

Performance Action Teams

Supporting improvement in social care services

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Reviewing the lessons from the work of performance action teams
with councils with social services responsibilities

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READER INFORMATION

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Summary of Key Messages

Performance Action Teams were commissioned by the Department of Health (DH) in 2002 to help improve the performance of 'failing' Councils with Social Services Responsibilities. This review describes the work and impact of the first eight teams. It draws out key messages about this model of engaging externally commissioned teams of private consultants to assist with improvement in public services. Informed by those who were directly involved, it highlights what is considered to have worked well and what might be improved in future engagements. The report focuses on the impact of the performance action teams, how they were set up in each Council, the work that was done and how the engagement was managed. The key messages from the review are shown below:

Setting up Performance Action Teams

- Effective PAT engagement depends on the willingness of all partners to engage positively in the process
- Clear, focused and accurate scoping of the work is crucial in achieving improvement. Clarity and shared agreement is achieved by involving all partners in scoping and specifying the work to be done
- Performance Action Teams had most credibility with all partners when they included people with recent social services experience and knowledge, as well as other specialists
- The most successful engagements involved the Council at every stage

Activities and methods

- Performance Action Teams tackled a range of strategic tasks and, to a lesser extent, direct practice
- Councils needed help with basic skills and knowledge of the business including telling their 'performance' stories
- Some products were created; collaborative methods of working were seen as more important in facilitating sustainable change.
- The presence of the PAT gave credibility and status to the Council at a time of low morale
- Work specifications should be implemented flexibly to reflect new information and changing situations
- PAT need to understand the Council context without spending too long on further analysis of problems or 'reinspecting'. Innovative approaches may help action teams to clarify the context and start to move the Council forward at the same time

Management

- Effective project management is crucial and the arrangements were generally regarded as successful
- The work is facilitated by clear roles and relationships, built on trust and mutual respect
- There are mixed views about how to involve Council Members in the process
- PAT work was most effective where the teams were engaged with competent and committed Council staff who had the authority to lead the recovery
- Exit strategies were linked to contracts rather than outcomes

The impact of Performance Action Teams

- All of the Councils said they had improved and 5 of the 8 had been awarded one star
- Some Council staff were ambivalent about the contribution of the PAT; they acknowledged some helpful aspects but emphasised that they had made the improvements themselves
- DH, SSI and the action teams identified the key PAT contributions as: helping to control the crisis, speeding up improvement, engaging political and senior management leadership, boosting morale and confidence, bringing in ideas from outside, direct work with practitioners, modelling good practice and introducing or improving systems especially performance management
- Timescales for achieving improvement must be realistic
- When new ways of thinking and working were embedded in practice and endorsed by managers, these were seen as signs of sustainable change

Looking back – Moving forward

- Conditions for improvement include Council **willingness** to engage with change; a clear **understanding and acceptance** of the reasons for failure; **capable and consistent Council management and leadership**; an agreed **recovery strategy** and work plan; **resources** to carry this out; a stable and capable **workforce** with which to engage; work on **basic skills** and direct practice as well as strategic focus.
- There is no single model for engaging a PAT – engagement must reflect the needs and circumstances of each Council.
- The PAT model has evolved since the first engagements and is still evolving.
- Greater flexibility in deploying performance action teams may be supported by clearer matching of the Council's circumstances against the known conditions for successful engagement, improvement and sustainability.

Summary of what worked and what could be improved

Impact of Performance Action Teams

What worked well	What could be improved
Being 'under the spotlight' means that improvement becomes a priority for the Council	Greater engagement by Councils to play an equal part in the specification and implementation of the work
Practical help with systems and processes especially performance management	A stable, committed and capable senior management team to work alongside the PAT
Sensitive and collaborative approach by the PAT is empowering	Timing of the engagement – when conditions for change are favourable
New skills and ideas are brought in from outside by PAT and others	More work with frontline staff on direct practice
Open communication and trust	Realistic timescales for improvement
Speeding up progress	Different models may be appropriate and bring better value for money than engagement of large teams
Council taking the lead on commissions at the end of the engagement	

Setting up Performance Action Teams

What worked well	What could be improved
<p>Involving Councils in choosing and appointing teams</p> <p>Involving Councils and Consultants in scoping and planning of the work</p> <p>Having a clear and transparent process for commissioning and setting up the teams</p> <p>Tailoring the specification and action plan to the needs and circumstances of the Council</p> <p>Credible teams had a wide range of skills and knowledge, including recent experience in social services</p>	<p>Provide more choice in engagement models e.g. more consultants, smaller teams</p> <p>Ensure equal partnership in the appointment and scoping process</p> <p>Link inputs and outputs in the specification to desired outcomes</p>

Activities and Methods

What worked well	What could be improved
For Councils	For Councils
<p>Flexibility in reviewing and amending the specification of the work where necessary</p> <p>Collaborative and empowering style of PAT</p> <p>Adding capacity in achieving specific pieces of work e.g. work on finance</p> <p>Addressing basic skills and core business practices e.g. 'learning to count smartly'</p> <p>Experienced SSD consultant working alongside practitioners and frontline managers</p> <p>Building on what the Council was already doing and developing the talents and skills of the existing staff</p> <p>Bringing in best practice ideas from outside of the Council</p> <p>Business like approach, modelling good practice</p>	<p>PAT to avoid re-inspecting and too much time on further diagnostics and analysis when the work starts.</p> <p>Flexibility to amend or renegotiate the specification</p> <p>Councils must be engaged with the process and not undermine it</p> <p>Ensuring that the team and the work they are doing is communicated to staff</p> <p>Consultants need to have experience and understanding of social services business and effective ways of bringing in expert advice.</p> <p>More direct work with practitioners</p>

Management

What worked well	What could be improved
<p>Robust project management</p> <p>Shared ownership of process</p> <p>Clear roles and relationships</p> <p>Regular and open communication between all parties</p> <p>Monitoring progress through focus on deliverables</p> <p>Senior level involvement including members</p>	<p>Councils must be engaged as equal partners in the process – can be intimidating at first</p> <p>Representation on Project Boards is appropriate – ensure the right people are there</p> <p>Project leads for each party have authority and are of sufficient seniority to make decisions</p> <p>Efficient administration of all parts of the management process</p> <p>The engagement is streamlined with other Council processes – not an ‘island’</p> <p>Relationships are open and transparent</p>

Conditions for Positive Engagement

The Council:

- Accepts the need for improvement
- Is willing to engage with PAT
- Has capable and consistent leadership
- Has resources to support the work
- Has stable and capable workforce with which to engage;
- Is supported corporately

The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI)

- Works with Councils to understand reasons for failure and improvement strategy
- Develops detailed knowledge about the Council and about what works
- Manages the process robustly and authoritatively through Project Board
- Builds up trust with all partners
- Is clear about SSI role – balances regulatory and development roles
- Has sufficient time and support for this intensive work
- Link inspectors have a balanced workload e.g. only one zero star council at a time






The PAT

- Is an appropriately experienced and credible team
- Ensures that people understand and are implementing basic functions
- Uses empowering and collaborative methods
- Works with what Councils do well and builds on their strengths
- Ensures that performance is reflected through PAF
- Provides a consistent and visible team

Partners working together have:

- Clear understanding of the reasons for failure
- An accurate, focused and agreed recovery strategy and work plan
- Mutual respect and transparent relationships
- Flexible approach to implementing the recovery strategy
- Building and achieving momentum
- Robust Project Management

Table 1: THE COUNCIL STAR RATINGS AS AT NOVEMBER 2003**(H) and (L) indicate a change in this aspect of the rating since 2002 (higher or lower)**

Council	ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Birmingham City Council	Some	Promising (H)	No	Uncertain	IMPROVED STILL NO STARS
Coventry City Council	Some	Promising	Some (H)	Uncertain	
North East Lincolnshire Council	Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	
London Borough of Haringey	Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Uncertain	
Swindon Borough Council	No (L)	Uncertain (H)	Some	Uncertain	STILL NO STARS
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	Some (H)	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	
London Borough of Waltham Forest	Some	Uncertain	No	Uncertain	IMPROVED STILL NO STARS
Windsor and Maidenhead Council	Some	Uncertain	Some (H)	Uncertain	

Chapter One

Introducing the Study – background, aims and methods

Background

Performance Action Teams were commissioned by the Department of Health (DH) in 2002 to help improve the performance of 'failing' Councils with Social Services Responsibilities. This review describes the work and impact of the first eight teams. It draws out key messages about this model of engaging externally commissioned teams of private consultants to assist with improvement in public services. Informed by those who were directly involved, it highlights what is considered to have worked well and what might be improved in future engagements. This report focuses particularly on the impact of the performance action teams, how they were set up in each Council, the work that was done and how the engagement was managed.

Performance Assessment Framework

The implementation of the performance assessment framework for Councils with Social Service Responsibilities has led to a more public focus on performance in social services than ever before. The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) has administered this framework in the past, and this role has now transferred to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

Each year, Councils with Social Services Responsibility (CSSR) are awarded a star rating according to the targets and requirements of the performance assessment framework, ranging from excellent performance (three stars) to 'failing' (zero stars). A range of 'universal' and 'enhanced' evidence is assessed by inspectors against a detailed framework, which sets out characteristics of excellent to poor performance. Judgements are made about how well Councils are serving adults and children at that time, and the Council's capacity for improvement in future. Further details of this process are set out in the CSCI operational policy available through their website. Table 1 summarises the latest (November 2003) performance star ratings, for the eight Councils in this study.

Councils given a zero-star rating are automatically placed on ‘special measures’, which include:

- rigorous and frequent monitoring by SSI/CSCI;
- strategy meetings with government officials;
- production of Performance Improvement Plans (PIP) and,
- engagement of Performance Action Teams (PAT)

The decision to engage a PAT rests with Ministers acting on recommendations from the Chief Inspector, based on SSI/CSCI’s assessment of the council’s capacity for change. The ultimate sanction is formal statutory intervention, which has not been used since the introduction of star ratings.

Performance Action Teams

Performance Action Teams aim to support council staff in developing their capacity and systems to deliver improved social services. They are provided by external consultants who are contracted for specific tasks over a specified period, and the process is formally project managed by a partnership consisting of SSI/CSCI, the Council, the PAT and DH officials. The first action teams were provided from large consultancy firms in the private sector with experience of local government auditing and organisational change management and development. These were Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC), Deloitte Touche and KPMG.

By May 2004, twelve teams had been commissioned. This review looks at the experience of the first eight Councils in:

Birmingham Coventry Haringey NE Lincolnshire	Swindon Walsall Waltham Forest Windsor and Maidenhead
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In March 2003, DH hosted an evaluation event to which those working in, and with, Performance Action Teams were invited to reflect on the first seven months. The proceedings of this event were written up and have informed this report.

Aim of this review

To review the use of Performance Action Teams (PAT) commissioned to support the improvement of Councils with Social Services Responsibility (CSSR) on special measures. The study aimed to:

- Explore with the key players, their experience of the engagement, management and work of the performance action teams in the eight councils, and particularly:
 - what worked best and why,
 - what didn't work and why
 - what was effective in improving Council performance
- Describe, in broad terms, criteria against which success can be measured
- Identify key factors that were judged to have been effective in achieving successful change and sustainable improved social services performance
- Identify those factors that were not effective

It is not the intention of this review to make independent judgements about the success or otherwise of the PAT engagements in each case; rather to sift the experiences for the key lessons about what has been most effective and what has hindered improvement.

Methods

The study involved the following activities:

- Study of relevant documents including commissioning agreements and ongoing progress reports;
- Interviews with key stakeholders in each Council including Chief Executive, Director of Social Services, Assistant Directors, Project Officer lead for the PAT work, middle managers and practitioners;
- Interviews/group meetings with PAT members including partners, project managers and team members;
- Interviews with SSI Directors and Project Managers/Business Link Inspectors.

Documents relating to the PAT work were provided by the Department of Health, SSI and the Councils. Examples of products such as commissioning strategies and needs analysis reports were collected during the fieldwork.

The fieldwork was carried out between February and May 2004. Interviews and group discussions with representatives from each of the key players were undertaken in person and by telephone. Interviews and group discussions were based on structured interview schedules, which were sent out in advance of the meeting or interview. In total, 30 interviews and 15 group meetings were carried out, involving 70 people.

Each Council was visited for a day and a programme of interviews and group discussions were carried out. We aimed to interview all Chief Executives, Directors of Social Services and Project Officers in all councils, and achieved this in most cases. Practitioners and middle managers were included to explore the extent to which they were aware of and involved with the PAT teams. On reflection, it might have been useful to interview Council Members who are seen as key to the PAT engagement and improvement of services. We also found that there was considerable turnover of staff in the councils, and some people who were central to the PAT and had subsequently left the Council, were telephoned and interviewed.

SSI staff were interviewed either in person or by telephone. The Performance Action Teams were interviewed by telephone, in person or by group meeting. DH officials directly involved in this work were also interviewed.

Participants welcomed this review, were willing to speak to us, and were very open in sharing their experiences. Assurance was given that no one would be named in the final report and that the reporting would be of general themes rather than about the detailed experience of any particular Council. The notes from the interviews were written up and collated to form the basis of this report, alongside the documentary material.

The PAT teams were engaged with the eight Councils between July 2002 and March 2004. The matrix in Annexe 4 summarises the key milestones for each Council.

Structure of the report

The key messages of this review are summarised at the beginning of the report; profiles of the engagements in the eight Councils are weaved randomly through the text. The main report begins with participants' reflections about their

experience of setting up the performance action teams. Subsequent chapters explore participant's views about the work and activities that were undertaken, the management arrangements and the impact of the teams. Chapter six summaries the key messages of the review, and reflects on conditions which may facilitate engagement and improvement. The annexes contain additional material including a literature review on organisational change and references.

Profile of Birmingham City Council

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	STILL NO STARS

(H) and (L) indicate a change in rating since 2002 (higher or lower, respectively)

Birmingham City Council is one of the UK's largest councils with a population of over one million. The Joint Review carried out between November and December 1999, concluded that the people of Birmingham were inconsistently served by their social services. The Review was presented to the Council in July 2000, and as a result, the Department of Health (DH) put the Council on "Enhanced Regional Monitoring". The SSI's Annual Review of Performance published in May 2002, together with findings from the review follow-up inspection of 2001, contributed (under the Performance Classification Scheme) to a "Zero Star" rating.

A Performance Action Team (PAT) from Deloitte & Touche began working in Birmingham in July 2002, and their Project Initiation Document set out three work streams:

Work stream 1: Review of Assessment and Care Management Processes

Work stream 2: The Commissioning Strategy

Work stream 3: The Strategic Direction

By July 2003, a new Director and a new senior management team were in place.

Deloitte & Touche worked on a commissioning plan for children's placements, and work with the assessment framework. They did a "Culture Print" of the way people saw the organisation as it was then, and they introduced a project management approach to oversee the PIP. The SSI and the Council felt that the PAT tried to cover the whole improvement agenda, but that the focus should

have been on Children's Services. The work on the Commissioning Strategy got bogged down but paved the way for the Council to continue this work. By April 2003, the Council had not been able to roll out the Assessment Framework, but planned to achieve this by December. The PAT helped the new management team – the culture print information was 'worrying', but a useful tool – and the project methodology was also helpful. Birmingham Social Services have formed their own "Performance Improvement Board" with a Council "Performance Action Team" and the manager of this team has used the methodology well.

In a summary of progress made since the CPA published in December 2003, the Audit Commission said that Birmingham City Council has made improvements in education, benefits, use of resources and the way it works over the past year, and is now scoring the maximum 4 out of 4 for those services. This improvement in services would have resulted in an upgrading in the overall CPA categorisation for the Council from "weak" to "fair", except for the rule that automatically prevents a local authority with a "no stars" social services from being rated higher than weak. In July 2003, the Social Services Inspectorate assessed services on current performance and their prospects for improvement, and awarded adult services an improved one star rating, but still no stars to children's services. At that time, the SSI said they expected the judgement to improve as current developments begin to impact on the city's services for children and families. Things began to get better once improvement became a corporate issue and not just a service issue, but there was still a critical Children's Services inspection last autumn (2003), and Birmingham City Council Social Services continues with a zero star rating.

The Performance Action Team finished in February 2004, after 8 months. The Commission for Social Care Improvement and the Council have made a bid for a second Performance Action team to take things further.

