

# **Comprehensive Performance Assessment**

**Teesdale District Council**

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## Introduction

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

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement and Improvement

## Executive summary

- 3 Teesdale District Council has made substantial progress since the 'poor' Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) judgement of 2004 and is now categorised as 'fair'. It is performing at least adequately in all aspects covered by this assessment, which is a significant improvement from 2004 when almost all were judged to be inadequate.
- 4 While there is still much to be done, the Council is able to demonstrate clearly that lessons have been learned since 2004 and it now operates in a more strategic and coherent way. For example, re-establishing the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a significant achievement for both the Council and its partners. Other indicators of improvement include a strong commitment to transition planning for Local Government Re-organisation (LGR), stronger corporate capacity, improved community leadership and better working in partnership.
- 5 The Council has recognised the need to engage more fully with stakeholders and is now an active member of the LSP and other strategic groups. It has worked with stakeholders to put in place a vision that is both appropriate and challenging. The vision and broad ambitions are based on a more rigorous approach to needs analysis rather than simply relying on local knowledge. High level outcomes have been identified and some are being realised, but others have yet to be translated into challenging action plans. There is now a sound basis, together with renewed optimism, for future improvements to the quality of life for local people.
- 6 The Council has had to balance the priorities of making corporate improvements while maintaining services and meeting wider outcomes. In broad terms it has done well in achieving this, although the recent nature of many developments means that there is less impact in areas the community would recognise. The Council now has clarity about what is important for the area and, more importantly, its role in contributing to meeting those priorities. It is stronger in its community leadership role. Many of the internal systems needed to deliver on priorities are improving, with service planning, financial planning, financial management and decision making all undertaken adequately, but target setting and action planning are still inconsistent.
- 7 The Council continues to make progress in its organisational development. Political and managerial leadership of the Council has improved significantly since 2004, with clearer roles and responsibilities for officers and councillors. Changes to political arrangements are bringing clearer decision making, another indication of councillors' recognition of the need to change. Corporate management has been strengthened and changes in political structures have led to improvements in governance arrangements.

- 8 While political capacity has improved there are still shortcomings. This is particularly evident in the scrutiny function, which the Council does not manage effectively and which often works in isolation. Progress on diversity has been slow, but has accelerated in recent months, with the Council progressing towards level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. There are examples of proactive work in relation to travellers and young people, but not all minority groups are sufficiently consulted or represented.
- 9 The Council is making more effective use of its resources. Its approach to procurement is good, while risk management and value for money are both adequate. The Council has significantly improved the way in which it reports on performance to executive, which is now done regularly. A good data quality strategy and an effective performance management framework are in place. The Council is able to demonstrate that performance management is leading to some service improvement, but overall developments are at an early stage and impact on outcomes is less evident. Some good work is being done to share information about the performance of partners through the LSP, but again target setting remains an area for further development.
- 10 The Council has a local reputation for commitment to service delivery and this is valued by local people. Performance on service improvement is varied. There are good levels of improvement in performance measured against performance indicators (PIs), with 70 per cent improving in 2006/07 compared with 45 per cent in the previous year. However, although 39 per cent of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) reflected performance in the top 25 per cent of councils, almost as many reflected performance in the worst 25 per cent. A number of areas of poor performance relate to the Council's priorities: for example, PIs for waste and recycling reflect performance that is well below average. Fifty three per cent of all PIs are on track to meet their target, but 43 per cent are off target.
- 11 The Council is working closely with a local charity to improve access to recycling and composting for local residents, and recycling rates are improving but remain below average. It has responded to residents' concerns over street cleanliness, and satisfaction in this area is improving. Services such as the bulky waste collection service are clearly designed to suit local needs and tackle the remoteness of many households. However, the amount of waste collected is increasing above national trends.
- 12 The Council is an active partner in the work of the Barnard Castle Partnership Board (BCPB) which has produced the Barnard Castle Vision – a comprehensive and challenging blueprint for the future of the main market town. Together with partners, the Council has put in place a number of initiatives to develop tourism and these have resulted in increased visitor numbers as well as improving the local economy and employment. The Teesdale Skills Development Fund has, over a period of four years, enabled a large number of individuals to either update or gain new qualifications.

- 13 The Council is working with Durham PCT to promote initiatives that will improve health, through programmes around exercise, walking, and recovering from strokes. Life expectancy is above the national average, with smoking rates below average. Teesdale is an area of low crime, but fear of crime is high.
- 14 The transfer of council housing stock to Teesdale Housing Association (THA) in July 2006 has enabled access to increased funding and THA is beginning to tackle the issue of decent homes. The Council has had some impact on the provision of affordable housing in Teesdale, which it has highlighted as a priority. The development in Mickleton was the most recent and represents a high quality project, developed in the face of strong local opposition which the Council handled well. There have been significant improvements in the benefits service, which is now performing strongly.

## Areas for improvement

- 15** To exercise its community leadership role effectively during the transition to a new unitary council for the county of Durham, the Council should:
- ensure that it continues to play an appropriate role in the various work streams underway, contributing effectively to Local Government Reorganisation and ensuring that it promotes the needs of the district and the interests of local people so that these can be reflected in the development of new local government structures and future delivery of services in the county;
  - ensure that it does not allow the demands of LGR to impact negatively on service quality during the transition period, whilst continuing to actively address areas of relatively poor performance; and
  - improve the attendance and contribution of councillors at partnership groups, keeping the profile of the district and the needs of its residents as high as possible during the period of transition.
- 16** To continue improving the way in which it functions, the Council should:
- tackle the shortcomings of the scrutiny function, manage it more effectively and ensure that the energy of scrutiny is channelled into supporting achievement of the Council's priorities, management of performance, policy development and value for money;
  - build on recent improvements to its overall approach to promoting equality and diversity by ensuring the pace of this work continues and that all minority groups are given the opportunity to participate in setting local priorities for improvement;
  - ensure that staff concerns over strategic leadership are fully tackled; and
  - ensure that action plans are sufficiently robust so that outcomes are improved, and clear, achievable but challenging targets are set.

## Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	6
	Prioritisation	2	4
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2	4
	Performance management	2	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement and improvement	2	14
<b>weighted score</b>			<b>32</b>
<b>CPA category</b>			<b>FAIR</b>
<b>*Key to scores</b>			
1 – below minimum requirements – <b>inadequate performance</b>			
2 – at only minimum requirements – <b>adequate performance</b>			
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – <b>performing well</b>			
4 – well above minimum requirements – <b>performing strongly</b>			

### \*\*Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

Category	Required score
Excellent	45-60
Good	36-44
Fair	28-35
Weak	21-27
Poor	20 or less

## Context

### The locality

- 17 Teesdale is a predominantly rural area, located in the south west of County Durham, bordering Cumbria to the west and North Yorkshire to the south. It covers a geographic area of 836 sq km and is the largest of the seven districts which make up County Durham, but with just 24,900 residents (ONS 2005) it has the lowest population of any district in England and Wales. The population density is just 29 people per sq km. Only six local authorities in England and Wales are more sparsely populated.
- 18 The district is divided into 19 wards. Teesdale is fully parished, with 50 parishes, but there are only 28 parish councils – some of which act jointly. The rest are administered through ‘parish meetings’. Around 23 per cent of the population live in Barnard Castle, the market town and administrative centre, located in the south west of the district. Other population centres are Middleton in Teesdale, Staindrop, Cockfield, Evenwood and Etherley. The rest of the district is characterised by many small communities, including former mining villages in the east, a large number of farms and agricultural holdings, isolated dwellings and a few large private estates.
- 19 The main transport route is the recently upgraded A66, running east to west across the southern part of the district. The nearest main north to south routes are the A1 and the A68; with the nearest mainline station (Darlington) and the nearest airport (Durham Tees Valley) some distance away. Accessibility, particularly in relation to public transport, is a major issue in the district.
- 20 Over half of the district is designated as part of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The majority of the remainder is recognised as having High Landscape Value. Teesdale has three internationally recognised National Nature Reserves and nearly 40 per cent of the area is classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. In contrast, the area produces high levels of domestic waste and energy use is high; with a high carbon footprint.
- 21 Teesdale is a relatively prosperous district with low levels of deprivation, a healthy population and low levels of crime. With 1.2 per cent of the population of working age out of work, unemployment is low compared with 2.9 per cent for the region and the national figure of 2.1 per cent. There are pockets of worklessness in the former coalfield area. The 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks Teesdale 209th out of 354 local authorities in England in terms of deprivation, where a ranking of 1 represents the most deprived. Teesdale has one ward in the bottom 10 per cent for employment and health deprivation; and two wards in the bottom 10 per cent for housing.

- 22** The district's employment base largely comprises service and manufacturing sectors, with a pharmaceutical company the largest employer. Public administration, education and health account for 27.8 per cent of employment. Agriculture remains a small but significant sector. The Council estimates that tourism accounts for £88.12 million of annual income, generated by the district's many attractions. Diversification of the employment base is recognised by the Council and partners as increasingly important to secure the district's economy.
- 23** Teesdale is a popular place for retirement, reflected in the age profile of the population, the fastest ageing in the north east. Young people have high levels of educational attainment with 67.2 per cent achieving five or more A to C grades at GCSE, compared with the England average of 59.2 per cent (DfES 2006), yet many of them leave the district to seek work, housing and other opportunities. A recent skills audit demonstrated that employers' needs for greater IT skills are not being met and that there is an oversupply of traditional heavy industry skills. An average house in the district costs six-and-a-half times the average income, and this ratio is widening; consequently affordable housing is now one of the key issues for retaining young people.
- 24** Despite the ageing population and pockets of ill health, the health of residents is marginally better than the rest of the region and life expectancy is higher than the national average, currently 76.6 years for males and 81.9 for females. Smoking rates are below average, but estimated rates of binge drinking are higher than average. The overwhelming majority of the population, 98.2 per cent, are White British. People from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups form only 0.8 per cent of the population, the largest minority ethnic group being Chinese at 0.2 per cent. However, the district has recently seen the arrival of people from Eastern Europe, mainly to work in the service and agricultural sectors.

## The Council

- 25** The Council employs 141 staff in the equivalent of 99 full time jobs. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) of the Council comprises the Chief Executive and six other senior managers. For 2007/08 it has a net revenue budget of £4.428 million. It has a capital programme for 2007/08 of £1.367 million.
- 26** There are 32 councillors: 15 Teesdale Independents, 6 Labour, 4 Conservatives and 7 non-aligned independents. The constitution was substantially revised in August 2005, with a further alignment of the Committee structure in June 2007, and provides for a politically balanced Executive Committee, with eight Lead Members. There is an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with 4 panels covering Finance, Performance, Services and Environment, overseen by a Co-ordinating Group. Other committees are Planning, Standards, Licensing, the Joint Consultative Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee.

- 27 Teesdale District Council is in transition during 2008/09 and will cease to exist on 31 March 2009. A new unitary council will be formed on 1 April 2009, covering the whole of the county of Durham and replacing Teesdale District Council, Durham County Council and all other councils in the county. Local elections to elect councillors to the new council will take place on 1 May 2008.
- 28 In 2004 Teesdale was judged to be a 'poor' council. At that time, there were significant weaknesses. The Council's ambition was not understood or owned by stakeholders and decision making was ineffective, with plans lacking long term outcomes. The Council had no clear priorities; resources were not managed effectively and were not shifted to priorities. Leadership capacity was ineffective with little officer or councillor development. There was no performance management culture, no systematic service planning and no agreed performance management system. Improvement plans at the time failed to address leadership weaknesses, and some key strategies were missing.
- 29 The Council responded to this assessment by implementing a recovery programme between November 2004 and November 2005. This focused on the key internal improvement building blocks of councillor development, organisational development and communication, strategic financial management, performance management, and corporate planning and project management. In the next phase until July 2006, the improvement focus was on communications, community leadership, corporate governance, customer services, equality and diversity, efficiencies and new ways of working, strategic financial management and organisational development.
- 30 The Council was put forward for a pilot Corporate Assessment in June 2006. This assessment recognised the significant improvements made by the Council to internal capacity, but recommended there was more work to do on political leadership, community engagement and identifying measurable outcomes, with strategies to support their delivery. The result was an updated improvement plan *Improving Together*, which comprises five key projects: Equality and Diversity, Community Leadership, Reputation and Engagement, Maximising Our Resources, and Working in Partnership.

