



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Chester-le-Street District Council

Annual Corporate Performance Report Summary April 2007 to March 2008

Report of Corporate Management Team

Data Quality

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the information presented in this Report. The council is committed to improving its data quality management. As part of this it has developed a Self Assessment, a Data Quality Policy and a Data Quality Strategy was developed in September 2006. The Director of Corporate Services has officer responsibility for data quality and the Executive member for Community engagement and Partnerships is Data Quality Member Champion. The Audit Commission has concluded that there are at least adequate arrangements in place to endure good data quality across all their Key Lines of Enquiry.



Chester-le-Street
District Council

This report is a summary of the detailed document entitled **Corporate Performance Report April 2007 – March 2008**. This is available on request. It provides a summary of the council's progress on key areas of its performance, what learning is taking place and how any under achievement is being addressed.

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1. Corporate Plan & Transition Plan Progress

1.1 Summary

The new Corporate Plan was published at the end of June. Progress against the plan has been delayed because of the uncertainty around Local Government Review. At the meeting of the Executive in October Members agreed a revised approach to re-assessing priorities and proposals. Revisions were considered by the Executive in December.

As a result of Local Government re-organisation, a new unitary Council will come into being in April 2009 and Chester-le-Street District Council will cease to exist. In order to set out a framework as to how the Council will conduct its business during this final year a Transition Plan has been adopted.

The objectives of the Transition Plan are to:

- state the Council's aims, objectives and priorities during the transition period
- build on the council's learning and continue its improvement programme
- set out revised corporate activity and funding arrangements for transition period
- clarify corporate transition programme management arrangements
- identify how we will support and motivate staff through the process
- set out the values and principles by which the Council will operate during transition;and
- establish terms of engagement with 'County Durham Council' Change Programme

This plan is now the overarching plan for Chester-le-Street District Council during the transition period, and as such sets out how services and projects will be facilitated, delivered and resourced. It incorporates a review of the Corporate Plan 2007/2010 and sets out the Council's new priority of **'People and Place'**.

The Plan was only adopted at the end of March 2008 and therefore it is too early to measure performance against. At the time of writing this report significant progress had been made.

2. Best Value Performance Indicators

2.1 Summary

There have been a number of indicators removed from the BVPI set for this financial year. There are now 44 Best Value Performance Indicators which the authority are required to collect and report for 2007/2008. These equate to 74 individual returns.

At the time of reporting, where indicators relate to Cestria, the data was not available to us. Performance for these indicators will be reported through the Best Value Performance Plan. For the purpose of this report, the analysis below is based on performance against the remaining set of indicators.

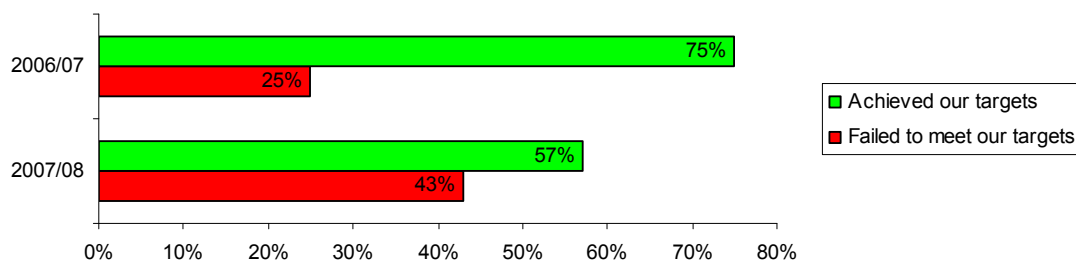
Best Value Performance Indicators

Performance for the Best Value Indicators is as follows (comparisons against last year's outturn figures are shown in brackets):

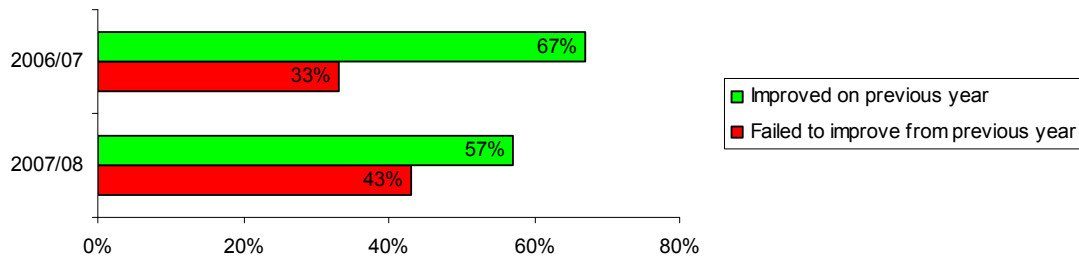
57% (75%) have achieved target
43% (25%) have failed to meet targets
57% (67%) have shown an improvement from last year
43% (33%) have failed to improve from last year
57% (65%) have shown an improvement over 3 years
33% (27%) have failed to improve over 3 years
47% (40%) show best quartile performance
28% (22%) show worst quartile performance

(Note: Quartile figures are estimated figures comparing performance against the National District Councils 2006/07 outturns published by the Audit Commission.)

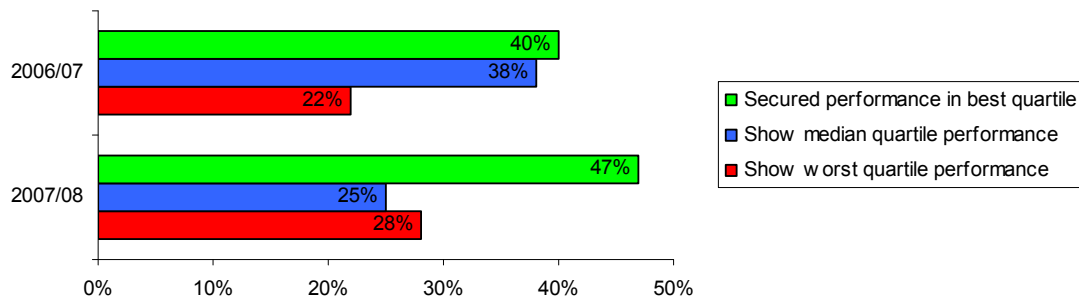
BVPI Achievement against Target



BVPI Improvement from last year



BVPI Quartile Comparisons



Figures indicate a dip in performance in terms of achieving targets and improvement from last year as well as showing an increase in the number of indicators within worst quartile. However, figures continue to show improved performance over the year in terms of securing best quartile performance.

Corporate Performance Clinics

Corporate Performance Clinics continue to be held each quarter and prove to be very effective. The Audit Commission has also acknowledged that the Clinics add value to data use and reporting and suggest it would be beneficial to continue with them.