Chapter Two

Setting up the Performance Action Teams

Key messages

- Effective PAT engagement depends on the willingness of all partners to engage positively in the process
- Clear, focused and accurate scoping of the work is crucial in achieving improvement. Clarity and shared agreement is achieved by involving all partners in scoping and specifying the work to be done
- Performance Action Teams had most credibility with all partners when they included people with recent social services experience and knowledge
- The most successful engagements involved the Council at every stage

Introduction

'We will send in performance action teams to help turn services round. This will help to ensure that improvements are made to social services sooner rather than later. If there is little evidence of improvement I will take further action and consider using further intervention powers'. (Jacqui Smith, DH press release May 2002,)

Following the decision in May 2002 to introduce performance action teams, DH was required to move quickly to set these up. Four Councils had been on special measures for several years and, despite enhanced monitoring, both inspectors and DH officials were concerned at their slow progress towards improvement. The new approach was intended to speed things up and, within the existing legislative framework, to assist councils to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. The model emphasised that council staff were the 'improvers' who would be supported by action teams, in a 'last chance' attempt to achieve change.

Speed was of the essence, and there was a clear and pragmatic decision to use the services of private sector consultants who, from their long experience of working with local government and other public services, were regarded as having the appropriate skills and knowledge to work with councils. External consultants had been part of Best Value work directed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the NHS, and preferred providers from these lists were approached, including KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Coopers (PWC) and Deloitte Touche.

Commissioning, through competitive tendering, was managed centrally by DH, working closely with SSI and the local Councils. The first scoping documents and invitations to tender were put together quickly and in July 2002, presentations were made for the first four performance action teams in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and NE Lincolnshire. By the beginning of August, teams had been appointed and 'mobilisation' meetings had taken place. In October 2002, the PAT for Haringey was appointed, Swindon's followed in January 2003 and those for Waltham Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead in March 2003. All planned to work with the Councils until March 2004, and the first four contracts included an expectation of some signs of improvement by October 2002, in line with the Minister's earlier announcement.

This chapter describes the appointment and setting up of the performance action teams from the perspective of those most closely involved in the first eight teams. The views of Council staff, SSI and PAT consultants are reported under key headings, and drawn together in their reflections on what worked well and what could have been improved.

Initial responses to the model of PAT engagement

Some **SSI inspectors** were sceptical about employing external consultants from the private sector, being concerned that they would not know enough about the social services world to be effective. Having worked with the Councils for some time, the inspectors also recognised the need for a different approach. In some cases, they hoped that the PAT would bring something new to the Councils; in others, where they felt the Council staff were not well engaged with the improvement process, they hoped it would 'unstick' them and 'get them to first base'.

The **consultancy firms** welcomed the opportunity to undertake this high profile work and saw it as a natural extension to the business in which they were already engaged. All three of the consultancy firms who have provided action teams were already working with Councils and some social services departments and they were confident that they could contribute to progress.

The prospect of a PAT was regarded with dismay by most of the **Council staff**, particularly senior managers. None of them said they would have chosen this model and they resented the teams being 'imposed' upon them. Even where Council members, in one example, had asked for additional support from DH, the Council staff did not like the stigma attached to the PAT process.

The literature indicates that the attitude of a 'failing' organisation is crucial to its recovery. In the earlier evaluation, Council staff talked about their sense of 'hopelessness', which was compounded by what they experienced as a 'top down process with little opportunity for us to contribute'. In this review, Council staff reflected on the impact of being on special measures. 'Shock', 'surprise' and 'disappointment' were the most common responses to being placed on special measures. Some felt humiliated and 'were chilled' at the threatened external 'intervention', particularly in the early days when it was not clear what this would actually mean.

Practitioners were often 'relieved that, at last, someone was going to do something about the mess we were in'. They had 'high hopes' of what the team might achieve for themselves and for service users. Some team managers said their staff 'came out fighting' after the zero star rating, either on their own behalf – where they blamed others for poor performance – or for the whole department – where people commonly resented the fact that good practice was overlooked in a blanket assessment. A system that labelled them as unacceptably poor without recognising 'pockets of good practice' was felt to be particularly unfair and demoralising. Where frontline resources were pressurised, some practitioners were sceptical about the benefits of bringing in 'yet more managers'.

Accepting a PAT was hard for managers who had acknowledged the need for change and were already working on new strategies. Where they felt they were 'turning the corner', the imposition of the performance action team was particularly irksome. It was even harder when they did not accept that the poor performance rating; some never agreed that a PAT was needed and remain unconvinced of the helpfulness of the model. Others were sanguine, recognising that their departments were 'in freefall' or 'meltdown'; while not welcome, they saw external assistance as inevitable and something to 'grin and bear'. The attitude of local politicians was said to mirror those of the staff, some being angry and disappointed, others determined to make the most use of this process.

Opinions about the PAT ranged from 'welcoming the cavalry' to 'reluctantly making the best of it' to 'angry suspicion of government spies'. Council staff described feeling 'kicked' by negative local media attention, often blamed and

ostracised by their wider Councils and left 'bruised and demoralised' by years of inspection and scrutiny. By the time the PAT started work, managers and practitioners were often thoroughly disheartened and found it hard to engage positively with the process, even where the need for improvement was recognised.

Triggering a Performance Action Team

The rationale for deploying a PAT is set out in the scoping documents which formed the basis of the tender, bids and further work specifications. Customised for each Council from a standard template, these documents identify the areas of concern from Joint Reviews, inspections and the enhanced monitoring exercises carried out by SSI. Across the 8 councils, these relate to children's services, adults services and key systems across the department such as performance management. Typically they reflect the following areas:

Concerns leading to a PAT

Practice

- Poor quality services
- Inconsistent delivery
- Delay in service provision
- Delay in service user progress through services
- Weak social work assessments
- Poor attention to outcomes in care plans
- High numbers of looked after children
- High use of external placements for children
- Absence of multi-agency risk assessments/thresholds
- Unallocated cases

Management

- Inadequate line management of social work practice
- Gap between operational reality and strategic aspirations
- Absence of preventative strategy for children and families
- Absence of strategy for children and adults services
- Limited management capacity – high turnover, vacancies, many ‘acting up’ arrangements
- Lack of leadership in the department and in the council
- Poor CPA assessment across the council

Systems

- No culture or understanding of performance management
- No or ineffective management information systems
- No commissioning strategies or expertise
- Absence of policy and procedures
- Poor financial systems

Demonstrating improvement

- Proliferation of action plans from previous inspections/joint reviews
- Unable to produce a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)
- PIP of poor quality (length, unrealistic, no targets, no outcomes)
- PIP not being implemented effectively
- No improvement in core business
- Unwilling to engage in improvement activities

Source: Scoping documents

Scoping the work

Scoping documents were drawn up by SSI, working with the Council, using a standard DH template. Used to invite tenders, these documents outlined the areas of concern and the required action and priorities for work. Inspectors emphasised the importance of clearly understanding and analysing the 'failure' and whether it was located in specific services, the whole department or the whole council. As the whole recovery strategy is based on these specifications, they must be accurate. If they are focused on the wrong things, then they may impede, rather than support, the improvement process.

Council staff also identified the scoping and agreement of priority areas as a crucial part of the process. Mostly there was agreement between them and SSI about the priorities and, the areas of work were usually accepted, even if staff did not agree about the concerns. Some indicated that, at that early stage, they could only comply as they were 'clearly not playing to strength', and were 'not in a strong position to argue'. Occasionally disagreements occurred, either at the time of the scoping, or on reflection. The following examples, from different engagements, indicate not only the issues relating to scoping but also the tensions which can arise between SSI and the Councils in this delicate work:

SSI found it impossible to engage one Council in work on the key Joint Review recommendation relating to improving political and managerial leadership. The Council would not accept that this was a key issue and refused to agree it as part of the work.

Even where agreement was made about the priorities, the work was undermined, according to SSI, by the Council then giving the same task to their own staff, and even paying other consultants to do it, at the same time as the PAT was working on it.

One Council said that SSI inspectors had not been explicit enough in stating their concerns about the quality of management and competency of staff working on the recovery plan. This meant that such issues remained unspoken and were worked around rather than tackled.

Council staff felt that the list of failings kept changing, as follow-up inspections revealed more concerns. This 'shifting ground' meant that it was harder for the staff to focus on specific areas.

Claims of improvement by one Council could not be substantiated with evidence and SSI discovered additional concerns about the safety of children.

All Councils on special measures are required to produce their own Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), which forms the basis for the specification of PAT work and leads to a Project Initiation Document (PID). The documents produced were, in some cases, very large and complex. Even those which appeared to be focused on one service, e.g. for children, usually included wider application into whole services.

Some Councils had found it difficult to do the PIP alone or to an acceptable standard, according to SSI, usually because of diminished management capacity. In some cases, the performance action team was brought in to help with this and the starting point for the engagement, therefore, varied depending on the Council's circumstances. In one such case, the Council found this useful: 'working alongside the consultants on this document was a real boost to our confidence, in which we felt like partners'. In such cases, Councils felt more confident that the PAT was tailoring the work to their needs rather than using 'off the shelf' packages.

SSI inspectors and Councils emphasised the importance of involving and engaging Council staff in the scoping process. This was achieved in all of the Councils, although staff views varied on the extent of their contribution. In some cases, they were part of the 'broad brush' scoping; in others they said they were not really involved at all. Some felt at a disadvantage because of their 'failed' status and found it hard to play an active role.

In most cases, and certainly in the early experiences, the consultants were not involved, mainly because this early process formed the invitation to tender. This was seen as a missed opportunity by some of the PAT consultants, who would normally contribute to identifying and planning recovery strategies for their clients. It was unusual for them to be presented with a list of issues and priorities without having been involved in their development. The bidding teams were invited to meet with the Councils with their competitors, to clarify the specification before tenders were made. The PAT consultants found these meetings useful but no substitute for detailed one-to-one discussions. More information at this stage would have better informed the subsequent bid, helped them to tailor the proposals more closely to the needs of the Council and reduced the need for further analysis once the work began.

When the consultants had previously worked with the Councils, their knowledge and understanding of the Council and context was extremely helpful in engaging with the work. The PAT consultants found it particularly helpful where they had worked on the PIP. Where the teams were not involved at this stage, there were times when the improvement plan was not helpful, being either unclear about what was needed and who would do it, or extremely detailed. In either case, it did not provide strong foundations for the subsequent work.

Appointing the PAT

DH aimed to involve all Councils in the appointment of their performance action team, and this happened in most cases. Council representation was usually at Chief Executive and Director Level, when people were in these posts. Where there were vacancies, this role was sometimes taken by interim managers. Involvement included attending the presentations by the consultants and being part of the selection panel. In some cases, this was said to work well: the staff felt that they played an equal part in the proceedings; they were listened to and had some choice in the team that was selected, including looking at individual CVs and asking for some individuals to be taken off the teams. Where the process was clear, systematic and transparent and included the Councils, SSI inspectors regarded it as particularly successful.

PAT teams indicated that, in their view, the best experiences were those where the Council was involved throughout the process, helping to combat resistance towards the whole exercise. The involvement of the Chief Executive and the Director of Social Services in choosing the team gave the work significant corporate backing.

In some examples, particularly in the later commissions when the three main providers were engaged with a number of Councils, staff and SSI said there was no choice about the consultancy firm that would be working with them. This was accepted by the Councils, in some cases reluctantly, reinforcing their feelings of 'being done to'. It was not clear to consultants why some engagements were single tender rather than competitive, although they were satisfied that opportunities were fairly distributed. Overall they found the whole commissioning process to be professional, transparent and fair.

Some Councils would clearly have preferred to have been given money to buy their own consultants, possibly from those on the ODPM/DH OJEC framework arrangement or from other contacts of their own. Some had already brought in interim managers and other consultants on this basis to assist them. They

disliked having action teams 'imposed' on them and were uneasy at the use of private sector consultants.

Creating performance action teams

The consultant firms created performance action teams by bringing together internal employees and external consultants who brought specialist social services experience and knowledge. There was typically a core team of a senior partner, project manager and three or four main consultants, with access to others as needed, including external 'experts'. The teams matched the work specification, bringing together the required knowledge, skills and experience. The work specification is therefore crucial in finding the right people. Flexibility to adapt the specification, and the team, to changing circumstances and emerging issues is equally important, as are contingency arrangements in using contracted days and timescales.

Team skills and experience

In every case, council staff and SSI inspectors said that the credibility of the team rests largely on the people and the skills, knowledge and experience that they bring. In some teams, council staff criticised the team saying that there were not enough people with experience of working in social services departments. Some were thought to be 'out-of date'. Other members of the team were valued for their wider skills in, for example, performance management and organisational development/change. 'Knowing the social care business' was the most important factor for the staff.

SSI inspectors said that external consultants with social services experience gave credibility to the team; they also thought that Project leads should have similar experience. Where consultants did not have this experience, they had to try 'harder' than others to work appropriately within the culture, and there were times when their language or approach were said to have created some tensions. Some disruption arose from the turnover of staff in the action teams, as people changed jobs and sometimes consultancy firms.

Criteria for success

Some Council staff were concerned that the work specifications did not enable them to assess the effectiveness of the teams. They said that assessing their impact was difficult as the work was not specified in terms of impact or outcomes, but as inputs (things the PAT would do) or outputs (things the PAT would produce). SSI inspectors acknowledged that the specifications were output based and focused on evidence of productivity. They said that the need to demonstrate value for money added pressure to cite inputs and products.

They agreed that measures about the impact of the work on social work practice and management would have been helpful, if difficult to identify.

Overall Views

Where Council staff were involved in appointing performance action teams and scoping the work, they felt that it had been undertaken professionally and gone smoothly. Their reactions to being on special measures indicate the difficulties of engaging with a process that has such an impact on morale and motivation. Whether they are angry or accepting, feeling powerless or determined, their attitude will affect their response.

The specifications and work plans produced from the scoping documents were, in some cases, very large and complex. Even those which appeared to be focused on one service, e.g. for children, usually included wider application into whole services. Whilst this may be appropriate in thinking about whole systems approaches, it meant that the specifications were far-reaching and might, in some cases, have been over-ambitious.

The **performance action teams** found the process of commissioning and engagement to work well and to work more smoothly over time, as everyone became more experienced. The process of receiving and responding to bids for development work was familiar practice to all of the teams, who came from large consultancy firms. What was different was working in a three or four way partnership where it was not always clear who was the customer. Involving them in the scoping process would make better use of their skills in assessing situations and creating recovery strategies to address them.

SSI Inspectors acknowledged how much they had learned about commissioning and working with teams of consultants, and said that this had improved over time as the process became clearer. All agreed that the commissioning and scoping process needs to be undertaken 'without rushing' to make sure that it is accurate and is appropriately carried out.

Everyone identified the engagement of the Council staff as a key element in working with the PAT. Where Councils were willing to accept and work with the teams, progress was made. In others, an unwillingness to engage made it hard for the team and the Council to work together, much less to achieve change. Even when Councils were involved in the scoping and appointment of teams, there were still examples of staff and member resistance to the subsequent work.

Reflecting on success


What worked in commissioning and setting up Performance Action Teams

Participants to this review highlighted what they thought had gone well in this process and what could be improved. Their responses are shown in the table below.

What worked well	What could be improved
For Councils	For Councils
<p>Having a choice of consultants and involvement in their appointment</p> <p>Being involved in the scoping and planning of the work</p> <p>Being listened to and taken seriously</p> <p>Working with their Performance Improvement Plan</p> <p>Making sure that the specification is tailored to what is needed in their Council</p>	<p>More choice in consultants – PAT and individuals on the team</p> <p>Equal partnership in the appointment and scoping process</p> <p>Having people with more SSD experience on the PAT</p> <p>Linking inputs and outputs to desired outcomes in the specification</p> <p>Everyone needs to be really explicit about what improvements are needed and what are the priorities</p>
For PAT	For PAT
<p>Clear commissioning process</p> <p>Competitive process</p>	<p>Opportunity to meet with Council staff before the bid is made</p>

What worked well	What could be improved
For SSI	For SSI
<p>Clear commissioning process which has improved with experience</p> <p>Clear and relevant specification for the work</p> <p>Better engagement when Council accepted need for improvement and ready to work together</p>	<p>Take more time over the commissioning process</p> <p>Work with Council staff on the Performance Improvement Plan if needed</p>

Profile of Coventry City Council

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some	Promising	Some (H)	Uncertain	

(H) and (L) indicate a change in rating since 2002 (higher or lower, respectively)

Coventry Social Services were reviewed, between February and March 1998, and the judgement was that people in Coventry were not consistently well served by Social Services. While Coventry was committed to involving users and carers in determining not only their own care but also in developing services, and there were some gems of quality and innovation, some vulnerable people were at risk. The Joint Reviewers acknowledged that the Council had had to make some hard decisions to ensure that they only spent what could be afforded, but said that the impact of those decisions on users and carers was not always thought through. Both councillors and senior managers needed to give much greater priority to maintaining safe, secure and efficient services to ensure people were well served.

