cent of residents satisfied. The top priorities for making somewhere a good place to live are broadly consistent with previous surveys. Tackling crime is most important to residents (56 per cent); followed by clean streets (40 per cent); health services (39 per cent); affordable decent housing (33 per cent); and education (29 per cent). However, while these issues are most important to local people, they often are not the issues that they believe need improving most. Activities for teenagers is the issue that most people want to see improved (39 per cent); followed by crime (36 per cent); traffic congestion (33 per cent); roads and pavement repairs (32 per cent); and clean streets (26 per cent).
- 77 Satisfaction with many individual service areas continues to improve. Reflecting improvements in environment service assessment scores, there are widespread improvements in satisfaction scores with improvement in satisfaction with cleanliness of public land (up 9 per cent between 2003/04 and 2006/07); recycling (up 5 per cent); waste disposal (up 4 per cent); bus service overall (up 6 per cent); and public transport information (up 4 per cent). Satisfaction with household waste collection is the only area where councils have experienced a slight decline, of 2 per cent, between 2003/04 and 2006/07.
- 78 Scores for culture related satisfaction indicators are also broadly consistent with service assessments, showing a slight decline in most, but not all, areas. Satisfaction with theatres and concert halls (down 3 per cent between 2003/04 and 2006/07) and museums and galleries (down 1 per cent) show a marginal downward trend while satisfaction with parks and open spaces (up 2 per cent); libraries (up 4 per cent); and sports and leisure (up 3 per cent) show improvement over the last three years.
- 79 The picture in relation to housing is also broadly consistent. There has been some improvement overall in terms of service assessment scores in housing and the satisfaction of tenants of council housing with the overall service has remained constant between 2003/04 and 2006/07. Satisfaction of tenants of council housing with opportunities for participation in management and decision making in relation to housing services provided by their landlord increased marginally (by 2 per cent) over the same period.

7

Planned changes for 2007

- 80 This year's results mark the second year of *CPA – The Harder Test*. We will consult this spring on changes we intend to implement to the 2007 CPA framework from which results will be published in February 2008. Some changes for 2007 have already been signalled but these and further refinements and changes, especially in relation to the Audit Commission service assessments, will be consulted upon. However, we anticipate that further changes will be kept to a minimum. Other inspectorates will also be reviewing their methodologies in light of this year's experience and further developments in their key service areas.
- 81 This will ensure that CPA continues to meet the expectations of users and promote continuous and sustained improvement in local government in the period up to April 2009 when we, in partnership with the other inspectorates, introduce Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).
- 82 At present, CPA categories are updated for all councils only once each year. This annual process will be the main categorisation activity that we carry out. To take into account results from corporate assessments that are carried out, and any other relevant work undertaken in the year, we also update categories for individual councils quarterly, where appropriate, rather than at the end of the year.
- 83 The Commission is undertaking research to examine the impact of local factors on councils' performance. This work will aim to identify the nature and extent of the relationship; exploring how, or if at all, external factors impact on performance, and will help to inform a future approach to performance information as part of CAA.

8

Table of scores and categories

- 84 The table overleaf displays the direction of travel, CPA category and scores for all single tier and county councils in England. The information is a summary of that provided on each council's scorecard on the CPA website: www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/authoritylist.asp.
- 85 The table groups councils together by their direction of travel (improving strongly, improving well, improving adequately, not improving adequately or not improving) and then listed by their CPA category (4 star, 3 star, 2 star, 1 star, 0 star). All scores subject to review are situated at the end of the table. The table also contains the individual scores for corporate assessments, use of resources, and the seven service assessment elements where applicable.
- 86 Each score is on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is the lowest score and 4 the highest score. The scoring key for single tier and county councils in 2006 is shown in **Table 7**, below. Scores for corporate assessments and level 1 services (use of resources, children and young people and adults' social care) are given more weight than other assessments within the 2006 framework.

Table 7

Scoring key for use of resources, corporate assessment and service assessment scores

4	well above minimum requirements – performing strongly
3	consistently above minimum requirements – performing well
2	only at minimum requirements – adequate performance
1	below minimum requirements – inadequate performance

Source: Audit Commission

- 87 Where we have carried out a new-style corporate assessment our approach is to report publicly both the new-style and the previous corporate assessment scores on the council's scorecard. The higher of the two scores will be used to determine the overall CPA category, until all councils have undergone the new-style corporate assessment. This will provide temporary protection for councils during the transitional period to ensure

comparability. Categorisation at the end of 2008 will be based on the score from the new-style corporate assessment only.