The Clinic held on 22 February 2008 principally focused on April to December 2007 performance; Data Quality Audit; Data Quality Policy; Data Quality Strategy Action Plan; Access to Services Inspection; and the National Indicator Set update. The Clinic held 22 April 2008 principally focused on LGR; Target Setting for the new National Indicator set; Data collection; Best Value Performance Plan; and the Annual Audit and Inspection Report. The next Clinic is scheduled to take place in August 2008.

Key 19 Best Value Performance Indicators

A set of 19 key Best Value indicators have been identified from last year's annual performance as requiring additional focus throughout this year. These indicators either: did not achieve target, did not improve, did not show an improvement trend, or were within the worst quartile performers.

The set of 19 indicators are listed in the table below. (Those highlighted in bold were also included in the key 20 indicators monitored last year.)

BVPI	Description	Why focus?
8	% invoices paid in 30 days	Target not achieved Worst Quartile
9	% council tax collected	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend Worst Quartile
10	% non domestic rates due	Target not achieved Worst Quartile
11a	Percentage of top-paid 5% of staff who are women	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend
12	No days lost as a result of sickness	Worst Quartile
64	Number unfit private dwellings returned into occupation	No improvement Downward trend Worst quartile
66a	Rent collected by the local authority as a proportion of rents owned on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) dwellings	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend
66d	Percentage of local authority tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears	Worst quartile
184a	% non decent homes	Target not achieved No improvement Worst Quartile
184b	% proportion of non decent homes	Target not achieved Worst Quartile
212	Average time to re-let homes	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend
202	The number of people sleeping rough on a single night within the area of the authority	No improvement Downward trend Worst quartile
76c	The number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit fraud investigations carried out by the Local Authority per year, per 1,000 caseload	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend
78a	The average processing time taken for all new Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims submitted to the Local Authority, for which the date of decision is within the financial year being reported	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend

BVPI	Description	Why focus?
82a(ii)	Total tonnage of household waste arisings sent by the Authority for recycling	Worst quartile
199b	The percentage of relevant land and highways from which unacceptable levels of graffiti are visible	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend Worst quartile
200b	Has the local planning authority met the milestones which the current Local Development Scheme sets out?	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend
127a	Violent crime per 1,000 population in the Local Authority area	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend
174	The number of racial incidents reported to the Local Authority, and subsequently recorded, per 100,000 population	Target not achieved No improvement Downward trend

Performance against the 19 key indicators is as follows:

46% have achieved target
54% have failed to meet targets
69% show an improvement
31% have failed to improve
62% direction of travel shows an improvement trend
31% direction of travel shows a declining trend
10% show best quartile performance
50% show worst quartile performance

Figures show improved performance over the year in terms of achieved targets and improvement from last year. However, there is a dip in performance in respect to securing best quartile performance as well as an increase in the number of indicators within worst quartile.

2.2 Detailed performance Information

Detailed performance information to support the above figures is available on the attached spreadsheet.

2.3 Learning and remedial action

Remedial measures to improve performance are agreed as part of the action planning and Performance Clinic work.

We continue to drive performance improvement through ensuring that:

- people are clear as to what has to be achieved;
- an action plan to deliver is in place;
- procedures are changed to provide capacity to improve; and
- careful monitoring of measures are in place.

2.4 New National Indicators

From 2008/2009 the Best Value Performance indicators will be abolished and replaced with a new single set of National Indicators to measure the Government's national priorities. The new performance framework is focused on outcomes and their delivery through stronger partnership working.

As some of the Best Value Performance Indicators have proved to be useful in measuring our performance we are to retain a small number of these indicators to be monitored in-house.

3. Local Performance Indicators

3.1 Summary

We continue to measure the local performance indicators which were developed for 2006/2007. These are not statutory indicators, but indicators that show our performance in other areas of service provision that are of local, rather than national, interest. This year there are 34 local performance indicators. These equate to 37 individual returns.

At the time of reporting, where indicators relate to Cestria, the data was not available to us. Performance for these indicators will be reported through the Best Value Performance Plan. For the purpose of this report, the analysis below is based on performance against the remaining set of indicators.

Performance for the local performance indicators is as follows (comparisons against last year's outturn figures are shown in brackets):

56% (51%) have achieved target
44% (49%) are behind target
70% (n/a) have shown an improvement from last year
30% (n/a) have failed to improve from last year

Figures show improved performance over the year in terms of achieved target and improvement trend.

3.2 Detailed Performance Information

Detailed performance information to support the above figures is available on the attached spreadsheet.

3.3 Learning and Remedial Action

Remedial measures to improve performance are agreed as part of the action planning. We will continue to work to refine these indicators.

4. Financial Monitoring Position

The mid year financial monitoring report was considered by the Executive in December. It has not been possible to report final outturns at the time of writing this report. Details will be provided as soon as this is available.

5. Risk Management

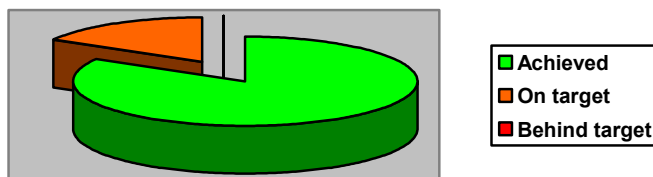
5.1. Summary

Implementation of the Corporate Risk Management Strategy for 2007-08 comprises 24 key actions which include the following achievements within the current period:

- Environmental Risk Review
- Annual Service Planning & Risk
- Support to Stock Transfer Insurance

The delivery of the strategy continues with 15 of the 18 actions due to date completed and the remaining 3 on target to complete to timescale.

Progress on the Strategy is therefore as follows:



The Corporate Plan set out 20 Key Strategic risks and it is considered that these have been effectively managed over the current year. The Strategic Risk Profile was updated for the current Corporate Plan and a more comprehensive review is due to be undertaken later in 2007-08 alongside the review of priorities and development of the transition plan.

5.2 Learning and remedial action

The council has committed to re-assess its key strategic risks as a result of its learning and this has been identified within the corporate planning cycle. Risk management will also be further embedded through the next round of service planning and key decision making. Progress is good in terms of the implementation of the strategy and no remedial action is considered necessary.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Summary

At the end of the period the Council employed 350 staff. Staff turnover for the year was 15%, which includes Casual staff.

Staff sickness was an average of 11.0 days per employee for the period, which can be broken down as follows;

Authority total: 11.0 days average
 6.2 days (long term)
 4.8 days (short term/occasional)

Directorates:

Resources 9.5 days average
 4.1 (long term)
 5.3 (short term/occasional)

Development 11.4 days average
 6.4 days (long term)
 5.0 (short term/occasional)

Community 13.7 days average
 8.1 days (long term)
 5.6 (short term/occasional)

CE/Corporate Services 8.1 days average
 4.9 days (long term)
 3.2 days (short term/ occasional)

A total of 105 employees achieved 100% attendance for 2007/08.

