
**COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT -
SELF ASSESSMENT**

Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor John Williams, Leader

Responsible Director(s) - Barry Keel, Chief Executive

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents draft information to be supplied to the Audit Commission to support the Council's corporate assessment as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process for 2004.

Summary

2. CPA scores for single and top tier authorities were refreshed in December 2003 and will be refreshed in December 2004 using the same methodology as for 2002.
3. A previous report to Cabinet¹ explained that the earliest point at which the authority could attain an excellent rating would be late 2004.
4. The attached self assessment provides supporting evidence for a corporate assessment to take place week commencing 11 October 2004.

Information and Analysis

5. After consultation with the local government community, the Audit Commission decided to refresh CPA scores on an annual basis using the methodology introduced in 2002. In 2005/06 the methodology will be revised.
6. CPA scores are based on: inspection results (OFSTED; Social Services Inspectorate, Audit Commission; Benefit Fraud Inspectorate); performance indicators (PIs) and assessed plans such as the Local Transport Plan, Capital Strategy etc.
7. In 2002, the authority was rated 'good'.
8. The authority's strong track record on PIs and assessed plans means that most improvement to scores in individual services comprising the overall CPA rating is dependent on future inspection results. This in turn depends on the timing of inspections.
9. To obtain an excellent score, the authority must improve its Social Services star rating from one to two stars and undergo another corporate assessment, as well as sustaining and improving other services.

¹ CPA - The Next Steps - 10 June 2003

10. Taking into account the timing of inspections and the development work underway in social services, it was predicted that the earliest opportunity to move from good to excellent is December 2004. This of course requires the authority to sustain and improve other services and corporately.
11. Evidence of improvement since 2003 includes:
 - (a) environment service block improved from a score of 2 to 3;
 - (b) benefits service block improved from a score of 3 to 4 (maximum score);
 - (c) use of resources block improved from a score of 3 to 4 (maximum score).
12. PWC carried out a qualitative assessment process on the council corporately in 2003. This resulted in the strongest statement of positive direction of travel.

“Darlington Borough Council has made significant improvements to services over the last year. It has improved benefits and environment services. It is investing to boost the local economy through major developments and offsets the effects of a factory closure by helping to create 354 new jobs. The council is working to help everyone be part of the community. More older people now have the help they need to stay in their own homes. More public buildings are accessible to people with disabilities. In education more young people gained five GCSEs, although achievements in some age groups declined. The council continued to improve the systems it uses to prioritise its work, measure its performance and develop its staff. Based on Darlington Council’s current plans, the council is well placed to further improve the way it works and services to local people.”
13. In 2003, therefore the authority retained its ‘good’ rating with strong prospect for improvement. The next step is a corporate assessment process which evaluates the progress made against strengths and on overcoming weaknesses. To support this process the council must complete a self assessment, a draft of which is attached as **Appendix A**.
14. Prior to CPA 2002, Resources Scrutiny Committee considered an early draft of the self assessment, made constructive comments and therefore helped improve the quality of the finished assessment. This process has been followed again and comments from Resources Scrutiny are expected following their meeting on 16 September.
15. The attached draft is obviously incomplete. Further work is necessary to:
 - (a) finalise text on the introductions and summaries of each section;
 - (b) add statistics and page numbers throughout the text and particularly to the section on achievement;
 - (c) convert the bullet points to text in order to tell a story;
 - (d) incorporate comments of Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Outcome of Consultation

16. The conclusion of Resources Scrutiny Committee will be incorporated within the final draft of the self assessment. The self assessment also draws heavily on the results of public consultation such as the residents' survey and employee surveys.

Legal Implications

17. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

18. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

19. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

20. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Recommendations

21. It is recommended that:
 - (a) the authority undertakes a corporate assessment in order to move towards an excellent rating;
 - (b) that the self assessment attached as **Appendix A** is submitted to the Audit Commission following amendments as outlined in paragraph 15 and agreement by the Leader.

Reasons

22. The recommendation is supported by the following reason: to ensure that the authority presents information to support the improvement achieved since the last CPA.

Lorraine O'Donnell
Head of Policy

Background Papers

BVPP 2004/2005

CPA Qualitative Assessment – 4 November 2003

CPA - The Next Steps - 10 June 2003

Corporate Assessment Team Report - December 2002

DBC Self Assessment - July 2002

CPA Self Assessment 24 July 2002

CPA – 16 April 2002

Lorraine O'Donnell : Extension 2013

Ambition

CPA in 2002 found that the authority had been ambitious for the borough and council services since LGR. It noted key strengths in leadership of both officers and members and very good partnership working. Two years ago, development of the Tees Valley Vision and the Community Strategy, whilst well advanced, was not yet complete.

Since 2002, plans have been finalised, agreed and are being implemented effectively such that improvements are recognised by local people (ADD EXAMPLES). The borough is being improved physically through strategic development that is attracting new jobs; Darlington Partnership is an exemplar LSP that is attracting national attention and addressing local problems in a holistic fashion. Striving for Excellence is yielding performance improvements – 15% improvement in PIs since 2002; improved service ratings for environment, benefits and use of resources. At the same time the council is investing in staff development and sustaining high levels of morale. Overall the authority is a more confident and successful community leader, service provider and employer than in 2002. All of our plans are linked and outcome focused which demonstrates our continued ambition for the future.

Briefing papers on the implementation of Darlington Gateway and the Development Showcase publication provide evidence of the authority's ambition becoming reality. Developments such as Morton Palms, West Park, Haughton Road and Faverdale are transforming the borough and creating jobs, for example 600 jobs will be created through Argos developing a new warehousing and distribution facility at Faverdale. The authority's ambition in this area is perhaps most evident in the success with which private sector speculative investment is being attracted to the town. Our ambition to become a stronger, high quality regional centre is therefore the right strategy and is becoming a reality.

