

CPA Progress Assessment

23 June 2005



CPA Progress Assessment

Northampton Borough Council

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Contents

Progress assessments	4
Introduction	5
Summary and recommendations	6
Context	8
The locality	8
The Council	8
What is the Council trying to achieve?	9
How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?	11
What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?	13
In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	16
Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004	17
Appendix 2 – Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment	26

Progress assessments

In 2002, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced at single tier and county councils (ST&CCs) and at district councils in 2003/04, as a way of supporting councils to deliver improvements in services to local people.

CPA brought together existing information on service performance in councils with a corporate assessment of each council's ability to improve. This was used to reach an overall conclusion about whether a council was 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'weak' or 'poor'.

Those councils classified as 'poorly performing'¹, were the subject of formal engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and were required to produce a recovery/improvement plan following their CPA. Through its network of relationship managers, the Commission worked closely with the lead officials assigned by the ODPM in developing an appropriate monitoring programme for the recovery/improvement plan.

The progress assessment will measure the impact and sustainability of the Council's improvement activity. Where necessary, it will report on regress. The progress assessment is tailored to local circumstances, provides appropriate public assurance and contributes to improvement reporting. It will report an evidence based judgement on progress against the original corporate assessment criteria, but it will not give a score.

The progress assessment is part of the Commission's commitment to helping councils ensure continuous improvement to services for local people. It does this in the context of its strategic regulation principles which look to minimise the burden of regulation at the same time as maximising its impact. We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators and the ODPM in this aim.

¹ 'Poorly performing' is defined as councils that were classified as 'poor' or 'weak' with a corporate assessment score of 1.

Introduction

- 1 In March 2004, the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Northampton Borough Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'poor'. The key strengths and weaknesses from this assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 2 This report presents an analysis of the Council's progress to date based on the Council's implementation of its recovery plan and comparison with the baseline position of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Summary and recommendations

- 3 The Council has made slow progress in this initial phase of its long improvement journey. In the seven-month period after the publication of the CPA report in March 2004, progress was limited. The appointment of the new chief executive in November 2004 has lent impetus to the change process and a major management restructuring is underway. Staff are working hard to deliver change. However, the overall picture is still of a council which has not moved on much and where services have not improved for local people.
- 4 The Council is using the recovery plan to drive improvement and a corporate plan was agreed in April 2005 which has all party support. The links between the recovery plan and the corporate plan however are not sufficiently clear or understood. The corporate plan has priorities but is not clear about non-priorities. Consultation and community engagement are not yet used effectively and internal communication initiatives need further improvement.
- 5 The Council does not yet have the capacity it needs to deliver improvement. Some progress has been made. Key senior management appointments have been made and consultants/interim managers have been employed since March 2004 to strengthen management. The management restructuring is intended to increase capacity. However, the challenge of change is proving tough and this is impacting on staff morale which is low. Staff have also been confused by the roles of the interim managers and their relationship to each other. A review of political structures is under way and a development programme for councillors, funded by the ODPM, is about to commence. Councillor commitment, to the review and the development programme, is mixed. Councillors in general have not yet taken on board the changed roles expected of them: to help lead change and to actively drive the Councils' priorities forward.
- 6 The Council also lacks other key strategies and systems to underpin and inform its work. For example, there is: no human resources strategy, no performance management framework, no community engagement strategy, no IT strategy and no communication strategy. Moreover, the Council does not have a robust control over the overall change management programme and has no communication strategy for the recovery plan. Performance management is ineffective and should be a key driver for improvement.
- 7 Overall service performance is still poor. The Council has put in place some processes to improve services and some services have improved, for example, recycling rates and housing. However, at 31 March 2004, 64 per cent of best value performance indicators were below average and the rate of overall improvement had declined. Housing benefits is still a very poor service.
- 8 Learning has improved and a more open management culture has been fostered but this now needs to be become embedded and sustained. Many key future plans are absent, which are needed to take the Council forward. For instance, the Council faces major financial pressures but has not developed a medium-term financial plan setting out how these will be proactively managed.

- 9 It is recommended that the Council:
- actively and promptly shares the findings of this progress assessment with staff;
 - takes it to an appropriate public committee meeting; and
 - uses the key findings as the basis for revising the recovery plan in conjunction with any direction from the Monitoring Board.