- 8 employee suggestions were made through the employee scheme, over the period.
- The Authority took part in Investors in People assessment in September 2007 and has successfully been awarded the IIP accreditation.
- The Council's Organisational Development Programme for 2007 "Rising Stars" is underway.
- 360 degree appraisals have now been concluded for Service Team Managers, the Council's Corporate Management Team and for Executive members.
- The Council's Organisational Development Strategy is on target.

- The Employee survey 2007 was issued to staff in September 2007 and we have recently received the results.
- TUPE transfer of employees to Cestria Community Housing Association has been completed.
- A procedure for devising Personal Profiles for all employees is currently being designed, prior to briefing sessions and implementation.

6.2 Learning and remedial action

Significant progress is being made in terms of HR performance. All action plans are on target. Action Plans will be developed where improvement is not being achieved. Progress has been made in improving sickness performance, from 11.8 days per employee for 2006/07 to 11 days for 2007/08.

The Organisational Development Programme has been significantly progressed and learning from this has been built in the Corporate Training Plan and Learning Strategy. In particular 11 Action Learning Sets concluded work on a range of topics to meet the council's priorities in the Corporate Plan and the Improvement and Recovery Plan. This approach has taken place once again during 2007/2008 as part of the next organisational development programme, with the three Action Learning Sets due to present their findings in May 2008. Not only will services improve as a result of implementing recommendations but the learning can be applied to action learning set development in the future.

In addition a programme of CPI (continuous process improvement) projects were also undertaken and completed during the year. These resulted in both measurable outcomes organisationally and individually, for those involved and increased learning and development.

The HR service has contributed to the transfer of staff over to Cestria Homes and the led the approach leading to the successful Investors in People Accreditation during the year.

7. Equality and Diversity Position Statement

7.1 Summary

The revised Diversity Impact Assessment methodology has been implemented by Service Team Managers as part of the service planning process. Completed DIA timetables were submitted to EDWG in February and a schedule of assessment monitoring drawn up. Consultation requirements will be co-ordinated centrally. As part of the LGR process, new impact assessment toolkits have been developed, and these will be rolled out in all 8 councils over the next year.

Local Government Re-organisation will impact in the following ways:

- The Corporate Equality Plan was not revised in January, but will remain unchanged until March 2009. Progress will continue to be monitored quarterly at Equality and Diversity Working Group. Checks will be made to ensure that requirements of the revised Equality Standard for Local Government are being met. A report was submitted to Council in January setting out this position and providing information so Members can be assured of our continued compliance.
- Although it is believed that the Authority meets the requirements of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, external validation will not be sought, and therefore we will not be able to declare our Level 3 target at the end of March.
- A number of actions contained within the Corporate Equality Plan action plans have been put on hold. These are primarily Level 4 actions, and therefore do not impact upon our declaration of Level 2.

The Equality and Diversity Working Group is now meeting quarterly rather than monthly. It will continue to monitor progress and performance, but has determined to focus on key events over the next year, covering all 6 strands of the equality agenda.

Performance

Corporate Equality Plan actions:

	Number of actions	% completed	% on target	% behind target
Corporate Equality Plan	115	84% (82%)	16% (18%)	0%
Equality Scheme	53	79% (58%)	21% (42%)	0%
Total	168	83% (73%)	17% (37%)	0%

Equality & Diversity Working Group work programme:

At the November meeting of EDWG, it was agreed to draw a line under the existing work programme and start afresh in the New Year with a new programme that reflects the group's objectives for the next 15 months.

7.2 Learning and remedial action

Following a review of the Equality and Diversity Working Group's effectiveness, in November it was agreed to move to quarterly meetings. Monitoring and performance management would still take place, but the group agreed to focus on a series of events over the following 15 months that would relate to all 6 strands of the equality agenda. This will be done on a task group basis, first 2 events being:

- ▶ February: LGBT history month. A number of activities were carried out including staff quiz within TeamTalk; a dedicated page on our website which contained historical and other interesting information, quizzes and useful links to other websites; and an information stand was set out in the Civic Centre mall.

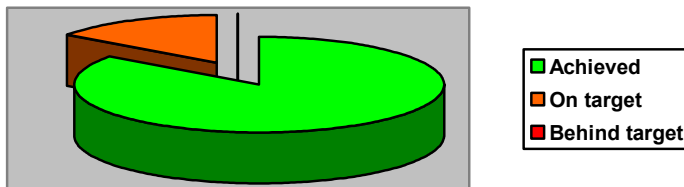
- ▶ April: It's a Knockout – a repeat of the event undertaken by an Action Learning Set in September 2006. There will be mixed participation – those with learning disability, physical disability and able bodied.

8. IRP Position Statement

8.1 Summary

The Council is now out of intervention, and a decision made to draw a line under Improvement and Recovery Plan (2). The remaining objectives to be achieved are about embedding good working practice and it is felt that this will be evidenced in the quarterly performance management report. A new, shorter Improvement Plan, aligned to the LGR Transition Plan, has been agreed, and this will be monitored through Programme Management Board, starting from April 2008. This is focused on the new council priority of People and Place, and will cover the period up to 31 March 2009 when the new unitary authority comes into being. Although the new Improvement Plan has a limited timeframe, it is extremely important that the council continues to ensure improving services for the community during that time.

At the end of December, final performance on IRP 2 was: of the 137 key actions 85% (85%) had been achieved, 15% (15%) remain on target, 0% (0%) were behind target.



8.2 Learning and remedial action

The implementation of 2 Improvement and Recovery Plans has led to an enormous amount of learning for both individuals and the organization as a whole, culminating in the 'good' CPA result. This should place people in a stronger position in terms of finding roles in the new authority.

10. Audit Feedback & Summary

10.1 Summary

The formal CPA Judgement was received in June and was reported in the last quarterly report. Chester-le-Street has moved from a 'poor' to a 'good' council.

There was only one key Audit Commission Report published during the second quarter. This was the result of the Pilot Benefits Inspection.

Earlier this year the Benefits Team volunteered to take part in an Audit Commission Pilot to help develop a new Inspection Framework for the Benefits Service. The learning from the pilot is intended to establish a completely new inspection regime following the merger of the former Benefits Fraud Inspectorate's merger with the Audit Commission.

The process is a 'harder test' based on customer outcomes rather than the previously process orientated performance standards approach. An inspection was undertaken in June and an Inspection report was issued in August. The Inspectors found that the service was now a 'good' service with 'promising prospects for improvement'. This was the best result out of all the pilots. We unofficially now have a better service than the likes of Bradford and Tower Hamlets.

This is another excellent result for the council and shows how much progress the benefits team has made. They were labeled a poor service in 2004.

In August the ITC section received the Charter Mark accreditation, the first in the region to do so.

