







SECTION THREE – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AND PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT











SUMMARY

The authority continues to produce a combined Corporate Plan and Best Value Performance Plan that looks at past performance at meeting targets and sets the agenda for the next 3 years. All priorities for action are identified in the context of the Community Strategy themes and corporate objectives. Further prioritisation is reflected in the identification of a number of priority PIs which comprise a subset of BVPIs, Social Services PAFs, Quality of Life indicators and local indicators. In 2003/04 the Council achieved an improvement in non-financial BVPIs of 4.8% building on the more than 10% per annum achieved in each of the previous three years. It is to be expected as performance approaches best quartile performance for over one-third of indicators with less than 10% being worst quartile that this rate of improvement would moderate. In 2004/05 the improvement in non-financial BPVIs however was 10.7% (CR8) - reflecting excellent performance in particular for promoting inclusive communities, enhancing the local environment and developing an effective transport system. Performance was relatively poor for stimulating leisure.

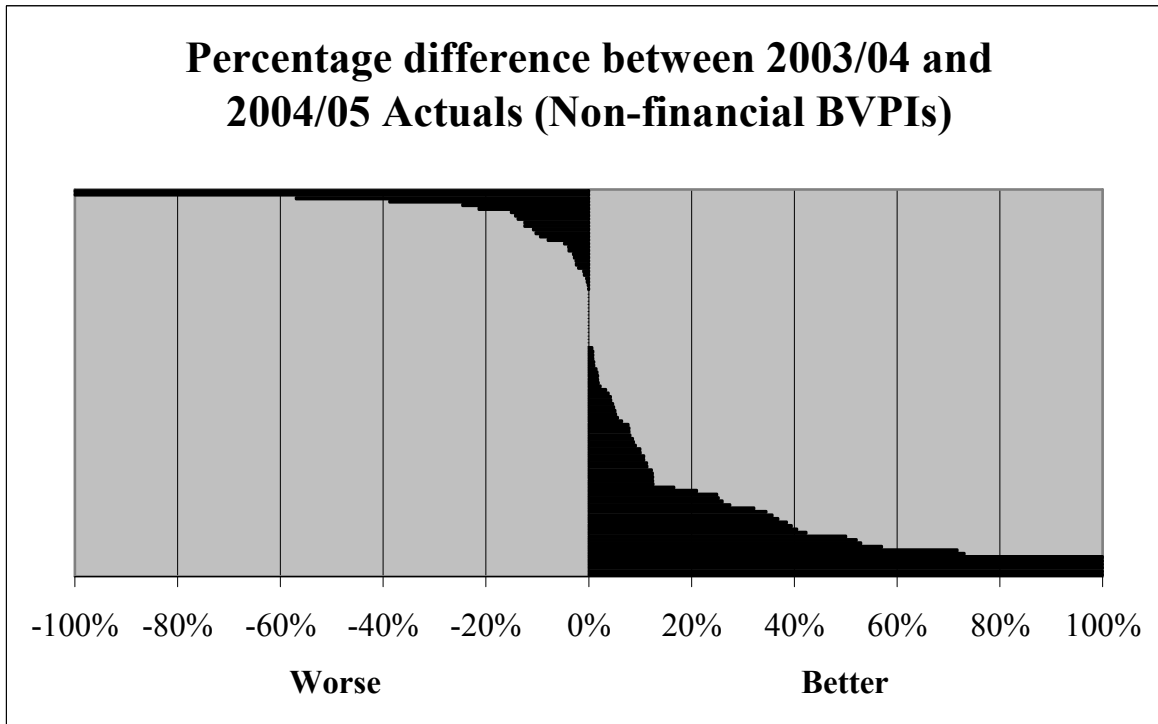
Summary of achievement by Corporate Objective for 2004/05 BVPIs and Local BVPP performance indicators

Corporate Objective	Overall Status	Comment
Shaping a better Darlington		Although some targets were not achieved for certain education attainment indicators overall good performance across the range of PIs
Delivering excellent services		Targets not achieved for some planning indicators due to a large increase in applications but action has been taken to improve performance.
Putting the customer first		Excellent performance on this small basket of indicators.
Ensuring access for all		Performance needs improving for some benefits and educational indicators.
Enhancing our capacity to improve		Corporate health improved significantly from 2003/04
DBC		