- 88 The assessment scores for each element are brought together by the Commission in order to categorise councils according to their performance. There is a series of rules for categorising councils. The rules table for categorisation of single tier and county councils in 2006 is shown in **Table 8** below.

Table 8
The overall rules for CPA categorisation

Corporate assessment	Level 1 assessments (children and young people, adults' social care and use of resources)	Level 2 assessments (housing, environment, culture, benefits, fire and rescue)	Category
4	None less than 3	None less than 2	4 star
4	None less than 2	No more than one less than 2	3 star
4	No more than one less than 2	No more than one less than 2	2 star
4	Any other combination		1 star
3	None less than 3	None less than 3	4 star
3	None less than 2	None less than 2	3 star
3	None less than 2	No more than one less than 2	2 star
3	Any other combination		1 star
2	None less than 3	None less than 2	3 star
2	None less than 2	None less than 2	2 star
2	No more than one less than 2	No more than one less than 2	1 star
2	Any other combination		0 star
1	None less than 3	None less than 2	2 star
1	None less than 2	None less than 2	1 star
1	Any other combination		0 star

Source: Audit Commission

Key to table

+	Councils that have received a new-style corporate assessment and the score has been used to inform the overall CPA star category.
#	Councils that have received a new-style corporate assessment and the score has been protected. In these cases the previous corporate assessment score has been used to inform the overall category.
n/a	Not applicable (because that service is not provided by the council).
*	Councils that have received a new-style corporate assessment and the corporate assessment score is currently subject to review. In these cases the previous corporate assessment score has been used to inform the overall category.
~	This council's corporate assessment / JAR is programmed for early 2007 or is currently subject to review. A separate annual performance assessment of children and young people has therefore not been undertaken in 2006. As a result the 2005 children and young people score has been used within the CPA framework for 2006. These scores will be updated to reflect any changes following completion of the corporate assessment / JAR or review as part of the quarterly update process.

Note: The Isles of Scilly are exempt from a star rating in 2006. The Audit Commission has agreed this with the Department for Communities and Local Government based on the applicability of the methodology to the island's circumstances. We have not published an environment or culture service assessment score for the Isles of Scilly in 2006. The star rating for Buckinghamshire is subject to review at the time of publication.

Council	Direction of travel	Star category	Star change 2005/06	Corporate assessment	Level 1 services				Level 2 services				Fire and rescue
					Use of resources	Children & young people	Social care (adults)	Housing	Environment	Culture	Benefits		
Improving strongly													
Camden	Improving strongly	4 star		4	3	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	n/a
City of London	Improving strongly	4 star		3	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	n/a
Kensington & Chelsea +	Improving strongly	4 star		4	4	4	3	3	3	2	4	4	n/a
Kent	Improving strongly	4 star		4	4	3	3	n/a	4	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Shropshire	Improving strongly	4 star		4	4	4	3	n/a	3	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
South Tyneside	Improving strongly	4 star	↑	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	n/a
Stockton-on-Tees	Improving strongly	4 star		4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	n/a
Tameside	Improving strongly	4 star		4	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	n/a
Wandsworth	Improving strongly	4 star		4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	n/a
Westminster	Improving strongly	4 star		4	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	n/a
Blackpool +	Improving strongly	3 star	↑	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	n/a
Tower Hamlets	Improving strongly	3 star		3	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	3	n/a
Improving well													
Bexley #	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	n/a
Blackburn with Darwen	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	n/a
Bolton	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	n/a
Darlington	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	4	n/a
Derby	Improving well	4 star		3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	n/a
Derbyshire	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	4	n/a	4	3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dorset	Improving well	4 star	↑	3	3	3	3	n/a	4	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Durham	Improving well	4 star		3	3	3	3	n/a	4	3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Essex	Improving well	4 star		3	3	3	3	n/a	3	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Gateshead #	Improving well	4 star	↑	4	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	n/a
Halton	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	n/a
Hampshire	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	3	n/a	3	3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hartlepool ~	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	n/a
Hertfordshire	Improving well	4 star		4	3	3	3	n/a	3	3	3	n/a	3