In early 2002 there were Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) inspections of both elderly and children's services. The elderly services showed some improvement but there were still problems in children's services. In May 2002 the star rating system was introduced and Coventry was given zero stars. The Director of Social Services left and the Chief Executive of the Council provided interim cover as Acting Director when the Performance Action Team (PAT) from KPMG began its work in August 2002.

KPMG set out project objectives, within its Project Initiation Document, to assist Coventry Social Services Department with delivering demonstrable improvements within the agreed timeframes in the key areas identified by the DH and the Council, and to leave the Council stronger and with the confidence to deliver performance improvements post involvement. To do this by delivering:

Work stream 1: Quality assurance of the PIP

Work stream 2: Children in need/child protection


Work stream 3: Children Looked After

The new Director started in November 2002, and was critical of the PAT brief and the work that had been done. He focused on introducing people to the basics of good operational practice, good management and robust performance management. The PAT was frustrated that their work plan was not renegotiated and their work fizzled out.

Concentrating on the basics of performance management – even the most basic concepts were not understood in the department – the new Director and his management team began to improve performance. In November 2003, Coventry Social Services were awarded their first star in the annual star ratings for Social Services and were taken off the special measures list after 5 years.

The work of the Performance Action Team had more or less come to an end by February 2003, but specific tasks on strategic partnerships and financial management continued until they left in March 2004.

Profile of London Borough of Haringey

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Uncertain	

A change in rating since November 2002 is represented by H for Higher or L for Lower

Haringey is a North London borough with a growing population currently estimated to be 223,000. The Borough had its Joint Review between March and April 1999. The overall summary was that the residents of Haringey and the users of social services were generally well served. The Council was described as continuing to make positive changes in order to improve the delivery of services and most of the weaknesses identified by the Review team were ones that the Social Services Department recognised and were addressing. However, in June 2000, a children's services inspection found that the service was poorly resourced compared to a similar group of councils and under-funded, spending well below its Standing Spending Assessment (SSA). There were some positives, but as a result of the inspection Haringey's children's services were placed on enhanced monitoring (special measures). Soon after this, the Part 8 Review of the management of Victoria Climbié's case was published, and the trial of Victoria's murderers and the first phase of the Inquiry into her death followed. Haringey was rarely out of the glare of the media spotlight and experienced a constant stream of damaging publicity.

A follow-up inspection took place in February 2002, and found virtually a complete turnover of managers, and social workers in the two district teams. Although there were improvements since the June 2000 inspection, this had not been sustained throughout the period. In May 2002, when SSI published the star ratings for all councils, the underlying service assessments produced a rating of zero stars. Council members and a local MP asked DH for additional support.

A PAT from KPMG began work at the end of October 2002. Its role was to accelerate the change processes currently underway, and to help senior management assess the way they had implemented the changes made so far in order to learn lessons for the future:

Work stream 1: Retention and staff development

Work stream 2: Increasing family placement capacity

Work stream 3: Raising the quality of social work

Work stream 4: Working in partnership

Work stream 5: Managing change

KPMG provided additional days for two further work streams to support the Council in delivering improved services in two areas for its Looked After Children:

Work stream 1: to assist in raising educational attainment levels for children

Work stream 2: To assist in improving the commissioning of placements

After some initial difficulties, the project management team worked well together. The most successful thing KPMG did was to put in place a workload management scheme, which has become a showcase as a good practice model. Less successful were the change management and commissioning work streams. In November 2003, Haringey was one of six authorities that moved from zero to one star. Although the Council was ranked as 'weak', in January 2004 the Audit Commission recognised that Haringey had put the building blocks in place to improve performance. The council still needed to improve the quality of Education and Social Services. The Performance Action Team finished in March 2004.

Chapter Three

Working with Councils

Key messages

- Performance Action Teams tackled a range of strategic tasks and, to a lesser extent, direct practice
- Councils needed help with basic skills and knowledge of the business including telling the 'performance' story
- Some products were created; collaborative methods of working were seen as more important in facilitating sustainable change.
- The presence of the PAT gave credibility and status to the Council at a time of low morale
- Work specifications should be implemented flexibly to reflect new information and changing situations
- PAT need to understand the Council context without spending too long on further analysis of problems or 're-inspecting'. Innovative approaches may help action teams to clarify the context and start to move the Council forward at the same time

Introduction

From the outset, DH envisaged the performance action teams providing help in the following areas:

- improving social work practice;
- developing/embedding performance management;
- enhancing commissioning strategies and their implementation;
- recruitment and retention issues.

The early brief described 'adding capacity and supporting Councils in making improvements'. It was recognised that they would 'neither direct policy, nor make operational decisions, because it is the council's staff who must be the 'improvers'. PAT will provide senior staff with support and advice on which they can act within the limits of their delegated powers, or to put as options to their Members'.

All performance action teams were expected to provide expertise to work alongside frontline staff and their managers to get the basics right, and to improve social work practice. They were also intended to tackle strategic issues such as developing and supporting delivery of strategies and in all cases to fully involve the council's staff to help them 'own' the development process.

Activities

The broad scoping documents set out the priority areas for the performance action teams, recognising that more detailed work specifications would be developed by the successful team, in discussion with the Council and SSI. Typically, the teams were commissioned to address the following types of activity, set here against the three priority areas identified in the previous chapter:

PAT activities

Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with staff to improve front line practice• Training in practice areas e.g. risk assessment• Developing skills and expertise• Making links between practice and performance management and demonstrating these to staff
Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing vision and strategy for children and adults services• Undertaking needs analysis and service projections• Undertaking service reviews• Management training

- Working alongside managers/mentoring
- Working on recruitment and retention procedures and practice
- Developing sickness absence monitoring
- Some management of change activities

Systems

- Developing commissioning strategies and supporting their implementation
- Helping to produce guidance and procedures for staff, training and familiarising staff in their use
- Developing performance management systems and expertise
- Improving management information and its use
- Reviewing and developing finance systems
- Advising on organisational structures and processes
- Workload management schemes

Demonstrating improvement

- Developing and implementing Performance Improvement Plans
- Developing quality assurance and monitoring for PIPs

Other

- Developing partnerships with other agencies
- Supporting the council in working with other partner agencies and stakeholders in the area
- Other tasks pertaining to the organisation and delivery of services, information and communication systems and general management

Focus of the work

The teams worked with individuals and groups of staff, mainly at strategic and middle management levels. While there were some direct practice work streams in some Councils, the work was mainly with senior staff. On reflection, some Council staff and SSI inspectors wished that more attention had been paid to quality of practice

Our interviews with practitioners across the Councils confirmed that in most cases, first line managers and practitioners had little contact with the performance action teams and, in some cases, knew them only as 'men in suits'. Some had been involved in early discussions, felt listened to and were then disappointed to 'never see them again'; some people had e-mailed the consultants for advice and received no reply. Some had enjoyed training courses run by the PAT consultants; others said they did not know who was part of a PAT and who was a consultant working directly for the Council. Where specific work was carried out with practitioners and first line managers, it made a big impact. There was some very positive feedback about the contribution of specific team members who worked alongside first line managers making the links between practice issues and performance management.

Counting 'smartly'

Consultants said that one of their key contributions, and this was endorsed by Council staff and SSI, was in helping people to 'count smartly'. Because some Councils did not fully understand how performance management informed performance indicators, they were disadvantaged in the star ratings process. When they had worked with the PAT to set up and run appropriate systems, they were able to 'tell a better story' from their practice.

Much of the strategic work related to the quality of management practice and developing and implementing systems. These often related to policies that have emerged over the last ten years, including commissioning, performance management and key Children Act requirements, as well as key messages from previous enquiries and inspection reports. The consultants were surprised to discover that, often, Council staff needed practical help with developing and implementing basic systems and procedures. In one example, consultants found that 'staff did not understand what performance management was about, even though they thought they were doing it'. There was 'too big a gap between what they were actually doing and the expectations on them'.

In some cases, the consultants found that the original scope for the PAT work was misleading in assuming greater understanding or higher functioning than actually existed. In one example, the team discovered that it was not possible to implement the required children's service plan because there no overall vision or strategy for the service and this needed to be done first. In other cases, consultants felt that the description of the Council's capability had been overstated. This highlights a key issue relating to 'analysis', which is the source of some contention between the Councils and the performance action teams.

'Diagnostics'

Once the PAT mobilisation meeting had been held it was agreed that the work should get started as quickly as possible. Some action teams were criticised by Council staff for spending too much time on 'diagnostics' or 'clever analysis' of the issues. Given that the scoping documents had been drawn up from inspection findings and joint review reports, this was regarded as an unnecessary and expensive luxury. As one manager explained: 'we already know what's wrong; we don't need to be told again, we need help to improve'. It was considered inappropriate and sometimes intimidating for staff to be re-interviewed when 'they have already been inspected to death' and are 'going over the same ground'.

Some council staff recognised that the consultants needed to familiarise themselves with the current issues and circumstances. They saw this as reasonable if the team were to produce tailor made approaches, rather than 'off the shelf' packages. However, they felt that alternative methods, such as group discussions and workshops, might be used, rather than individual interviews. In only one example was the PAT criticised for 'taking the Joint Review recommendations at face value when they should have done further analysis'.

The consultants all felt that, in the first stages of an engagement, they need to make their own assessment of the situation in the Council. One of the PAT team project managers emphasised the importance of getting alongside staff in the councils to 'discover what understandings they held' and to inform the team about what is happening in the organisation. Even within a specific brief, this was an important part of working 'with' rather than 'doing to' the staff. The teams recognised that a careful balance is needed between further diagnostic work and getting started quickly. Each case should be judged on its own merit, depending on the quality and age of the available intelligence.

While recognising that inspections and joint reviews did usually make clear the issues, SSI inspectors considered that the PAT should spend some time getting up to speed with the Council and its issues. It was also important to adapt and develop the work in discussion with the council staff, within the parameters of the agreed contract. There was a view in SSI that the PIP should remain a 'work in progress' rather than something that is signed off and closed at the outset.

Flexible implementation

Generally participants were happy with the scoping documents **as long as** they could be adapted in the light of new information and could be implemented flexibly. Difficulties arose where this flexibility was not negotiable through the project management process.

The need for flexibility showed itself in two specific examples. Where new information comes to light when the team starts working, and where a new management team comes into the Council during the PAT engagement. It was not uncommon for the PAT to discover that the brief for the work had gaps which emerged once the work started, that the focus might be wrong, or as in the example above, that other work had to be carried out first. In such cases, council staff said that flexibility to change the focus of the work was crucial. There were examples where this had happened to the satisfaction of all parties, either by delaying a piece of work until something contingent on it had occurred, or by adjusting the timings of a task. All of the parties agreed with this in principle. However, there were also examples where such negotiations had not been possible and this had created some tension and disagreement.

This flexibility was particularly significant in Councils where new social services management teams, appointed mid way through the PAT engagement, disagreed with the direction and work that was taking place. In all eight councils, new directors were appointed either just before or during the life of the PAT. In some cases, the PAT work continued under the control of the new director; in others, there was frustration that the contract and work plan was not re-negotiable with SSI. In these situations, managers believed that progress was impeded, which affected the PAT's credibility in their eyes, and in some cases, brought its work to a standstill.

Role of the PAT and methods

The performance action teams were not intended to do the work for the Councils or to tell the staff what to do. They added capacity only in the sense of being an extra pair of hands and providing additional support where a Council was beleaguered by staff or skills shortages. In all cases, it was

intended that the Councils would continue to take responsibility for the work and to make best use of the skills, knowledge and experience of the PAT consultants in supporting this.

The consultants talked about their approach in terms of 'collaborative working', 'facilitating', 'empowering', working alongside and engaging people, transferring skills and involving people to make the changes sustainable for themselves. They became increasingly aware, with experience, of the need to work sensitively with staff, to encourage and assist them. Members of the action teams talked about helping Councils with 'steps to progress' or 'building the foundations' for lasting improvement. They used a variety of approaches with individuals and groups, including mentoring, focus groups, workshops, training, demonstration sessions, external visits and consultations. Some methods are described below:

Building on existing practice

In some cases, the consultants were helping to build on systems which the Councils had already developed but which they were not fully using. For example, in one Council a needs analysis document was created from the data already produced, but not collated by the in-house team. One team commented that 'failing' councils sometimes do the right things but don't 'join them up in the right way' and they were able to offer a new perspective for taking existing systems forward.

Modelling

An important dimension of the PAT approach was in modelling different ways of working and this was felt by some teams to contribute to culture change in the Council. For example, where there was a culture of poorly attended meetings, late starts and rambling agendas, the PAT made a point of modelling good practice, to the surprise of those used to the old way of working. People quickly learned that they would miss out if they arrived late, and changed their behaviour. Similarly, the introduction of project management practice in systematically starting and finishing tasks was helpful to Council staff. In other examples, the teams felt they had been able to achieve a change of culture in practice e.g. Children in Need, where people changed the way they were thinking and working in this area. Another aspect of modelling was in demonstration workshops where a new commissioning process was rehearsed with staff working with older people and children with disabilities.

Bringing in ideas from outside the Council

The consultants observed that a characteristic of 'failing' councils is that they tend to have a 'siege mentality', are inward looking and do not take opportunities to seek out and make use of good practice from other Councils. One of the aims of the PAT was to bring in examples of good practice from their wide knowledge of other councils and other models. They did this as part of their everyday work, including producing 'best practice' guides.

They also tried a number of ways to give the Councils access to staff in three star councils. In one example, an expert panel of directors from three star authorities acted as advisors to both the PAT and the Councils. Overall, neither the PAT nor the Council found this model particularly helpful. The gap between zero and three star councils was wide in some cases and very small in others, and it was not always easy for the panel to appreciate the difficulties being encountered. Also the team concluded that the expertise of the Directors was too generalist/broad and an expert network of lower tier officers might have been better. In another example the consultants set up a link with a neighbouring three star council with the aim of encouraging exchange between the two, including sharing of documents and visits to each other's services. Again this was felt to have been useful for some, but overall not very successful. It was difficult to get people to take the time to make visits and very quickly the staff in the partner council had moved on. The most useful aspect of this arrangement was in reassuring participating managers that in some things they were as good as, or even better than, the three star authority. 'It helped us realise that we were not complete crap and that they could learn from us too'.

Products

The performance action teams did create some products which have been highlighted by DH as useful to others e.g. commissioning strategies, workload management systems, needs analysis reports, best practice guidance, referral/care pathways. However, the teams emphasised that their aim was to help with implementation rather than to produce documents. Some Council staff appreciated the work they produced, others were sceptical about their usefulness, e.g. best practice guides were seen as something that would be quickly out of date.

The experience of the Councils

The extent to which the Councils found the PAT activities and methods to be useful sometimes seemed to reflect their own engagement and their attitude to having the team in the first place. Some were grudging in acknowledging the helpfulness of what the teams did, said that it slowed them down and was of

little value. Some seemed to be intent on discrediting them; 'nothing they did was helpful'. Some staff highlighted that promises were not delivered, for reasons that were not always clear to them.

Visibility

Both Council staff and SSI inspectors said that the performance action teams could have been more visible, particularly where they had offices in the Council and 'were not often there'. While time spent in a room is not a useful measure, visibility, particularly of the Project Lead, is seen as an important indicator of commitment to the organisation. In most engagements, PAT consultants said they encouraged the Council to introduce them and their work to staff through information sessions and bulletins. Our interviews with practitioners suggested that these strategies were not always effective. Some practitioners said they were 'vaguely aware' of the team but did not know who was on it or what they were doing, and apart from some training contacts, did not know about the overall strategy.

Practitioners and managers described their perceptions of 'many people coming in and out', 'lots of people being involved' and 'seeing a consultant once and then never again'. At times, there was a danger of 'consultant-overload', particularly when senior management teams were staffed entirely by consultants.