Context

The locality

- 10 Northampton Borough Council is the largest district council in Northamptonshire with a population of about 194,500, living in 85,000 households. Minority ethnic communities form 8.5 per cent of the population. The town is part of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands area identified for economic and population growth as part of the ODPM's Sustainable Communities Plan. The newly formed Urban Development Corporation (UDC) is planned to deliver economic, social and housing growth in West Northamptonshire including Northampton.
- 11 The Council is ranked 168th out of 354 local authorities in the Indices of Deprivation. No wards are in the worst 10 per cent for deprivation but 33 per cent of Northampton's wards are in the 25 per cent of most deprived wards in England. Unemployment is lower than the national average with lower than average take-up of benefits by working age people.

The Council

- 12 The Council comprises 47 councillors elected every four years. There is no overall political control of the Council. There are 19 Conservative, 17 Liberal Democrat and 11 Labour councillors. The Council has a leader and executive system; the executive includes the leader, deputy leader and five other councillors. All are Conservatives, and have individual portfolios covering: housing; environment; planning, regeneration and transportation; revenues and benefits; finance; community safety; health; community leadership; and e-government. Overview and scrutiny chairs are held by Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors.
- 13 Since CPA, the chief executive and three directors have left the Council and 23 service head posts have been disestablished. The new chief executive took up her post in November 2004. Two of the three new corporate directors were in post by February 2005; the third is now due in early May. Two existing service heads were appointed to the new corporate manager role. Seven further appointments are planned to be in place for September 2005. Interim support has provided and continues to provide management support and consultancy during this period.
- 14 The Council employs approximately 1,800 full and part-time employees. The Council's overall budget for the year 2004/05 is £27 million and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is about £50 million with a working balance of £3.1 million.

What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 15 The Council is beginning to define its ambitions and priorities more clearly.
- 16 The Council has made some progress in taking forward its recovery plan. The Council identified the elements for recovery at an early stage and drew up its recovery plan. The recovery plan includes all the key elements highlighted by the CPA report. The latest version and its annex outlines the 43 different projects with actions and 'milestones' to be achieved. The projects are categorised under three corporate priorities and three major service areas:
 - political and managerial leadership;
 - cultural and organisational transformation;
 - citizen-focused services;
 - revenue and benefits;
 - improving housing management; and
 - street scene.
- 17 Delivery of the recovery plan is being monitored by the Council but the rigour applied is variable. The plan is monitored by councillors on a cross-party recovery board and also challenged by a government monitoring board led by a lead official from the ODPM.
- 18 The Council finally agreed a corporate plan for 2005/06 in April 2005, which clearly identifies its vision and values and its priorities. The plan has three key themes: citizen-focused services; strong political and managerial leadership; and how the Council will change. They are supported by eight current priorities:
 - working with partners to reduce crime and disorder across Northampton;
 - improve the cleanliness of the street scene in Northampton and reduce environmental crime;
 - continue to improve housing benefit and revenue services;
 - reduce deprivation in Northampton working with partners;
 - ensure the availability of decent and affordable homes for all;
 - invest in Neighbourhood Wardens;
 - improve the overall political and managerial leadership and efficiency of Northampton Borough Council; and
 - create and sustain an attractive economic environment for inward investment and regeneration.

- 19 Leading councillors are able to work together effectively. Leading councillors across all three parties developed the corporate plan with its new vision and a set of clear priorities for the Council. As a result, amongst these leading councillors, ownership of, and commitment to, the new plan as a key document is strong. Engagement with the plan amongst backbench councillors is variable. In particular, the plan's implications for the future direction of the Council and for service delivery, are not yet widely understood; not least due to the plan being finalised relatively recently in April.
- 20 The corporate plan commits the Council to 'doing things differently' and using service priorities to lead the budget. However, it does not overtly identify what is not a priority. Lower priority areas such as museums and leisure, are not identified in the plan, although there is a commitment to consider these services for trust status or other alternative means of delivery. Moreover, the links between the corporate plan and the recovery plan are not sufficiently clear or understood.
- 21 Consultation and community engagement are not used effectively by the Council. The Council does not yet have strategies in place to develop these tools. Local people were not directly involved in the development of the corporate plan although it was considered by the LSP and other partners.
- 22 Progress on internal communication is mixed. New initiatives have been put in place, for example a fortnightly 'Core brief', road shows and briefings jointly by senior managers and councillors, and a team of staff 'Change Champions' as two-way communicators. However, staff are still unclear about key messages.

