A picture of performance

Early lessons from comprehensive performance assessment
The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, health and criminal justice services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

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Summary

For the first time the Audit Commission has pulled together in a single framework a wide range of information on the performance of single tier and county councils in England. Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) means a series of things for each of these councils. It:

- produces assessments of ‘current performance’ on a range of key services, and gives an overall assessment of the council’s performance as a service provider;
- provides an assessment of the council’s ability to improve in the future;
- places the council in one of five categories: excellent, good, fair, weak or poor; and
- forms the basis on which the council, Government departments and inspectorates will plan for future improvements.

The best-performing councils are able to harness their capacity in order to match their high levels of ambition:

- single tier and county councils have high levels of ambition. They have set themselves demanding targets for improving the quality of life of their citizens;
- most councils assessed make effective use of their capacity – that is, their staff, money and other resources – and they have the ‘raw material’ to do almost anything that they want to do;
- councils with high levels of focus pay attention to their own priorities and stick with them, rather than being diverted by the latest big idea or by short-term crises;
- in councils that are good at managing their performance, staff and councillors have a shared understanding of the council’s priorities and of what they must do to realise those priorities; and
- working in partnership with others is paying off for almost all single tier and county councils. Partnerships are leading to better services, and councils are using them to deliver their priorities.

The CPA framework has taken account of local factors like deprivation:

- deprivation and other local factors can influence the quality and type of services that councils provide;
- in designing the CPA framework, the Commission has been guided by the principle that councils should be assessed not on the circumstances they find themselves in, but on the way that they respond to those circumstances; and
- some councils assessed as being excellent are in the most deprived areas. And there are poor and weak councils in relatively affluent places in both urban and rural areas.
CPA has helped to promote self awareness and learning in many single tier and county councils:

- many councils have commented on the value of carrying out self-assessments using four simple but challenging questions;
- involving peer officers and members in the assessment process has promoted learning and networking across different councils; and
- CPA has helped many councils to focus on tackling their biggest issues, and provided a sense of momentum.

CPA represents a considerable investment on the part of councils, Government, the Commission and other regulators. For this investment to pay off:

- councils should use improvement planning to pull together their existing plans and change programmes, and to identify their top priorities;
- Government should make available packages of freedoms and flexibilities, and targeted support and intervention; and
- the Commission and other regulators should agree a co-ordinated and proportionate programme of audit and inspection work that is appropriate for each council.
Introduction

1 In December 2001 the Government asked the Audit Commission to develop a new performance management framework for councils in England: comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs). The first CPAs have now been carried out for single tier and county councils. This bulletin summarises some of the key learning from CPA about the performance of the best councils. This will help commentators, councillors and managers to interpret and put into context the assessments for individual councils when they are published on 12 December 2002.

2 This bulletin is based on:
   • an analysis of the CPA scores and the corporate assessment reports for all of the 150 councils assessed;
   • case studies of individual councils; and
   • surveys carried out by MORI of councillors and managers in single tier and county councils in England.

This bulletin will be followed by a range of other publications and information explaining the results and outcomes from CPA.

Local government in England

3 Local councils in England provide a wide range of services, including education, social services, waste collection, and transport – services that people experience every day. Between them, local councils were responsible for £91 billion of public spending in the UK as a whole between 2001 and 2002 (one-quarter of the total government expenditure of £367 billion) and they employ over two million people. The performance and standard of council services have a major impact on our quality of life. The December 2001 Local Government White Paper Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services¹, referred to the ‘critical importance of local authorities as a tier of democratic government’. These councils have more than 21,000 elected councillors and a unique status as elected providers of local services.

4 Local councils serve diverse populations in varied places. There are great differences in their size, with some large councils, such as Kent County Council, serving a population of 1,340,000, through to the Isles of Scilly with an electorate of around 1,600. Local councils cover both rural and urban areas. This diversity is reflected in their working arrangements, priorities and the ways in which they provide services.

5 English councils are made up of three main types: single tier, county and district. In many areas a single all-purpose council provides all of the local government services. These ‘single tier’ councils are usually (but not exclusively) found in urban, metropolitan areas. In other areas, there are county councils, each with a number of smaller district councils within their borders.