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

### Ambition

- 31 The Council is performing well in this area. It has made significant progress since 2004 and although many developments are at a relatively early stage, ambitions are beginning to have a recognisable local impact. The Council has recognised the need to engage more fully with stakeholders and is now an active member of the LSP and other strategic groups. Ambitions are based on a more rigorous approach to needs analysis rather than simply relying on local knowledge. A challenging and appropriate vision is in place. A number of high level outcomes have been identified in relation to broad themes, but these have yet to be fully translated into challenging action plans. The ambitions for the area provide a sound basis for future improvements to the quality of life for local people.
- 32 The vision for the area is appropriate and challenging, and has been produced and agreed by the Council and its partners, including the County Council. Clearly stated within the recently revised Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) the broad vision is that “Teesdale will be a place where people will want to live, work and visit while we protect and enhance our valuable environment; where we use opportunities to strengthen our economy; where our communities are vibrant and prosperous; and where our people are safe and healthy, and able to realise their full potential”. This vision is supported within the SCS by four clearly stated and comprehensive themes: people, environment, access and prosperity. As a result, broad ambitions for the area provide a sound basis for future improvements to the quality of life for local people.
- 33 All major plans link well together. Shortcomings in earlier strategies and plans mean that many have been recently revised and the Council has used this opportunity to good effect. The SCS and Corporate Plan (CP) have been written to link together closely. For example, the SCS theme of 'environment' is mirrored in the Council priority of making 'Teesdale a cleaner, greener place' and the theme of 'prosperity' is linked to the Council priority of 'growing Teesdale's economy'. Both plans demonstrate clear links to the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The SCS and CP have been approved by the LSP and Council respectively, with the SCS publicly launched in March 2008. Ambitions within the SCS are clearly reflected in the recently produced Barnard Castle Vision (BCV), an ambitious plan for the future of this important market town. Similarly, the Regeneration Strategy and Housing Strategy both demonstrate appropriate links. The CP priorities are supported by appropriate actions, but the eleven high level outcomes identified within the SCS have not been fully translated into challenging and specific measures at action plan level, which hinders the LSP's and Council's ability to measure progress and success.

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

- 34 Ambitions are already having an impact. The ambition to create 'a strong, diverse rural economy with Barnard Castle as a vibrant Market Town at its centre' is being realised through the Barnard Castle Vision. This is energising local stakeholders and creating optimism about the future - through ambitious plans that include a health campus, a higher education facility and enhanced tourist facilities. The vision also recognises the need to retain and enhance the character of the town and support projects such as the farmers' market, linked to promoting tourism as a means of job creation. Ambitions around access are being realised through initiatives such as Community Visiting Officers who are increasing access in rural as well as urban areas. Plans to expand broadband to rural areas are well advanced and will bring improved access for local people, community groups and rural businesses. Consistent with the ambitions of the Council and its partners to meet the needs of local people, the housing needs of disadvantaged groups are being met through well-designed affordable housing schemes such as Mickleton and initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour in Etherley. Work with a local environment group is addressing ambitions to create a better environment, for example improving street cleanliness which is important to both local people and visitors. All of this means that ambitions are challenging, relevant and increasingly real to local people, and contribute to the wider needs of the area such as promoting the economy.
- 35 The Council has performed well in involving stakeholders in the development of the vision, although this has not been consistent across all communities. Stakeholders are positive about the vision and the way they have been consulted on the SCS, for example through the community consultation events in Middleton, Mickleton and Barnard Castle; and specific consultation with young people, disability groups and the local business community. Faith groups and young people are represented on the LSP, although not all places for the former are filled. There is less evidence to demonstrate that the Council has fully involved other small minority communities. Stakeholders who have been involved in developing the vision are more confident of their ability to influence future developments, but the Council and LSP cannot be confident that the vision reflects the diverse needs of all of the district's communities.
- 36 The Council now recognises the need to modernise and improve the way in which it consults and engages with local people. A good Community Engagement Strategy and communication toolkit is in place. This has led to a more structured approach to consultation and communication, for example in the use of the County Council's 'Citizens' Panel'. Consultation and engagement is less well established at corporate level than in some services – with the culture and leisure service demonstrating some effective examples of consulting users. 'Teesdale Listens' is improving the way in which the Council engages with local communities, but is at an early stage in making an impact on improved outcomes for local people. Parish councils feel they have a stronger voice through the Parishes Forum. As a result, the Council has a broader view of community needs and aspirations and is seen by local people to be listening more.

- 37** The Council has worked effectively with partners to re-establish the LSP, which now has an independent chair and active support from all stakeholders. Improved governance arrangements have resulted in a clearer LSP structure with more focussed theme groups, clearer links to the Durham LAA and increased involvement in the LSP by councillors and senior management of the Council. Overall, the Council is more comfortable with partnership working and the first stage of the Council's scrutiny review of partnerships in 2006/07 showed that many are helping to deliver service improvements. A good example is the housing benefits partnership with Wear Valley District Council delivering improvement with a significant improvement in overall satisfaction and performance against PIs.
- 38** The Council is now performing its community leadership role with increasing confidence. The Council knows its area well. Local councillors have always been firmly rooted in their communities, but the Council now realises that relying on this knowledge alone is not sufficient and has adopted a modern and broader approach to understanding local needs. Significant progress has been made in this area since 2004, and the Council is increasingly committed to working in partnership with others. There is good awareness of different needs in relation to rural isolation in the west, deprivation in former coalfield areas to the east, and the strategic importance of Barnard Castle as the main market town. As a result, the leadership of the Council is able to articulate and act upon a clearer sense of purpose and a better vision and direction.

## **Prioritisation**

- 39** The Council is performing adequately in this area. It is working with increasing effectiveness to balance the priorities of corporate improvement with those of maintaining services and meeting wider outcomes. In broad terms it is clear about what is important for the area and its role in meeting those priorities. It is making better use of needs analysis to understand and agree priorities. Internal systems to deliver priorities are improving, with service planning, financial planning, financial management and decision making all undertaken with increasing confidence. Action planning is still inconsistent.
- 40** The Council is clear about its priorities, how these relate to the SCS and the impact they have on local quality of life. The corporate plan contains four priority areas which are: to make Teesdale a cleaner, greener place; to grow Teesdale's economy; to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and develop safer communities; and to improve the housing needs of our residents. The Council has demonstrated an ability to focus on key areas, although the broad range of priorities it faces, together with limited capacity, means it is not always able to do so as effectively as it might wish.