**Summary of achievement by Community Strategy Theme for 2004/05
BVPIs and Local BVPP performance indicators**

Community Strategy Theme	Overall status	Comment
Improving the local economy		More focus is required on addressing museum visits, the cost effectiveness of financial support to businesses and measures related to narrowing the employment/deprivation gap between the most prosperous and most deprived areas of the borough.
Promoting inclusive communities		Sound performance overall with excellent performance on housing and e-government. Need for further improvement in some benefits indicators.
Raising educational achievement		Although the overall performance in this trend looks to be on target, this is largely due to good performance on a range of local performance indicators, early years performance and a school being removed from special measures. Best value performance indicators for attainment and attendance are overall below target. This is a serious concern and being addressed urgently through the development of Children's services.
Stimulating leisure activities		There are a number of reasons for the disappointing overall performance in leisure, i.e. failure to meet satisfaction targets (though it should be noted that satisfaction with leisure is top quartile), attendance targets at Eastbourne sports complex were not met and the data to measure progress against the PSA target has not yet been collected.
Promoting community safety		Generally good performance across the board that demonstrates the Council working effectively in partnership with Durham Constabulary.
Improving health and well-being		Good performance again demonstrating the benefits of partnership working with Darlington PCT.
Enhancing the local environment		Improved for many of these PIs but some planning BVPIs still require further attention.
Developing an effective transport system		Condition of roads has again improved considerably in line with investment. Overall solid achievement against targets but bus passenger numbers have again declined.
All themes		Excellent performance for most corporate health indicators including early retirements. Sickness absence is on an improving trend and this needs to be sustained.
DBC		As in 2003/04 a very satisfactory overall measure of achievement against targets set against the Community Strategy Themes. Given the priority of education attainment, improvement in this area needs to the focus in 2005/06.

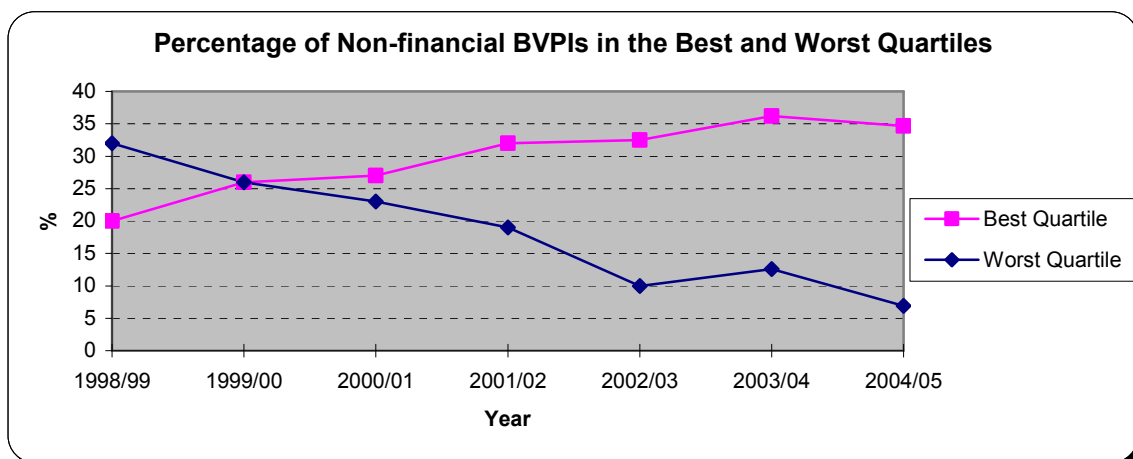
The graph below illustrates that for the majority of non-financial BVPIs performance is improving and that the picture is somewhat more favourable than 2003/04 in that the slope's transition for the 'Better' performance is further towards the zero indicating that more indicators are improving by relatively larger amounts.



The graph below shows the percentage of non-financial BVPIs in the Best (Top) and Worst (Bottom) quartiles compared to all English authorities. In 2004/5 there are 35 non-financial BVPIs in the best quartile (34.6%), 7 (6.9%) in the worst quartile and 59 (58.4%) in the middle half. It should be noted from the table that the number of BVPIs included has decreased due to the exclusion of the satisfaction BVPIs that are collected every three years.

Number of BVPIs and percentage in all English authorities' quartiles

Year	Best Quartile	Middle Half	Worst Quartile	Number of BVPIs
2002/03	23 (32.4%)	43 (60.1%)	6 (8.5%)	72
2003/04	46 (36.2%)	65 (51.2%)	16 (12.6%)	113
2004/05	33 (32.9%)	57 (56.7%)	10 (10.3%)	97



Headline Conclusions

The authority made a 10.5% improvement in the non-financial BVPIs in 2004/05 and this is more than twice the improvement made in 2003/04. This is an excellent result given the Council's already high performance compared to all English authorities.