Ways of working

Views differed about how well PAT balanced building capacity in others and doing the task for them. Some staff were 'just angry that they wouldn't do it for them'; others highlighted this as a strength of the model and appreciated the sensitive and empowering style of the consultants. There was positive feedback about the skills and knowledge brought by the teams and their helpful input in bringing fresh perspectives and ideas. Often it was individuals on the team who made greatest impact, typically where they were able to engage people and work skilfully and sensitively alongside them. Council staff generally appreciated the collaborative style of working and where relationships were good, they found it empowering and validating. There was also a view that the PAT gave the council staff and the work they were doing some credibility and status, by virtue of their involvement. Some said the team brought a helpful business-like approach and the new ideas from other authorities were useful at times.

Specific tasks

Towards the end of the engagement, Councils took a more active lead role in directing the last 30/40 days of the PAT contract. DH deliberately took a back seat, recognising that the Council had recovered its confidence and capability sufficiently to steer the work. Such days were used for specific pieces of work

such as developing finance systems. Council staff generally preferred this way of working, rather than having the team engaged on a range of more nebulous activities such as 'managing change' events. This reflected the increased confidence of the Council in managing its improvement programme, and the transfer of the lead role at this stage was generally regarded as a significant part of the PAT exit strategy.

The experience of SSI

SSI inspectors generally appreciated the collaborative working style of the consultants and how they balanced 'working with' staff and 'doing the work'. They recognised that some aspects of the specification took longer or were more difficult to implement than others and that unforeseen changes or emerging issues could influence the work. It was regarded as particularly unhelpful when Councils requested a specific piece of work from the consultants and then disregarded or 'rubbished' it. Individual team members were noted for their particularly sensitive or empowering style and for what they were able to achieve with the Council.

Overall views

The PAT work covered a range of areas and activities relating to management, systems and structures and, to a lesser extent, to frontline practice. Participants recognised the importance of the areas covered and would have liked more direct work with practitioners. A flexible approach by all parties to delivering the work specification is essential to the engagement. Expectations must be realistic: some staff were disappointed because they expected the PAT to 'make it all right for them' and they couldn't do this. Although the presence of the PAT boosted the confidence of the Council in some cases, they could have no 'quick fixes' in what were often long-term, large-scale agendas for change.

The shortfall in basic skills raises concerns about the way that national policy initiatives have been implemented in the last ten years. It is particularly significant when this affects a Council's ability to represent itself in the performance assessment framework.

Reflecting on success


What worked in Performance Action Teams?

Participants to this review highlighted what they thought had gone well in relation to the work of the performance action teams and what might be improved. Their responses are shown in the table overleaf.

What worked well	What could be improved
For Councils	For Councils
<p>Collaborative and empowering style of PAT</p> <p>Good relationships</p> <p>Mentoring and critical friend role</p> <p>Sensitivity in working with 'bruised' staff</p> <p>Adding capacity and transferring skills</p> <p>Experienced SSD consultant working alongside practitioners and frontline managers</p> <p>Learning to 'count smartly' - explaining performance management and linking new systems to practice</p> <p>Bringing in best practice ideas from outside and visiting other CSSR</p> <p>Calibre of PAT teams in some cases</p> <p>Business like approach, modelling good practice</p> <p>Undertaking specific pieces of work e.g. on financial systems</p> <p>Flexibility in reviewing and amending the specification of the work where necessary</p>	<p>To avoid re-inspecting and too much time on further diagnostics and analysis when the work starts.</p> <p>Flexibility to amend or renegotiate the specification</p> <p>'Expert panels' not really helpful</p> <p>Make sure that team is appropriately experienced for the tasks e.g. have up to date SSD practice experience and experience of systems</p> <p>Practitioners would like more involvement and more awareness of whole thinking</p> <p>Greater management capacity can be perceived as 'rubbing salt in the wounds' of practitioners who are under-resourced</p> <p>Slowing down the process</p> <p>Poor team visibility</p> <p>Too many consultants coming in and out.</p>

What worked well	What could be improved
For PAT	For PAT
<p>Working collaboratively with council staff</p> <p>Good products and modelling new ways of working</p>	<p>Different models for engaging expert advice from outside</p> <p>Aligning scope with what is found in the organisation once work begins</p>
For SSI	For SSI
<p>Using external consultants to engage and develop the internal talents of the existing staff</p> <p>The collaborative working style of the consultants</p> <p>Building on what the council was already doing well or trying to do well</p>	<p>Councils must be engaged with the process and not undermine it</p> <p>Consultants need to have experience and understanding of social services business and effective ways of bringing in expert advice.</p> <p>More direct work with practitioners where appropriate.</p> <p>Keep Performance Improvement Plan as a 'work in progress'.</p>

Profile of North East Lincolnshire Council

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	

(H) and (L) indicate a change in rating since 2002 (higher or lower, respectively)

North East Lincolnshire is a small unitary authority (population of approximately 160,000), formed in 1996 as part of Local Government Reorganisation. In November 1999, following the death of a child, NE Lincs was warned by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) that they faced direct government intervention, unless they improved. A Joint Review between February and April 2001 concluded that NE Lincs met some people's needs well, and had improved some of its key services from a relatively poor position. There had been a significant improvement in the political support for social services locally. Yet, support in the community remained at very low levels for some groups, and the cost of some services was high. A combination of some serious budget risks, the need to turn round the areas of low performance, the effect of some major developments in the local Health service and within the Council itself, and the slow development of systems to monitor overall performance, all led to a judgement of uncertain prospects for continued improvement. The Review was presented to the Council in January 2002.

In May 2002, the Social Services Inspectorate gave a "zero star" rating for the Social Services Department. A PAT from PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) began working in NE Lincs in August 2002. In describing the scope of work, the Department of Health (DH) pointed out the greatest concern for Children's Services. Although Child Protection Services had been improving, the SSI had not seen sufficient progress. The proposal from PWC and subsequent Project Initiation Document contained the three works streams:

Work stream 1: Implementing the PIP

Work stream 2: Developing the strategic direction of children's services

Work stream 3: Raising the quality of social work

The initial diagnostic phase was not well received. Both the SSI and the Council thought PWC were covering familiar ground – they knew the issues and the problems. PWC acknowledged this but regarded it as necessary, at least in the early engagements. NE Lincs managers asked for a compendium of good practice from other authorities, around the country, but PWC found it hard to deliver this. Training events took place but were not well received by staff. A plan to involve Sunderland social services managers as sources of information about good practice, and as mentors, was reported as good by some, but unworkable by others. More managers did go to Sunderland in January/February 2003, when their mood was lifting and morale growing. Some work on financial management had useful outcomes. What was most successful was the hands on work with the managers – by someone whom staff respected. Senior managers reported that within a couple of months, the PAT showed that they were accountable also to the Council.

As early as May 2002, the Council was in no fear of further intervention, because they knew that Social Services would gain the Council 1 point towards the next CPA score. Social Services managers had gained so much in confidence that they could predict 2 points in 2003. In December 2002, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) categorised the Council as poorly performing, but by January 2004, the Audit Commission judged North East Lincolnshire to have improved in some key services, notably children's social services and benefits. The overall Council's CPA score was "weak", being one of only four authorities that have progressed out of the "poor" category. In November 2003, North East Lincolnshire was one of six authorities that moved from zero to one star. The Performance Action Team finished in June 2003, after 11 months work.

Profile of Swindon Borough Council

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
No (L)	Uncertain (H)	Some	Uncertain	STILL NO STARS

(H) and (L) indicate a change in rating since 2002 (higher or lower, respectively)

Swindon is a small unitary council, formally part of Wiltshire. Over the past 50 years Swindon has developed from being primarily a railway town of 76,000 people to a major regional centre where more than 180,000 people live. The growth is due to continue and by 2011 the population estimate is 208,000. Most of the population live in the urban area of Swindon, which is surrounded by rural communities and smaller towns.

A Joint Review of Swindon Social Services took place between June and September 2001. A presentation of the findings of this Review was given to Swindon's Housing, Social Services and Inclusion Policy Commission in June 2002. The overall conclusion was that Swindon Social Services were serving some people well and prospects for improvement were poor. Swindon was described as a new authority with high aspirations and ambitions, which had yet to get to grips with some key aspects of corporate management and with the complexity of social care issues.

Despite this, some people received a good service and staff were committed and worked hard. Children's services were generally stronger and there was evidence of some improvement. In adults' services assessment and care management systems were not working well. Lack of reliable financial and activity data made it difficult to plan. Some services were not cost effective. The majority of managers responsible for assessment and care management functions for older people and people with physical disabilities were acting up or on temporary contracts. This situation was not sustainable. There was no overall leadership and direction within the Authority and during the Joint Review there was a period when there was no political administration. Corporate objectives were not well defined and there was a lack of vision for

Social Services. Within Social Services the lack of strategic plans that integrate service and financial planning was a reflection of this.

Swindon was rated zero star in May 2002, and consequently produced a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) that was agreed by SSI. All zero star councils were required to make demonstrable improvement by October/November 2002. Following the refresh, the Chief Inspector of Social Services decided that Swindon Borough Council would benefit from the support of a Performance Action Team (PAT) to speed up implementation of the Council's PIP.

A PAT from PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) began working in Swindon in January 2003, and their approach, methodology, deliverables and timetable was set out as three work streams:

Work stream 1 – Adult Services

Work stream 2 – Children's Services

Work stream 3 – Performance Management System for Social Services

Progress was slow due mainly to limited internal management capacity. Some useful work was undertaken in Children's services and some progress was made around information and performance management. Relationships were strained between all of the parties and all sides acknowledged that this was not a productive engagement. Improvements began when all of the government agencies started working together with the Council; and for Social Services, with the appointment of a new Director and Assistant Directors for Adults and Children. The Performance Action Team effectively finished in October 2003, but PWC continued to help with Financial Management initiatives until April 2004. At the time of this review, the Council was working towards an all-government target for improvement by September 2004. Social Services was considering a franchise arrangement with Kent County Council to assist with on-going improvement work.

Chapter Four

Managing the Process

Key messages

- Effective project management is crucial and the arrangements were generally regarded as successful
- The work is facilitated by clear roles and relationships built on trust and mutual respect
- There are mixed views about how to involve Council Members in the process
- PAT work was most effective where the teams were engaged with competent and committed Council staff who had the authority to lead the recovery
- Exit strategies were linked to contracts rather than outcomes

Introduction

'Performance action teams are formally project managed so that they address discrete areas of work and set timescales linked to tangible deliverables that the council owns. This disciplined approach is used to embed their key purpose, that is, the sustainability of improvements that have been made by the council's staff while the PAT is on site.' (DH)

Each PAT engagement was formally project managed using PRINCE 2 methodology. This centred around regular, scheduled meetings of the PAT Project Boards, linked to key deliverables; a Project Initiation Document to direct the work and monitor its progress and clear allocation of responsibility to project lead officers in SSI, the PAT and the Council. In the earlier evaluation, the management arrangements were highlighted by all parties as a key area, particularly clarifying the roles of the three/four key partners and improving relationships between them; agreeing the role and weight of the Project Boards where practice varied, and agreeing the most effective ways to involve Councillors. This chapter describes the

participants' views of the management arrangements and what they considered worked well and what could be improved.

Project Board

Formal Project Boards were set up for each engagement. They were hosted by the Council whose staff were responsible for making the arrangements and note taking. The meetings were chaired by SSI and sometimes by DH officials. SSI inspectors considered it important that they took the lead in this, as they had a formal link to the Council. DH had a watching brief over the proceedings and could intervene if they ran into difficulties. PAT consultants were responsible for presenting reports to the meetings, in consultation with the Council. Meetings were programmed in advance to coincide with the key milestones and delivery dates within the overall project plan.

Representation varied across the different PAT engagements, but the meetings generally included:

SSI (Chair)

Regional Director

Lead Business Link Inspector (Project Manager)

DH

DH official in attendance and sometimes in Chair

Council

Representation varied across the engagements but could include:

Council Members e.g. leader for social services

Chief Executive/Assistant Chief Executive

Director of Social Services

Assistant Director (Project Manager)

Other staff as required

PAT

Senior Partner

Lead consultant (Project Manager)

Other team members as required

Other (in some cases)

ODPM lead government official

Membership and representation

This core membership was agreed by most of the review participants to be appropriate to the task and gave the Board a fitting level of seniority and status. A number of issues were raised about representation including:

Level of representation – representatives needed to be of sufficient seniority to engage with this high level meeting. Where Chief Executives were involved in the Boards, this was universally regarded as helpful in ensuring senior level engagement in the work. There were dilemmas about involving middle managers. In some examples, Council officers wanted to include their senior managers who were leading the operational work. In another, the senior management team felt that the board had operated at such a senior level that it was disconnected from the operational realities with which they were working. They were concerned that the PAT Board operated ‘like an island’, set apart from day to day realities, including other Councils structures and meetings.

Number of people – the boards needed to include key representatives but not be too large. In one small unitary authority, staff found it ‘overwhelming’ to have 16 people attending one meeting. In the view of SSI and the Council staff, the meetings needed to be attended only by key people to ensure good working numbers, and reduce their size and cost. They were particularly concerned that no more consultants on high daily rates attended than was absolutely necessary.

Involving members – there were different experiences of involving members in the Boards. In the first engagements, members were not included on the PAT Boards, and officers were expected to keep them informed and involved in the process through their usual channels. In later engagements, members have attended meetings with the Chief Inspector, and been more directly involved in the subsequent PAT deployment. In some examples this has worked extremely well. Where members were initially excluded from the PAT Board in one engagement, this was found to be counter-productive. When they were then invited as observers only, this was even worse.

Everyone agreed that members must be engaged in the whole process, however this is done. Social Services Departments were often blamed for a poor Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA). In some Councils, SSI inspectors suggested that members had not grasped sufficiently their responsibilities for service departments, particularly in the Unitary authorities. The zero star rating was as much a wake up call for them as for officers. Where councillors were not willing to engage with the PAT process or actively

undermined it (according to SSI), it was an uphill battle for everyone. In some cases, a change in political leadership was seen as instrumental to members' engagement with the recovery. For some participants, the involvement of members and their willingness to engage are the most crucial factors in successful turnaround.

Work of the Boards

The aim of the Board was to manage the project and to monitor progress through the deliverables. An early task was to agree the Project Initiation Document, which turned the scope and Performance Improvement Plan into a working project plan. This document formed the basis for subsequent monitoring, alongside other reports of progress.

The Boards were conducted formally and were generally regarded as 'business-like and efficient'. Everyone, to some degree, said that this model gave a clear focus to the work, and helpfully modelled good practice in setting up, seeing through and monitoring the delivery of the tasks.

Some key issues were identified including:

Developing working relationships

As the Boards were formal, the working arrangements supporting them were particularly important. At the outset, it was useful for the project leads to meet before the first Board meeting, to make each other's acquaintance and start to develop working relationships. This was particularly helpful where councils were feeling awed or hostile to the process. Some were still reeling from their earlier meetings with the Chief Inspector - 'not an experience I wish to repeat' and were wary of the formal arena.

Separating the PIP and the PAT

In one or two cases, progress on the Performance Improvement Plan was separated from the formal project monitoring in the PAT Board by holding two concurrent meetings. The project leads had the opportunity to reflect on progress and agree actions. While it created more work for those involved, it led to more productive formal meetings.

Reporting

Tensions ran high in some cases, around reports to the Board. The PAT was responsible for reporting progress, in discussion with the Council staff. Where the reports were produced late, sometimes the day before the meeting, there was no opportunity for this discussion and Council staff complained of being

excluded and disadvantaged. This led to disagreements in the Board and unexpected challenge. On two occasions, SSI inspectors commented that they found the reports by the PAT to be overly complex and confusing documents and in one case, the inspector drafted a template for reporting that was subsequently used. PAT consultants had most difficulty when the minutes and action points of meetings were not written up and circulated promptly.

Managing the work

SSI inspectors were responsible for accounting for the days used by the consultants and signing these off for payment. Where they were not close to the day-to-day work, some inspectors acknowledged that they found it difficult to monitor this closely. Some council staff questioned how the days were accounted for and whether the PAT was being managed effectively under this arrangement.

Roles and relationships

In the 2003 evaluation, it was emphasised that roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and agreed in this complex four-way partnership. Unlike normal commissions where a single client contracts with and pays a consultant to do specific work, there were different interests and alliances.