How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 23 The Council does not currently have the capacity it needs to achieve full recovery and improvement.
- 24 Since March 2004 and the publication of the CPA report, the then chief executive and three directors have left the Council and 23 service head posts have been disestablished. This is part of a comprehensive restructuring aimed at strengthening capacity. The new chief executive took up her post in November 2004, and two of the three new corporate directors were in post by February 2005. The third is now due in early May 2005. Two existing service heads were appointed to the new corporate manager roles. Seven further appointments are planned to be in place for September 2005. Staff morale is however low and people are uncertain about their future. The challenge of change is proving tough. There is a willingness and commitment to improve but this has not as yet translated into overall service improvement.
- 25 The Council has established interim arrangements, and has also employed management support and consultants during the last year, to supplement capacity but this has had mixed success. The benefits service has received additional support and resources, including assistance from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), to improve the service but this has had limited impact. The Council has also established temporary management arrangement, involving interim managers, to deliver business pending the full-time appointments in September. These 'transitional authority' arrangements however, are not yet widely understood by permanent staff, who are confused about what interim staff are trying to achieve; their timetables and targets and the relationships they have with each other.
- 26 Progress to achieve two key objectives in the recovery plan – political and managerial leadership and cultural and organisational transformation – is mixed. The senior management structure has been approved by the Council and is being implemented. The review of managerial structures, 'Root and Branch', is underway. Root and Branch involves staff from all levels in six review teams who are looking at all the functions of the Council: for example e-government, community services. It is being facilitated by consultants and interim managers and the findings will be externally challenged. A review of political structures has just begun after a false start, and a development programme for councillors, funded by ODPM, is about to commence. Commitment amongst councillors, to the review and the development programme, is mixed. Leading councillors have sought to support the overall change agenda but have not sufficiently encouraged 'buy-in' to these developments from backbench councillors. Councillors in general have not yet taken on board the changed roles expected of them: to help lead change and to actively drive the Councils' priorities forward.

12 CPA Progress Assessment | How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 27 The Council does not have key strategies and policies in place to enable it to function effectively. For example, there is: no human resources strategy; no performance management framework; no community engagement strategy; no IT strategy and no communication strategy. Moreover, the Council faces major financial pressures but has not developed a medium-term financial plan setting out how these will be proactively managed in the short (it will have to fund substantial redundancy costs in 2005/06) and medium-term. There is also no internal control over the programme management; no governance for the programme management and no communication strategy for the recovery plan. Work is underway to re-dress these weaknesses but it remains at an early stage.
- 28 Performance management is ineffective. The Council is developing a performance management framework but it has not yet developed reliable data collection systems and processes for managing and reporting performance are not yet effective. A high-level diagrammatic 'route map' has been developed, to measure the progress of the recovery plan, but this is still at an embryonic stage and is therefore not yet being used. Linking service plans to the corporate plan is at a development stage. There is also not an embedded culture of managing services or individuals effectively.
- 29 Change management is at an early undeveloped stage. The Council does not have a project manager for the overall change process nor does it have a detailed programme to underpin the recovery plan. The members of the recovery-change teams lack expertise in change management. They are not functioning as change agents but rather as programme managers and collators of information. Work is being undertaken to re-shape the culture. The Council has however, recently held staff roundtable meetings for the 80+ managers. This has resulted in valuable feedback for the corporate management team about change management in the Council. The Council has invested significantly in programme management but there is not sufficiently strong leadership from the top. Strong relationships, key to delivering large-scale change, have been forged with the Unions.
- 30 Risk management is progressing slowly. The Council faces a number of major risks; including: the identification of housing benefits cases, which have not been recorded; gaps in capacity; poor performance and management information and financial capacity. The Council is aware of these risks to varying degrees but is not responding to them all with equal rigour.

What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 31 The Council is not delivering significant improvement for local people. Customer awareness is low and achievement is focused on internal improvements.
- 32 Performance to 31 March 2004 deteriorated according to audited best value performance indicators (BVPI) for 2003/04.