It is pleasing to report that the authority is on track to deliver the Corporate Plan in overall terms and for each objective. Therefore the ambition and vision of the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan is being translated into outcomes as planned.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS

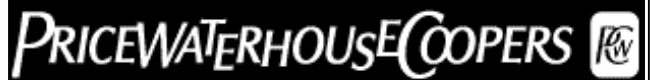
An 'Excellent' authority, improvement in Social Services and positive inspection results...

The authority has embraced external inspection and used the findings to enhance future service provision. Continued improvement across service areas and corporately has resulted in the authority being measured as 'Excellent' in the way that it serves its local people.

This section of the Performance Plan gives a commentary on the wide range of external audit and inspection activity that has taken place within the Council over the last year. Key aspects and specific ratings from inspections can be found in the following pages.



- Comprehensive Performance Assessment [service block scores], (December 2004)
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment [Corporate Assessment], (April 2005)
- Inspection of Supporting People Programme (June 2005)



- Audit and Inspection letter (December 2004)
- Inspection of Housing Repairs and Maintenance (October 2004)
- Inspection of Transport Services (October 2004)



- Inspection of Adult and Community Learning (February 2005)



- Inspection of Physical Disabilities (February 2004)
- CSCI Star Rating (November 2004)



Comprehensive Performance Assessment - April 2005

Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2004

How is Darlington Borough Council performing?

Overall Performance

excellent

Darlington Borough Council has been measured as **excellent** in the way that it serves its local people. The chart opposite shows what share of councils also received this rating.

We reached this overall rating by looking at:

1. How **Darlington Borough Council** is run; and
2. How **Darlington Borough Council's** main services perform.

Performance against other councils

Rating	Percentage
Poor	0%
Weak	10%
Fair	22%
Good	38%
Excellent	28%

1. How is Darlington Borough Council run and what progress has the council made in the last year?

Darlington Borough Council has changed from being good to excellent.

It has made improvements in social care, benefits and the local economy over the last year. Social care for adults and children improved significantly and the benefits service improved once more. The council has worked with others to attract businesses and create jobs, and has established new services in the most deprived areas of the borough. Local people's satisfaction with council services is high and people feel safer. There have been some improvements in educational attainment but performance at GCSE level fell in 2004. The council has strong ambitions and works well with its partners to achieve these. It manages its performance and budgets well and continues to invest in the way it works. It is developing its approach to diversity and has a new strategy to help it to improve the way it provides services to all sections of the community. However, the council is not yet able to demonstrate value for money across all of its services. Based on Darlington Borough Council's plans, the council is well placed to continue to improve the way it works and the services it provides to local people.

In April 2005 **Darlington Borough Council** received a measurement of 4 out of 4 for the way it is run.

2. How do Darlington Borough Council's main services perform?

We have assessed core service performance in the service areas shown alongside. Each service is scored on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. Education and social care are given more importance in reaching the overall service score than other areas.

Overall service performance **3 out of 4**

Service Area	Dec 2002	Dec 2003	Dec 2004
Education	2	3	3
Social Care (adults)	2	2	2
Social Care (children)	2	3	3
Environment	2	3	3
Housing	3	3	3
Libraries & Leisure	3	3	3
Benefits	3	4	4
Use of Resources	3	4	4



Comprehensive Performance Assessment - April 2005

In last year's combined Corporate Plan/BVPP it was reported that Darlington BC had been measured as 'Good' in the way that it serves its local people. This overall rating was reached by looking at how the council is run (received a measurement of 3 out of 4) and how the council's main services perform. In October 2004 the council underwent a further Corporate Assessment to assess how the Council is being run. In addition, in December 2004 the performance of the Council's main service areas were examined. This led to the Audit Commission assessing Darlington BC as an 'Excellent' authority.

'Darlington's overall rating of excellence was reached by looking at:

1. How the council is run (received a measurement of 4 out of 4);
2. How the council's main service perform (received a 3 out of 4).

How the council is run

The scorecard below summarises the performance of how the council is run. In assessing any council, the Audit Commission consider four issues:

1. What is the council trying to achieve?
2. How has the council set about delivering its priorities?
3. What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?
4. In light of what has been learnt, what does the council plan to do next?