The Community Strategy has been agreed and is owned by all partners. It forms the top level plan from which a 'golden thread' exists to link all corporate, departmental and service plans within the council and increasingly of other partners. The LSP is a mature partnership able to lead creatively on issues that are important to local people such as anti-social behaviour and alcohol. The existing strong partnership culture within the LSP has proved very supportive of performance management development and pro-active implementation of the Community Strategy. The ODPM (Lord Rooker), the Audit Commission and the LGA have all sought to learn from the approach taken in Darlington. Our bid to become a pilot Local Area Agreement authority is based on the belief, supported by others, that Darlington epitomises partnership working and is leading in this area.

Ambition for council services was evident in the origins of *Striving for Excellence*. The authority set out to be excellent in CPA terms, provides extremely good service delivery (first in the country on CPA BVPIs) despite one of the lowest council tax bases. Service improvements have been made in environment, benefits and use of resources and are further expected in social services. The BVPP 2004/05 shows that the authority is on track to deliver on our corporate objectives and community strategy themes. Our relative position on citizen satisfaction has improved markedly since 2001.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambitions for the borough and for the Council's services since LGR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambition for the borough was apparent in 2002 through the development work on the Tees Valley Vision and Community Strategy. These are now both in place, being implemented and showing results (see below). Ambition for the council was apparent in <i>Striving for Excellence</i> which is now a well established strategy leading to outcomes (see below) and the authority's ambition is clearly to be an excellent authority. Both types of ambition are apparent in the authority's strong desire for improvements to be recognised by the public. The authority is top quartile for the majority QUANTIFY satisfaction BVPIs. The authority is now very active in national and policy development e.g. piloting of children's trusts; participation in Local Area Agreement development and Darlington : Town on the Move; full service/extended schools. Ambition for an innovative education village is becoming a reality – the PFI was signed off within 12 months and construction is underway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tees Valley Vision. Community Strategy <i>Striving for Excellence</i> ODS Analysis of Public Satisfaction BVPIs. Briefing paper on involvement in policy development. Darlington: A Town on the Move. Briefing paper on education.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear leadership by councillors and senior officers, including very good community leadership; development of Community Partnership/LSP seen as essential to improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy implementation driven by LSP using outcome focused annual action plans and on track. • Darlington Assembly attendance increasing and addressing important crosscutting issues in addition to monitoring the implementation of the Community Strategy. • LSP and Community Strategy increasingly being used by other agencies. • Voluntary/community representation on the LSP strengthened. • LSP secretariat has been strengthened. • Increased recognition of strength of Darlington Partnership and effective community leadership style of the council. • LSP ownership of Quality of Life indicators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy. • Community Strategy Action Plans (2003/04 and 2004/05). • Briefing note on Darlington Assembly. • Assembly agendas and conference notes (Choosing Health; Antisocial Behaviour). • Membership of LSP Board. • Agendas of LSP Board showing participation of all sectors. • Board paper on election process for community representatives. • Board papers on Quality of Life indicators. • Briefing note on ODPM, Audit Commission and other interest in Darlington Partnership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ambition for the borough in context of Tees Valley now emerging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tees Valley Vision now adopted by Tees Valley Partnership including Darlington Gateway and town centre developments. • Darlington Gateway implementation is delivering what it sets out to do including major strategic developments such as Houghton Road, Morton Palms, West Park, Faverdale, Commercial Street and Pedestrian Heart. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tees Valley Vision • Briefing note on Darlington Gateway implementation. • Planning Showcase document.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ambition for the organisation set out in 'Striving for Excellence' strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All elements of the Organisational Development Strategy are being implemented effectively (see CAPACITY for further details). • 3 constituent parts of the ODS have been revised and updated to reflect better than expected delivery of outcomes (as measured through employee surveys). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee survey analyses for 2003 and 2004. • Revised documentation for 3 strands of ODS – people management, performance management and communications.

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council may not be ambitious enough especially in context of heritage, culture and the arts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New cultural strategy (Moving up) adopted in 2003. Theme of ‘Stimulating leisure activities’ has been incorporated in the Community Strategy. Dolphin Centre refurbishment plans in development. Arts managers and staff providing assistance to Durham City Gala Theatre. Young People’s opera (Blaze) celebrating Darlington’s rail heritage makes national press. Excellent satisfaction ratings for arts. Create partnerships school based. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving Up Dolphin Centre outline plans Acquire reference from Leader, Durham City Council. Blaze review The Guardian. Leisure attendances Analysis of Public satisfaction BVPIs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priorities are difficult to identify in the Community Plan, which is structured around themes, and in the Council’s 12 aims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Strategy has 8 themes, 3 are ranked as highest priorities: the economy, education and social inclusion. Corporate Plan amalgamated with BVPP in 2003/04 (a year ahead of Government guidance) and in 2004/05. Both clearly show the council’s contribution to the 8 themes. 5 corporate objectives ensure the council takes a balanced scorecard approach to all planning. Service planning completely revised – common thread linking all plans to the Corporate Plan and Community Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Strategy. Community Strategy Action Plans (2003 and 2004/05). Corporate Plan and BVPP (2003/06 and 2004/07) Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of relationship between planning and performance management. Service plans. Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of performance of each theme.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Management Framework revised to report progress against themes. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only implicit reference to overarching themes of social inclusion and no reference to e-government in Community Plan and council aims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social inclusion is the third highest priority in the Community Strategy. • Social inclusion strategy in development. • Effective leadership of LSP and council approach to social inclusion. • Ensuring access for all is one of the 5 corporate objectives used to ensure a corporate approach to e-government. • £500k has been approved for the development of a call centre/contact centre which is being project managed according to PRINCE2. • Council's influence helped ensure LSP addresses e-government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy. • Community Strategy Action Plans (2003/04 and 2004/05). • Social Inclusion Strategy. • Briefing note on social inclusion. • Page XXX in current BVPP for reference to E-govt. • E-govt Strategy. • ICT Strategy. • In 2003 SOCITM named Darlington one of the country's most improved websites. • Call/Contact Centre PID. • LGOL funding was obtained to improve the LSP's website.