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- 41** The Council has made progress on meeting community priorities and in responding to corporate priorities arising from its corporate assessment in 2004. These priorities have been set in conjunction with the government office monitoring board and focus on five priority areas for improvement which inform the actions within the *Improving Together* programme. Again, the Council has demonstrated an ability to address many of these priority areas, such as improvements in community leadership, the way in which the Council engages with local people, and speedier and more focused decision making.
- 42** The Council's approach to delivering its priorities is still developing. Earlier gaps mean that a wide range of strategies and plans have recently been either updated or put in place. These include an Annual Training and Development Programme and Member Development Programme, a Human Resources Strategy, a Corporate Equality Plan, an Economic Options Study and an Employment Land Study, and a Play Strategy. Although the approach to strategic delivery and prioritisation is becoming more robust, the fact that so many key strategies and plans are newly developed or still in development means that as yet their impact is unclear.
- 43** The Council has significantly improved the way it approaches needs analysis – demonstrated by the way in which a number of key strategies have been produced. Examples include the SCS, Barnard Castle Vision, Housing Needs Survey and the Teesdale Economic Options and Employment Land Study. All of these demonstrate good use of needs analysis to give a clear view of what local priorities are. As a result of these improvements, the Council and partners are able to determine local priorities on the basis of good quality intelligence, rather than relying solely on the local knowledge of councillors. This improved understanding of local priorities means that the Council is in a better position to promote the needs of Teesdale residents in the transition to a new council.
- 44** Staff have a good understanding of the Council's priorities and their role in delivering them. Seventy seven per cent of staff feel they know how their work contributes to corporate priorities and 78 per cent know what their service plan is trying to achieve. This means that staff are able to articulate their role and understand the implications of what they do.

- 45 The Council's approach to financial planning in order to meet priorities has improved and is now adequate. It has responded to earlier criticism and established improved arrangements for financial management and budget setting, which are aligned to priorities. Revenue and capital budget proposals are aligned to the four corporate plan priorities and five themes of *Improving Together*. A Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is in place, but the Council has decided, understandably, not to revise this in the light of LGR. The Council has improved the quality of debate and decision making for councillors in setting the budget. The use of a 'Star Chamber' approach to deciding priorities and allocation of resources has had a positive impact on the quality of decision making. This was demonstrated by the Council's response to the public's priority of tackling dog fouling by allocating additional time to the post of dog warden; this extra resource responded to local people's priorities as well as improving the experience of visitors to the district. This approach means the Council is better able to link resources to its priorities.
- 46 The Council is able to make and stick to difficult decisions related to both priority and non priority areas. Given the local context such decisions represent relatively small areas of service delivery but a significant commitment by the Council to resolve issues that are both difficult and unpopular. A decision to close toilets in Barnard Castle due to lack of resources to maintain them has been taken in the face of vocal opposition. The Mickleton affordable housing scheme was completed despite initial opposition and criticism from local communities. The transfer of its housing stock to a registered social landlord was a difficult decision for the Council but this has freed up resources in terms of administration and capital investment, and has improved the service to residents. The impact of this willingness to make difficult decisions is a more robust approach to delivering priorities.
- 47 In meeting the challenges of LGR the Council is demonstrating further that it can make swift and appropriate decisions. It is playing a full part in the delivery of LGR transition plans and the establishment of the new council, through representation on all major work streams while maintaining service delivery.
- 48 The overall approach to corporate and service planning to deliver priorities is adequate, but action planning is still inconsistent. A corporate planning cycle is now in place. To maintain its focus on priorities the Council has developed a high level action plan which identifies key themes and actions for each priority and sets timescales and targets. Service managers review service plans following budget and priority decisions in parallel with development of a combined Corporate Plan/BVPP for 2007-2010. Service planning is improving through the adoption of a more consistent and structured approach, although many service plans for 2008/09 are still under development. Plans do not consistently make clear what impact actions will have, particularly on local and regional priorities. This means that the Council cannot be confident that its plans will enable it to deliver effectively against all of its priorities.

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- 49** The Council's approach to promoting diversity and equality is meeting with some success, but gaps remain. It has started to make use of equality impact assessments for front line services, a corporate equalities group has been established and all staff have been trained on equalities. Progress towards the Equality Standard for Local Government has recently accelerated, and the Council is on target to reach level 2 in 2008. The Council has responded well to the needs of some minority groups: its work with travellers is particularly proactive. The Council is working to develop a youth forum. However, it does not have challenging targets relating to diversity and employment. There is less evidence of corporate consultation and action planning with other minority groups for example: BME residents; disabled people; lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people; and migrant workers. This means that the Council cannot be confident that its priorities take into account the diverse needs of all of its communities. It also has implications for future service delivery - because the Council does not understand the needs of all of its communities, it cannot promote these needs during the development of the new council.
- 50** The Council is effective in reaching some groups at risk of disadvantage. Rural isolation is recognised as a major barrier to delivering customer service. This has been addressed by employing Community Visiting Officers (CVOs) and users feedback positively on their effectiveness. CVOs attend luncheon clubs, parent and toddler groups and the Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Service Centre where they hold joint surgeries with the Citizens Advice Bureau. CVOs also provided a concessionary travel roadshow in 2007 which was initially for providing bus passes and travel vouchers, but was opened up to other agencies such as the fire service and Carelink (social services). For 2008 the roadshow has been widened to more agencies due to high resident demand. The impact of this is to improve the way in which local people can access services.