The council answered these questions initially via a self-assessment, followed by an intensive inspection process carried out by the Audit Commission. This resulted in the following scorecard:

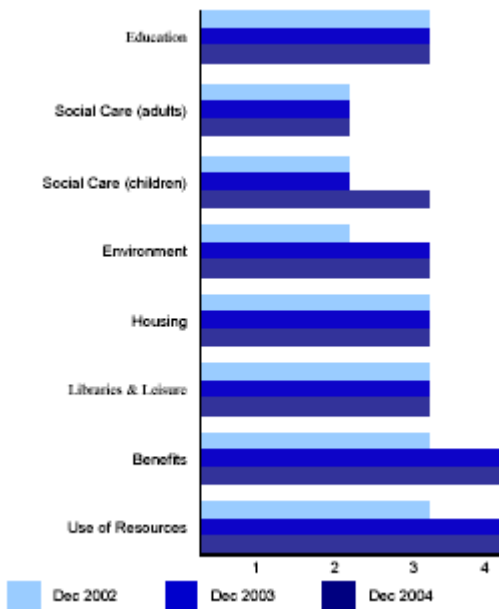
Corporate Assessment Score

Key Question	Theme	2002 Final Weighted Score	2004 Un-Weighted Score	2004 Weighted Score
What is the council trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	4	4
	Prioritisation	2	3	3
	Focus	3	4	4
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	3	3	3
	Performance management	2	3	3
What has the council achieved to date?	Achievement	9	3	9
	Investment	8	4	8
In light of what has been learnt, what does the council plan to do next?	Learning	3	3	3
	Future Plans	3	3	3
TOTAL THEME SCORE		36		40

Overall Corporate Assessment score (4 out of 4)

How do the council's main service perform?

Half of our service blocks (4 out of 8) have improved in score since the first CPA service block assessment in 2002.



The Audit Commission has assessed core service performance in the service areas shown alongside.

Each service is scored on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

Education and social care are given more importance in reaching the overall service score than other areas.

Overall service performance 3 out of 4

The Audit Commission stated:

‘Darlington Borough Council has changed from being good to excellent. It has made improvements in social care, benefits and the local economy over the last year. Social care for adults and children improved significantly and the benefits service improved once more. The council has worked with others to attract businesses and create jobs, and has established new services in the most deprived areas of the borough. Local people's satisfaction with council services is high and people feel safer...
... Based on Darlington Borough Council's plans, the council is well placed to continue to improve the way it works and the services it provides to local people’.

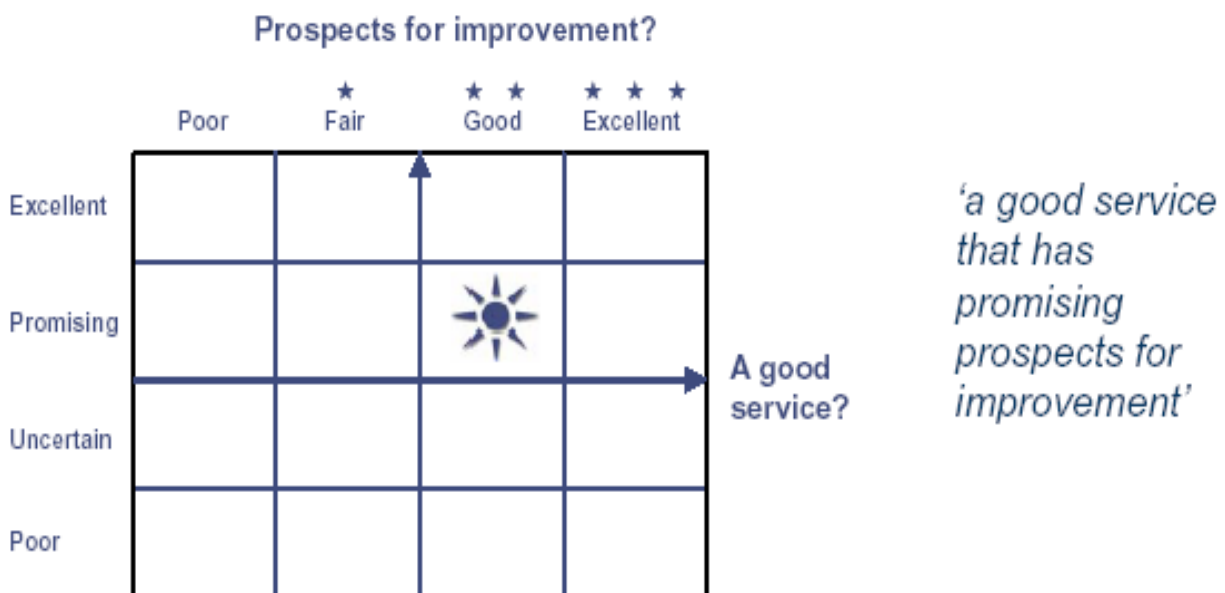
The council recognises that notwithstanding this excellent result, there remains much to do and we have commenced on the next stage of our organisational strategy, i.e. to be a Leading Edge authority.