3. What other progress has been made?

- Maturity of the LSP to tackle difficult issues e.g. alcohol, ASB and to engage in mature, challenging debate amongst the partners.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 - strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

Strengths in 2002 remain strengths and have been built on over the past two years. All weaknesses have been addressed. Ownership of the Community Strategy by partners and the LSP's adoption of performance management makes us confident that the ambition set out in Darlington Gateway and the Community Strategy will be delivered. The ability of the partnership to recognise and respond to important local issues means that ambition will continue to be demonstrated on a day to day basis as well as the long term. Our comparison of LSPs and Community Strategies in other areas has led us to conclude that we are now strong (score of 4) in this area.

Prioritisation

The long term priorities for the borough have been set out clearly in the Community Strategy. This has been based on extensive consultation, analysis of socio-economic indicators and discussion amongst all partners. Priorities are owned by all partners and the Community Strategy provides the overarching framework within which other plans are developed. This is happening for real in Darlington – it is not lip service and this explains at least in part, the interest from the ODPM and Audit Commission is learning more about Darlington Partnership. The LSP monitors the high level priorities of the strategy. The 2004/05 Community Strategy Action Plan demonstrates that overall the Community Strategy is on track and is helping us focus on outcomes that need improving.

Prioritisation exists at all levels within the council. Corporate ‘priorities for improvement’ are linked clearly to community strategy themes and corporate objectives. This is also the case at departmental and service levels. Furthermore, an innovative communications tool – corporate service planning posters was developed, in liaison with staff across the council, to articulate as simply as possible the linkages between a service team’s priorities for improvement and the highest level, Community Strategy priorities. This poster also explains simply the roles of leading members and senior officers in the service planning process.

The authority’s strong performance management framework and consultation processes feed information into the service planning process. All services develop their service plans to a common template, at the same time and produce service specific plans to the corporate design. The degree of ownership of the process is demonstrated by the willingness of all services to use the process as part of their development days; the speed with which the process was achieved in the second year of implementation and the numbers of posters visible throughout all council venues. Furthermore, managers’ PDRs are now based on the extent to which they have delivered their service plans – the link between community strategy and PDRs is now complete.

The authority is increasingly able to demonstrate the linkage between spend and priorities e.g. the Leader specifically challenges the degree to which the authority meets citizen’s priorities. The BVPP explains how resources are allocated to priorities.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New 'priorities for improvement' within the six themes of the Community Plan are based on internal and external factors, with focus on under-performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approach helped the authority address underperformance in areas such as social services, benefits and transport. Proved to be extremely good foundation for the innovative approach to service planning. See CAPACITY. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved performance on PIs and inspection ratings in social services, benefits and transport. QUANTIFY.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular consultation with local people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong political commitment to incorporating citizens' priorities into the MTFP. Very good comparative performance on citizens' satisfaction. Continued strong approach to consultation e.g. primary schools review; housing options appraisal and social inclusion. Strong corporate co-ordination of consultation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of Spending on Citizens' Priorities. Analysis of Public Satisfaction BVPIs. Consultation Strategy Briefing note on consultation. CPN agendas and minutes.

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic priorities not clearly articulated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priorities now clear in ‘golden thread’ from Community Strategy, Corporate Plan/BVPP/departmental plans, service plans and statutory plans to PDRs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Strategy. Community Strategy Action Plans (2003/04 and 2004/05). Corporate Plan and BVPP (2003/06 and 2004/07) Service plans. Directors PDR submissions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priorities not articulated in a way which enables forward planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priorities now clear in ‘golden thread’ from Community Strategy, Corporate Plan/BVPP/departmental plans, service plans and statutory plans. Evidence of delivery – priority PIs more likely to be delivered than non-priority PIs. Linkage of plans with PMF – PIs of all types (BVPIs, PAFs, local PIs, QoL etc.) prioritised according to importance in relation to delivery of Darlington’s priorities. Linkage with service planning – clear relationship between individual service’s ‘priorities for improvement’ and Community Strategy themes. Adoption of PerformancePlus enables the authority to manage performance against priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Strategy. Community Strategy Action Plans (2003/04 and 2004/05). Corporate Plan and BVPP (2003/06 and 2004/07) Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of relationship between planning and performance management. Service plans. Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of performance of each theme. Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of performance against priority PIs. Consultant’s report on effectiveness of PerformancePlus implementation. Cabinet/CMT/Scrutiny reports on half year updates.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach risks council being reactive rather than proactive in identification of priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative service planning framework uses rear view processes (consultation results, performance information and complaints) as well as horizon scanning methods (national policies, opportunities, etc.) to ensure that proactive and reactive approaches are taken to service planning. See also CAPACITY. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of service planning process.
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3. What other progress has been made?

- A draft NRS is in place following extensive consultation and capacity building in 11 of the most deprived areas.
- Senior Managers’ Workshops have been held on the top 3 priorities: economy, education and social inclusion to take a holistic view of these across the authority.
- PSA was developed in accordance with Community Strategy and Corporate Plan priorities.
- Employees understand priorities [QUANTIFY].

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 – strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

Since 2002, the council’s approach to prioritisation has improved markedly. A common thread exists from the Community Strategy to individuals’ appraisals. The authority is able to demonstrate how it has shifted resources to support the economy, education and social inclusion. The authority specifically asks residents for their views on priorities for improvements and increasingly aligns resources with this intelligence. Well established consultation processes are in place and the authority has improved its ability to consult with hard to reach groups such as for the Social Inclusion Strategy. Capacity building work has supported the development of a draft Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

Progress in this area has been so substantial as to justify an improved score from 2 to 4. Our work on the implementation of PerformancePlus with authorities across the country suggests that our clarity of priority setting and the consistency and coverage of prioritised service planning is not commonplace. For this reason we have scored ourselves 4.