In October the council was successful in gaining the Investors in People Accreditation. This is a significant success and proves how well the council supports and develops its workforce in delivering its services. In the same month Leisure services achieve the Quest Accreditation. The council has received many other accolades through external assessment such as the 'Loo of the year award', the Golden Green Apple award and Green Flags.

The only Audit Report to be received in the third quarter was confirmation that the Best Value Performance Plan complied with the relevant legislation.

The audit commission submitted its Annual Audit and Inspection letter to the council at the end of March 2008. This was reported to Council at the end of the month and is available on the Council's website.

Every year the Audit Commission publish their Annual Audit and Inspection letter. This year's letter was issued at the end of March and can be downloaded from the link at the right hand side of this page.

It provides an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council. It draws on the most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), the findings and conclusions from the audit of the Council for 2006/07 and from any inspections undertaken since the last Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. It includes the council's Direction of Travel report for the previous year. The letter provides some very positive messages about the council's progress over the last couple of years.

It is considered that the Annual Audit and Inspection report demonstrates the massive progress the council has made over the last few years. The report acknowledges that the council was the first council in the country to make such a significant improvement in its CPA and considers the council's performance improvement to be 'impressive'. The letter identifies that overall Use of Resources judgement has improved to a Level 3 and the Value for Money judgement has been maintained at a level 2.

The key messages arising from the Commission's inspection work are:

- The Council has continued to improve its services in its priority areas and overall. The scale of the Council's improvement is now reflected in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) category which has improved from 'poor' to 'good' as a result of a CPA inspection in June 2007. The Council was the first District Council to achieve such a significant improvement in its CPA category.
- Progress against the Council's priorities and contribution to wider community outcomes is good. There are many examples of where the Council has worked closely with residents and partners in delivering significant improvements.
- In common with Councils across Durham, the Council has implemented good regeneration projects. However, the Councils are not working together well enough to close the gap between economic prosperity in Durham and the rest of the country.
- The Council has good arrangements for further improvement.

The Key messages arising from their audit work are:

- they were able to issue an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounts
- the Council considered stakeholder views when deciding not to produce an annual report

- the Council continues to ensure that its medium term financial strategy, budgets and capital programme are soundly based and designed to deliver its strategic priorities;
- the Council has continued to improve arrangements for controlling spending and reported an overall underspend in 2006/07;and
- the Council has improved arrangements in internal control and continues to perform well in this area

Other Key messages

The Government has decided to take forward the option of local government reorganisation in County Durham. The Council will demise next year and its functions will be transferred to a new unitary council that will cover the whole of County Durham. Early indications are that the Council is making a positive contribution to making a success of the new Council but this early impetus needs to be maintained over the coming months. In particular the Commission recommended that the Council should:

- Prioritise making a positive contribution to transitional working designed to establish the new Council
- Set aside or secure sufficient resources to make the above contribution; and
- Ensure that attention is given to maintaining key public services in the transition period

10.2 Learning and remedial action

The council has learned much from the CPA and Pilot experiences and service improvement has been undertaken as a result. Most importantly the council volunteered for both inspections. Indeed Investors in People is a voluntary accreditation and this proves that the council is open to external scrutiny and evaluation.

This has been an excellent year for the council in terms of progress in its improvement programme which is clearly shown by external assessment responses and successes.

The council's progress has been recognised at regional level when the council won the first Shine Improvement Award.

11. Compliments, comments and complaints Analysis

11.1 Summary

Throughout 2007-2008 the Council continues to focus upon embedding the culture of handling and responding to complaints in a timely and positive manner. Complaints should be seen as an opportunity for feedback from customers and a way to influence the way we deliver services in the future. To further embed the complaints culture into the organisation, a continual process improvement project commenced in December 2007 with specific aims to raise awareness of the importance of dealing with complaints and also to evaluate and improve the process overall.

Total Complaints

The following statistics represent the information received for the period April 2007 – March 2008. Figures for the same period last year are indicated in brackets.

234 (339) formal complaints were received by the Council.

27 % (44 %) were considered to be justified

73 % (56 %) were considered to be unjustified

10 (14) Ombudsman complaints were received during the period.

No (No) complaints were upheld by the Ombudsman

191 (224) compliments/letters of thanks were registered during the period.

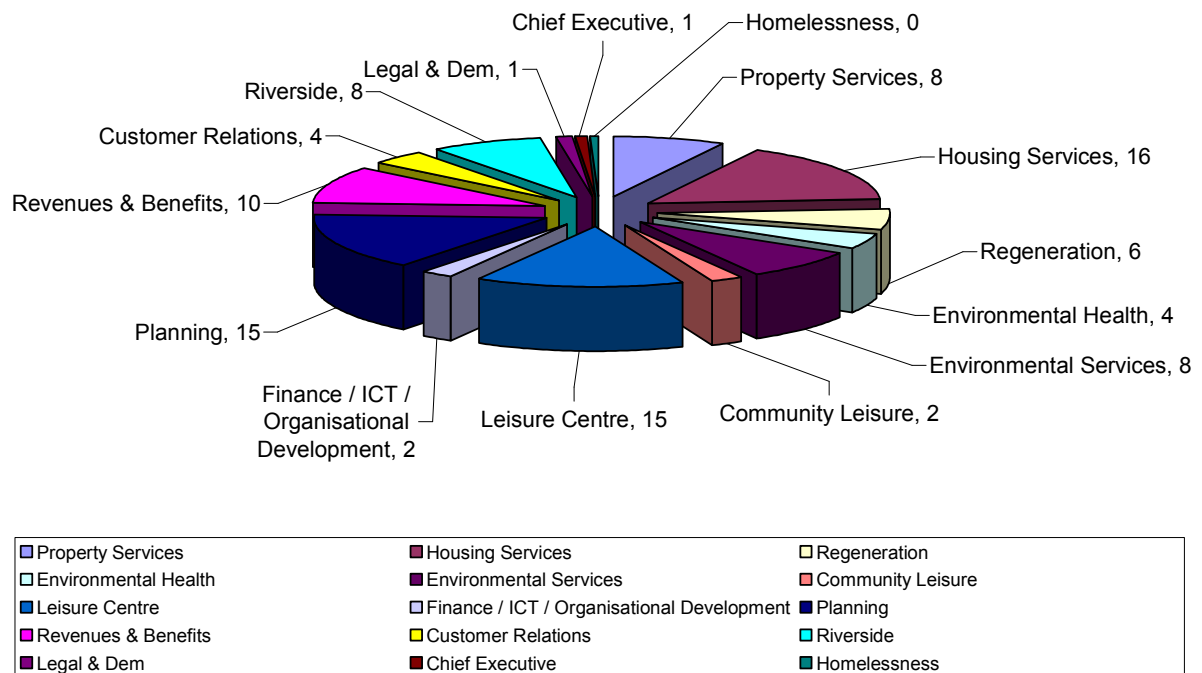
11.2 Formal Complaints April 2007 – March 2008