Inspection of Supporting People Programme (June 2005)

'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services, which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.

The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and uncoordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.

The service was inspected against two key criteria; how good is the service and what are the prospects for improvement; i.e.:



The report stated that the service had been classified as 'good', because "... the governance structures are in place and with all partners engaged and with the exception of the core strategy group operating effectively. Relations with service providers are good. Action has been taken to ensure that legacy services are eligible for grant and savings have been made as a result. These have been re-invested in priority areas to ensure gaps in service provision can be addressed.

The five-year strategy is complete within the agreed timescales, is based on need and has a clear focus on priorities to be delivered in future. Where there are gaps in need research is planned to fill those gaps. Interim contracts have been put in place for all services and accurate payments are being maintained to ensure the continuous provision of services. Partnership working is well established and is contributing to the delivery and achievement of shared objectives. A greater number of local people have access to housing related support to help them maintain independent living. There are some good examples of service delivery which is delivering real benefits".

In addition, the service was acknowledged as having 'promising prospects for improvement, with the inspection team stating... "there is no doubt that, the Supporting People programme has delivered more services for the vulnerable people of Darlington. There are positive track records on delivering improvements both as part of the programme and corporately. There is a willingness to learn from others and make changes following feedback.

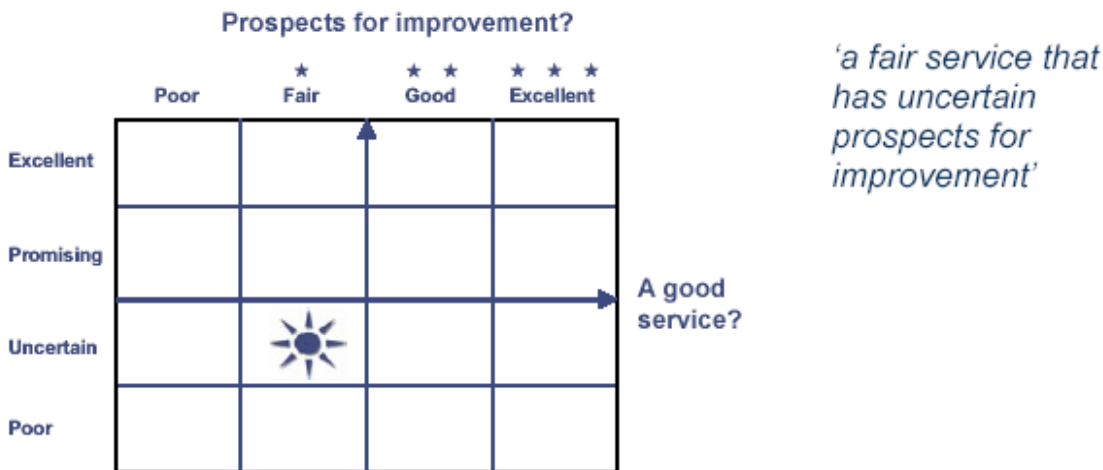
The inspectors offered some recommendations in order to further improve service delivery and the authority will be compiling an improvement plan to ensure this work is carried out.



Inspection of Housing Repairs and Maintenance (October 2004)

As stated in last year's Performance Plan, Darlington Borough Council was one of six pilot authorities where PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) were undertaking inspection work alongside their external audit work. PwC have used the Audit Commission's criteria for judgment to assess services inspected and have applied the Audit Commission's inspection methodologies.