DH	The work was commissioned, contracted and paid for by DH
SSI	It was managed by SSI inspectors and overseen by the PAT Boards.
	The consultants and Council staff worked together to achieve the agreed tasks
Councils	The Council was intended to be the lead improver
PAT	The PAT consultants were independent and needed to gain the trust of both SSI and the Councils

Within these arrangements, there was great potential for strain, misunderstanding and different alliances to emerge. For example, the Council staff often described themselves as the 'wounded partner' or being 'on the back foot' in this relationship. While they had (usually) signed up to the work plan, they did not always support it and sometimes resented having to work with others in this way. They could not change the work plan or the way that the resources were allocated without the permission of the Project Board.

There were disagreements between Councils and SSI inspectors about the judgements that had been made and how best to take the PAT forward. SSI and DH officials did not always agree themselves. Inspectors and Council managers emphasised that SSI has a regulatory rather than a developmental role and there were times when these became confused.

The PAT recognised that their independence was important and were aware that they needed to build the trust of Council staff to establish that they were not a 'DH Trojan Horse'. Council staff were frequently critical of PAT consultants. Where progress was slow or conflict occurred, some council staff felt that the PAT distanced themselves, blamed the council and were more interested in 'looking good' for SSI and DH, than in working with them. When there were strained relationships between the Council staff and the PAT, or between SSI and the Council, the other partner talked about their role as a 'mediator' or 'safety valve'.

Where it worked well, however, the partners said they were very clear about their roles, their authority and accountability for the project. Disagreements were discussed and worked out together openly. Communication was key to achieving constructive working relationships. In the best examples there were regular meetings or telephone conferences between the three project leads (SSI, PAT and Council), sometimes as often as once a week in the early days. This moved to fortnightly and monthly as the work progressed. Regular telephone contact between the PAT senior partner and the Director of Social Services was also cited as effective and much appreciated on both sides. Clarity about how information would be handled between partners was important. One PAT made it clear that all information about the work and progress would be shared; where this was less clear, some PAT consultants found themselves caught unhelpfully between the Council and SSI.

Working together

Trust and good communication were developed over time, when people came to know and respect each other. All of the performance action teams emphasised the importance of having a consistent lead officer in the council with whom to liaise. Ideally this person has the necessary seniority and authority to make decisions and co-ordinate the work. Likewise, clearly designated project leads were identified in SSI and in the PAT; the more visible and approachable these people were, the better the relationships.

Some of the engagements were said to be 'blighted' when key people in any of the organisations left or changed their job. Inspectors, consultants and council staff came and went, some to promotion, some to different jobs and some due

to sickness absence. While such turnover is inevitable, particularly in organisations in crisis, it is disruptive in this kind of engagement. Where Council Directors and senior managers changed during the process, this caused some difficulties for the teams in securing and maintaining agreement to the on-going work programme.

A zero star announcement can have a major affect on staff turnover. It is not uncommon for there to be a complete or partial turnover of senior staff and there were new Directors of Social Services in all eight Councils. In their absence, posts were covered by interim managers either acting up (or down) from within or who were brought in on temporary contracts. Recruiting a new management team was often a major step in the recovery of the Council and some only realised or achieved this well into the PAT engagement. Here, management teams, 'clanked' along unable or unwilling to see that drastic action was required, either to support people in making the transition to leadership or by bringing in new leaders. In these cases, the implementation of the PAT could be instrumental in holding the work in the absence of leadership or developing new understandings.

Where entire senior management teams had left, those representing the council in the PAT engagement might be new to the department or to that role; and they had varying levels of authority to make decisions and lead the recovery. Where the Council was in 'meltdown' or 'a whirlwind' it was impossible for those in this role to know how to represent it. When the PAT team was engaged at this stage, it was very difficult to establish mutuality and to agree an action plan. In these situations, some people said the PAT 'never stood a chance' and felt that it should not have been engaged until a stable situation was achieved.

When a new, permanent senior management team was appointed, it was disruptive, in some examples, to the PAT process. Inevitably, new teams wanted to bring in their own ideas, styles and strategies. Where the PAT work did not match these, and it could not be re-negotiated, there were tensions and in some cases the engagement floundered until new relations were negotiated. In other cases, the new Directors supported the PAT work, even if they did not always agree with its direction.

Exit strategies

The previous evaluation highlighted the need to clarify the exit strategies and how the transition would occur.

The PAT withdrawal was discussed and signed-off through the Project Boards. PAT engagements were for a limited period; the length of contract was agreed at the outset and was linked to the delivery of outputs rather than outcomes in the Council. There was an expectation that the work would be specific and time-limited rather than open-ended. The experience of the 8 Councils varied depending on the progress of the engagement. Some finished their contracts and went on to PAT 2 and PAT3. In others there were times when the work tailed off, sometimes to the mutual relief of all concerned. In all cases, there was a formal signing off process at the Project Board.

Some of the teams and Boards reflected on what had been achieved, but inspectors and Council staff said evaluation was difficult because of the way the work had been specified. In some cases, the exit coincided with an inspection, which created a 'natural hiatus' and an opportunity for 'independent' assessment of progress. Where this occurred, this was felt to be useful by all those involved, giving a more thorough assessment of the progress than was gained from the Board monitoring alone. It was suggested that inspections might be more routinely linked to the end of PAT engagement.

In most of the Councils, the exit was linked to the transfer of the lead role in managing the last 30 or 40 days of the PAT contract. As noted earlier, this was valued by Councils and marked a significant transition point in the process.

SSI inspectors and the consultants were concerned that Councils might 'take their feet off the pedal' once the teams had left and the spotlight had shifted. They suggested that some follow-up activities might be useful e.g. small studies or interventions a year later, in addition to the ongoing business link relationship with CSCI.

Overall views

Overall, those interviewed acknowledged that the management of the PAT process had worked well, supported by an efficient if, at times, uncomfortable formal process. Issues relating to representation and operation of the PAT Board, engagement of members and exit strategies were raised. Of particular interest is the dilemma about the timing of the PAT engagement and whether this should be attempted only when permanent managers are appointed. Overall it does not seem to matter if the staff are permanent or interim – what counts is that they are committed, competent and given sufficient authority to make decisions, to lead the improvement strategy and engage with the PAT process. If these conditions are not met, then the engagement of a PAT may not be appropriate – or may need to take a different form – for example,

becoming the interim management to plug the gap? In either case, the PAT can contribute to the improvement process.


Reflecting on success What worked in Performance Action Teams?

Review participants highlighted what they thought had gone well in relation to the management of the performance action teams and what might be improved. Their responses are shown in the table below.

What worked well	What could be improved
For Councils	For Councils
<p>Regular Project Board Meetings</p> <p>Monitoring progress through focus on deliverables</p> <p>Council administrating the Boards</p> <p>Regular meetings of the Project Managers outside of the Project Boards</p> <p>Regular contact with the PAT</p> <p>Involving Chief Executive</p> <p>Involving Members</p>	<p>Making sure that Council representation is at appropriate level – engages people rather than disconnecting them</p> <p>Making sure that reports to the Project Board are shared with them beforehand</p> <p>Avoiding very large meetings Resource intensive – avoid creating too many additional administrative tasks in servicing the Boards</p> <p>The Project Board needs to streamline with other Council processes – not be an ‘island’</p> <p>CSSR need to be equal partner in the process – can be intimidating at first</p> <p>Transparency and develop trust between the three partners – easy for collusion and scape-goating</p>

What worked well	What could be improved
For PAT	For PAT
<p>Business-like and efficient process The focus on deliverables The three way partnership Transparent relationships Regular Project manager meetings outside of the Project Board Having a consistent lead officer with authority to make decisions</p>	<p>Making sure that minutes are noted and circulated quickly Being clear about roles – who is the customer? Not making it any more bureaucratic Follow-up progress e.g. a year later</p>
For SSI	For SSI
<p>Chairing the Boards Monitoring progress by focusing on deliverables Project Management methodology Separating the discussion of the PIP and PAT Boards Having regular meetings with Project leads outside of the Project Boards</p>	<p>Involving members Ensuring Board reports are clearly written, agreed in advance and sent out in good time Clarifying roles and responsibilities Good liaison can be resource intensive Making links to other council activities e.g. ODPM Tie in inspection towards the end</p>

Profile of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some (H)	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	

(H) and (L) indicate a change in rating since 2002 (higher or lower, respectively)

Walsall covers 40 square miles and has a population of 260,000. By 2001, Walsall was facing a substantial corporate development agenda arising from the findings of several reports from government audit and inspection activities. Performance improvement activity in social services had to be delivered in the context of possible further government interventions with the council as a whole. Walsall Social Services was reviewed between August and October 2001 and assessed as not serving people well. While some people were happy with the traditional services provided, others experienced difficulty in gaining access to services, long waiting times, a poor range of services, and processes which were not sensitive to their needs. A high proportion of resources were tied up in providing residential, nursing and other building based care. There were too few preventative services for children. The quality and flexibility of community support for adults needed improvement. Overall, people were fitted to services, rather than services to people.

Prospects for improvement were poor. Stronger leadership was needed. The overall political and financial instability of the Council had prevented effective long-term planning of services. The lack of clear direction and financial planning had limited progress on joint work with Health. Information about service user needs and Departmental activity and expenditure levels needed substantial improvement. Prospects for improvement depended upon these fundamental changes being put into place. The Joint Review report delivered in May 2002 as "not serving people well", and "with poor prospects for improvement" meant that the council was now in the "zero star" category. A Performance Action Team (PAT) from KPMG began working in Walsall in August 2002.

The first PAT Project Initiation Document identified three themes for external support:

Work stream 1: Commissioning

Work stream 2: Occupational Therapy and Adaptations

Work stream 3: Quality and Performance Management

The second PID (June 2003) set out a mutually agreed second phase of work on commissioning:

Work stream 1: Commissioning Services for Looked After Children and

Work stream 2: Commissioning Day and Domiciliary Care for Older People.

In January 2004, a mutually agreed, abridged third PID described two supplementary work streams to conclude the commissioning inputs:

Work stream 1: The recruitment and retention of Foster Carers

Work stream 2: Strategic Partnership for Older people's services

Alongside the work of the PAT, good political leadership and the efforts of an interim management team together started the recovery process. The interim Director of Social Services subsequently took up the permanent post and this continuity has been a success factor. The Director supported the decision for the PAT team to be involved with the areas of biggest impact. Social Services were seen as universally in trouble, but with some islands of excellence, and everyone was looking for what would make the biggest change. The KPMG consultants demonstrated they were working with the Council and drawing on their expertise.

In November 2003, Walsall were one of six authorities that moved from zero to one star. The Performance Action Team finished in April 2004.

Profile of London Borough of Waltham Forest

IMPROVED

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some	Uncertain	No	Uncertain	STILL NO STARS

Waltham Forest is an outer London Borough to the north east of London, with a population of around 222,000. The Joint Review carried out between October and December 2001, concluded that the people of Waltham Forest were not well served by the Council's social services and that the prospects for improvement were uncertain. However, it acknowledged that, if the Council continued to deliver on its current plans and intentions, there could be some significant improvements and a new quality of service for local people. The Council's record on change and improvement had been erratic, with weak management of resources creating financial problems and sudden changes in services.

In the November 2002 refresh of star ratings, Waltham Forest was rated zero star. The Chief Inspector judged the council's social services would benefit from the support of a PAT to speed up implementation of the council's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). Deloitte & Touche began working in Waltham Forest in March 2003. The PAT Project Initiation Document interpreted the scope of the project as follows:

Work stream 1 – setting and establishing the future direction for social services

Work stream 2 - improving social work practice

Work stream 3 – performance management

Work stream 4 – improving commissioning

Work stream 5 – recruitment and retention

Everyone was concerned about the absence of strong leadership in the Council at the outset. There was a long period of no improvement, and the Council said they would like the involvement of a PAT, whilst not accepting that they were as bad as people said they were. The Council spent its own money on projects involving the same things expected of the PAT – for example, Performance Management and Social Work practice. These things emerged as the project progressed, and the PAT consultants came across other consultants doing the same or similar things. As things got better, the PAT team found a way forward, and were able to ask what the problems were. There were some negotiation and compromises made.

Some work on Sickness Absence work was very well received, and the figures were seen to be going down as a result of this work. The work stream on Performance Management was also successful, but other work streams were less successful. In November 2003, a new Director, with experience of successfully "turning around" another authority, was seconded to Waltham Forest and began a new programme of change management.

A Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) inspection of Children's Services in Sept\Oct 2003 concluded Waltham Forest was on a steady road to recovery with management information systems in place to measure performance.

Performance indicators were improving; safeguarding children was a key priority corporately and with partner agencies. The three year financial strategy was not robust and planning arrangements needed to be strengthened. Commissioning was at the very early stages of development. Attention to equality issues at strategic and operational levels was poor.

Although rated zero star in December 2003, an improved judgement of serving some children well with uncertain prospects was made. SSI expected the judgement to improve, and an inspection in July 2004 confirmed that progress was continuing, and also identified further improvements. The Performance Action Team finished in April 2004.

Chapter Five

Reflecting on the impact of Performance Action Teams

Key messages

- All of the Councils said they had improved and 5 of the 8 had been awarded one star
- Some Council staff were ambivalent about the contribution of the PAT; they acknowledged some helpful aspects but emphasised that they had made the improvements themselves
- Others identified the key PAT contributions as: helping to control the crisis, speeding up improvement, engaging political and senior management leadership, boosting morale and confidence, bringing in ideas from outside, direct work with practitioners, modelling good practice and introducing or improving systems, especially performance management
- Timescales for achieving improvement must be realistic
- When new ways of thinking and working were embedded in practice and endorsed by managers, these were seen as signs of sustainable change

'It appears to me that what achievements the social services department has shown have been due to the efforts of management and staff rather than the PAT team. I do think though that the 'shock treatment' of being a no star authority has precipitated major changes – also the advice and visits from and to well performing authorities are helpful' (manager)

Introduction

Assessing the impact of the Performance Action Teams is complex. Where a Council improves its services there are many influencing factors, of which the PAT may be one. Measuring improvement itself is complicated – should it be judged by the achievement of a star or in terms of overall improvements, securing the safety of service users, and achieving sustainable change? Over what period is it reasonable for this to be judged?

In the previous evaluation in March 2003, it was considered too early to assess the impact of the performance action teams, but they were felt to be making a difference in:

- 'unsticking' councils and helping to make progress
- increasing confidence especially for staff who had stopped taking risks
- helping staff to move away from 'doing everything so perfectly that you never start'
- clarifying what standards were acceptable and building on existing good practice
- speeding up progress
- increasing organisational control
- implementing new systems e.g. for commissioning and performance management
- developing good practice in leaders, strategic development and interagency working

Recognising that changing culture and practice takes time, the participants in the first evaluation said that the measurement of PAT impact needed to separate the achievement of the deliverables in the contract from their contribution to longer term, sustainable improvements in the Council.

In this second review, participants were asked to reflect on the improvements the Councils had made and the contribution of the performance action team in this. The achievement of outputs, products and deliverables was monitored and

managed through the Project Board process and has not been the focus of attention in this review. This chapter reports on these improvements and contributions.

Improvements

'This is a marathon not a sprint'.

Improvements were mainly described in terms of achieving a star (for five of the 8 councils) and the broader changes that have been made in Councils. Even where stars have not been awarded, the Councils said that change was afoot: there was commitment to improve, better understanding of the issues and reason for optimism. The table below shows the changes that have been made in the underlying decisions related to the star ratings between 2002 and 2003. (H) and (L) indicate a change in this aspect of the rating since 2002 (higher or lower).

<i>Council</i>	ADULTS		CHILDREN		<i>Star rating</i>
	<i>Serving people well</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Birmingham	Some	Promising (H)	No	Uncertain	No star
Coventry	Some	Promising	Some (H)	Uncertain	1 star
Haringey	Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Uncertain	1 star
North East Lincolnshire	Some	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	1 star
Swindon	No (L)	Uncertain (H)	Some	Uncertain	No star
Walsall	Some (H)	Promising (H)	Some (H)	Promising (H)	1 star
Waltham Forest	Some	Uncertain	No	Uncertain	No star
Windsor and Maidenhead	Some	Uncertain	Some (H)	Uncertain	1 star

All but one Council has experienced some change in at least one of the underlying dimensions and those with stars are serving, at least, some children and adults well. Capacity for improvement is usually 'promising' although there are still some, even with stars, where this is judged to be uncertain.