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

### Capacity

- 51 The Council is performing adequately in this area. It has continued to make progress in its organisational development. Political and managerial leadership has improved significantly since 2004 and is now adequate. The roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors for taking decisions are clear. Corporate management has been strengthened and changes in political structures have led to improvements in governance arrangements. Procurement, risk management, financial planning and financial management are all adequate. The approach to asset management is inadequate.
- 52 The Council has made significant improvement in its political capacity, which is now adequate. It has increased and clarified the responsibility of lead councillors. Terms of reference define the actions required to fulfil a lead councillor role and clearly set out responsibilities. For example, the new performance management framework sets out the role of lead councillors in monitoring performance. Councillors' contribution to partnerships is improved but still mixed overall. At their most effective, Teesdale councillors attend meetings regularly and their contribution is recognised and valued by partners. However, attendance at some partnership boards remains poor. This means the Council is not maximising its impact in all areas of partnership activity.
- 53 Corporate governance has improved and now operates effectively. The realignment of committees has led to more streamlined decision making and improved monitoring. Lead councillors are more involved in policy development. There is now a good working relationship between officers and councillors, demonstrated through the use of workshops to develop the corporate plan, and monthly meetings between executive members and service heads to discuss performance. The Executive Committee works well with each councillor having a lead role. Councillors are briefed by officers, but they present the reports at council meetings and then defend and explain them. Overall councillors are managing performance better and are knowledgeable about their service areas.
- 54 The approach to governance is good and councillors, officers and other partners now generally operate to suitable ethical standards. A revised Local Code of Corporate Governance has been approved and the Council has adopted model guidance on the receipt and registration of gifts and hospitality by council members and employees. The Council's Standards Committee meets quarterly, has an independent chair, and provides advice and assistance to the Council. No complaints have been taken up by the Standards Committee. The committee provides assurance that councillors and officers work effectively within the ethical framework.

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- 55** Senior management has been strengthened through recent permanent and temporary appointments. The corporate management team (CMT) work effectively together. CMT meets weekly and progress against the action plan is reported as part of the agenda. Internal communication is improving, with effective use of the intranet, bulletins and the CMT blog. A staff survey in November 2007 showed improvement in staff attitudes to political and managerial leadership, but a substantial proportion expressed concern about the overall strength of strategic leadership. Since the staff survey, which was undertaken at the time of a Council restructure, the Council has taken steps to improve strategic leadership through the appointment of an interim Deputy Chief executive. Staff are generally enthusiastic and committed, but effective strategic leadership during the period of LGR is important to ensure that staff morale and performance are maintained.
- 56** The capacity of key councillors and officers is adequate and improving. Personal Development Plans (PDPs) are in place for both staff and councillors. A cross-party councillor development group is in place, together with a strategy and programme. All councillors are engaged in the personal development process. Staff training needs are identified effectively. The Managers Forum is a good vehicle for the exchange of knowledge and ideas, as well as a support network for individuals. Managers are effective and now shape the organisation and its development, which is leading to service improvement.
- 57** The Council's scrutiny function is having a positive impact on service and policy development. For example, it identified poor operation of waste transfer sites as a county-wide issue with specific local implications. Scrutiny's work on this involved the County Council and led to closer performance monitoring of local waste transfer at the Stainton Grove facility by Teesdale District Council, resulting in fewer complaints by the public.
- 58** However, there are shortcomings in the scrutiny function which limit its capacity to improve services. A prioritised annual scrutiny programme is in place but officer support has been limited and not sufficient to allow it to flourish; the Council has recently increased senior officer support to scrutiny to address this. Reports are produced by panel chairs and all research is done by scrutiny members. Scrutiny concentrates on its policy development role but plays little part in performance monitoring. It is generally operating in isolation rather than as part of a Council-wide approach to service improvement, although monthly meetings of leader, deputy leader and scrutiny chair and vice chair are helping to develop trust and improve working relationships. Overall, the Council does not manage the scrutiny function well. This means the energies of scrutiny are not being channelled to support delivery against the Council's priorities, so that the Council cannot be confident its scrutiny function is contributing effectively to service improvement.

- 59 Risk management is adequate. The Council has recently put a system in place for identifying and managing risk across all of its activities. A risk management strategy has been approved, and a Risk Management Group is responsible for training and awareness sessions aimed at ensuring risk management considerations are incorporated into the Council's management processes. All actions and decisions of the Council are informed by an understanding of managing the associated risks.
- 60 The Council's approach to procurement is good. It is using procurement to deliver economies of scale, shared risk and improved customer focus. An example of this is the joint purchase of the customer relationship management (CRM) system through the Durham e-government partnership; this has saved £2.75 million across the county compared with purchasing individual systems. The Council makes good use of outsourcing and working in partnership to enhance its capacity. This includes the health and safety function delivered by Stockton on Tees Borough Council and legal services being transferred to Darlington Council. A shared benefits service is being delivered with Wear Valley District Council. The Council is working with Wear Valley to produce an updated joint procurement strategy. There are several joint officer appointments, such as health development (with the PCT) and community safety and purchasing (with Wear Valley District Council). The Council is demonstrating a proactive approach to this and is achieving better value for money by doing so. Although there are shortcomings in the Council's procurement strategy, these agreements mean that the Council benefits from the expertise of others and makes better use of limited resources.
- 61 The Council makes good use of its limited staff and skills to deliver priorities in most areas, but there is little if any additional capacity within the organisation. This is being further tested by the additional demands of LGR with many staff involved in transition groups, which is putting pressures on service delivery and staff access to training opportunities. This pressure means that while improvement is clear, there is still some way to go before capacity issues are fully resolved. The Council also lacks capacity to fully resource work when staff are on sick leave. The impact of this is that the Council cannot be confident that it has the capacity to deliver against its priorities.
- 62 Sound HR policies and procedures support the Council's efforts to develop its staff to deliver against corporate priorities. A workforce development plan and a training and development plan are in place. The PDP scheme is used to identify training needs within current roles and for succession planning. PDRs are valued by staff and lead to effective access to development opportunities. All Streetcare front line staff have completed an appropriate NVQ Level 2 qualification. Following training and development there is some shared learning within service teams but this is not systematic across the organisation. The Council has been effective in improving staff morale by reviewing communications, training and development, and recognition rewards. As a result of these activities the Council can be confident that it is supporting and developing its staff to enable them to deliver against corporate priorities.