The council's Housing repair and maintenance service was inspected in July 2004 and was judged to be a 'fair' service with uncertain prospects for improvement; i.e.:



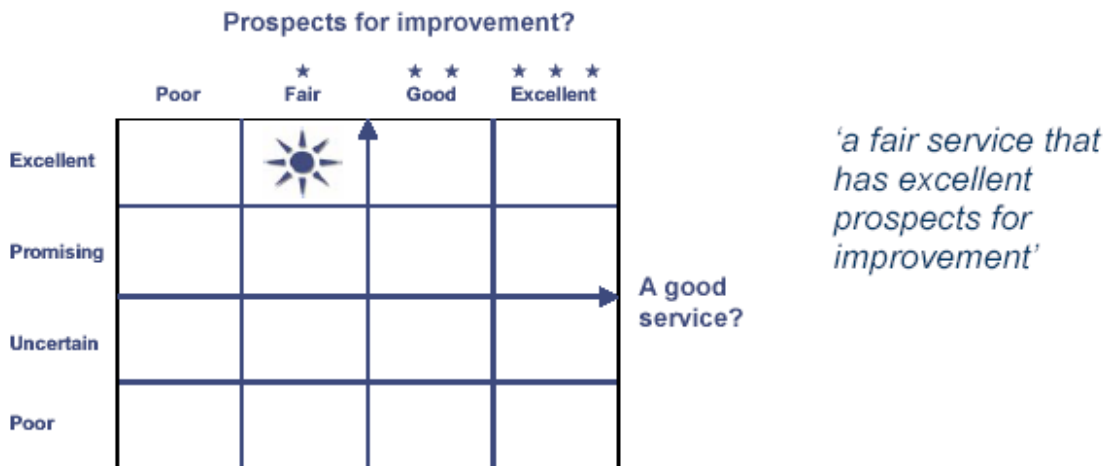
The inspectors found areas of strength within the service, notably regarding detailed consultation undertaken with tenants on the housing stock option; few properties within the council's housing stock fail the Decent Homes standard; low slippage occurred in recent years on planned maintenance; Estate walkabouts which are held with tenants and residents; a long-established residents' panel, which provides a good forum for consultation on community wide issues; and ninety nine per cent of properties were found to have a gas-servicing certificate less than 12 months old as at the date of the inspection.

However, some weaknesses were raised including issues around value for money, the lack of tenant involvement, and the fact that delivery of the responsive repairs service was limited in a number of ways and lacked customer focus.

The council has embarked on a range of initiatives aimed at implementing the inspectors' recommendations.

Inspection of Transport Services (October 2004)

This inspection covered transport services, including transport policy, engineering, highways maintenance, road safety, car parking and public transport. The revenue cost of these services was £2.586m in 2003/04. Capital expenditure on transport schemes, mainly funded through the local transport plan (LTP) was £3.189m in 2003/04. The service was inspected in August 2004 and was classed as a ‘fair’ service, with ‘Excellent’ prospects for improvement; i.e.



The inspectors noted that the council can “demonstrate that it has developed clear aims for the service, which are linked to the community strategy and underpinned by challenging targets in most areas. Performance is improving in key areas. In 2003/04 less than five per cent of principal roads were in need of repair, compared to almost 30 per cent in 2000/01. At the same time non-principal roads in need of repair were reduced from 38 per cent to less than ten percent. Furthermore, the number of people killed or seriously injured on Darlington’s roads has been reduced from 57 in 1998 to 37 in 2003. In some areas the council’s performance is now in the best quartile.

PwC did note some weaknesses, on which the council is working to improve service delivery. PwC noted that the council’s delivery against its aims has been variable and there are significant areas where the LTP programme has not been implemented on schedule or in a sustained manner. In addition, public satisfaction remains low in the key priority area of highway maintenance, although additional investment and further improvements are being sought to address this. Against other unitary authorities, comparative casualty rates are variable – consistently low for motorcyclist and cyclists in recent years, but not as low for car drivers, and despite investment in public transport infrastructure, bus patronage levels have continued to decline, albeit at a slower rate in recent years.

The council’s prospects for improvement were judged as excellent, with PwC stating, “there is strong leadership that is focused on improving the service. Additional resources have been allocated to support this improvement drive and the service has a clear plan of action to use these resources and achieve improvement. Capacity is being enhanced through additional staff and a procurement exercise to identify a private sector partner for the consultancy Service. Going forward the service has better capacity to improve than at any time since local government re-organisation in 1997.

Audit and Inspection letter (December 2004)

PwC hold key audit responsibilities within the authority, and report on three key elements: performance, accounts and governance:

Performance

PwC reviewed the combined Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan for compliance with the Local Government Act 1999 and offered the following conclusions:

An unqualified audit opinion on the BVPP;

No statutory recommendations on the procedures to be followed in relation to the BVPP, and;

No recommendation for referral to the Audit Commission or the Secretary of State.

PwC also stated “on the basis of the work carried out (on best value performance indicators) we conclude that the Council’s arrangements to collect, record and publish its BVPIs are appropriate”

“The council has continued to make progress with the development of its performance management framework during the year... PricewaterhouseCoopers have monitored the implementation of the new system during the year and are pleased to report that considerable progress has been made”.