Focus

In 2002, the authority was rated 3 in recognition of our focus on the ‘new’ services of education and social services following LGR. Notable successes in community safety, the town centre and young people were also recognised.

A small unitary authority needs to be able to focus better than others – relatively small diversions of staff and/or resources would have a disproportionate effect. That the authority can remain focused is readily apparent from our pursuit of the LGR claim against Durham County Council leading to the award of £12 million. Similarly, the authority’s ability to recognise the risk inherent in the equal pay claim, take difficult decisions and resolve the issue successfully whilst remaining focused on the delivery of the Community Strategy and corporate plan is strong evidence of focus.

Major improvements to the quality of plans (Community Strategy, corporate plan and service plans); performance management and service planning as outlined in other parts of this assessment have meant that we have achieved a step improvement on focus also. The authority is focused on delivery of objectives as measured by high level indicators. Although there is inevitably slippage in some areas and reprioritisation in year, the fact that the Community Strategy and corporate plan are both on track is testimony to our ability to focus.

At the same time, the authority does not sacrifice rigid adherence to project timetables to learning. For example, the authority took longer than anticipated to produce a social inclusion strategy and neighbourhood renewal strategy. Although both could have been produced faster, the authority listened to key stakeholders and put a premium on effective engagement to ensure that these strategies have the same degree of ownership, as for example, the community strategy.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track record of focus on issues of importance: partnership development, education, social services and local economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued strengths of partnership working were highlighted under AMBITION. The council continues to focus on education: new schools, attainment, Federation, extended schools etc. The council continues to focus on social services: PAF, inspection results, new services to help people live at home; reduction in the numbers of looked after children. The council focused particularly on its strategy for council care home closures, tackling a difficult decision effectively and following the strategy through to the successful opening of high quality facilities. As outlined under AMBITION the council is making great strides under the Darlington Gateway programme. The council continued to focus on the economy in a immediate and effective response to the closure of BAT's Darlington operations. <p>N.B. ADD STATS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As for AMBITION. Pages XXX of BVPP relating to education. Pages XXX of BVPP relating to social services. Pages XXX of BVPP relating to the economy. 2004 ARM letter. Inspection of Physical Disability Services – Most, promising result. Briefing note on Darlington Gateway implementation. Successful negotiation of £1 million BAT legacy. Briefing note on education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused work on community safety and young people, both important to local people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued progress was made in Community Safety – achievement of Beacon Status and the agreement to mainstream fund community wardens. An opportunity to provide services for young people and address community concerns of young people causing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beacon Status award and feedback. Briefing note on Youth Service.

	<p>annoyance was secured by arranging youth discos. This has now been taken on by the private sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger links are being forged between the Youth Service and leisure following a restructuring. • Youth Assembly. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implicit priority of market town characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong development and implementation of projects designed to ensure Darlington retains its status as one of the region's prime shopping towns e.g. Pedestrian Heart and Commercial Street developments. • The Litter initiative was developed, launched and implemented to improve the cleanliness of the town centre. This struck a chord with residents and became an award winning project attracting national media coverage. • New town centre management group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing note on Darlington Gateway implementation. • Interviews on commercially sensitive developments. • LGC award submission for Community Initiative of the Year 2003 (winning entrant). • ENCAMS award. • BBC TV coverage. • Agenda and minutes of town centre management group.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing focus on social inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong developments – see under addressing weaknesses below. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are clear about roles: good staff appraisal system and good internal communications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Survey reinforced this strength (ADD STATS). • Flyer continues to be a well regarded magazine – again award-winning. Departmental magazines have improved in frequency, format and style from last time. • Talktime with Chief Executive enables organisation to respond to employee concerns. • PDRs increasingly linked to service plans. • Senior Manager's Workshops continue to focus on the council's priorities and engaging a wide cross section of staff on finding new ways of working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of employee surveys. • Flyer wins XXX award. • New staff kitchens built following staff suggestions at Talktime. • PDRs of staff and managers including CX and directors.

Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top level themes for the most part not outcome focused and measurable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy now outcome focused since April 2003. • Corporate Plan outcome focused for two years. • Service plans measurable and linked to Community Strategy and Corporate Plan. • PMF structured to reflect priorities and measurable at all levels. • PerformancePlus used to tailor performance reporting to themes, Cabinet portfolios, scrutiny terms of reference, departments etc. • Community Strategy progress reported against outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy. • Community Strategy Action Plans (2003/04 and 2004/05). • Corporate Plan and BVPP (2003/06 and 2004/07) • Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of relationship between planning and performance management. • Service plans. • Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of performance of each theme. • Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of performance against priority PIs. • Consultant’s report on effectiveness of PerformancePlus implementation. • Cabinet/CMT/Scrutiny reports on half year updates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strategic approach to social inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Inclusion Strategy in place. • Social Inclusion identified as third highest priority in the Community Strategy. • Policy Advisor (Social Inclusion) appointed to be lead officer for the council and the LSP. • Social Inclusion officer and member groups revised to provide strategic leadership. • Extensive consultation on social inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Inclusion Strategy. • Briefing note on social inclusion. • Community Strategy.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service planning underdeveloped; financial planning not yet linked to priorities and policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New approach to service planning that was seen as a strength in 2002 INVESTMENT has now been completely and consistently implemented and is in second year of operation. See also CAPACITY. • Innovative approach to service planning involved the development of posters, simplifying relationships between all levels of planning and a service’s actions for the year. This has contributed to excellent ownership of the process and very good levels employee knowing what is expected of them [ADD STATS]. • Service planning priorities feed into the MTFP process. Good linkages of the Capital Strategy and Community Strategy/Corporate Plan. • A NRS in development identifies priorities in 11 deprived areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy. • Community Strategy Action Plans (2003/04 and 2004/05). • Corporate Plan and BVPP (2003/06 and 2004/07) • Pages XXX in current BVPP for explanation of service planning process. • Service plans. • Service plan posters. • MTFP 2003/07 and 2004-08 (CHECK) • Capital Strategy • Analysis of Spend on citizens’ priorities. • NRS background papers. • Briefing paper on matching spend to priorities.
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3. What other progress has been made?