Table 1 Best value performance indicators for 2003/04

NBC BVPI performance	Below average	Top quartile	Improved against previous year
31 March 2003	62%	30%	62%
31 March 2004	64%	24%	52%

- 33 The Council's un-audited information to 31 May 2005 shows that 20 per cent of indicators have improved; 71 per cent have remained the same and 9 per cent have deteriorated.
- 34 Performance in housing benefits is significantly poor. During 2004/05, the Council's un-audited data shows that whilst there was sporadic improvement during the year, this was inconsistent and performance remains in the bottom quartile. The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people is in the bottom quartile at 11.63 weeks (bottom quartile nine weeks). Un-audited data for 2004/05 suggests that this has been reduced to four weeks.
- 35 Planning performance is also in the worst quartile for the percentage of applications determined (based on 2003/04 audited data):
 - major applications in 13 weeks 32 per cent (worst quartile 40 per cent);
 - minor applications in 8 weeks 56 per cent (worst quartile 53 per cent); and
 - un-audited data for 2004/05 however suggests that (a) has improved to 64.6 per cent and (b) to 71.8 per cent.

- 36 In relation to crime, the Northampton crime and disorder reduction partnership (CDRP) is not performing well and is one of the 40 highest crime CDRPs in England.

Table 2 Crime and disorder reduction partnership 2003/04

2003/04	NBC	All England
Domestic burglaries per 1,000 households.	31.4	Worst quartile 19.9
Robberies per 1,000 persons.	3.8	Worst quartile 1.8
Theft of a motor vehicle per 1,000 persons.	8.4	Worst quartile 6.1
Theft from a motor vehicle crimes per 1,000 persons.	22.5	Worst quartile 12.5
Violence against the person per 1,000 population.	23.2	Worst quartile 20.5
Sexual offences per 1,000 population.	1.1	Worst quartile 1.1

- 37 Service improvement overall has been limited. However, the Council has made some improvements in services which directly affect local people. For example, a new recycling scheme and a 'twin bin' initiative for household rubbish and garden waste has resulted in a significant increase in waste recycled from 13 per cent to more than 30 per cent – a positive achievement. A focused campaign by the Council's rent income section to highlight the need for tenants to pay their rent on time resulted in a 6.5 per cent reduction in arrears during 2004/05. The Audit Commission housing inspection in January 2005 judged the service to be fair with uncertain prospects for improvement, which was an improvement on the previous housing inspection which rated the service as poor.
- 38 The Council is investing in improvements which have yet to yield fruit. For example, new systems and processes for the benefits service have been introduced with external support. However, performance is not improving and the Council intends to look elsewhere for support and expertise to help deliver improvement. Considerable investment has gone into the physical re-siting of the one-stop shop but the Council recognises that this development needs to be linked more clearly to its overall customer focus strategy. The Council has also appointed 12 neighbourhood wardens with enforcement powers over anti-social behaviour such as litter, abandoned cars, fly tipping and graffiti. It plans to extend this initiative to a total of 12 communities.
- 39 Service improvement ideas and suggestions from staff at different levels are not being used effectively and systematically. Staff do not feel that in the 'transitional' stage, particularly whilst the Root and Branch review is being carried out, that they can usefully suggest service improvements as it appears to them that management is focused on internal matters.

- 40** The Council is beginning to focus its attention on the achievement of improvement. Targets for those BVPIs which are currently in the lower quartile are included within the corporate plan, with the aim of bringing them up to the upper quartile performance by 2007.

In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?