Accounts

“PricewaterhouseCoopers are pleased to issue an unqualified opinion on the Council on the quality of the working papers supporting the statement of accounts and its adherence to a challenging closedown timetable. This enabled the statement of accounts to be certified by 30 September 2004, two months before the current statutory deadline”.

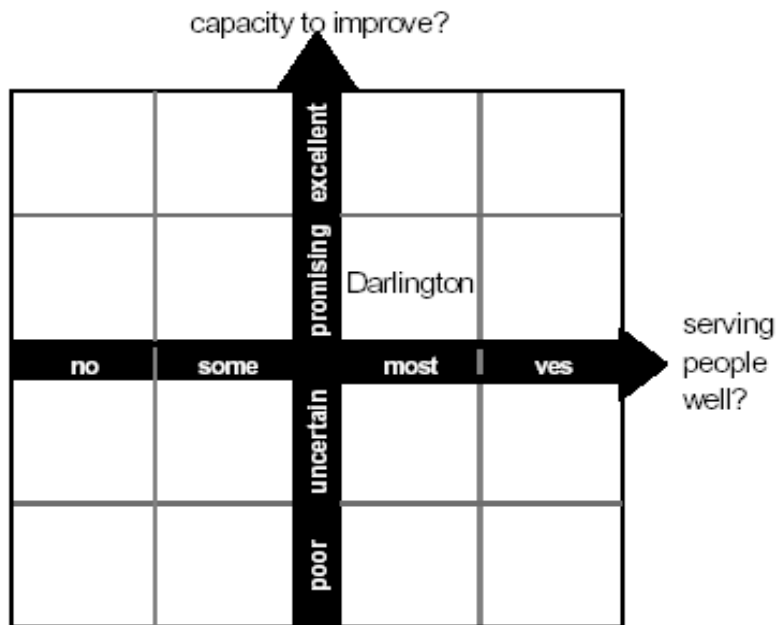
Governance

“Overall, PricewaterhouseCoopers were impressed with the Council’s arrangements to manage the financial aspects of corporate governance and did not find any significant weaknesses... As a result of the work undertaken, PricewaterhouseCoopers concluded that the Council’s arrangements to ensure that its financial position is soundly based are adequate”.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

As reported in last year’s Corporate and Best Value performance Plan, the Social Services Inspectorate (now known as the Commission for Social Care Inspection) undertook an inspection of Darlington’s services for disabled adults between 2 February 2004 and 13 February 2004. Using evidence gathered across various standards a judgement was made on two key questions; ‘Serving people well?’ and ‘Likely to improve?’ The four possible answers to the first question are ‘none’, ‘some’, ‘most’ or ‘all’. The possible answers to the second question are ‘no prospects’, ‘poor prospects’, ‘promising prospects’ or ‘excellent prospects’. The findings of the inspection and the inspection report were not taken to Cabinet until July 2004 and as a result, at last year’s time of publication the findings of the inspection were embargoed.

The service was judged as serving most people well, with promising prospects for improvement. SSI stated “... services to disabled people and those with sensory impairment were moving positively in the right direction. There had been many changes in social services over the last year, including the appointment and arrival of a new management team. There was a recognition of the need to drive forward and implement plans to improve the quality of services to this group of people that had initially developed from the Best Value Review of Disability. Some significant progress had been made and many other plans were in the process of development”.



CSCI Star Rating (November 2004)

The Social Services department was one of only 27 nationally to receive an improved rating from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in 2004, Darlington having received a two star rating in a performance system, which ranks all social services from three stars for top teams to zero stars for the worst performers. Darlington's prospects for improving children's and adult services were classed as 'promising'.

	Serving children well?	Year Capacity for improvement in children's services?	Serving adults well?	Capacity for improvement in adults' services?	Performance rating
2004	Most	Promising	Some	Promising	**
2003	Some	Promising	Some	Promising	*
2002	Some	Promising	Some	Promising	*

Adult Learning Inspectorate

Re-inspection of Darlington Borough Council's Community Learning Service

The Council's Community Learning Service was established in 2001, inspected in 2004 and, as a result of some unsatisfactory gradings in that inspection, re-inspected in April 2005.

At the end of the re-inspection, all aspects of provision inspected were rated satisfactory or better.

The inspection focused on two key areas: Leadership and Management and Information and Communications Technology.