A total of 234 (339) formal complaints were submitted in the period

Nature of Complaints – Service Teams

- 10 % (8 %) related to the Revenue and Benefits service
- 8 % (8 %) related to the Environmental Services
- 8 % (8 %) related to the Property Services
- 16 % (18 %) related to Housing Services
- 25 % (27 %) related to the Leisure Services
- 15 % (15 %) related to Planning Services
- 6 % (5 %) related to Regeneration
- 4 % (4 %) related to Environmental Health Services
- 4 % (4 %) related to Customer Relations
- 2 % (2 %) related to Finance / ICT & Organisational Development

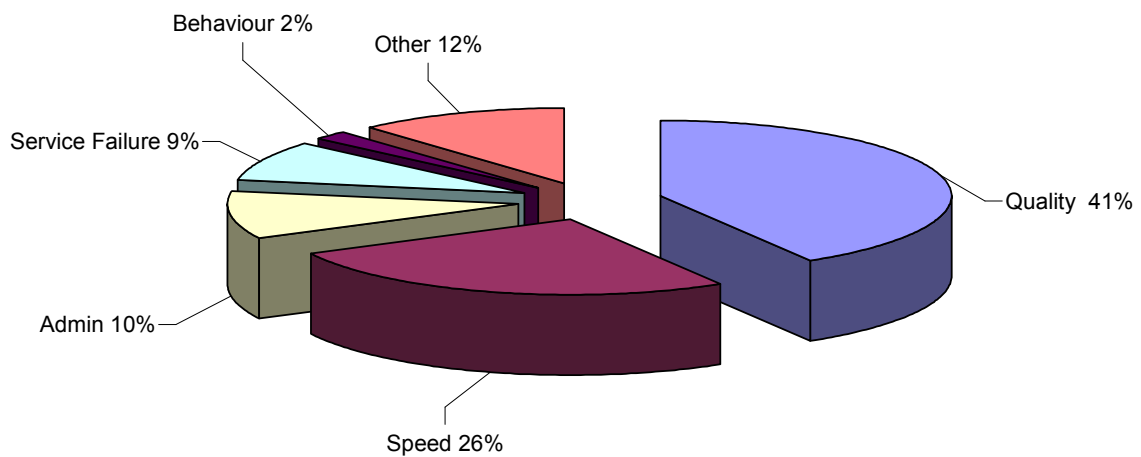
**% of complaints received by Service Area
April 2007 - March 2008**



Nature of Complaints – Complaint Types

41 % (45 %) were in respect of *quality of service*
10 % (11 %) were in respect of *administration of services*
2 % (2 %) was in respect of *behaviour of staff*
9 % (5%) were in respect of *service failure*
26 % (25 %) were in respect of the *speed of service provided*
12 % (12 %) were in respect of other reasons

Nature of complaint 2007/2008

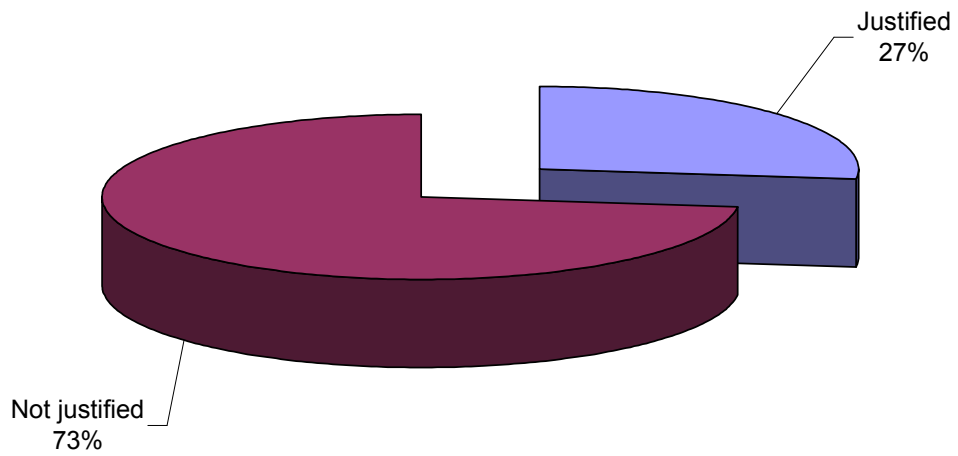


Outcome

27 % (44 %) were considered to be justified

73 % (56 %) were considered to be unjustified

Proportion justified / unjustified complaints 2007/2008



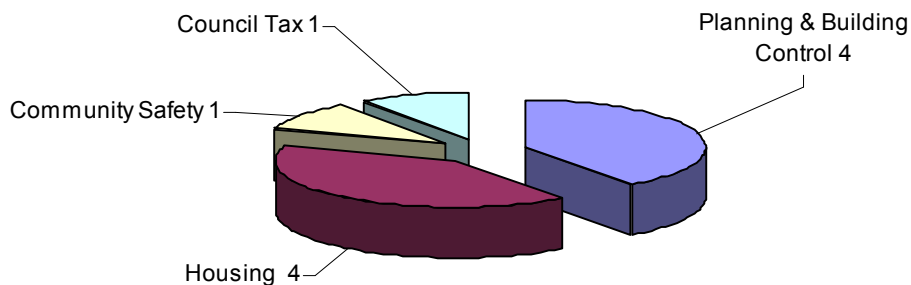
11.3 Ombudsman Complaints April 2007 – March 2008

- 10 (14) Ombudsman complaints were received during the period.
- No (No) complaints were upheld by the Ombudsman
- The overall number of complaints raised against the council has reduced by 29% compared to 2006 – 2007
- All complaints were responded to within the Ombudsman’s target time (29 days)

Nature of Complaints

40% related to planning services
40% related to housing services
10% related to council tax
10% related to community safety

Ombudsman by classification 2007 / 2008

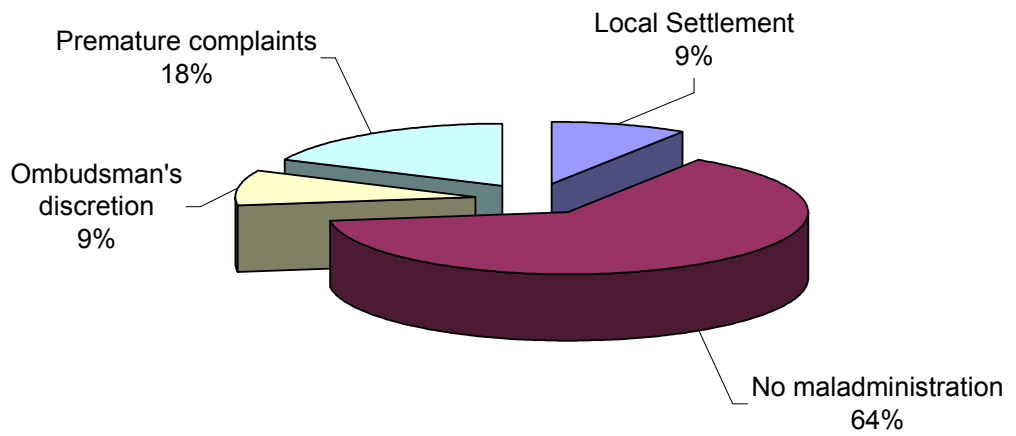


Outcome

The Ombudsman issued 6 decision letters in the period – no complaints were upheld against the Council:

Local settlement	9%
No evidence of maladministration	64%
Ombudsman Discretion	9%
Premature complaints	18%

Ombudsman decisions 2007 /2008



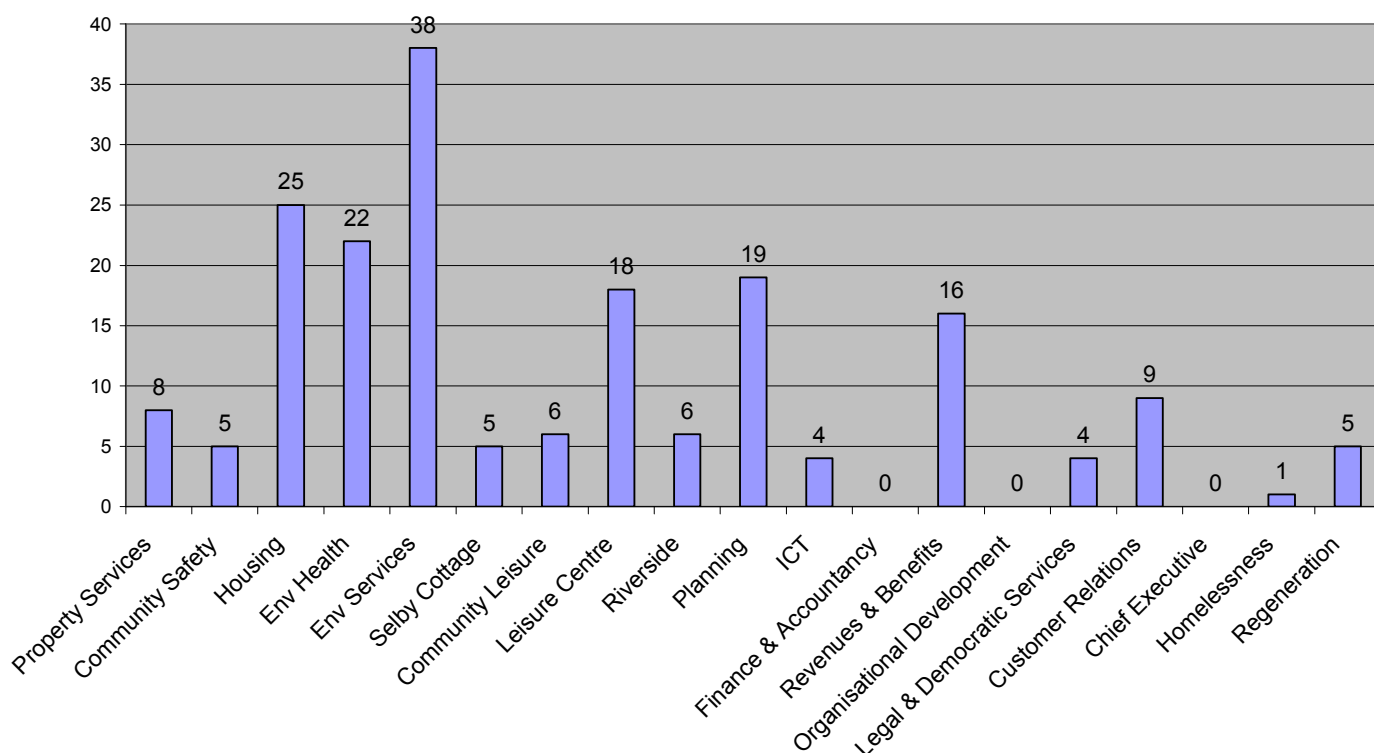
11.4 Compliments April 2007 – March 2008

191 (224) compliments/letters of thanks were registered during the period.

Nature of Compliments

- 16 related to the revenue & benefits service
- 38 related to the environmental services
- 25 related to housing services
- 27 related to the leisure services
- 19 related to planning services
- 22 related to environmental health services
- 5 related to regeneration
- 9 related to customer relations
- 4 related to resources / ICT / organisational development
- 10 related to council / combined services

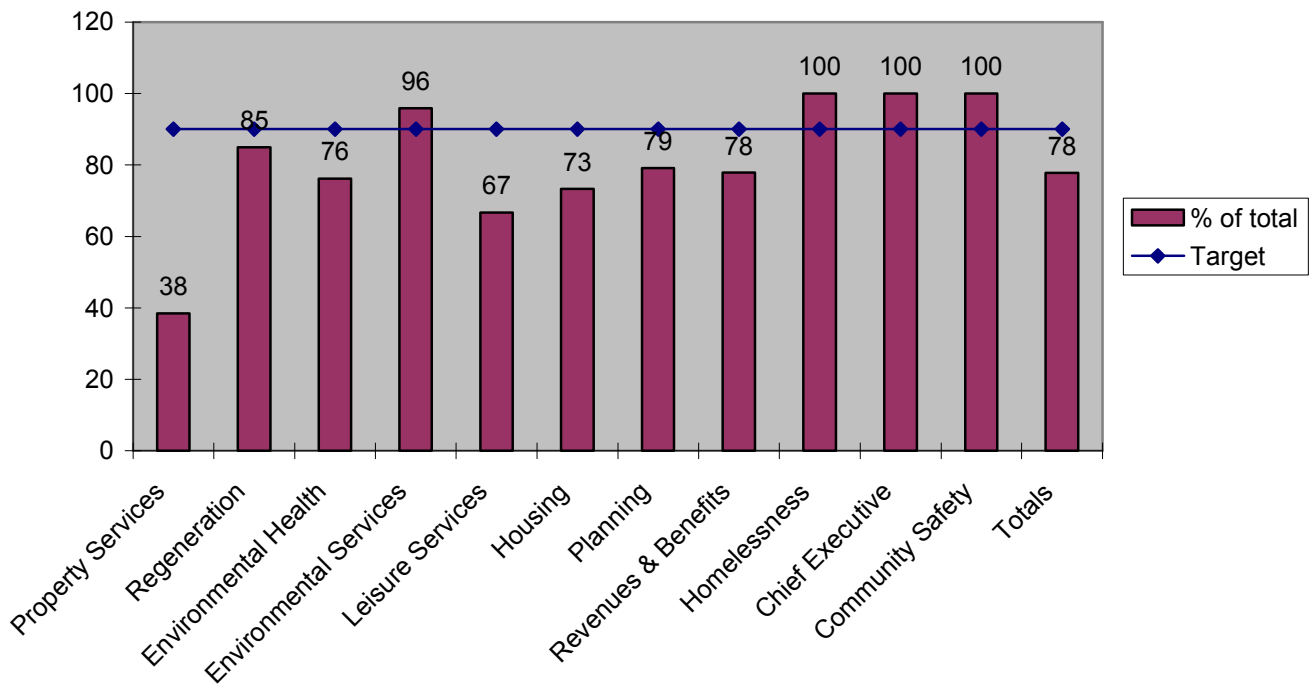
Compliments Received by Teams April - December 2007



11.5. Response to MP Enquiries within 10 Working Days

The graph below shows the performance by each service team in dealing with MP enquiries within the agreed service standard performance of 10 working days.