## 22 Comprehensive Performance Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 63 The way in which the Council uses its resources is adequate overall. Although asset management is inadequate, work is in progress to address deficiencies. Financial planning is much improved: senior managers now have more budget holding responsibilities and budget decisions make better use of PI data. All managers have had training on the process. The 'star chamber' is working with increased effectiveness, for example it did not agree plans for additional spending on environmental health because this was not felt to be a Council priority. This means limited resources are being used effectively.
- 64 Budget monitoring has also improved considerably and is satisfactory. Budget managers have been reduced in number and now meet monthly. Each budget manager has dedicated accountancy support and all budget managers make monthly projections. The audit and governance committee takes an active interest in projections, and the Council has developed relevant local PIs. Monthly reporting takes place to departments then to CMT and executive. The Council is developing a more risk based approach with quarterly reporting agreed for low risk budgets. There is limited involvement of scrutiny in budget and financial monitoring. The Council now has a clearer view of how it is spending against priorities.
- 65 The Council's approach to value for money (VfM) is adequate. Managers assess VfM implications as part of their decision making processes. The Council has a framework for demonstrating and evidencing VfM. Finance and performance are reported together to the Improvement and Performance Board, with links to corporate plan PIs. There is some awareness of VfM in specific service areas, for example: in the planning service there is awareness of the links between costs and performance; and the Council acknowledges that refuse collection costs are high and performance is low. As a result the Council is in a better position to understand its costs and improve VfM.
- 66 The Council has been successful in attracting external funding from Sport England, English Heritage, the National Lottery and other regeneration schemes. The Council was a key partner in the 2003-2006 Market Towns Initiative, which was particularly successful in Barnard Castle. In 2005/06 the Council obtained £980,000 grant aid from other sources using £80,000 from its Capital Programme. The Council won £140,000 from Sport England in 2006, for three years, to further the community sports network within the LSP's culture and leisure thematic group. This level of funding is a significant addition to the resources of the council, which has relatively small annual budgets.
- 67 The Council is working well to develop the capacity of voluntary and community groups. It takes steps to raise community groups' awareness of the many funding initiatives that exist and ensures that community groups have access to resources for training, information and support so that they can take part in the partnership process. This leads to improved opportunities for the voluntary and community sector to make a contribution to improved quality of life for local people.

- 68** The Council is making good use of IT, through the CRM system and its website, the improvement of which have been recognised by the Society of Information Technology Management. Following consultation with local people, the Council has made good progress in providing its services electronically, having made 98 per cent of relevant services available electronically by 2006. The Council is working with the other Durham councils to improve access to services across the county by 2010, within the clear framework of the County Durham e-Government strategy. This enables wider access to council services by local geographic communities and among different age groups.

## **Performance management**

- 69** The Council is performing adequately in this area. A good data quality strategy and performance management framework is in place. The Council has significantly improved the way in which it reports on performance to executive and cabinet, which is now done regularly. The Council is able to demonstrate that performance management is leading to some service improvement, but overall developments are at an early stage and impact on outcomes is less evident. Some good work is being done to share information about the performance of partners through the LSP. Target setting is inconsistent.
- 70** The Council has put in place a good data quality strategy and performance management framework, but this is not yet fully embedded. This clearly states why data quality is important and outlines the way in which the Council aims to ensure data is accurate. The performance framework is well structured and illustrates how the Council intends to collect and report on performance data. It outlines the mechanisms for scrutiny and challenge together with appropriate responsibilities. This means that the Council has the mechanisms agreed to operate an effective performance management regime, but as yet there is no indication of the impact this is having on performance.
- 71** Performance management is now an integral part of how the Council works. Managers are clear about measures, indicators and targets and communication around them has improved. All performance information is available to councillors and staff on the intranet. Where targets are not being met, managers are held to account and corrective actions are taken, for example a poorly performing environmental health BVPI is now being monitored against an action plan to ensure that it improves. An Improvement and Performance Board is beginning to look at ways in which the Council delivers its priorities and achieves value for money. It allocated additional resources to planning because performance was declining and deteriorating performance in benefits was tackled through partnership with Wear Valley. Where necessary, the board makes referrals to the executive committee, CMT or the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. For example in relation to poor performance around collection of household waste per head the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been asked to examine performance against this indicator in more detail, although it is too soon to identify the impact of this.

**24 Comprehensive Performance Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 72** The Council and its partners have made good progress in developing performance management through the LSP. There are quarterly reports to thematic subgroups and subsequent reporting to the LSP board. The Council has integrated the reporting of the performance of partners into its monitoring system. The PIs for the SCS are monitored quarterly by the LSP and are reported to the Executive Committee by the lead councillor responsible for each theme. This means that performance of all of the community's priorities is being monitored in a clear and transparent manner.
- 73** Target setting is inconsistent. Those targets that matter are usually clear, challenging and reflect priority areas. For example, regeneration activities have helped the Council exceed its 2006/07 targets for new jobs created, businesses created and businesses supported. The 28 businesses created and 168 supported in 2006/07 are both almost double the 2005/06 figures. Targets are reviewed and challenged by senior managers and overview and scrutiny as part of the service planning process. However, not all targets are challenging: for example, the targets for top five per cent of earners in the Council who are either from BME communities or who are disabled are both 0 per cent. Council tax collection and domestic waste collected both reflect worst 25 per cent performance but targets do not seek to significantly improve this performance. Shortcomings in target setting mean that the Council cannot be confident that its performance is underpinned by targets that will enable it to achieve the necessary improvements to services.
- 74** Target setting within the LSP is similarly inconsistent. Action plans for the thematic groups do not always contain measurable outcomes. In some instances measures assess whether an action has taken place, rather than its impact - such as the leisure and culture action plan's action to recruit more volunteers. The Health and Social Care sub group has an action to establish a Wear and Tees Alcohol Task Group, and one of the indicators is to reduce binge drinking in the short term, but no timescale or target is provided. Without setting specific, measurable and outcome-focused targets the LSP cannot tell whether it is making progress against thematic objectives; without being challenging it cannot be sure it is pushing its achievements to their maximum potential.
- 75** The Council's monitoring of CP priorities by the improvement and performance board is not fully effective. It often lacks key information about targets. Actions against ambitions are shown with timescales, responsibility, measures and targets, and progress. However the progress column is not dated and there are no traffic light indicators, so it is impossible to tell whether targets are being met and therefore impossible to identify poorly performing actions. Without this information, performance cannot be effectively managed.

