

# The Scale of Things Part 4

## Direction of Travel-Audit Report

### The Final Journey

Studied prepared for O&S Committee

Cllr Newton Wood

Chair Overview and Scrutiny



## **Direction of Travel-Final Journey**

On January 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny was called to a meeting with a representative from the Audit Commission.

At the beginning of this meeting the Audit Commission representative stated that his interests were in 'The Direction of Travel' meaning the work that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had achieved in the transition to unitary status in handing over the responsibilities of Teesdale to the new Durham County Council.

I was able to provide the auditor with 'The Scale of Things Part 2' which was an integral part of 'The Scale of Things' report. This report clearly identified:

- The weaknesses identified by the CPA 2008
- How these weakness had been dealt with
- Our partners and partnerships which we would seek advice as to whether the new authority would be interested in their continuation and contribution

This report showed the improved performance in specific areas which would then be handed over to the new authority with a satisfactory conclusion.

The auditor's response was little short of amazement as all the questions he was seeking and answers given were clearly recorded and documented within this report.

His comment was that this report was a model example for other authorities to follow.

He sought answers to questions in respect of specific partners and community engagement.

The auditor took the report with him, I assume to assist him in the preparation of his audit and inspection letter.

An Overview and Scrutiny analysis of the CPA Direction of Travel report is attached. This report shows areas in which:

- the improvement has been good
- the remaining weaknesses have been identified
- continuing improvement was evident

Only 6 areas were identified as remaining weaknesses. These were:-

- The amount of waste collected had increased (This is currently under review by Cllr Richard Bell)
- The least affordable housing in Co. Durham, annual shortfall 110 has been passed to Durham County Council
- An increase in domestic burglaries ( police issue)
- Council housing strategy 'value for money' was the weakest area

- The Councils transition plan... however there are not always clear plans in place to achieve all targets (currently being addressed by Cllr Richard Bell)
- PIs - 23 below target, these are however improving

Following the CPA assessment 2008 when our improvement was assessed from 'poor' to 'fair' this Council was still well below average compared with other authorities.

From the Audit Commission website it showed that we were still not in the top 200 councils of the 238 in England.

However, in 2008 the auditors did comment that there were many new initiatives and in respect of these it was too early to give a true assessment.

These initiatives were due to a new strategic direction and a new form of management introduced by the newly appointed Interim Deputy Chief Executive Mr Paul Wilding and administered by the Assistant Chief Executive, Rachael Bowles.

These new initiatives were now bearing fruit, as evidenced by Overview and Scrutiny report 'The Scale of Things Part 2', and had served to re-shape the Council into one efficient body that had achieved significant improvement within such a short period of time.

My own assessment, having dealt with the Audit Commission, is that I now feel that we are at the top of the achieving councils and are very close to achieving excellence. Beyond doubt this is a truly astonishing improvement which deserves the highest praise to all involved.