- 41 More people in the Council now accept the need for change. There is more self-awareness and a willingness to learn. However, significant gaps still exist in plans for the future.
- 42 The culture of the Council is changing. Previously, the organisation accepted a culture of fear, blame and bullying. The emerging culture encourages an open and nurturing atmosphere, where staff are encouraged and empowered and people are treated as equals and are expected to contribute and take decisions. The management team is not yet at establishment and those in post, especially the chief executive and two directors, are facing considerable work pressures, not least has staff need constant reassurance and a reiteration of the key messages. The management team has not received any executive support or mentoring capacity: to ensure that the culture change is consistent and effective; to put in place the necessary changes and to focus at a strategic level.
- 43 The Council is becoming much more aware of how other councils operate and is using a variety of learning opportunities to encourage improvements including visits and peer support. Councillors have visited other councils seeking best practice (Maidstone, Nottingham and Ipswich). A number of councillors work with peers from other authorities and councillors from excellent authorities have been involved in the political review. Staff are also planning similar exchanges. However, the Council does not have a systematic approach to the dissemination of its learning across the organisation.
- 44 The Council lacks key plans and strategies. The corporate plan and the recovery plan are the most recent and relevant plans for the emerging organisation together with the revised (2004) community strategy. Gaps in relevant plans, policies and strategies are recognised by the Council and work is planned for each area. The medium-term financial strategy is being developed and in its current form provides only a basic financial narrative rather than a full strategy. Some weaknesses in financial controls and management of the Council have been identified by the Council's auditors since the CPA. Work has only just begun on the Council's best value performance plan for 2005/06, which is due by 30 June 2005.

Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear high-level ambitions in community strategy following consultation. • Housing development, cleanliness and community safety clearest council ambitions. • Clear local plan. • Political ambition developing. • Led community in creation of LSP, community safety, flooding. • Examples of participation; tenants, town centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strategic objectives behind broad values and vision. • Scope of proposed ambition not realistic in financial context and need for consensus in NOC. • Housing plans not robust; HRA, DH – high risk of deficit by 2005/06 as SOA decision timed for April 2004. • Need and diversity of community not clearly incorporated, eg no strategy for social inclusion, race equality scheme lacks focus. • Lack of managerial leadership to drive change and ambitions; Staff continue to report lack of clear vision. • DH ambition weakened by latest investment decisions. • Ambitions and outcomes not defined, eg housing, leisure.

18 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented modernised structure. • Stayed focused on key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community safety; - regenerating sites; and - cleaner and greener. • Organisational structure changes providing strategic focus on key areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not kept a focus on critical peer findings, eg O&S, pace of change, corporate plan. • Not kept focus on housing management performance and DH programme. • Missed deadline of some elements of Secretary of State's direction. • Examples of slow to act on priority areas, eg benefits, graffiti. • New CMT format but corporate steer not given. • Scrutiny not part of system to consider performance and drive improvement.
Prioritisation	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's panel used in budget consultation, some service specific consultation. • Balance of local and national housing priorities. • Developing evidence base and focus on youth work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of no clear priorities. Following elections/NOC detailed prioritisation not determined – no indication of what is not a priority. • No overall measurement of need to guide priorities, eg scale of total leisure provision. • Inconsistent communications to staff about council priorities and key developments. • Communication of plans/progress in BVPP is poor. • Resources not targeted, budget gaps continue.

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004 19

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor contribution and direction. • Representative workforce, some good service heads. • Better than adequate reserves. • Strong record of leverage of external funds in partnership has led to improvements on the ground. • Section 106 agreements brought in financial capacity for schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient corporate management of organisation, no overall plan for change. • Lack of leadership repeatedly reported, directorate have own approaches. • Inadequate councillor support. • Ineffective HR management. • High sickness. • No corporate training strategy. • Scrutiny ineffective, less of priority for officer support. • Budget shortfalls continue. Deficit risks in housing. Medium-term financial strategy does not fill annual estimated gap. • LSP not affecting capacity and Council's attitude still criticised. • Slow to pursue large scale alternative options – in-house service decisions. • IT underdeveloped.

20 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Performance management	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountabilities framework in place. Corporate reporting systems active. • Some examples of resolving poor performance, eg fly tipping, abandoned cars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No corporate plan to shape priorities and outcomes. • Councillors not getting appropriate performance information. • Senior managers' views of Council's relative performance is unrealistic hindering improvement. • Service plans, target setting are inconsistent, of variable quality and not adhering to council policy. • Key gaps in risk assessments eg decent homes. • Lack of timely preventative or corrective action eg in housing, and a large percentage of targets are being missed. • Lack of local indicators and standards reflecting what matters to local people. • Poor handling of complaints. • Many areas not able to demonstrate VFM, eg trade waste, highways, housing maintenance.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National neighbourhood regeneration award. • Good brownfield development and acting on contaminated land. • Affordable homes delivery. • Private sector housing BV PIs top quartile, innovative services, eg energy improvements. • DDA access top quartile. • Most national environmental and planning national PIs best quartile 2001/02. • Top quartile satisfaction for museums, parks and open spaces, just below best quartile for leisure and cultural services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of service PIs show bottom quartile performance. • Low public satisfaction overall – lower than levels of deprivation would predict. • Poor satisfaction with cleanliness of streets, waste collection and recycling facilities. • All aspects of public satisfaction with housing benefit are poor. • Key frontline services are poorly performing, eg housing management and benefits. • Local initiatives are having a limited impact on crime figures – majority of crime PIs in worst performing quartile.