- 76** The Council is committed to learning from its own experience and that of others to improve services, but performance in this area is inconsistent. It makes effective use of complaints to improve performance. Complaints are recorded on the CRM system and the relevant service area, or the County Council if it is in their area of responsibility, is notified. Although the level of complaints received by the Council is very low, there are examples of learning from complaints to improve performance. Complaints relating to revenues and planning have led to improved communication for customers, and in the planning service procedures were improved to ensure quicker upload of planning applications to the council website. However, there is insufficient use of benchmarking to measure the Council's relative performance and bring about service improvement. This means the Council could be missing out on opportunities to learn from others to inform its own service improvements.
- 77** The Council is open to external challenge and willing to listen to others, clearly illustrated by the way it has engaged with the monitoring board and the IDeA. The Council uses external review to drive improvement but is realistic about the extent to which it can follow recommendations. The efficiency peer review identified the need for greater understanding of the efficiency agenda across the Council, and for a strategic, corporate, cross cutting approach to delivering efficiencies. The Council's appropriate response was that it was inappropriate to use resources to address the efficiency issues if they were likely to be addressed as a result of LGR. This demonstrates an increased awareness and maturity in the way in which the Council uses external challenge and ensures that resources are not diverted unnecessarily to projects which are not a priority.

## What has been achieved?

### Achievement and improvement

- 78 The Council is performing adequately in this area. It is improving the quality of its services to local people. It has a local reputation for commitment to service delivery – this is valued by local people. It is also delivering a more co-ordinated approach to wider community outcomes, which in itself is an achievement. This is reflected in the number of new strategies being developed in order to tackle issues in regeneration, housing and the environment. However, many of the strategic developments are recent and have not yet had time to translate into outcomes.
- 79 The Council's performance against BVPIs is mixed. There are good levels of improvement in the performance of PIs, with 70 per cent improving in 2006/07 compared with 45 per cent in the previous year. However, although 39 per cent of BVPIs reflected performance in the best 25 per cent of councils, an almost equal proportion reflected worst performance. Poor performance against a number of indicators reflects priority areas for the Council, for example those relating to waste and recycling, which are below average. There have been improvements in planning performance, but this is still below average. Similarly, in terms of achieving targets the position is variable. Fifty three per cent of all PIs are on track to meet their target, but 43 per cent are off target. For key PIs - those relating most closely to the Council's priorities - 42 per cent are on track to be achieved, with 55 per cent off target.

### A cleaner, greener place

- 80 The Council is performing adequately in its priority to make the area a cleaner, greener place. Performance against 80 per cent of waste BVPIs has improved in the last year compared with the national district council average of 64 per cent. The Council works well in partnership with a local charity, ROTTERS, leading to an improvement in recycling and composting rates. A Sustainability Officer is in place and the Council is proactive in encouraging recycling through the use of stickers on bins to remind residents of the benefits of recycling, and by promoting long term changes in behaviour through the Waste and Resources Action Programme. The Council is meeting local targets on recycling, but performance remains below average, while the amount of waste being collected is increasing. The Council has responded to residents' concerns over street cleanliness. It responds promptly to specific requests for cleaning operations and there is now improved satisfaction with street cleaning.

- 81 The Council's waste management service was inspected by the Audit Commission in 2006 and judged to be a good service, but with uncertain prospects for improvement. The report recognised a strong focus on customers, together with good levels of public satisfaction. Services such as the bulky waste collection service were clearly designed to suit local needs and tackle the remoteness of many households. However, the report also highlighted that the amount of waste collected was increasing above national trends and this remains an area of relatively low performance.
- 82 The Council and its partners are committed to reducing carbon emissions, but progress is slow. The Council has identified that it has a high carbon footprint and although work is underway with the Carbon Trust to survey the Councils' offices in Barnard Castle, there has been no impact to date. The leisure centre has a new heat recovery system in place, which is helping the Council to reduce its carbon emissions. The LSP has an environmental action plan in place, but again this is at an early stage and has not yet made an impact.
- 83 The Council responds appropriately to local needs and concerns. It fulfils a range of environmental health, licensing and food hygiene services to local businesses, within the context of limited capacity. Improved approaches to consultation highlighted a major local concern over dog fouling; the Council responded by allocating additional resources to make its dog warden full time and worked with Parish Councils to provide more dog bins in identified areas. The Council responds promptly to fly tipping.

### **To grow the economy**

- 84 The Council is performing well against its priority of growing the economy. There have been some areas of success and the Council, together with partners, is putting in place a number of ambitious but realistic strategies. These represent important building blocks for the future, but not all have made an impact to date.
- 85 The Council is an active partner in the work of the Barnard Castle Partnership Board (BCPB). The BCPB, using a detailed needs analysis, has produced the Barnard Castle Vision – a comprehensive and challenging blueprint for the future of the area's main market town. The BCPB has been successful in obtaining £290,000 for project development appraisals and the creation of an information point. Long term plans include the development of a pavilion, a health campus and an indoor market hall. A further £630,000 has been obtained from the Teesdale Market Towns Initiative for improvements to Barnard Castle. Benefits from these initiatives include improvements to the Barnard Castle streetscene through improved paving and street furniture, but more importantly a growing sense of business confidence.

- 86 The Council has had some success in its work on tourism. Together with partners, the Council has put in place a number of initiatives to develop tourism and these have resulted in increased visitor numbers as well as improving the local economy and employment. The Council estimates that since 2002, between 1,100 and 2,000 jobs have been created with approximately 45,000 additional visitors to the area. This has been achieved through initiatives such as:
- the development of the Hamsterley Forest Cycle Centre in conjunction with the Hamsterley Trailblazers, with the appointment of a Development Officer, the creation of new trails and increased numbers of visitors;
  - close work with the Bowes Museum;
  - an annual event for accommodation providers;
  - strong links to Teesdale Marketing with Council involvement in the production of a monthly newsletter; and
  - a close working relationship with [www.teesdalediscovery.co.uk](http://www.teesdalediscovery.co.uk) - a web site developed by local volunteers to promote the area.
- 87 There is good progress in the areas of skills, employment and business development. Over a period of four years, the Teesdale Skills Development Fund has enabled 676 individuals to either update or gain new qualifications. This has led to increased employment opportunities, for example in relation to classroom assistants, sheep shearing, mole catching and tractor driving. It has also had an impact on new business start ups, with new enterprises created in varied fields such as hairdressing, racehorse training and salami making. VAT registrations have fallen recently, but figures are still high and close to 1,200 per annum. The Council has undertaken work in relation to protecting jobs in Evenwood by giving support to a management buy-out.
- 88 The regeneration service was rated as good by Audit Commission in 2007, but with uncertain prospects for improvement. The work of the service was described by the report as having delivered improvements against its key strategies and regional initiatives. It also highlighted that the service engages well with local businesses and is making increased use of village halls and community group offices. Finally, the report noted the significant Barnard Castle streetscape improvements, the Council's good record of delivering regeneration projects and projects that deliver value for money.