MP Enquiries % response within 10 days April 2007- March 2008



Total Number of Enquiries Received from MP	
Total Number of MP enquiries / complaints received 2007 / 2008	151
Total Number which were MP enquiries	122
Total Number which were MP complaints about the Council	29

Performance has dropped slightly by 1% compared to the previous quarter but has increased by 2% against the same period in 2006 / 2007. IF we were to discount the performance of the services transferred to Cestria, the overall performance of the remaining council services would increase to 84% for the whole 2007 – 2008 period.

11.5 Other Performance Information

New monitoring processes were put in place last year and the following results can be identified:

- 85 % of complaints were responded to in 10 days (target 90%)
- 78 % MP queries were responded to in 10 days (target 90%)
- 97 % Freedom of information enquiries were responded to in 20 working days (target 100%)
- 93 % of e-mail enquiries were responded to within 24 hours (target 100%)

11.6 Learning and remedial action

It has become clear over the year that the analysis of complaints at service level is necessary in order that individual services can learn from complaints and share this learning across the organisation. Proposals have been built into the Learning Strategy to embed this throughout the organization.

A further analysis of results shows that:

- The number of complaints logged compared to the same period last year has reduced by 31% – 234 compared with 339, however part of this can be attributed to the handover of housing services to Cestria Community Housing Group in February 2008.
- Most complaints related to Leisure Services, Planning and Housing which combined equate to 58% of all complaints received.
- 41% of complaints related to the quality of service people have received.
- The % of justified complaints has reduced from 44% to 27% when compared to the same period in 2006 / 2007.
- Targets set to respond to a range of complaints and enquiries have not been met throughout the year, however there have been clear signs of improvement compared to the same quarter in 2006 / 2007, namely an overall 2% increase in MP enquiries dealt with in target time and also overall handling of complaints within target time has increased by 2.7%. It is also encouraging to note that the remaining council services all achieved a 100% target achievement for the final ¼ of the financial year and this issue will continue to be addressed and promoted as part of the wholesale review of complaints procedures and processes as part of the Council's Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) project between December 2007 and May 2008.

12. Partnerships Progress

12.1 Summary

As part of the council's Improvement and Recovery Plan there were clear actions to consider and improve the effectiveness of existing partnerships. To add weight for the need of this the Audit Report, identified in Section 10 (page 17), suggested that the council was underperforming in this area. Whilst the council was therefore already aware of this there was a clear need to make change.

The council has responded by approving a Partnership Strategy in November 2006 with a detailed Action Plan. The council has commissioned an electronic Partnership 'toolkit' through the North East Centre of Excellence and provided training to Corporate Support Team. The Chief Executive has been selected as the council's Partnership Champion and the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Partnerships is the Member Champion.

It is clear that partnership working is fundamental to what we can achieve in the District. Many of the achievements set out in the Corporate Plan could only have happened by working with others. 'Working in Partnership' is a firm priority and we have developed a Partnership Strategy to help us achieve our vision. The key components of the strategy are:

- understanding what partnerships we are in;
- understanding how effective they are;
- understanding how healthy they are; and
- ensuring that we improve those which need to be.

Programme Management Board is monitoring implementation of this toolkit.

The review of our partnerships has a significant impact on the development of a single priority of '**People and Place**'. An assessment of the potential gaps in performance of partnerships and what we can do in the council's remaining lifetime to secure sustainable change is part of ongoing work to develop the new priority. Progress will be reported here in due course.

The Transition Plan has addressed what needs to be done and a significant part of the '**People and Place**' priority is to develop the partnerships as part of the 'Strengthening Partnerships' Action Learning Set. At the time of writing this report a Delivery Plan to address improving partnerships had been agreed by the Executive.

12.2 Learning and Remedial Action

It is too early to measure improvement as a result of the introduction of the Strategy. Similarly it is too early to gain any learning from our experiences and with the use of the toolkit. We have found that some partners are reluctant to engage in our effectiveness activity and we will need to find ways of convincing partner organizations of mutual benefits. Clearly we need to ensure that both the strategy works for the council and meets our objectives and addresses the previous findings of the Audit Commission. Programme Management Board will capture such learning and will consider remedial action against **'People and Place'** .priority delivery plan implementation underperformance. The Strategy itself will be reviewed as part of the process agreed by Executive for reviewing strategies in the light of local government re-organisation.

13. Data Quality Progress

13.1 Summary

The following progress has been made in respect of the implementation of the Data Quality Policy since April 2007:

- The adoption of the Strategy and action plan;
- Data quality risks, commitment and proposals built into Corporate plan;
- Data Quality Policy and Strategy communicated to customers through the Internet;
- Data Quality Policy and Strategy communicated to staff and members through the Intranet;
- Data Quality built into Performance Management Handbook and communicated to staff;
- Data Quality considered as part of the Performance Management Review;
- Data quality commitment incorporated as a feature of Corporate Performance Reports and within performance clinics:
- Decisions made not to publish information because data quality was not proved e.g. a decision not to publish BV 166 quarterly statistics because the information as to performance was not dependable, and now resolved.
- Data Quality included in Corporate Training Plan as part of Performance Management training.
- Intranet site developed
- Corporate Guidelines developed and implemented
- Corporate Audit devised and built into intranet, will identify gaps to assist strategy development
- Further awareness undertaken as a result and data quality is communicated more clearly now. Communications plan developed and on intranet
- Data Quality Responsibility Register developed and significantly completed
- Programme Management Board taking stronger role on monitoring of data Quality
- Improved sign off with LPI's following same process as BVPI's
- Data quality incorporated into all corporate reports and built into Report Writing Protocol
- Developed revised Service Plan Guidance
- Staff and Managers Audit undertaken
- Training presentation provided to all staff
- Data Quality Training provided as part of Members Induction programme
- Data quality built into Performance Clinics
- A review of the Data Quality Strategy Action Plan and the Data Quality Policy has been completed

- A Revised Policy and Strategy Action Plan was agreed at the end of March

The Audit Commission has carried out an audit of Data Quality Arrangements. This has proved to be positive with few recommendations made. The council has reviewed its action Plan in the light of the recommendations made.