Scorecard: Grade 1= outstanding, Grade 2= good, Grade 3= satisfactory, Grade 4= unsatisfactory, Grade 5= very weak.

Leadership and Management	2	Information and Communications Technology	2
Contributory Grades:		Contributory Grades	
Equality of opportunity	2	Adult and Community Learning	2
Quality assurance	3		

As part of its judgement of leadership and management, the inspection report also looked at the previously unsatisfactory area of English, languages and communications and felt that performance in this area was now reflected in the overall score for leadership and management: 2.

Key messages from the inspection were as follows:

- The service has clear strategic direction;
- There is good operational management;
- There is an accurate and effective management information system;
- Effective measures are in place to improve the quality of provision;
- There are very good strategies to widen participation and support disadvantaged learners;
- The service provides responsive local community provision with good teaching and learning.

But:

- The programme has a limited range;
- There has been a slow implementation of "skills for life" strategy in community learning;
- Further work needed on identifying the progression needs of learners and assessing their literacy, numeracy or language support needs.

In short, the inspection described a significantly improved service and noted the positive way in which the Community Learning Service had taken "rapid action" following the previous inspection in order to tackle the weaknesses and build on strengths.

Recognition of achievements

Investors in People success

In September 2004 the council was re-assessed against the Investors in People standard and attained the highly regarded status for a further three years. The assessors were particularly impressed with our planning framework which was described as exemplary due to our employees understanding of how they contribute to the overall objectives of the council. In addition, they commented on the important role that the Performance Development Review system and service planning posters had to play in developing employee knowledge. They also commented on our commitment to fairness and diversity issues in respect of training and development and on our investment in developing management capacity at all levels.

The council has now held IIP status since 1996, having been re-assessed three times and is still one of only a small number of authorities to have council wide recognition.

Charter Mark

Services holding Charter Mark status which were re-assessed leading to a further award (in 2004) for three years covered:

Environmental Services (Horticultural services and Building Cleaning)

Technical (Woodburn Nursery plant production)

Leisure and Arts (Dolphin Centre, Arts Centre, Civic Theatre, Stressholme Golf Centre and the Eastbourne Complex)

Customer Services & Reception (Vicarage Road)

Horticultural, Building Cleaning & Customer Services were awarded best practice for making arrangements with other providers to actively provide a co-ordinated service.

Woodburn Nursery was awarded best practice for making the most of available resources, and Leisure & Arts were awarded best practice for planning and realistically working out the cost of proposed or future developments and for being positively involved with the community.

Customer Services & Reception were awarded best practice for arrangements being in place for the benefit of the customer.

Local Government Chronicle Awards

The council's Finance team were runners up and 'highly commended' by the Local Government Chronicle at its Annual Awards Ceremony held in March 2005. The awards recognise the top achievers in performance and best practice in local authorities across the country.

Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride in the Region Awards

Darlington's Communications Team won PR Team of the Year Award, and in addition won gold awards for Best In-House Campaign and Best Public Sector campaign. We were the only organisation in the country in either the public or private sector to win awards for two publications in the Best Newsletter category and were the only local authority to win gold in both the In-House and Public Sector campaign categories (the 'Town Crier' won gold in for Best Newsletter and 'The Flyer' won silver).

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AND PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In last year's plan, we set out our goals against the themes of the Community Strategy, how each related to our corporate objectives, our priorities and indicators of how we would measure progress against priorities.

In the following section we present for each theme:

- a high level summary of performance;
- more detail on outcomes secured and other achievements;
- progress against planned actions;
- areas for improvement.
- Case studies are also used to provide pen pictures of improvement since last year.

An overarching theme is also offered at the end addressing the Council's fifth corporate objective – Enhancing our capacity to improve. This summarises the Council's use of resources and organisational development in the same way as previous themes.

The Corporate Plan element at the end of each theme is set out as follows: each action which will deliver the council's priorities is assigned a portfolio holder and lead officer who together are accountable for delivery; a target date for completion and the performance measures which will be used to determine, ultimately whether the course of action has been successful.

These actions sit within a framework of the visionary goal and theme of the Community Strategy to which the action contributes, as well as the relevant corporate objective. Within this framework the key measures have also been identified.

There are two main levels of performance assessment in-year:

- By outcome as measured by progress against the key PIs identified;
- By progress against the key actions set out.

It is a measure of the council's stage of development on performance management that monitoring progress by outcome is preferred. This will simplify reporting and reduce bureaucracy. Some PIs will be supported by several actions. Only where performance targets have not been achieved will performance progress be reported.