¹ Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Cm 5237.
In the first year of CPA, the 150 single tier and county councils have been assessed. The larger number of district councils will be assessed over the next two years.

Comprehensive performance assessments: where they came from and what they’re for

CPA pulls together for the first time in a single framework the existing information on council performance which is held by councils, government departments, auditors and inspectors. It also builds in a new ‘corporate assessment’ of councils’ ability to improve. CPA identifies the strengths and capabilities of the council, as well as where more support is needed.

The purpose of CPA is to act as a springboard for improvement in local services and for an improved quality of life for local people. The assessment process is not an end in itself. It:

• will demonstrate that the best councils can effectively manage their own affairs, helping to build trust between central and local government, and between local government, local communities and other providers of local services;
• will lead to additional freedoms and flexibilities for high-performing councils, and support for those that need it;
• is an additional opportunity to re-energise councils’ commitment to improvement, and will help them to focus their attention and resources on what must change if they are to become – and remain – excellent councils;
• will help local people to understand better how their council performs;
• is a way to learn together, so that all councils can match what the best councils do already; and
• will enable the Commission and other regulators to target inspection and audit, so that it has a greater impact where it is most needed.

How comprehensive performance assessments are carried out

The CPA framework measures the effectiveness of the whole council in terms of the way that it provides services and works in partnership. Its focus is on the leadership, systems and culture that lead to improved services, as well as on the current performance of services.
The elements of CPA

CPA draws on a wide range of evidence to produce assessments of ‘current performance’ on a range of key services. This evidence includes inspection judgements from the Commission and other inspectorates, auditor judgements, performance indicators and Government assessments of councils’ plans. These service assessments are combined to provide an overall assessment of the council’s current performance on services.

CPA also draws on a ‘corporate assessment’, which results in a judgement about the council’s ‘ability to improve’ (this means a council’s ability to lead its community, and to improve services) [Exhibit 1]. The corporate assessment began with a ‘self-assessment’, which required councils to answer four simple but challenging questions about their own performance. The self-assessment was followed up by an external ‘corporate assessment’, carried out by a small team which included an auditor and inspector as well as officers and councillors from ‘peer’ councils. The outcome of the corporate assessment was a high-level report on the council’s strengths and weaknesses, and a judgement about its ability to improve.

Exhibit 1
The CPA framework

CPA brings together a range of evidence to form an assessment of each council.

Source: Audit Commission
The experience of local people

One of the guiding principles for the Commission and other inspectorates is to focus our work on the public, and on the way that people experience public services. The experience of local people is reflected in a number of ways in CPA. Inspectors routinely take account of the experience of service users by talking to them directly, holding focus groups, carrying out surveys of users, and by trying out the services for themselves. Performance indicators which measure satisfaction with services have also been included in the CPA framework. And corporate assessment teams met and talked to users and their representatives to help them to assess councils’ ability to improve.

Bringing it all together

The judgements about current performance and about the council’s ability to improve are combined to form an overall assessment of each council, placing each of them in one of five categories: excellent, good, fair, weak or poor. These categories and the underlying scores will be publicly reported by the Audit Commission, and councils will be expected to use the findings of their CPA as a basis for improvement planning. The Commission has also given clear guidance to councils about the best ways to communicate the final results of CPA to local people.

Five types of council

CPA gives us the most complete picture yet of the performance of single tier and county councils. This section of the bulletin analyses what we have learnt about the councils in each of the five CPA categories, describes what a ‘typical’ council in each category is like, and identifies areas where councils will want to focus their attention.

The Commission recognises that no real council will be exactly like any of these ‘typical’ councils. Each single tier and county council will have carried out its own self-assessment and will have been through a detailed corporate assessment and analysis of key services. This will have helped councils to identify their top priorities for improving services, tested whether they have the ability to make these improvements and assessed their community leadership. The descriptions below draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses that emerge for many of the councils in each CPA category, and help to identify the areas where councils should focus their efforts in order to move up through the CPA categories or to maintain their excellence in future years.