Participants in this review identified the following improvements:

People

- Attracting new staff
- Proud to be part of the Council
- Higher morale
- Greater self esteem and confidence
- Free from 'paralysis' of getting it wrong
- Better inter-agency partnerships

Systems

- New procedures and guidance
- New systems e.g. finance, commissioning
- Better understanding of performance management
- Improving performance indicators
- Better able to tell the performance story
- Better project management
- Better communication

Management

- New management team
- Strong leadership
- New direction and momentum
- Clearer focus
- Clearer management responsibilities and accountabilities
- More outward looking

Organisation

- Culture change
- Change in line with corporate direction
- New political leadership
- Strong organisation
- More interest in social services

PAT Contribution

The extent to which the improvements were brought about by the PAT activities are hard to gauge. Council staff acknowledged that the presence of the PAT could 'galvanise them into action' and 'made them think'. The teams brought additional capacity, new ideas, skills and insight into different ways of working, and expertise in key areas such as commissioning and performance management. As one practitioner explained: 'a major change has been a shift in the perception of social workers and OTs from the belief that all that mattered was to follow good practice and care management processes and give the best possible service to service users. We now understand that statistics matter, that data entry matters and that accurate information on what we do must be available'. The PAT methods helped staff to build on what they already knew and gave them the confidence to develop their own skills and expertise.

Generally however, Council staff were often ambivalent about how much the PAT had contributed to the improvements. They said the changes were down to their own efforts, there was only grudging acknowledgement of some of the practical work that the teams had carried out with systems, managers and staff. Some Councils talked about the business-like approach which had been modelled for them and others referred to the value of specific pieces of work that had made an impact, e.g. modernising services, reviving referral and assessment processes for children in need, developing strategies for preventive services and commissioning, developing information and performance management systems and providing training for staff. Also the direct work undertaken with practitioners was again highlighted as helpful.

Councils who had not rated the process highly could appreciate the value of bringing in outside experts, but said they would have preferred to choose these without government oversight. They considered that the teams were too big and inflexible, with the wrong kind of people, spending too long telling them what they already knew, and did not provide value for money in the work that they carried out. Some said that they had done nothing that their own staff could not do, missing the point that they wouldn't have been in that situation if they had already done it for themselves.

SSI and the PAT teams identified both the work that was done and the way that it was approached, as making an important contribution to the improvements: It had:

- helped to control the crisis;
- speeded up improvement,

- engaged political and senior management leadership,
- provided a sharper focus on what is needed
- given status and credibility to the activities
- boosted staff morale and confidence,
- brought in ideas from outside,
- focused direct work with practitioners,
- modelled good practice and
- introduced or improved systems, especially performance management

The fact that this work was sponsored by the government was felt to be of great significance. The change efforts of the Councils had not been effective in the previous years and the Government spotlight meant that Council members and staff had to make this work a priority.

The specific work that was undertaken was thought to be instrumental in helping Councils to improve, focussing through the specifications on the areas in which they were deemed to have failed. Bringing in additional capacity and 'fresh' new ideas from outside was felt to make a major contribution. The teams' ability to bring in people with different expertise was also helpful. The facilitative and empowering way that the teams worked was crucial to their success in working alongside Council staff, rather than 'doing it for them'. It was particularly constructive for staff where they felt listened to by people who understood their working environment and the issues they faced.

All of those interviewed recognised that sustainable change across whole organisations can take a long time. They saw the PAT engagement as being most useful in 'kick-starting' a process that would then be continued by the Council. There was some uncertainty about the sustainability of the changes, particularly where Councils had started from a low base and where they were facing new pressures from the outside environment, budget and recruitment crises. The PAT consultants hoped that changes were sustainable, particularly where new systems and ways of working were embedded into the 'fabric' of the organisation, and were understood and accepted by managers and staff. If change occurred without corresponding changes in leadership and understanding, they feared it might well not stand up to new pressures.

Timescales for improvement need to be realistic. It was acknowledged that the early requirement for improvement in the first three months of the early PAT engagements had not been realistic and had not been rigorously followed up. What had been reported, however, was Councils' 'appetite for improvement' - indications that the Councils were willing to engage in the process. Sustainability was increased, it was believed, where the changes were wider than a single department and where they complemented initiatives across the Council. In several examples, corporate reviews had led to new direction across the whole council and, in some cases, social services was regarded as being at the forefront of this change. In these cases, all parts of the organisation were pulling in the same direction and there was a high level of energy, commitment and engagement of staff.

Evaluating success

It is important to distinguish between assessing whether the PAT did what it set out to do, according to the criteria set out in the PID, and measuring the impact of the teams in relation to overall improvements made in the Council. It does not seem appropriate to measure the impact of the PAT just by how far the Council improved; while they may have contributed to this, they are only one part of a much wider effort. Nor is it fair to say that if the Council does not improve, then the PAT was not effective overall. While the process was criticised by some for not specifying 'outcomes' success criteria in advance, it may well have been much more realistic to set them in terms of deliverable outputs. This then places more onus on the specification being the right one to achieve improvement in the Councils' particular circumstances.

Overall Views

Assessing the impact of the teams is complex and it is important to separate out the different strands. Participants found it hard to say how much the improvements they identified had been helped by the PAT. In some cases, it was clear that systems and strategies had been the direct result of the PAT engagement; measuring changes in culture, attitude, and ways of working is more difficult, as is gauging the extent of the PAT contribution to these.

Overall, the model of performance action teams is generally acknowledged to have had an impact, although there were some doubts from SSI inspectors and council staff that it had been value for money or the only way to achieve improvements. PAT consultants felt they had met expectations albeit in some difficult situations. Certainly those interviewed recognised that the whole process had made an impact on councils, most particularly by the increased publicity, attention and resources that they had received through the whole

engagement. How far the engagement was then productive often depended on the willingness and capacity of the Council to bring value to the process. The next chapter looks at overall messages and identifies the factors that seem to have contributed to successful engagement by Performance Action Teams.

Reflecting on success and what could be improved


Review participants highlighted what they thought had worked well in relation to the impact of the PAT and what could be improved.

What worked well	What could be improved
For Councils	For Councils
<p>The spotlight that having a PAT brings</p> <p>Changes in Council – political leadership and management</p> <p>Practical help with systems and processes especially performance management</p> <p>Sensitive and collaborative approach by the PAT</p> <p>New skills and ideas brought in from outside by PAT and others</p> <p>Project Management</p> <p>Council commissioning specific pieces of work from the PAT</p>	<p>Avoid being ‘passive recipients’, recognising the complexity of relationships</p> <p>Make sure the PAT does not drain resources in supporting this process</p> <p>Make sure PAT work does not hold you back</p> <p>PAT must have people with experience of SSD and skills in working alongside staff</p> <p>More work with frontline staff on direct practice</p> <p>Specifying criteria for success at the outset</p> <p>Value for money of large interventions?</p>

What worked well	What could be improved
For PAT	For PAT
<p>Contribute to culture change by introducing new ways of thinking and doing things</p> <p>Modelling good practice in ways of working</p> <p>Bring added impetus and motivation - help to 'kick start' a process</p> <p>Bring in external ideas and practices</p> <p>Engaging staff – supporting champions for the work and increasing self-confidence</p> <p>Genuine communication and honesty in relationships</p> <p>Project management</p>	<p>More attention to the quality of practice</p> <p>Driving too fast for the Councils in some cases under pressure from DH timescales</p> <p>Too many changes of personnel in the PAT</p> <p>Timing of engagement</p> <p>Don't increase the bureaucracy</p>
For SSI	For SSI
<p>Spotlight on Council meant they had to take it seriously</p> <p>The way that the PAT worked alongside managers</p> <p>Sensitivity and facilitating approach</p> <p>Modelling skills</p> <p>Introducing project management skills and methods</p>	<p>More council leadership in engaging with own problems and taking responsibility for the recovery</p> <p>Setting realistic outcomes and timescales for change</p> <p>More presence of consultants in the councils</p> <p>Timing of interventions – length of time on special measures and readiness of council to work with PAT</p>

Practical help with systems	Specifying criteria for success at the outset
Contribution of particular individuals team members	Value for Money of large interventions?
Flexible deployment of team	

Profile of Windsor and Maidenhead Royal Borough Council

ADULTS		CHILDREN		STAR RATING
<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	<i>Serving people well?</i>	<i>Capacity for improvement</i>	
Some	Uncertain	Some (H)	Uncertain)	

(H) and (L) indicate a change in rating since 2002 (higher or lower, respectively)

The population of Windsor and Maidenhead is estimated to be 140,500. At the time of the Joint review in February/March 2002, the Royal Borough was a Conservative administration. Within Social Services, there were significant changes at senior management level, and there were many new and temporary appointments. The Joint Review concluded that Windsor and Maidenhead was not serving people well, and that the prospects for improvement were uncertain. Despite achieving some positive changes over previous years, and improving services for several user groups, the Authority had not ensured that people receive a positive response when they first ask for help. Both children and adult service users were let down by poor access arrangements and some weak care management practice. Too many people who needed services were being turned away at the front door, or required to wait for a service. Arrangements for assessing and reviewing users' needs were underdeveloped. This had the effect that the right services were not always offered at the right time. Moreover, risks to vulnerable children and adults were not always being identified or addressed. The Authority had been making some improvements to the systems within social work teams, and tackling longstanding weaknesses in performance management. However, these developments were at an early stage during the Joint Review and it was too early to be sure that they would deliver results. The Authority now needed to achieve further improvements both in its practice and in its planning. In doing so it needed to listen more to local people and involve service users in shaping better services for the future.

Windsor and Maidenhead's council was zero rated in November 2002 and consequently produced a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), based primarily on the findings of the Joint Review published in October 2002. In essence the role of a Performance Action Team (PAT) was to accelerate the change

processes currently underway.

Structural changes were envisaged in the social services directorate, including several new "heads of" posts for Community Care, Commissioning for adults and children's services.

A Performance Action team from PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) began working in Windsor and Maidenhead in March 2003, and a summary of the proposed activities against each deliverable in the 4 work streams was provided by PWC in their Project Initiation Document:

Work stream 1 – Improving Social Work Practice (Adults and Children's Services)

Work stream 2 - Performance Management System for Social Services

Work stream 3 – Developing Capacity for Forward Planning/Commissioning Services

Work stream 4 – Human Resources/Social Services Corporate Development

In May 2003, a Liberal Democrat administration was elected. A new Director started in November 2003, and the PAT consultants' impressions and insights were helpful at this stage. PWC helped managers to produce a robust Performance Management System, reaching down to the level of individual adults and children, and relating performance indicators to practice. Other products are: Competency training programmes; Communication Strategy; Succession Planning.

In November 2003, Windsor and Maidenhead were one of six authorities that moved from zero to one star. The Performance Action Team finished in April 2004.

Chapter Six

Looking Back – Moving Forward

Key messages

- Conditions for improvement include Council willingness to engage with change; a clear understanding and acceptance of the reasons for failure; capable and consistent Council management and leadership; an agreed recovery strategy and work plan; resources to carry this out; a stable and capable workforce with which to engage; work on basic skills and direct practice as well as strategic focus.
- There is no single model for engaging a PAT – engagement must reflect the needs and circumstances of each Council.
- The PAT model has evolved since the first engagements and is still evolving.
- Greater flexibility in deploying performance action teams may be supported by clearer matching of the Council's circumstances against the known conditions for successful engagement, improvement and sustainability.

Introduction

This review has covered a wide range of areas and issues. This chapter reflects briefly on some of the key messages and considers how these might inform future development of the PAT model. In looking forward, participants' views about the conditions for successful engagement and for improvement are set out alongside contributions from the improvement literature that contains similar messages. Together, these frameworks may provide useful next steps for this work.

Looking Back

Setting up the Performance Action Teams

Involving Councils

It was generally agreed that the most effective relationships with PAT developed where the Councils were actively involved and engaged in the process from the start. This gave them the chance 'buy-into' the process and be part of the decision-making – increasing their investment in the success and making sure that their hands were 'firmly on the steering wheel'. How far they did this in practice depended on the willingness and ability of staff and members to participate. Clearly the experience of being on special measures could be disheartening and affect morale. There was high staff turnover during such times and those who remained were not always the most competent, most senior or in positions of authority. In such a situation, the Councils may not be best placed to participate equally at the PAT table with SSI/CSCI and action teams.

The environment in which most of the performance action teams were introduced was variously dispirited or volatile and the impact of this should not be under-estimated.

How far SSI and the PAT trusted the Council to play that part in directing its own future was another dimension. Some had doubts that those who had contributed to the initial 'failure' would have the capacity to lead them out of it, even with support. Clearly there was a commitment to supporting the Council in making its own improvements, but where there is a long and frustrating history of non-compliance and failed strategies, it is challenging for everyone to make a success of this new, 'last chance' arrangement. Everyone, it seems, had some part of a double-edged sword of success or failure hanging over them and an investment in making it work. It was a challenge for everyone to achieve a mutual partnership in which the PAT and the Council staff could work together, under the commissioning eye of SSI, the Department of Health and the rest of the world!

PAT teams

The composition of the PAT was clearly important in establishing credibility within the Councils and with SSI. Recognising the need for a mix of skills and knowledge, the performance action teams had tried to include people with experience of working in social services, alongside consultants with expertise in performance management, finance and other corporate systems. It is important that these social services 'experts' have recent experience and the skills to work

sensitively, and practically, alongside Council staff in their particular situations. Exceptional individuals have stood out in the feedback from councils and they are crucial to the credibility of the teams.

Activities and Methods

Focus of the work

PAT teams tackled a range of strategic tasks and, to a lesser extent, direct practice. Much of the engagement was with middle and senior managers and related to developing and implementing strategy. In some examples, SSI and Councils, on reflection, felt that more work could have been done with practitioners. It is important in improvement work to address both and not to assume that because 'the top corridors' are working well, this will filter down to the frontline. Gerry Smale's work shows clearly that there can be a chasm between senior managers and the frontline practice, even to the extent that managers can assume that new policy is being implemented while in practice very little has changed. An effective strategy is therefore likely to target both; there were some examples of this working well in some of the teams, usually centred on a skilled individual with social services experience and knowledge – i.e. someone the practitioners could relate to and respect.

Basic skills and knowledge

The consultants found that much of the work involved helping staff to develop basic skills and understanding of the core business, and to implement effective systems to support it. Learning to 'count more smartly' was a key message and raises an interesting link between improvement judgements and the ability of Councils to tell a better story about their performance.

Products and methods for sustainable change

Some products were created; collaborative methods of working were seen as more important in facilitating sustainable change. The primary role of the PAT was to work alongside council staff, rather than doing it for them or telling them what to do. There was general agreement that this is what the PAT teams did, with some exceptions, where, according to the council staff they did 'very little'. In the view of SSI, some teams 'never stood a chance' in the hostile environments in which they found themselves.

Some of the most effective methods were those that engaged staff about their practice and those that modelled new ways of working e.g. helping people to think differently, act differently by example or demonstration. Building on what the councils were already doing was considered most helpful in making 'steps

to progress. In some cases, the presence of the PAT was felt to bring renewed status and credibility to what the Councils said and did, and this in itself was highly valued.

Diagnostics

There were mixed views about how much time PAT should spend in assessing further the issues facing the Councils they are working with. This is something of a judgement call, depending on how much intelligence is available from inspection and other sources, and how up to date it is. PAT have to know the environment and issues in order to create a strategy for this council – otherwise they will be falling back on blueprints and templates which is acceptable to nobody. Too much analysis slows the process down and can leave bruised staff feeling more battered. Earlier involvement of the PAT at the scoping stage may assist where it is compatible with the competitive selection process. Equally, as the literature suggests, there may be other ways to gather information about the issues, whilst at the same time, taking staff forward rather than going over the same ground. Some of the solutions focus and strengths based approaches such as appreciative inquiry described in the literature review, will serve both functions and be a positive experience for those participating.

Flexible implementation

Work specifications should be implemented flexibly to reflect new information and changing situations. A common feature of 'failing' Councils is the inability to implement policy in practice. So, there are important lessons in having clear direction and seeing a plan through to implementation. However, there should also be flexibility to ensure that what is implemented is what is needed and that the work responds appropriately to changing circumstances or new information. Clearly, decisions to renegotiate the specification are not taken lightly by the Project Board, but may, in the long run, facilitate improvement. It is important to recognise that these are dynamic organisations in a rapidly changing environment.