There are no issues of Data Quality failures or exceptions to be reported during this year

13.2 Learning and remedial action

Significant progress has been made in respect of the implementation of the Data Quality Strategy largely around corporate awareness. The Audit Commission produced a positive audit report.

As a result of the audit we now have a good understanding of where there are potential weaknesses in the Authority and will be able to address these in the future.

No remedial action is required as part of any Data Quality failures or exceptions during the current quarter.

14. Local Government Reorganisation Progress

14.1 Summary

In September 2007 a project team was set up to help manage the council's contributions potential transition to a new single unitary authority. The team is led by the Director of Corporate Services and based around the council's Performance and Improvement Team. It also includes key Human Resources, communications, a representative for the trade unions and support staff. So far it has:

- Developed and agreed terms of reference and principles;
- Developed an Intranet site to allow access to key documents and information for staff and members;
- Developed an Information Request Register and responded to initial data requests where appropriate;
- Developed a communications plan; and
- Published three newsletters to staff and Members
- Engaged in transitional arrangements.

The team will be commencing development of a project plan as soon as there is clarity on the future following decisions on judicial review.

The council has re-organised its senior management to assist it in developing the capacity within the organisation to deliver business as usual while contributing to the transition to the new organisation. At the same time the council has commenced developing a transitional plan which will help it focus on a single priority of 'people and place' through to March 2009.

The council is now significantly engaged in assisting the transition to the new authority .It has key officers who are leading and engaging in the workstreams and taking best practice into the new council.

14.2 Learning and remedial action

Significant progress has been made in establishing a team to assist the council positively contributing to the smooth transition to a new unitary authority.

15. Corporate Governance Progress

15.1 Summary

The council has taken corporate governance seriously as part of its Improvement Programme. During the year the corporate working group which drives corporate Governance improvement – the Corporate Governance Group (CGG) lost two key members of the team as a result of them moving to other appointments outside the authority. The team has regrouped and is now chaired by the Director of Corporate Services providing a key steer from the corporate centre. Members of the group have ensured progress and the CGG has

- Developed and secured council approval of the Local Code of Governance;
- Implemented the associated action Plan;
- Commenced work on this years Annual Governance Statement;
- Commenced work on this years Use of Resources submission;
- Contributed to the development and review of the Data Quality Policy and Strategy action plan, agreed by the Council in March 2008;
- Developed an Intranet site to allow access to key documents and information for staff and members;
- Considered reports on the effectiveness of Internal Audit and the Annual Internal Audit report which both show positive achievement of internal audit at a time of change;
- Set out Strategic risk assessments for the Transition Plan and agreed key strategic corporate risks with Corporate Management Team;
- Commented on the Audit commissions annual Audit and Inspection letter; and
- Raised awareness of corporate governance through a range of LGR workstreams

Significant progress has therefore been made and it is considered that the council is strong in terms of its commitment and delivery to corporate governance. It is considered that the very positive Annual Audit and Inspection letter from the Audit Commission reflects this point of view.

15.2 Learning and remedial action

Significant progress has been made in maintaining a team to assist the council in ensuring high standards of effectiveness of corporate governance.

16. Overall Performance

16.1 Summary of Overall Performance

It has been another significantly positive year for the council. This has been against challenges of a time of significant change as a result of local government re-organisation and in terms of transferring its housing function to a registered Social Landlord, Cestria Homes. The council's performance has been captured in the most positive Annual Audit and Inspection Letter received from the Audit Commission in the council's history. During the year the council marked its achievements against its ambitious improvement programme by becoming the first council to move from a 'poor' to a 'good' Comprehensive Performance Assessment categorisation. This has been followed by achieving a significant range of external assessed awards including a Chartermark for ICT, Investors in People accreditation for the whole council and the Quest Accreditation for the Leisure centre.

The council's performance over the last year can be summarised as follows:

- The corporate plan proposals and priorities have been reviewed through the development of a Transition Plan which was adopted by the council at the end of March 2008. The council now has a single priority 'People and Place' which it is now actively working to achieve;
- While 57% of indicators have achieved targets less are showing improvement since last year (57% compared with 67%), 47% of indicators show top quartile performance compared with only 40% last year although more also show bottom quartile performance.
- In terms of the 19 key indicators in need of improvement, 57% have seen targets achieved, 69% have improved, 62% show an improving trend and there are now more in top quartile and less in bottom quartile. This shows a significant improvement since last year;
- Local indicators continue to show performance improvement as 70% have improved last year compared with only 51% last year;
- 75% of actions in the Risk Strategy have been completed and work commenced on the remaining 25%, strategic risks will be re-assessed as a result of the adoption of the emerging Transition Plan;
- There is strong HR performance at a time of reduced capacity which not only included the transfer of a significant number of staff to Cestria but also included the achievement of Investors in People. Sickness levels within the council have improved. Staff turnover is high for the first time this year with a 15% turnover rate being recorded, reflecting the impact of uncertainty around LGR;
- There are no actions in the Equality Plan action plan behind target and the council now leads on equality in terms of Local Government Review;

- It has been agreed that the work of the Modernisation Team has been achieved and the Team no longer meets;
- The Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP2) has been drawn to a close following the council officially coming out of intervention. This has been replaced by an Improvement plan which is now accommodated in the Transition Plan;
- During the year the council has received some crucial and significant Audit Commission reports including a 'good' CPA report, a significantly and seriously positive Annual Audit and Inspection letter including a positive Direction of Travel statement following CPA recategorisation. In addition the council has achieved IIP accreditation (which proves the progress the council has made in supporting and developing its people), a Charter Mark for ICT, Quest accreditation for Leisure Services, Golden Green Apple Award, Green Flag Awards and a significantly positive Pilot Benefits Inspection judgement. The council also won the first regional Shine Improvement Award for proving to be the most improved council in the country;
- There have been significantly less complaints this year than last (234 compared with 339 this time last year) and the proportion of compliments, is improving towards one compliment being received for every one complaint received. Only 27% of complaints were considered justified compared to 44%% this time last year;
- Response times to corporate standards continued to improve overall;
- Significant progress has been made on Data Quality and a good Audit Commission Data Quality audit was received before the end of the year and was reflected in the Annual Audit letter and Direction of Travel Statement. At the end of the year the council reviewed its Data Quality Policy and its Data Quality Strategy Action Plan;
- Local Government Reorganisation has begun to impact on the work of the council and the council is taking a significant role in the programme; and
- Strong and positive arrangements in corporate governance exist and are improving.