Excellent councils

Excellent councils have shown that overall they deliver high-quality local services, especially in areas of national priority, such as education and social services. They have effective leadership and management arrangements and are strong in maintaining their performance. They are clear about their priorities, which are linked to local needs and aspirations. Council finances are well managed and are directed at agreed priorities.
Excellent councils are often better at achieving more for their communities through the delivery of cross-cutting projects, often in partnership with others.

**Good councils**

Good councils tend to have strong services overall and know where they need to make improvements. These councils provide effective leadership and management. Good councils have high levels of ambition and are mostly focused on what matters to their communities. To become excellent, these councils need to strengthen their ability to manage and apply resources where they are needed most and work more closely with partners to achieve more for their communities.

**Fair councils**

Fair councils provide reasonable services overall but they need to deliver significant improvements to ensure that local people benefit from more consistent and reliable delivery. For these councils, their current performance is generally stronger than their ability to make further improvements. To become good or excellent councils they need to identify the things that really matter, focus on them, and manage their performance more effectively. These councils need to make better use of their resources, particularly their staff and to improve their leadership skills and managerial impact.

**Weak councils**

Weak councils tend to provide low standards of service for local people and have limited ability to make them better. There are few that currently have the ability to move quickly out of the weak category. Weak councils may have one or more services that are performing reasonably well, but they do not spread this better performance from one service to another. Their priorities are unclear, do not reflect local aspirations and are not adequately tied to resources. Developing their political and managerial ability to tackle their problems is a top priority for weak councils.

**Poor councils**

Poor councils offer inadequate services and do not have the leadership and managerial capacity or focus to improve them. Performance management is ineffective and resources are not used to the best advantage of the council. Most poor councils are trying to make improvements to services, but lack the focus and clarity of priorities to do so effectively. Engagement with local people does not translate into positive changes or better services for the community. Without external support, the efforts that many poor councils are making to improve services for their citizens are unlikely to lead to lasting change.
Learning from CPA

21 What have we learnt from CPA about how the best councils achieve their high levels of performance?

Harnessing capacity to match high levels of ambition

22 One of the most striking findings from the 150 corporate assessments has been the high level of ambition in single tier and county councils. The majority of these councils have set themselves demanding targets for improving the quality of life of their citizens. These ambitions are leading councils to change the way that they work, and to provide better services. This is far from the picture of a complacent and timid local government that is sometimes painted by public commentators.

23 Most single tier and county councils also make effective use of their capacity – that is their staff, money and other resources – and so have the ‘raw material’ available to do almost anything that they want to do. They also make use of additional resources from outside their own organisation, by linking up in partnership with other public, private and voluntary organisations, and by encouraging local people to participate in improving their own quality of life.

24 However, currently, it is only the best of these councils that are effectively harnessing their capacity to match their high levels of ambition. The key factors that make the difference are the degree to which the council focuses on and prioritises what really matters, the way in which it manages its performance and the use it makes of partnerships. Where these factors are strong, and where they are linked, they form a chain that effectively connects the council’s ambitions with its capacity [Exhibit 2].

Focusing and prioritising

25 Councils with high levels of focus pay attention to their own priorities and stick with them, rather than being diverted by the latest big idea or by short-term crises. They are able to make difficult decisions, and they stick to them. They know if they are achieving their priorities and can take corrective action if they are drifting off course.

26 Councils that are good at prioritising choose carefully which new initiatives they will pursue, checking first that there is a clear link to one or more of their top priorities. They are also clear about what is less of a priority. As a result, these councils are better able to resolve the tension between top-down national priorities, and bottom-up local priorities, by interpreting national priorities in ways that are important to local people.
EXHIBIT 2
The best councils are effectively harnessing their capacity to match their high levels of ambition

Where three key factors are strong, and where they are linked, they form a chain that effectively connects a council’s ambitions with its capacity.

Consistent focus and clear prioritisation help councils to link their ambitions with their capacity. This is particularly true when it comes to making difficult budget decisions. In a survey of officers and councillors in single tier and county councils carried out by MORI for this bulletin, nearly one in three (32 per cent) of those interviewed said that they found it ‘fairly difficult’ or ‘very difficult’ to make decisions where there are competing priorities. And a majority of those interviewed (55 per cent) said that they found it ‘very difficult’ or ‘fairly difficult’ to find the resources to back their action plans. Making and sticking to these difficult budget decisions is a factor that distinguishes the most effective councils from the rest.