Managing the process

Management

Management of the PAT process was businesslike and efficient and most people said that it was successful in keeping the work on schedule and holding the project together. The formal Project Boards worked well especially when supported by regular communication of the project leads in the partnership.

Members

Involving members in the PAT process was thought to be crucial although there were different views about including them in Project Boards, depending on whether they were judged to be part of the problem as well as crucial to the solution.

Roles and relationships

Responsibilities must be clear in each engagement and open communication was essential. Regular contact between project leads, who had authority to make decisions, supported the work and helped to build up trust and mutual respect. Regular contact between the PAT and the Director was important in building relationships.

Timing of PAT engagement

The most successful PAT work occurred where there were senior managers and officers with which to engage. Where PAT consultants worked with a range of interim and permanent senior managers, what mattered most was that these people were willing, were competent and had the authority to make decisions. Otherwise, the engagement ran the risk of floundering. There is a judgement to be made about the best time to send in a PAT, and where it is impractical to wait, being clear about what can be achieved with unstable management arrangements. This also requires greater clarity in scoping what can be achieved in the particular circumstances. What is attempted with a new management team is different to one that is depleted or demoralised.

Exit strategy

These were set in the original contracts, relating more to use of days and the delivery of outputs than outcomes in the Council. The transfer of leadership to the Council towards the end of the engagement was felt to be significant and constructive; Councils particularly valued this part of the model.

The impact of Performance Action Teams

Councils said that they had made improvements, particularly in capacity and capability, motivation, and adopting new ways of working. However, some were ambivalent about acknowledging the contributions of the Performance Action Teams. They were not convinced that, given the right people and the same amount of money, they could not have achieved it themselves. SSI and the PAT consultants did identify specific areas where the teams had brought something new into the Council, had helped staff develop new skills, practices and to build up confidence, and generally speeded up the Councils progress.

They were less confident about how sustainable the improvements would prove to be and identified as crucial, the endorsement of managers and their ability to embed changes into practice and the culture of the organisation.

Examples where those interviewed felt that the process could be improved included greater engagement of council staff and members; a stable, committed and capable senior management team; more direct work with practitioners and a consistent presence of the PAT consultants, appropriate to the work. In assessing the impact of the work, the point was made that clear criteria for successful engagement needed to be specified in the contract for the work, some said in terms of outcomes rather than outputs.

Looking forward

Having reflected on the findings of this review and its key messages, the final part of this chapter turns to what might be useful in the future. There are clear lessons for future engagements and some of these have already been incorporated into the SSI/CSCI and DH protocols. Overall, there was a general view from SSI and the PAT consultants that this is a process which has improved with experience and which is still evolving. In the early days, everyone was learning about what a PAT was, what they would do and how they would work with the Councils. SSI was moving into a new phase of working with 'failing' councils and councils were experiencing special measures for the first time. With experience, those involved have become better at implementing this process, recognising that its success does depend on a number of factors. It is regarded as a model that has further potential in either its present form or in an adapted version.

More recently, DH has started to experiment with using Performance Action Teams to work preventatively with struggling one star Councils. Officials are also undertaking more direct commissions with consultancy firms for specific tasks. Other suggestions for the PAT model from this review include sending in smaller teams to work on specific areas, rather than one large team and making greater use of former social services employees as consultants.

In taking this work forward, it is clear that understanding the local context is an important part of achieving successful engagement and ensuring that the work fits what is needed to improve services. Four aspects are considered by way of conclusion: scoping the improvement strategy, conditions for engagement, facilitating improvement and achieving sustainable change.

Scoping the Improvement Strategy

Much of this report has focussed on the importance of an accurate and shared understanding of how the Council has failed and what needs to be done to improve. The evidence base for judgements about performance has become more comprehensive and sophisticated since the assessment framework was first introduced, going far beyond the simple analysis of performance indicators. The standards and criteria currently used by CSCI offer a useful model for identifying and defining areas of strength and weakness, both in the quality of services to adults and children and the Council's capacity for improvement. Certainly these provide a basis for dialogue about performance in a process which is intended to be transparent and which should mean that Councils are less likely to be caught off-guard by poor ratings.

The dilemma of how much 'diagnostic' work needs to be undertaken by performance action teams – whoever they are – could be addressed by using some of the innovative approaches which facilitate positive change by focusing on what already works well and building on this. There may be opportunities to use such methods to scope the improvement agenda with Council staff, avoiding tedious and distressing 're-inspection', and leading to a more embedded strategy which can be implemented flexibly.

Conditions for engagement

In working with change, for individuals or organisations, the literature indicates that there are certain factors which facilitate change. Likewise, common themes have emerged from this review about the conditions under which the performance action teams successfully engaged with a Council. Clearly not all of the conditions will be present at the start of an engagement; some will develop over time, providing a crucial toehold for the work. These factors may provide a helpful framework for future engagements, in assessing whether it is appropriate to send in a PAT and in deciding what kind of team is needed.

These conditions were:

Conditions for successful PAT engagement

The Council:

- Accepts the need for improvement
- Is willing to engage with PAT
- Has capable and consistent leadership
- Has resources to support the work
- Has stable and capable workforce with which to engage
- Is supported corporately

SSI

- Works with Councils to understand reasons for failure and to develop an agreed improvement strategy
- Develops detailed knowledge about the Council and about what works
- Manages the process robustly and authoritatively through the Project Board
- Builds up trust with all partners
- Is clear about SSI role – balances regulatory and development roles
- Has sufficient time and support for this intensive work
- Link inspectors have a balanced workload e.g. only one zero star council at a time

The PAT

- Has an appropriately experienced and credible team
- Ensures that people understand and are implementing basic functions
- Uses empowering and collaborative methods
- Works with what Councils do well and builds on their strengths
- Ensures that performance is reflected through PAF
- Provides a consistent and visible team

Partners working together have:

- Clear understanding of the reasons for failure
- An accurate, focused and agreed recovery strategy and work plan
- Mutual respect and transparent relationships
- Flexible approach to implementing the recovery strategy
- Building and achieving momentum
- Robust Project Management

What makes a difference in improving services?

Review participants were asked what they thought had made a difference in improving their performance. Common themes emerged which may provide a useful framework for promoting improvement. A number of these factors may be provided by, or associated with, the PAT engagement:

What helps Councils to improve?

Spotlight

The publicity and attention provided by the star rating and PAT process ensures that priority is given to the business of improvement

Council wide improvement initiatives

Where corporate change was also occurring this supported changes in social services.

Commitment from council members and strong political leadership

Enthusiastic and positive support from councillors ensured that change in social services was given a high priority and resources

Strong management and leadership – throughout the organisation

Leadership and strong management throughout the organisation was believed to be crucial in directing and facilitating improvement. This applied from the Chief Executives down to front line managers who have a crucial role in changing behaviour and practice.

Realistic expectations of outcomes that can be achieved

A clear strategy about what can be improved and what this will look like when it is achieved

Engagement of staff and members

Commitment and willingness of those involved throughout the organisation to make improvements

New ideas from outside of the authority about best practice

These might be via the PAT or by other means

Resources to do the job

Sufficient resources to support staff in making improvements

Trained and supervised staff

A skilled and well-supervised workforce

Strong performance management

Understand the links between practice and performance and know how to ‘count smartly’

Realistic expectations of time to change

Sustainable change takes time and needs to be consolidated

Ingredients for Successful Change

Moss Kanter (1983) explores the necessary ingredients for successful change in the following model:

Pressure for change	Leadership and Vision	Capable People	Actionable First Steps	Effective Rewards	Successful Implementation
Pressure for change	Leadership and Vision	Capable People	Actionable First Steps	Effective Rewards	Evaporation
Pressure for change	Leadership and Vision	Capable People	Actionable First Steps	Effective Rewards	Frustration
Pressure for change	Leadership and Vision	Capable People	Actionable First Steps	Effective Rewards	Disengagement
Pressure for change	Leadership and Vision	Capable People	Actionable First Steps	Effective Rewards	Disengagement
Pressure for change	Leadership and Vision	Capable People	Actionable First Steps	Effective Rewards	Disinterest

Ingredients of Successful Change

R. Moss Kanter The Change Masters (1983)

The factors for successful engagement and for making improvements identified in this review echo the ingredients for successful change which Kantor described in 1983. She suggests that the outcomes in the final column are created when specific organisational attributes are missing. This provides a useful framework for thinking about an organisation’s **readiness** and capacity to support change and improvement.

Achieving sustainability

How far changes or improvements are sustainable was not explored in great detail in this review. As most of the engagements ended in the spring of this year, it is too early to tell whether the improvements will be lasting. However, there are some useful indications from the experience of the NHS modernisation agency about the conditions for achieving sustainable change. Some of these echo the features listed in the above tables and may contribute to plans for future engagements. These are shown in detail in the literature review and summarised in the table below:

Factors influencing the potential for spread and sustainability of service improvement

Change Process	Overcoming Scepticism Dedicated Time Coherence with organisations needs and priorities Early engagement of staff Implementation – attention to pace and phasing
Nature of Programme	Launching and marketing the initiative Highlighting the benefits Giving people incentives
Organisation	Ready for change Adequate infrastructure and resourcing A history of successful change Participative Culture Attention to entrenched working practices
Human dimensions	Clear and credible leadership 'Influencers' to spread the change Teamwork – including 'transformation' teams Specific roles & relationships
Embedding Practice	Time for new practices to be integrated Sense of ownership Integration with other changes and programmes Regarded as a priority and not conflicting with other priorities
Reinforcing Improvement	Recognise achievements Evidence of effectiveness is sought and fed back to staff Attention to barriers Continued priority is given to the change

Conclusion

This review has explored the experience of the first eight Performance Action Teams, working with Councils between 2002 and 2004. In reflecting on the key messages, the participants and the authors recognise that the process of engaging and working with performance action teams has already changed in some ways from the first engagements and continues to evolve. And there is interest in this model from other agencies and government departments who are increasingly engaged in the business of improving services and performance. What is clear from the different experiences in this review is that there is no single model which can be applied in every case; every Council has different needs and circumstances and recovery work must be tailored to these. The key messages in this chapter provide a basis on which to take this work forward, ensuring that best use is made of the growing experience and knowledge about what helps a council or organisation to improve.

Annexes

- Annexe 1 List of organisations participating in this review
- Annexe 2 Scope of Work for the use of Performance Action Teams to Support the improvement of Social Services in Local Councils
- Annexe 3 Review of Turnaround Literature and References
- Annexe 4 Summary of the Councils

Annexe 1

List of organisations participating in this review

Councils

Birmingham
Coventry
Haringey
NE Lincolnshire
Swindon
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Windsor and Maidenhead

PAT teams

KPMG
Price Waterhouse Cooper
Deloitte Touche

SSI/CSCI

North East Region
South West Region
London Region
West Midlands Region

DH

Annexe 2

Scope of Work for the use of Performance Action Teams to Support the Improvement of Social Services in Local Councils

The new system of social services star ratings differentiating the performance of local authorities was unveiled by the Secretary of State for Health in October 2001. The stars are on a scale of three stars to zero stars, with three stars signifying excellent performance. A letter to Directors of Social Services from the Chief Inspector of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) in April (CI 2002/4) described how the ratings would be produced. The first set of social services star ratings for local councils was published by SSI on Wednesday, 29 May 2002. Full details of the social services star ratings system can be found on the Department of Health's website at: www.doh.gov.uk/pssratings/ The social services star ratings forms the social services assessment which will be an integral part of the overall council Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) performance profile which is planned to be published by the end of this year. Following the announcement "zero star councils" were immediately placed on "special measures", a form of intervention which means they will be monitored rigorously by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI). For further details about intervention are on the Department of Health's website: www.doh.gov.uk/scg/pssperform/module11.htm

As a consequence of special measures SSI's monitoring will be undertaken through one or more of the following:

A Performance Improvement Plan – the Chief Inspector has met all zero star councils to discuss the content of a performance improvement programme.

A Performance Action Team – four councils, Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and North East Lincolnshire, were the first four Councils assessed as needing outside assistance to improve, followed by Haringey, Swindon, Waltham Forest, and Windsor & Maidenhead.

Timescales – The first four zero star councils had to demonstrate improvement or the capacity for improvement by November 2002 when the social services star ratings would be refreshed for the CPA. A scope of work set out the requirement to establish a Performance Action Team for each Council to deliver demonstrable improvement by October 2002, using the ODPM/Department of Health framework arrangement for intervention, OJEC ref: 00/S 143-94371/EN.

Performance action teams were provided by external consultants to support council staff in developing their capacity and systems to deliver improved social services. However, PATs neither direct policy, nor make operational decisions, because it is the council's staff who must be the "improvers". PATs do provide senior staff with support and advice on which they can act within the limits of their delegated powers, or to put as options to their Members. The decision to engage a PAT rests with Ministers acting on a recommendation from the Chief Inspector based on SSI's assessment of the council's capacity for change. Typically PATs address one or more of the following:

- improving social work practice;
- developing/embedding performance management;
- enhancing commissioning strategies and their implementation;
- recruitment and retention issues.

All PATs provide expertise at practitioner level to work alongside frontline staff and their managers to get the basics right, and improved social work practice. They also tackle strategic issues, e.g. developing commissioning strategies to provide services, but in all cases the emphasis is on the council's staff being fully involved in, and owning the development process. PATs are formally project managed so that they address discrete areas of work, to set timescales linked to tangible deliverables that the council owns. This disciplined approach – key deliverables are PATs' "exit strategies" – is used to embed the key purpose of the PATs, the sustainability of improvements that have been made by the council's staff while the PAT is on site at the council.

Annexe 3

Review of Turnaround Literature

In 2003, Department of Health commissioned a literature review to identify effective factors for achieving successful change and improved performance in 'failing' organisations. Turning around 'failing' organisations describes key messages from a wide range of public and private sources about 'organisational turnaround' of poorly performing organisations. The review examines the nature of failure and success and the complexities of moving from one to the other. In conclusion, it draws together the common themes for achieving improvement in organisations in crisis. Some of the key points are summarised below and in Annexe Two.

What is failure?

DH has identified the failure of councils with social services responsibilities (CSSR) to:

- Meet statutory responsibilities
- Manage resources effectively to reach those in need
- Provide safe, consistent and reliable services
- Fulfil Best Value duty to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness
- In all cases, the consequences of failure for those who are using the services are given high priority.

In A Force for Change (2002) the Audit Commission concludes that 'serious and sustained service failure is also a failure of leadership by senior councillors and top managers. Poor leadership leads to poor systems and culture; collectively these lead to serious and sustained service failure such as children at risk and unallocated social work cases' (p17).

Responding to failure

The literature suggests that how an organisation responds to the label of failure will be instrumental in its recovery. Likened by Harrison Owen (2000) to the stages of grieving following bereavement, the failure must be acknowledged, accepted and worked through. Those organisations that deny or refuse to accept that all is not well will take the longest to 'recover'. Bibeault (1982) identifies as crucial the *'moment of truth'* (p76) when they finally admit the problem, 'for what they do and how they do it' will determine whether they survive. *'When this acceptance ceases in any company, a hardening of the arteries starts to set in'*.

In their work on failing hospitals, Edwards, Fulop et al found that Trusts were often surprised by a zero-rating, although it came as no surprise to external stakeholders. The authors speculate that either the performance management system was not acting as an efficient early warning system or the failings were known and action was not taken or not quickly enough. John Gardner (1965) suggests that 'most ailing organisations have developed a functional blindness to their own defects. They are not suffering because they cannot solve their problems, but because they cannot see their problems'.

Skelcher (2003) refers to Staw's (1982) 'threat rigidity effect', which 'accentuates the inertia already present in a poor performing organisation and presents an even greater impediment to change'. In a case study of Marks and Spencer plc, Mellahi et al note : *'this failure to react and believe in the need for new forms of change was exacerbated by the political vulnerability of certain groups, who fought to maintain the status quo'* (2002 p 26).

Recognising success

'Organisations that learn to work together, that trust one another, and that become more expansive and inclusive, develop the capacity to deal with whatever happens. They have created a capacity for working and thinking together that enables them to respond quickly and intelligently to surprise and distress' (Wheatley).