Council	Direction of travel	Star category	Star change 2005/06	Corporate assessment	Level 1 services				Level 2 services				Fire and rescue
					Use of resources	Children & young people	Social care (adults)	Housing	Environment	Culture	Benefits		
Improving well													
Southampton	Improving well	3 star		3	3	3	3	3	4	3	2	2	n/a
Southwark	Improving well	3 star		3	3	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	n/a
Trafford +	Improving well	3 star	↑	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	n/a
Waltham Forest	Improving well	3 star	↑↑	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	n/a
West Berkshire	Improving well	3 star	↑	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	n/a
Windsor & Maidenhead #	Improving well	3 star		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	n/a
Wokingham	Improving well	3 star		3	2	3	3	2	4	2	3	3	n/a
Bedfordshire	Improving well	2 star	↑	2	2	3	3	n/a	3	2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cumbria +	Improving well	2 star	↑	2	2	2	2	n/a	3	4	n/a	4	4
Hackney +	Improving well	2 star	↑	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	n/a
Hillingdon +	Improving well	2 star		2	2	3	3	4	3	2	4	4	n/a
Isle of Wight +	Improving well	2 star		2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	2
Merton	Improving well	2 star		2	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	4	n/a
North East Lincolnshire	Improving well	2 star	↑↑	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	n/a
North Somerset +	Improving well	2 star		2	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	4	n/a
Oldham	Improving well	2 star		2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	n/a
Plymouth +	Improving well	2 star		2	2	2	2	3	2	2	4	4	n/a
Swindon +	Improving well	2 star		2	2	2	2	4	3	3	3	3	n/a
Wirral +	Improving well	2 star		2	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	n/a
Lambeth	Improving well	1 star	↓	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	n/a
Improving adequately													
Cheshire #	Improving adequately	4 star	↑	3	3	3	3	n/a	3	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wiltshire	Improving adequately	4 star	↑	3	3	3	3	n/a	4	3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bournemouth +	Improving adequately	3 star		2	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	n/a
Bracknell Forest	Improving adequately	3 star		4	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	n/a
Calderdale +	Improving adequately	3 star		3	3	3	3	2	4	3	4	4	n/a
Cambridgeshire	Improving adequately	3 star		4	3	2	n/a	n/a	3	3	n/a	n/a	n/a

Council	Direction of travel	Star category	Star change 2005/06	Corporate assessment	Level 1 services				Level 2 services				
					Use of resources	Children & young people	Social care (adults)	Housing	Environment	Culture	Benefits	Fire and rescue	
Improving adequately													
Doncaster #	Improving adequately	3 star		3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	4	n/a
East Sussex	Improving adequately	3 star		3	3	3	2	n/a	3	3	3	n/a	n/a
Herefordshire #	Improving adequately	3 star		3	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	n/a
Manchester +	Improving adequately	3 star		3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	n/a
Medway +	Improving adequately	3 star		3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	n/a
Reading	Improving adequately	3 star		3	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	n/a
Salford +	Improving adequately	3 star	↑	3	3	2	4	3	2	2	2	3	n/a
Wolverhampton	Improving adequately	3 star		2	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	n/a
York	Improving adequately	3 star		3	2	4	3	2	3	2	3	3	n/a
Birmingham +	Improving adequately	2 star		2	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	4	n/a
Harrow ~	Improving adequately	2 star		2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	4	n/a
Kingston-upon-Hull +	Improving adequately	2 star	↑	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	n/a
Liverpool	Improving adequately	2 star		3	2	3	3	1	3	2	2	4	n/a
North Tyneside	Improving adequately	2 star		2	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	4	n/a
Nottingham	Improving adequately	2 star		2	3	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	n/a
Southend-on-sea	Improving adequately	2 star		3	2	2	2	1	3	4	4	4	n/a
Staffordshire +	Improving adequately	2 star		2	3	2	2	n/a	4	3	3	n/a	n/a
Thurrock	Improving adequately	2 star		2	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	3	n/a
Torbay	Improving adequately	2 star		2	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	n/a
Wakefield ~	Improving adequately	2 star		2	2	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	n/a
Rutland +	Improving adequately	1 star	↓	2	2	3	3	1	3	2	4	4	n/a
Sandwell +	Improving adequately	1 star		2	2	1	3	3	3	2	3	3	n/a
Not improving adequately													
Stoke-on-Trent #	Not improving adequately	1 star	↓	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	1	1	n/a
Isles of Scilly													
Isles of Scilly	Improving adequately			3	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2

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