Source: Audit Commission
Case study 1

**Focusing and prioritising: Hertfordshire County Council**

Hertfordshire County Council maintains a consistent focus on its customers, which drives all that it does. It undertook a whole organisation review in 1997 and has continually reviewed its organisational structure since then to ensure that it remains a customer-focused organisation.

In recent years the council has prioritised the provision of integrated services that treat clients as ‘whole people’, rather than as the recipients of individual services. It created an Adult Care Services Department and a Children, Schools and Families Department, and has implemented a customer services centre in response to customer needs. Resources have been reallocated from non-priority areas to fund these developments. The council is financially well managed, and its budget setting process supports this allocation and redistribution of resources to help to achieve the council’s priorities.

**Sources:** Hertfordshire County Council and Audit Commission

**Managing performance**

28 Managing performance is about more than having an effective performance management system. The elements of performance management – targets, indicators, plans and so on – are important, but they are not enough by themselves. In councils that are good at managing their performance, staff and councillors have a shared understanding of the council’s priorities and of what they need to do to realise those priorities. Because people know what matters most, they can solve problems and overcome barriers quickly. They recognise that the point of managing performance is not to hit targets and fulfil plans as ends in themselves – but to do so in a way that produces high-quality services for local people.

29 Most councils recognise the importance of performance management. In a survey of councillors carried out by MORI for the Commission earlier in 2002, 89 per cent of those interviewed said that performance management was a ‘very high’ or ‘fairly high’ priority for them in improving local services. But we know from the corporate assessments that many councils struggle to use performance management in practice.

**Building partnerships**

30 Single tier and county councils are involved in a wide range of partnerships with other public service providers, businesses and voluntary groups. Some county councils that cover a large geographical area can be involved in hundreds of partnerships. Central government has strongly influenced the development of partnerships, by, for example, encouraging the creation of ‘local strategic partnerships’ in which councils play a leading role.
The evidence from CPA is that these partnerships are beginning to pay off in terms of an improved quality of services for local people, and in an increase in the types of services that are on offer. Our corporate assessments found that nearly 70 per cent of councils were involved in ‘productive partnerships’ – that is, partnerships that are clear about what they want to achieve, and that succeed in realising their aims. In a high proportion – 59 per cent – these partnerships were closely linked to the council’s own priorities. These productive partnerships have helped to build confidence in the minds of councils’ partners. In 60 per cent of corporate assessments, partners reported that their confidence in the council had increased. And MORI found that 63 per cent of officers and councillors they interviewed had found it ‘very easy’ or ‘fairly easy’ to fully involve external partners, compared with only 20 per cent who had found it ‘very difficult’ or ‘fairly difficult’.

Case study 2
Building partnerships: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Blackburn with Darwen is a mixed urban and rural area in East Lancashire. Fourteen per cent of residents are from minority ethnic communities and 33 per cent of the population is under 20 years old. Unemployment is higher than both the regional and national averages, though it has declined in recent years. The borough has a significant level of deprivation and is ranked 26th on the indices of deprivation, with 51 per cent of its residents living in wards that are among the most deprived 10 per cent in England.

The council has a positive attitude to tackling the problems that its area faces, and it is determined to bring about improvements. It sees working in partnership with others in the public, private and voluntary sectors as crucial to achieving its own aims, and has effective partnership mechanisms in place. Its strong Local Strategic Partnership is an example of national good practice. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has a 20 year vision, which is shared by its partners, and which has been developed as a result of extensive and inclusive consultation. Partners see the council as credible, with high-quality officers and members providing a clear vision and direction.

Partnerships are designed not only to provide services but also to tackle wider social issues. For example, a ground-breaking public private partnership with Capita plc is delivering both service improvements and wider community benefits, such as employment opportunities. This public private partnership also demonstrates that the council is prepared to be innovative and take bold steps in order to realise its ambitions.