- 89 The performance of the planning service is mixed. The Local Development Framework (LDF) completed the Issues and Options stage in December 2007 and the Council is now preparing its preferred options. A number of performance indicators are improving and have exceeded their target. However, some targets are not challenging and overall performance remains below average. For example the percentage of new homes built on previously developed land has improved from 87 per cent in 2005/06 to 90 per cent in 2006/07; but this is against a target of 60 per cent for previous and future years. Performance in relation to speed of deciding major and minor planning applications has been variable, which is a reflection of fluctuations in staffing levels within the service. Under-performance on planning issues can hamper the ability of the Council and its partners to implement regeneration plans.
- 90 Other successful work has led to a number of developments, at different stages of progress. For example, plans are well advanced to provide - by summer 2008 - wi-fi in Barnard Castle and improved access to high speed broadband within rural areas. Areas of poor reception - 'white spots' - have been identified, funding packages are confirmed and work is due to start within the next few months. The Council has worked with the County Council to access rural renaissance funding for former mining areas.

### **Improve health and well being and safer communities**

- 91 The Council is performing well in relation to its priority to improve health and well being and promote safer communities.
- 92 Although the overall health of local people is good, the Council is committed to addressing health inequalities in the district and is working well to improve health through physical activity. A Walking for Life scheme promotes participation in organised walks around the area. The Council is working with Durham PCT to promote initiatives to improve health. A GP exercise referral programme is in operation at the leisure centre and participation has increased from 45 in 2004 to 260 in 2007. An innovative Stroke Referral Scheme has 25 participants, exceeding the original target of 21. People attending the scheme report improved general fitness and self confidence. The Passport to Sport scheme has attracted almost 1,500 members and serves to actively encourage participation in sport. Sport England's Active People survey in 2006 showed that Teesdale has a higher than average proportion of adults who are physically active – 22 per cent compared with 21 per cent in England as a whole.

- 93 Crime levels in Teesdale are low, but fear of crime is high. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) works successfully across Teesdale and Wear Valley. The Council is actively involved in the CDRP and works well with the police. The CDRP is high performing, being the sixth best nationally in terms of its performance against key indicators. The work of local agencies is on target for a 13 per cent reduction in overall crime for 2007/08. There has been a 42 per cent reduction in domestic burglaries. Responses to the fear of crime involve closer relationships with the Parishes Forum and this is beginning to have an impact. For example, the Council responds promptly to requests to remove graffiti and has worked with the police to reduce anti-social behaviour in Cockfield - cutting hedges following representations from the Parish Forum.
- 94 The Council works well with stakeholders to tackle specific problems of crime and disorder. In response to crime and disorder associated with being on the route to the nearby Appleby Fair, Teesdale Resident and Travellers Forum developed an action plan to resolve local concerns by working with partners to secure official sites. Most of the measures put in place for 2007 have been successful, and the amount of crime and disorder has been significantly reduced.
- 95 The Council's proactive approach to the provision of activities for children and young people has met with some success. £140,000 over three years has been obtained from Sport England for a community sports network, much of which is targeted at young people. Many diversionary activities for young people are based at the leisure centre and a young people's transport scheme in Cockfield and Evenwood has improved access to leisure facilities. There is a jointly funded young people's drop in centre in Barnard Castle, operated by the YMCA. Groundwork is working in Barnard Castle as part of a cycling development programme, targeted at young people.
- 96 The Council supports a number of voluntary organisations to develop work with children and young people, for example the group 2D who are involved in children and young people's participation work. Use of the leisure centre by schools is actively promoted. Schools welcome this and recognise the potential benefits to children and families this brings. The Council is actively involved in the work of the Evenwood Sure Start project. Developments in relation to the youth forum are at an early stage and have yet to have significant impact on the involvement of young people in decision making.

### **Meet the housing needs of residents**

- 97 The Council is not yet meeting the housing needs of residents, although it has taken steps to improve the position, and the benefits service is now performing strongly. It made the decision to transfer its housing stock of 900 dwellings to Teesdale Housing Association (THA) in July 2006. This has enabled access to increased funding and THA is beginning to tackle the issue of decent homes. BVPI data shows that the current figure of 45 per cent non decent homes is above average, but un-audited figures provided by THA indicate a potential fall in non-decent homes from 45 per cent to 30 per cent in the current year. Eighty per cent of housing BVPIs improved in 2006/07. The Council is working with THA to convert a number of single person flats to provide more appropriate housing.

- 98** The Council has had some impact on the provision of affordable housing in Teesdale, which it has highlighted as a priority, but not sufficient to meet local needs or its own targets. There is now a strategy in place which proposes a target of 30 per cent affordable housing on all new sites. Thirty two units have been provided since 2004 which falls considerably below the target of 25 annually. More are being planned, with a study underway to identify need and available land. The development in Mickleton was the most recent and represents a high quality project, developed in the face of strong local opposition which the Council handled well. The Council is using Community Land Trusts to enable further progress to be made.
- 99** A number of effective initiatives are in place to prevent homelessness. These include a rent deposit scheme, a mediation service, floating support services, the use of a housing options adviser and joint protocol in place for dealing with 16/17 year olds. The Council and its partners make limited use of temporary accommodation and B&B for families. There are consequently low numbers of people presenting as homeless in Teesdale.
- 100** There have been significant improvements in the benefits service, which is now performing strongly. The Council has developed a close working relationship with neighbouring Wear Valley Council to improve capacity and share skills and resources. This has resulted in significant improvements in performance for Teesdale through sharing expertise and implementing new working practices such as home working. New claims are processed quickly - performance in this area is in the top 25 per cent nationally. The time taken to respond to changes in circumstances has fallen from 12.4 days in 2005/06 to 7.4 days in 2006/07. This means that local people now receive an improved benefits service.

## Appendix 1 – Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
  - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
  - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
  - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Teesdale District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 3 to 7 March 2008.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.