- PerformancePlus – facilitating better focus on priorities.
- LSP adoption of PerformancePlus
- Continued informal meetings of Cabinet/CMT to identify and track ‘challenging issues’ as they arise. These are issues such as equal pay claims with the potential to throw the authority off track if not managed effectively. Equal pay claims provides a useful case study as to the authority’s ability to do this effectively.
- The council has been able to prepare earlier and more detailed budget papers to support development of the MTFP which is now well established.
- Striving for Excellence ensures that key messages are communicated to all staff.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 - strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

Since the council now has the tools (plans, PMF, planning processes, risk management process etc.) to support the desire for focus, there is sufficient evidence to justify an increased score of 4.

Capacity

Striving for Excellence was designed to improve people management, performance management and communications. In addition to the performance improvements noted elsewhere, it is clear that the organisational strategy is working. Two employee surveys have been carried out since 2002. These show that inter alia:

- 79.3% employees believe that the council is committed to better services;
- 92.8% employees are aware of the standard of service they need to deliver;
- 84% regularly see the Flyer.

More than 100 managers have completed a management development course at various levels; X are studying towards a public services MBA and the authority has 2 national graduate trainees.

Talktime has been carried out successfully across the organisation enabling the chief executive to work closely with directors on specific departmental issues and address employee concerns.

Senior Managers' Workshops have been held on the top priorities (the economy, education and social inclusion). An awards ceremony was held in July 2004 to recognise individual and team achievements.

All members undertake at least a minimum number of training sessions each year. Democratic Services work closely with members to design a training programme specific to their needs. Scrutiny members have designed and take part in innovative training programmes to improve still further from a high base – Darlington was selected as one of nine pilots nationally to undertake externally funded research which will be evaluated. Darlington Scrutiny Members have been asked by the IDeA, EO etc. to help train members in other authorities.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillors are well led and well informed; joint meetings cabinet/CMT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member induction programme for all new members following the 2003 elections. Commitment to members training – all members attend at least 5 training sessions from a programme on which they are consulted. Cabinet/CMT development days have continued and have been particularly useful in addressing ‘challenging issues’ and discussing service development e.g. on Children’s Services. Stable leadership at member and officer level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member induction programme. Member training programme. Briefing note on Member/Officer development days.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny is maturing and working well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint Cabinet/Scrutiny days have been held. Further, ground-breaking scrutiny training involving video analysis of committees. Scrutiny member awareness and training on service planning and PerformancePlus. Successful bid for funding to carry out scrutiny project to be evaluated by XXX University. Chair of Monitoring and Overview has led training sessions at other authorities. Task groups held on important issues e.g. primary school review, procurement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing note on scrutiny training. Briefing note on PerformancePlus implementation. Nationally funded research on Scrutiny review of breastfeeding. Task group minutes. LGC shortlisting of scrutiny training for Member Initiative of the Year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘Striving for Excellence’ strategy being implemented: covers people management, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good progress on people management: XX new managers; XX middle managers and 6 senior managers on management development programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Striving for Excellence. (ODS) Progress reports on ODS. Revisions to ODS.

<p>performance management and internal communications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XX PDRs completed to revised process linking into service planning. • Employee Suggestion Scheme implemented and Awards celebration held (CHECK NAME). • Good progress made on performance management (see PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT). • Good progress made on communications: Flyer wins award; Intranet developed; Talktime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGA featured ODS on Road Maps for Improvement. • Employee surveys.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR action plan and 'IIP' accreditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress of HRM set out in LGC submission for Personnel Team of the Year which was highly commended. • IIP reaccreditation due September 2004 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGC Submission.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good internal communications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intranet launched September 2003. • Approach to internal and external communications was set out in LGC submission for Communications Team of the Year which was commended. • Senior Managers' Workshops continue to be held on priorities. • Talktime. • Joint Consultative Committees meetings with unions at corporate and departmental levels are more advanced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGC Submission. • Senior Managers' Workshops programmes. • Flyer award. • Employee kitchen developments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very good partnership working to enhance capacity to improve services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See AMBITION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See AMBITION

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approach to equal opportunities is not yet producing results after two years' work (except for women in senior management posts). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attained Level 2 of the RCE Equality Standard for Local Government. Proactive recruitment in BME communities following more detailed analyses of HR data. Monitoring uptake of LanguageLine. Information for All project Corporate Equalities Plan produced to cover the council's approach to all equalities issues. Improved networking and involvement in policy development regionally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BVPI2 CMT reports on HR equalities monitoring. Briefing note on Social inclusion. CMT reports on Information for All. Corporate Equalities Plan. Successful bid to ODPM Capacity Building Fund.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications with staff are still largely paper based; no Intranet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intranet now in place. Departmental newsletters distributed electronically. The council piloted a phone helpline service. All communication announcements are made by email and email is used extensively within the authority and with partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental newsletters.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement capacity is underdeveloped. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement Advisor in post since Feb 2003. Revised Procurement Strategy reflects development of Corporate Procurement Function which is being strengthened through further recruitment. Procurement Strategy ensures that DBC will meet National Procurement Strategy targets and the Efficiency Review targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement Strategy Briefing note on Procurement. CMT papers on spend map. CMT, Council and Tender panel reports on Development and Environment consultancy work. Council reports on PFI.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CX and Head of Policy represented on regional steering group and advisory network for Regional Centres of Procurement respectively. • Spend map enabled priorities to be identified for securing economies of scale. £XXX savings have been identified so far. • Rationalisation and improved contract monitoring have been achieved on priority areas e.g. mobile phones. • Corporate leadership of procurement decisions. • Work with AMEC • D&E consultancy work • PFI 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management strategy not implemented yet (only recently agreed). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management integrated with service planning – innovative approach. • Key risks, corporately and departmentally are identified, assessed and rated. • Current controls for risks are identified and where these controls are deemed insufficient, new controls identified. • Named ‘riskholders’. • Chief Internal Auditor leading the risk management process works closely with CPN. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Management Strategy. • Service planning template. • CPN minutes. • Equal pay claim as example of well managed risk.