Successful organisations are generally characterised by strong, visionary leadership; clear strategy linked to explicit, measurable objectives and outcomes; and sound working practices to engage and value staff at all levels. In 2000, the Joint Review Team described councils that were doing well as those which *'exist to meet the needs of users they service, who focus on the*

best way to deliver appropriate services, and are organised to lead and support the staff at the frontline'. It concludes that 'the effectiveness of services provided is largely dependent on the way in which the organisation supports and leads those people employed to do the work'. (p3)

The Joint Review Team summarised 16 critical success factors of well-performing social service authorities:

Critical Success Factors from Joint Reviews of CSSRs

Leadership	Strategy	Involvement/Empowerment
Vision and ambition	Clear focus on priorities	Ownership of problems
Visibility of leaders	Strong and consistent performance management	Commitment to user participation
Putting basics right first	Having a best value orientation	Engaging staff
Good political leadership	Resourcing the changes	Cultural change
Leadership style		Communication
Corporate support		Developing strong partnerships

Adapted from Joint Review. *Tracking the Changes in Social Services in England 2001/2*

Turnaround

The quality of leadership by politicians and senior officers; the ability to develop and implement strategy on a number of fronts, engaging staff and service users and other stakeholders; and communicating clearly with everyone, are all emphasised throughout the turnaround literature. Ensuring that priorities link to objectives and desired outcomes, and are appropriately resourced (finance, people), implemented and monitored are also crucial. Learning organisations, and those which promote high performance working practices, are generally regarded as those most likely to be effective and sustain improvement (Ashton and Sung 2002).

The literature for both private and public sector turnaround emphasises the need to stabilise the organisation ('stop the bleeding' - Balgobin and Pandit) or, for social care, to ensure that services are safe. This may require different tactics to those required for long term, sustainable improvement and high performance. Different management teams may be needed for each phase. There is still debate about the benefits of deploying interim, temporary managers to rescue and lead a recovery compared with engaging people who will be managing and working in the service in the longer term. (Skelcher 2003, Gray 1999).

Norman Flynn (2002) emphasises that the approach to recovery will need to reflect the circumstances of the failure. How failure is diagnosed and described is critical in deciding the focus. Where situations of 'complicated and deep-rooted problems' (p18) are characterised by:

- lack of political will
- high rates of turnover of senior staff
- strong and resistant trade unions
- cynical staff
- overspending and loss of control

the application of a standard management template is unlikely to solve the problems. 'If an organisation is out of control, standards very bad and finances overspent, then probably a period of 'turnaround management' is required. This implies:

- Centralisation of spending authorisation
- Imposition of discipline
- Replacement of staff who are unwilling or unable to change their behaviours

'The very opposite prescription may be appropriate for a middling performer trying to raise its standards. Here a process of quality improvement through consultation and 'empowerment' is likely to improve performance.'

The approach of those leading the recovery is crucial. Barker and Mone (1998) observed that a decline in performance may 'increase organisational rigidity, inhibit the likelihood of innovative change, and therefore lessen organisations' abilities to achieve improvement'. In this 'mechanistic shift', decisions are centralised and tight controls are implemented. Particularly, they say, a feature of incoming chief executives, the shift aims to consolidate their authority and their ability to promote and constrain changes in relation to the recovery strategy. However, Barker and Mone suggest that this tendency to tighten central control of organisations can be counter-productive in stifling the very innovation and creativity which may help to turn it around. Successful organisations engage and empower staff at all levels, and this potential is limited if the organisation is too tightly controlled from the centre.

Skelcher (2003) observes that 'mechanistic shift' might be anticipated in local government 'because of the imperative to respond positively to external regulation'. Central government intervention may unintentionally contribute to this by adopting an 'essentially managerial, top-down approach with ideas being generated at the centre and policed through the audit and inspection bodies' (Flynn 2002).

Emerging approaches to managing change

There is growing tension between approaches which aim to solve problems through diagnosis and recovery (Slatter and Lovett) and those which regard problem-based approaches as counter-productive. *'Problem methodologies are based on deficit discourse. Over time they fill the organisation with stories, understandings and rich vocabularies of why things fail. A compulsive concern with what's not working, why things go wrong and who didn't do his or her job demoralizes members of the organisation, reduces the speed of learning, and undermines relationships and forward movement.'* (Cooperrider).

There are emerging ideas about the importance of working with complex organisations as whole systems, rather than focussing on isolated problems. Some authors (Chapman, Dawson) are critical of the traditional linear, mechanistic approaches to managing change, which fail to acknowledge and respond to the 'murky, unforeseen and dynamic character of change' (Dawson). For these writers there are no 'simple universal solutions', context is all and interventions for change are most effective when based on cycles of action, continuous learning, adaptation and improvement.

'Strengths-based' approaches (e.g. solutions focus, appreciative inquiry) seek out and build on what is already working well, even in a failing organisation. These approaches promote collaborative working and learning with the people who know and understand the business and the organisation. *'Our experience is that most change efforts (in health care) fail, not because of poor strategy, but because of faulty implementation – brought on by outmoded approaches to change – often resulting in indifference, misunderstanding and anger. We have found that the reliable way to make change happen is for people to come together...to use their unique knowledge and wisdom to help source and drive change'* (Groody and Wood, AI Practitioner May 2004). Weisbord (1987) refers (p257) to a growing literature that indicates how the medical model is proving less and less satisfying for workplace improvement: 'If I could ask one thing of a crystal ball in every situation, it would not be *'what's wrong and what will fix it?'* but *'what's possible here and who cares?'*.

'He advocates new approaches which:

Work away from:	Work towards:
Solving the problem	Creating the future
Giving it to an expert	Helping each other learn
Getting a task force	Involving everybody
Finding the technique	Finding a valued purpose
Doing it all now	Doing what's do-able in season

Approaches to intervention

Alongside the new focus on performance assessment, there is a growing literature about the purpose and character of government ‘intervention for ‘failing councils’. In an internal paper written in December 2002, SSI describes four models or styles of tackling intervention:

Doctor	Based on the medical analogy of diagnosis and treatment. Find problems and treat them.
Detective	Something is wrong. Need to find the persons responsible so they can be changed or removed. Can be associated with blame.
Sales	Assumes those intervening have a product or service which help solve the client’s problem. ‘A solution in search of problems’.
Travel Agent	Assumes client is on a journey and it is the consultant’s role to go through their objectives, and working out the best means to reach their destination. Client is in control and intervener facilitates and advises. Only model which takes a challenge-based, rather than problem solving approach.

DH Performance Action Teams

As part of its response to CSSR on special measures, DH has introduced Performance Action Teams (PAT) to assist these councils to make improvements. Nine months into the work, DH brought together stakeholders in the process to review critically the progress of these teams. Early feedback (DH March 2003) suggested that some CSSR have found the engagement of PAT useful, particularly in ‘unsticking’ them from the ‘paralysed helplessness’ in which they had found themselves. From the DH perspective, improvements included the production of clearer strategies and greater control of the ‘crisis’ situation in some CSSRs. The evaluation of progress gave rise to many questions about success and failure and how these are to be measured and assessed, particularly in relation to coming off special measures in the future. Participants recognised that there are two aspects to this – initial swift actions to ensure that services and service users are ‘safe’, and longer term, sustainable improvements which will assure everyone that the CSSR is performing well.

There was general agreement that the Performance Action Teams (PAT) should focus on the most important areas for each CSSR, recognising that these will be different in each case; ensure that CSSR had greater control in the commissioning process and that the PAT are flexible to emerging issues and information. All parties wanted to see a more consistent approach, building on the lessons learned from the early experiences.

In A Force for Change (2002), the Audit Commission identifies three phases of intervention with related activities and events:

Overcoming denial: Challenge/Persuasion/Compulsion/Threat

Taking action: Impetus/External solutions/Setting and monitoring targets/Building capacity

Exit: Intervener trusts council/Monitoring and special measures ceases

These themes are developed further by ODPM (2002) in their consultation process on CPA intervention. Recovery planning is based on the following principles for tackling poor performance:

Swift - No time for denial or excessive diagnosis; government to make quick decisions

Well-targeted and flexible - Bespoke solutions for specific problems

Coherent - Tackle service –specific issues alongside corporate ones

Creative - Develop new models to meet new problems

Collaborative - Draw on right expertise wherever it is found

For long term gain - Creating solutions for stability, sustainability and continuous improvement

Effective - Improved outcomes as quickly and as economically as possible

Time-limited - Intervention will be limited and linked to clear exit strategy.

While the emphasis is on swift, specific, high impact interventions, the turnaround research indicates that these may be worthy and, in some ways, contradictory principles. Time is needed to acknowledge the failure and to be clear about the nature of the issues; organisations may need to be tackled as whole systems, working on a number of fronts at once rather than on isolated problems, short term goals may be achieved **and** it must be recognised that wholesale change takes time. Approaches which build on the strengths of the organisation, rather than focussing wholly on the failures, may, in the long term, prove to be most effective.

Sustainable service improvement

Factors contributing to the successful spread of and sustainability of service improvement are described by staff leading modernisation programmes for the NHS Modernisation Agency. In a paper published in 2003 by the Innovation and Improvement programme, the following factors are identified (table adapted from the paper):

Positive organisational characteristics

- Informal atmosphere, non-hierarchical structure, **participative** rather than dictatorial management and lack of entrenched working practices
- Mature organisation with a **history** of successful change
- Adequate **infrastructure and resources** to support changes (e.g. IT systems)
- Readiness for change

Human dimensions

- Clear and credible **leadership**, providing support and ensuring continuing priority of service improvement
- Support and **involvement** of consultants
- Multi-disciplinary teams working co-operatively (rather than competitively) with common goals and priorities
- The existence of **influencers** who will encourage spread, sustainability or both
- Specific **roles and relationships** can be key to successful service improvement (varying between organisations and programmes)
- Effective 'modernisation' / '**transformation**' teams who drive changes, help to integrate initiatives and provide guidance and support

Nature of the service improvement programme

- Staff interest and involvement is influenced by how the programme has been **launched** and marketed (as perceptions and understanding are affected)
- Demonstrating the benefits and advantages arising from the programme encourages both spread and sustainability (**benefits** to staff and their working practice as well as to patients)
- National programmes can bring **incentives** such as additional resources and support (facilitating spread)

Process of change

- **Coherence** of national programmes with organisational needs and priorities
- Early **engagement** of all staff, especially clinicians
- Overcoming **scepticism** and resistance among key individuals, whether clinical, managerial or administrative
- Dedicated **time** for those involved to meet, plan, develop and undertake improvement activities
- Fast pace of **implementation** may increase spread but can prevent sustainability
- Phased implementation can aid spread (especially through 'quick wins'), but 'wave' / 'phase' structure and funding can hamper sustainability

Embedding new practicee

- Sufficient **time** for new practice to become fully integrated as the 'norm'
- **Incorporating** new practice into an organisation's 'core' business and priorities, through business plans, objectives, job descriptions, policies and procedures helps sustain improvements
- **Integration** and coherence with other modernisation programmes and projects
- Sense of '**ownership**' (important for sustainability) facilitated by staff involvement at all levels, all disciplines and in all stages of the change
- Programme regarded as **priority** for all involved and does not conflict with other priorities or interests

Reinforcing the improvements and maintaining momentum

- **Recognition** of effort and achievements as well as encouragement and support contribute to sustaining improvements
- Evidence of effectiveness and benefits of programme sought and **fed back** to participants
- Continuing high **priority** of programme to senior management
- **Barriers** to sustainability identified and prevented (i.e. changes to organisation, external pressures, competing demands, short term contracts or funding)

NHS Modernisation Agency 2003

Conclusion

This literature review highlights a range of issues and views in defining and responding to failure, recognising success and achieving effective and lasting turnaround and improvement. The messages from the systems and strength-based approaches may be useful additions to the growing literature on recovery and intervention to achieve sustainable change in poor performance. Some key points are summarised in the bullet lists below.

Key points from the literature

Achieving change/improvement means:

Acknowledging failure

- Take notice of early warnings (Edwards, Fulop)
- Acknowledging and accepting failure is important
 - Some don't see it (Bibeault)
 - Grieving process (Ofsted/Owen)
 - Don't be afraid of crisis – it is an opportunity for creative change (Owen)

Adopting a Learning Approach

- Use learning approaches e.g.
- Take a range of actions, evaluate the results and learn what works best (Chapman)
- Learn from what is working well in the organisation (AI)
- Don't change what is working well (Smale)
- Approaches that overly focus on problems or failure can perpetuate the framework in which the failure occurred, add to poor morale and consolidate the language of failure in the organisation.
- It is useful to focus on past and present good practice, understanding the key elements of this and developing it throughout the organisation.

Analysis and Understanding

- Be clear about fundamental issues and underlying problems (Slatter and Lovett)
- Tackle the underlying causes rather than the symptoms (Slatter and Lovett)
- Be broad and deep enough in scope to resolve all the key issues (Slatter and Lovett)
- Recognise priorities e.g. making services safe within a context of sustainable improvements ('stop the bleeding' - Balgobin and Pandit)

- Remember that deficit-based approaches and undue focus on problems can impede successful intervention (Cooperrider and Whitney)

Strategy

- Be clearly focussed on priorities
- Address whole systems rather than targeting isolated problems (Chapman)
- Recognise that tightening control can work against innovation and recovery. (Staw). This is especially dangerous in centralised approaches where top down emphasis generates ideas at the centre that are policed through audit and inspection. (Flynn)
- Public services are complex adaptive systems and therefore need to be treated as whole and evolving systems (Psek and Chapman)
- Focus on the purpose of change (Smale)

People

- Strong leadership and central direction is crucial (all)
- You may need a different management team for achieving change to those who manage a stable situation (Bibeault /Fulop)
- Action needs to involve everyone (Wheatley, Joint Review)
- Communicate x 10 inside and outside the organisation – openness and transparency (Edwards, Fulop et al)
- Intervention needs to be well targeted and flexible (CPA) and collaborative with the people who will continue in the service.
- Work away from blame culture to one of responsibility/ownership (Climbie Inquiry Report)
- Seek people moving in the same direction rather than spending energy to overcome resistance (Smale)
- Introduce high performance working practices (Ashton and Sung)

Implementation

- Work on a number of fronts at once (Slatter and Lovett)
- Achieve short-term goals/early wins (Edwards/Fulop) (crisis stabilisation/stop the bleeding) (Balgobin and Pandit)
- Recognise that sustainable, wholesale change takes longer
- Recognise that things often get worse before they get better; as new issues are revealed, morale may dip (Fulop)
- Recognise that structural or policy change does not equal practice change (Smale)
- Resources must be sufficient and appropriately targeted
- Delivery and intervention is rarely a one-off task – it is a circular process of continuous learning, adapting and improving.

Implications for Improvement Teams

- Achieve quick wins – ‘stop the bleeding’ and make sure that services are safe
- Work on multiple fronts
- Build on what is assessed as good
- Engage staff at all levels
- Be innovative and creative
- Be prepared to respond flexibly to emerging issues
- Lay foundations for longer-term sustainability
- Have explicit, agreed criteria for judging improvements

These bullet lists are neither exhaustive, nor prioritised. The literature suggests that change is best achieved through a whole systems approach that works flexibly to engage people throughout the organisation, recognising their particular context and situation.

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Annexe 4

Summary of Councils

	BIRMINGHAM	NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE	COVENTRY	WALSALL	HARINGEY	SWINDON	WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD	WALTHAM FOREST
STAR RATING	Still No Stars					Still No Stars		Still No Stars
2004	PAT from Deloitte & Touche Jul 02 to Feb 04	PAT from PriceWaterhouse Coopers Aug 02 to Jun 03	PAT from KPMG Aug 02 to Mar 04	PAT from KPMG Aug 02 to Apr 04	PAT from KPMG Aug 02 to Mar 04	PAT from PriceWaterhouse Coopers Jan 03 to Apr 04	PAT from PriceWaterhouse Coopers Mar 03 to Apr 04	PAT from Deloitte & Touche Mar 03 to Apr 04
2003								
2002	Zero Stars May 2002	Zero Stars May 2002	Zero Stars May 2002	Zero Stars May 2002	Zero Stars May 2002	Zero Stars May 2002	Zero Stars Nov 2002	Zero Stars Nov 2002
2001	SSI follow-up inspection	Joint Review Feb and Apr	SSI inspections of both elderly and children's services	Joint Review Aug/Oct	Victoria Climbié's case was published	Joint Review Jun/Sep	Joint Review Feb and Mar	Joint Review Oct/Dec
2000	Enhanced Regional Monitoring	Special Measures from November 1999, following a child death			SSI inspected children's services in June 2000			
1999	Joint Review Nov and Dec		Joint Review Feb and Mar		Joint Review Mar and Apr			
1998								



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