22 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing improvements in some estates. • Improved feelings of safety and well-being in Blackthorn, eg now a waiting list for homes. • Eyesores being cleaned up and new facilities delivered. • Recent BFI report fair to good on prospects for improvement. • Removal of abandoned cars and fly tips much improved. • Satisfaction with planning is improving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many key service PIs show 'stationary' position from previous results with very small increases and many remain in worst quartile of 2001/02, eg benefits, rent collection. • 2002/03 has seen more local PIs showing deteriorating performance compared to 2001/02. • Key crime figures rising; burglaries and vehicle crime. • HR corporate health indicators show deteriorating 2002/03 performance – sickness, leavers, ill-health retirements. • Reversal of improvement in 2002/03, eg speed of determination of planning applications and missed bins.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Investment	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing significant external funds, eg sustainable communities, DEFRA, healthy living. • Improvements to the IT infrastructure etc support the delivery of electronic government. • Procurement expertise developing. • Continuing to implement key systems; risk, project management, best value. • CRISPIN project beginning to improve customer focus. • Effective needs based youth work. Partnership work with NCC evolving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invited but not fully acted on external challenge in a timely manner. • Significant feedback that managerial leadership and corporate working not strong, not being acted upon. • Have not resolved scrutiny weaknesses or enhanced councillor support. • Investment gaps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prioritisation and resolution of annual budget gaps; - council-wide vision for management of change; and - performance management to drive and measure service improvement.

24 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in March 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Learning	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing partnerships following peer feedback. • More inclusive relationship between CMT and departmental heads. • Political awareness on reality of unitary status and learnt not to set their plans against this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness is low: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appreciation of actual performance of the Council; and - rate of progress seen as satisfactory. • Not learnt from external feedback – over arching change management strategy absent. • Failure to recognise current failings within the DHS self-assessment. • No formal mechanism exists to share good practice cross the Council. • Staff have limited ability to influence service improvements.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for sustainable development in strong partnership, eg Upton Park. • Milton Keynes South Midlands plan supported. • Better plans – draft cultural strategy, waste, IEG – longer-term and outcome-led. • Good rating on asset and capital plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No overarching corporate plan giving context to other plans. • Weak BVPP. • Stakeholders and communities not involved in key future plans. • HRA business plan not robust and landlord plans not driving improvement. • No tangible housing investment progress. • Race equality scheme not implemented fully and lacks focus. • Corporate development plans not coordinated and timely ‘change management’. • Staff not yet effectively engaged in planning for the future. • Council not good at difficult decisions; staffing reviews, terms and conditions, large scale outsourcing.

Scoring key

1 – Weak

2 – Weaknesses outweigh strengths

3 – Strengths outweigh weaknesses

4 – Strong

Appendix 2 – Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 45 The original Comprehensive Performance Assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2004.
- 46 Under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 ('the Act'), best value authorities have a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions, having regard to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By virtue of sections 10 and 13 of the Act, the Audit Commission may carry out inspection activity to ensure that a best value authority is complying with this duty, and may issue a report as to its findings. This progress monitoring activity and reporting to assess improvement falls within sections 3, 10 and 13.
- 47 The main elements of this progress monitoring report were collation and analysis of evidence from:
- self-assessments of progress made, completed by the Council;
 - appointed auditor evidence from performance and financial audit activity;
 - audited and un-audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments;
 - reviews of key corporate documents including performance reports, committee papers and management reports; and
 - observations, interviews and focus groups with managers, staff, customers and partner organisations.
- 48 This progress monitoring report for Northampton Borough Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from September 2003 to April 2005.
- 49 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for reporting progress to any Monitoring Board and updating and improving any Recovery Plan as appropriate.