3. What other progress has been made?

- Conscious effort to participate more fully in regional/national forums and in pilot policy initiatives.
- Acted in advisory capacity for others e.g. Teesdale, Wansbeck, Durham City, OTHERS??
- Working in partnership with private/public sector to supplement capacity e.g. Waterstons (egovt); Stockton (CRM procurement); Stockton (educational psychology); SEN Partnership (Stockton).
- Management restructuring and ICT investment in 2003 has built capacity in social services.
- Provision of services to other authorities e.g. CCTV, asbestos removal, theatre management.

3. Overall how would you score the council?

3/4

4. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

To be added.

Performance Management

In 2002, financial management was recognised as a strength; performance monitoring was seen to be effective and the new performance management framework was being put into place very effectively.

Performance management has improved considerably over the last two years. The advances in the quality of plans, prioritisation and innovative service planning process have been linked effectively to our performance management framework. Evidence of improvement can be seen from the following:

- data quality has improved – only one BVPI was qualified in 2002/03 and none in 2003/04;
- the authority has a linked set of priorities (from community strategy to service plans) that, at every level, are measured by PIs;
- the authority no longer concentrates on BVPIs – the PMF comprises QofL, PAF, BVPIs and local indicators. Relevance to Darlington's objectives is the deciding factor for inclusion and prioritisation not type of indicator;
- the authority chose PerformancePlus as its corporate performance management system because of its ability to link planning and performance. PIs are the means by which we determine whether our plans are on track i.e. we focus on outcomes and outputs not actions;
- the authority is at a very advanced stage of implementation of PerformancePlus, as recognised by an independent challenge. Consequently Inphase use Darlington as a reference site and we lead the regional user group;
- the LSP and partners such as the police are now also beginning to use PerformancePlus as a reporting tool;
- performance information is tailored to individual portfolios, scrutiny committees, departments, themes so that challenge is provided at the most appropriate level;
- PDRs challenge attainment against PIs.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance is monitored and reported, with focus on poor performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMF has been further strengthened (see strengths below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of performance improvements including best performance in country on CPA PIs and x%, x%, X% X% improvements over last four years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sound financial management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long established MTFP process. Improved linkage between financial and service planning process. Improved auditor scores for financial management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MTFPs BVPP Improved Use of Resources score from 3 in 2002 to 4 in 2003. Management Letters.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New performance management framework being put into place very effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Striving for Excellence led to embedding of strong performance culture – all improvements in performance management (see overcoming weaknesses below) stem from this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of performance improvements including best performance in country on CPA PIs and x%, x%, X% X% improvements over last four years. See also addressing weaknesses below.

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance management not yet fully in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMF now well established – performance culture demonstrated through results and employee surveys. Investment in performance management software, PerformancePlus to improve linkage between planning (AMBITION, PRIORITISATION) and delivery (FOCUS and ACHIEVEMENT) Hierarchy of PIs from Community Strategy, Corporate Plan, departmental and service plans to PDRs. Approach to performance management extending into all policy development and partnership working. Acknowledged leading authority on performance management. Tailored management reporting (Cabinet/CMT/Scrutiny) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BVPP Employee surveys. Briefing note on PerformancePlus. PSA being managed using PerformancePlus. CRDS to use PerformancePlus. Leading PerformancePlus regional user group. Good peer feedback on Darlington developed user manuals etc. Request reference from Robert Hobbs, MD, Inphase. Consultants report on implementation of PerformancePlus. Community Strategy Action Plan 2004/05. PerformancePlus scorecards. Half year reporting on priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service planning currently inconsistent and incomplete, not linked to financial planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See above (FOCUS and PRIORITISATION) for linkage to Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and MTFP. Service planning complete, consistent, carried out as early as possible and owned by departments. New corporate planning template and timetable introduced and in second year of operation. Innovative service planning posters developed and rolled out across organisation as communications tool for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See FOCUS and PRIORITISATION. Community Strategy. BVPP Service planning template. CPN agendas and minutes. Service plans. Service planning posters.

	<p>staff. Evidence of understanding from employee surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of members more explicit and integral part of service planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PerformancePlus scorecards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member involvement in performance management underdeveloped. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet members work with directors to agree service plan posters. • Scrutiny members monitor service plans. • Member training sessions on performance management. • Cabinet/CMT days included performance management. • Cabinet and Scrutiny champions of PerformancePlus. • Scrutiny sessions on PerformancePlus. • Scrutiny training days on BVPP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service plan posters. • Member training programme. • Briefing note on Member/Officer development days. • Briefing note on PerformancePlus. • Minutes of scrutiny training sessions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management processes not yet fully developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Management Strategy in operation for 2 years. • Integration of risk management and service planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management strategy. • Service planning template. • CPN agendas and minutes.

3. What other progress has been made?

- Securing LGOL funds to incorporate PerformancePlus in the LSP.
- The LSP Secretariat assuming responsibility for Quality of Life data.
- Closer linkages with the Police and PCT on the performance agenda.
- Bidding for LAA pilot status as the natural extension of strengths in partnership working and performance management.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 - strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

Performance management will continue to evolve in Darlington. Because of the intimate linkage with planning, the authority is able to probe further into cause and effect of different levels of performance. The authority is also able to 'join up' objectives between services and departments. The potential of the system is almost endless. The authority's linkage with Inphase Software who have many high profile clients enables us to challenge our approach to performance management whilst providing independent evidence that we are in a leading set of authorities on this issue. For this reason we have scored ourselves 4.

Achievement of Improvement

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant achievements since LGR in improving education and housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New schools – ADD DETAILS • Attainment trends - QUANTIFY • Decent homes standard – best in region reflecting history of sound strategic and operational management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing note on education. • Briefing note on housing [N.B. NEEDS TO RELATED TO R&M INSPECTION].
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements also in social services, although performance more mixed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance no longer mixed – strong direction of improvement in e.g. delayed transfers, older people helped to live at home and reduction in numbers of looked after children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARM letter. • Most, promising prospects result for Physical Disability Inspection. • Authority expects 2* in 2004.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in community safety and in the development of the borough and local economy including job creation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in public’s feelings of safety [QUANTIFY]. • Beacon Status for CDRP. • ASB work. • £1million legacy negotiated with BAT as part of plant closure. • Darlington Gateway transforming strategic developments in the town. • Argos to bring 600 jobs through development of a new warehousing and distribution facility at Faverdale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVPI • Beacon Status award and feedback. • Darlington Assembly Conference notes. • BAT legacy. • Argos • Briefing note on Darlington Gateway implementation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives on social inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See PRIORITISATION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See PRIORITISATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance overall against non-financial PIs improved 14% 2000/2001-2001/02; performance improving faster than in many authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintained and improved on this direction of travel. Performance results extremely good in comparison with all English, unitary and regional authorities. Analysis relative to council tax spend makes this an even better result. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance analysis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents see improvement in key service areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents see progress on the Community Strategy. • Council's satisfaction results compare very favourably with regional, national and unitary peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents' Survey analysis. • Analysis of citizens' satisfaction.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, Best Value Inspections are positive and 5 of 7 have seen 'promising' prospects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2002, the only inspection has had excellent prospects for improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regeneration.

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declining performance or no improvement on about one third of national indicators in 2001/02. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TO BE ADDED FOLLOWING FINAL PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance analysis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little overall improvement in social services this year, with poor and declining performance in some aspects of the council's services for vulnerable people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No longer the case. Most recent inspection was first 'most' result for the authority. PAFs improving – QUANTIFY. ADD FURTHER EXAMPLES FROM ARM LETTER. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical disability inspection. PAFs. ARM Letter.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External assessment of benefits service as 'fair' with limitations on capacity for improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now fair to good. CPA rating improved from 3 in 2002 to 4 in 2004. ADD STATS FROM BENEFITS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DWP Benefits rating. CPA Benefits Score. Performance analysis pages XXX.

3. What other progress has been made?

- All Community Strategy and Corporate Plan objectives on track.
- See achievements in current BVPP for each theme (Pages XXX).
- CPA ratings improved for Benefits, Environment and Use of Resources from 2002 to 2003. Improvement expected in Social Services in 2004.
- PSA in place.
- College move.
- Litter initiative.
- Beacon Council third consecutive year.
- LGR resolution.
- PFI signed off within 12 months of invitation to tender and within price envelope. Contractors now on-site.
- First collaborative result (Eastbourne/Hurworth Schools) in the country. Good progress at Eastbourne which is expected to come out of special measures in November.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

3/4

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

To be added.

Investment

This was our strongest element in CPA 2002 reflecting the sound thinking behind and development of new initiatives at that time. These included Tees Valley Vision and Community Strategy development, service planning and Striving for Excellence. As outlined throughout this assessment, major areas of investment are now paying dividends in terms of achievements on the ground, performance improvements and increased capacity.

In line with our ambition for the borough and council services, the council is also investing in new initiatives to deliver over the next few years:

- £500k investment in the development of a call/contact centre;
- a revised procurement strategy to ensure the council delivers against National Procurement Strategy and Efficiency Review targets and further recruitment to the corporate procurement function;
- prudential borrowing to support attainment of 'Darlington Standard' decent homes (i.e. higher than national standard);
- joint member/officer working on the development of children's services;
- joint CMT/headteachers working on improving educational attainment and social inclusion – to extend the council's successful track record of partnership working to schools in order to deliver the community strategy;
- project management investment has been made in new staff and adoption of a new project management methodology;

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Striving for Excellence’ being implemented – new performance management, people management and communications frameworks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See CAPACITY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See CAPACITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in training and development of councillors and staff, including senior management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for new managers, middle managers, senior managers (specifically related to attainment of corporate objectives) • Member training • Member induction • Corporate induction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress reports on ODS. • Employee surveys. • Member training programme. • Member induction programme. • Corporate induction programme.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused effort to improve performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilisation of financial resource base, Medium Term Financial Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulted planned council tax rises. • LGR settlement. • Equal pay claim. • Pilot authority for prudential borrowing first in country to use this as a strategy to meet the decent homes standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MTFPs • Council reports.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular consultation, consultation strategy in place; effective partnership working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See AMBITION and CAPACITY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See AMBITION and CAPACITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiatives to improve quality of life in local communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Strategy focused on securing improvements to quality of life. Specific initiatives on difficult, crosscutting issues. Full service/extended schools pilot in Hummersknott/Skerne Park Schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Strategy. Community Strategy Action Plans ASB Alcohol project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invested in new ways of working recognised with external awards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beacon council awards in 3 consecutive years. 4 shortlistings and one outright winner of LGC awards. ENCAMS and PR awards. MJ award shortlisting for Member training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Legal Service, CAHMS and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Member Initiative of the Year; Communications Team of the Year; Personnel Team of the Year and Community Initiative of the Year. Litter Initiative and Postal voting campaign.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing internal and external challenge, plus good BVR process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspection results (undisputed) show this is still true. SOLACE challenge to Cabinet/CMT/Scrutiny and external facilitation of training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing note on Member/Officer development days.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement strategy being implemented, with new approaches to procurement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk management strategy agreed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT strategy in development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted and being implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICT Strategy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External recognition/awards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awards as above Increasing participation in regional and national policy development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above LAAs, Planning, LSPs, Procurement, Equal opportunities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking steps to tackle equal opportunities and sickness levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See ACHIEVEMENT for equal opportunities Scrutiny review of sickness absence Revision of Occupational Health contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See ACHIEVEMENT for equal opportunities Scrutiny minutes Successful reduction in long term sickness (QUANTIFY)

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
None identified.	None identified.	None identified.

3. What other progress has been made?

- Children's Services preparations.
- Work with headteachers to challenge attainment and social inclusion.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 - strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

Comparison of investment in 2002 with improvements secured by 2004 shows that the council is skilled at turning investment into results. Now embedded planning processes ensure that the authority is investing in the major areas needed to ensure continued delivery in the future. In our view the score remains 4.

Learning

In 2002 the authority was able to demonstrate that it had applied learning from the 'seamless transition' phase of organisational development following unitary status through a period of taking stock from independent challenges and incorporate this into the development of Striving for Excellence.

Improvements over the last two years chiefly involve seeking and applying learning in a more systematic way such as:

- pro-actively seeking challenge/learning through the Beacon Council process – both through feedback at application stage and in the processes of dissemination/networking;
- sharing learning across the organisation e.g. CPN on consultation and planning and Senior Managers' Workshops;
- supporting other councils e.g. Teesdale, Wansbeck, Durham City on specific issues whilst learning from a different environment and context (officers/members);
- applying to pilot new initiatives to test out new ideas e.g. children's trust, sustainable transport town, LAA, extended schools;
- applying experience of taking difficult decisions to new situations.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good learning about partnership working now informing development of LSP and Community Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above for AMBITION and FOCUS • Participation in NUBs, LGIU, ODPM learning sets • Work with Audit Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above for AMBITION and FOCUS. • Briefing note on learning from others. • Briefing note on ODPM, Audit Commission and other interest in Darlington Partnership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational development based on learning from external challenge and own experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGA Road Map for Improvement – participated in study and featured as main case study. • ODS challenged and revised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGA documentation. • ODS progress reports. • Revised ODS frameworks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of ability to overcome barriers to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council tax increases • LGR • Equal pay claim • Care homes • School closures/amalgamations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEEDS BRIEFING NOTE.

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aims are not measurable so difficult for council to learn about what is and is not working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aims now measurable – See AMBITION, PRIORITISATION and FOCUS Service planning process facilitates learning – each service questions whether previous year’s actions have been effective and CPN evaluates whole process. LSP now doing this as part of annual action planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See AMBITION, PRIORITISATION and FOCUS. CPN minutes. LSP minutes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning is not yet based on fully implemented performance management systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMF fully in place, feeding service planning by reflecting on what works and challenging how we compare with others and over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison of BVPPs to see direction of evolution.

3. What other progress has been made?

- BVRs - the authority continues to learn from others in the course of BVRs. For example, in the Access to Services BVR, extensive visits were carried out to a range of local authorities. Furthermore, strategic partnerships were explored in depth with local authority chief executives and the ODPM.
- In addition to learning from others, the authority has sought to help others by sharing learning e.g. with Teesdale District Council on CPA.
- 8 employees are studying for an MBA at Teesside University.
- The authority continues to be part of benchmarking groups, both corporately and in individual service areas.
- The authority has learned from successful achievement of awards e.g. Beacons and is using this to assist new bids.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 - strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

Once again, improved planning and performance management systems are supporting this key area of activity. The service planning process requires all services to consider what worked and what didn't by linking priorities for improvement to PIs. The authority has a higher profile in the local government community as a consequence of Beacon Status, LGC pilot schemes and participation in national roundtables. This in turn supports the authority's learning and stimulates thinking on service improvement. For this reason it is believed that the authority's score has improved to 4.

Future Plans

The authority now has the planning framework in place and the mechanism with which to develop and review plans. Our approach has been to join up consultation and planning processes where possible to reduce the likelihood of consultation fatigue; utilise resources more effectively and maintain the common agreed direction established through the Community Strategy. For example consultation for the Local Plan and Cultural Strategy were carried out at the same time as the Community Strategy; the PSA was developed to support delivery of the Community Strategy and the CPN helps maintain consistency on service planning.

The service planning process builds in a regular reviews of plans and the council's ability to deliver on these. For example, delivery of the service plan is evaluated through the PDR process. When service plans are being drafted, any additional resource requirements are identified and considered as part of MTFP finalisation.

1. How have you built on and sustained the strengths identified in the 2002 corporate assessment?

Strength in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future planning in place in context of wider vision of Tees Valley. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tees Valley Vision now in place and fully linked to Community Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tees Valley Vision. • Briefing note on Darlington Gateway implementation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy is being developed on very sound basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key strengths referred to above. Now shaping everything that the authority and LSP does. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing note on ODPM, Audit Commission and other interest in Darlington Partnership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of ability to make difficult decisions to support improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Schools Review • School closures/amalgamations • Equal pay claim • LGR • Care homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEEDS BRIEFING NOTE.

2. Have you progressed the weaknesses identified in the 2002 corporate assessment? How much progress have you made?

Weakness in 2002	Progress	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic priorities not clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic priorities now clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy. • BVPP • Service Plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future plans not yet fully articulated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now fully articulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above.

3. What other progress has been made?

- The MTFP, which was rated highly in CPA 2002, has been strengthened through the LGR settlement.
- Striving for Excellence is acknowledged by employees, members and external assessors to be working and will continue to deliver results.
- The Community Strategy is being implemented through an annual process of action planning which is owned by the LSP.
- An ICT Strategy has been agreed.
- Procurement Strategy
- Social Inclusion Strategy.

4. Overall how would you score the council?

4 - strong

5. Please give the reasoning behind this assessment.

The main improvement from 2002 is the existence of robust systems to develop, monitor and challenge plans. For this reason we have scored this factor 4.