Sources: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Audit Commission
The impact of local factors

32 Local factors, such as levels of poverty, unemployment or ill-health (often referred to as ‘deprivation’), can influence the quality of services that councils and their partners provide. They also have an impact on the type and volume of services that councils need to offer. For example, under current circumstances there are some services for which, no matter how hard they try, some councils in areas of high deprivation do not achieve outcomes that are as good as those achieved by some councils in areas of low deprivation: this is true of GCSE results, for example. There are also services where high levels of deprivation mean that more of the service has to be provided, because need is related to deprivation – for instance, child protection services.

33 Deprivation is not the only local factor that can affect the quality and types of services that councils provide. The complexity of local populations, whether people are leaving or moving into an area, whether new communities are forming, and the age profile of an area are some of these other factors.

34 Given this complicated local picture, the principle should be that councils and their partners should be assessed not on the circumstances that they find themselves in (for example, in areas of high or low deprivation), but on the way that they respond to those circumstances. In designing CPA the Commission has aimed to uphold this principle in a number of ways:

• CPA is partly based on inspection judgements and Government assessments of councils’ plans, both of which take into account local circumstances;
• for most of the performance indicators used in the assessment framework there is no evidence of a relationship with deprivation; and
• some performance indicators for which there is evidence of a causal relationship with deprivation – council tax collection and some user satisfaction performance indicators – have been adjusted accordingly.

35 The evidence shows that the way that the CPA framework has been designed has gone some way to reducing the impact of deprivation on the final judgements. There is no evidence of a relationship between deprivation and the judgements that councils have received for their corporate ability to improve. There is very little relationship between deprivation and councils’ overall scores on current performance on services. Overall there is some evidence of a weak relationship between deprivation and councils’ final CPA categories. But because it is a weak relationship, there are many exceptions. Some of the most deprived councils are appearing in the group of excellent councils, and some councils in relatively affluent urban and rural areas are to be found in the poor and weak categories.
Through CPA, the Commission has learnt more about the relationship between these local factors and outcomes for local people. But we recognise that this is not the final story, and that we have more to learn. We want to work with stakeholders to develop our understanding of, and approach to, deprivation in light of the lessons from this first round of CPA. One of the areas that we want to explore further is understanding why councils with high levels of deprivation demonstrate very different levels of performance.

Case study 3
Performing well in an area of high deprivation: Gateshead Council

Gateshead has high levels of deprivation and has undergone significant economic change as industries like mining have vanished, and employment in heavy engineering has declined. Unemployment is currently higher than the national average and levels of literacy, numeracy and higher education qualifications have historically been below national averages. The council is highly ambitious and wants to reverse economic decline and deprivation in the borough. It is seeking the best possible quality of life for its communities.

In the past Gateshead Council was seen as stable and solid, but also as being inward looking and traditional with a ‘paternalistic’ attitude to service delivery. The council recognised that these perceptions were a significant barrier to achieving its goal of regeneration for the borough. So over the last four years Gateshead Council has transformed its culture, style and approach in a way that is valued by its partners, service users and communities. The council is now seen as modern and well-run, open to new ideas, and self-confident. It has a good record of achievement against its key priorities, particularly the regeneration of Gateshead. How has the council achieved this transformation?

The Chief Executive and Leader, backed by the management team and councillors, took a calculated risk in launching a major programme of change in the absence of any obvious ‘crisis’ or dramatic problem. Firstly, councillors decided to modernise the way that they worked. This sent a positive signal to officers about councillors’ willingness to change. This was followed by radical changes to officer structures, supported by a cultural change programme.

The council has used landmark regeneration projects – such as the ‘Angel of the North’ sculpture and the Gateshead Millennium Bridge – to build confidence in itself and among its communities. As its confidence has grown, it has built on what it has learned in order to take on progressively more complex projects. As a result Gateshead has been awarded beacon council status for regenerating through culture, sport and tourism.

The council has excellent capacity to deliver its complex agenda, including high-calibre members and officers who work well together, and strong and stable political and managerial leadership, which has helped to maintain focus and to sustain the council through the major change process. It also has prudent financial management and robust financial systems. Having achieved this transformation, how does the council now describe its approach?
“Gateshead firmly believes that you need to deliver the basic services well – the essentials that people rely on like education, social care, street cleaning and refuse collection. That gives you the capacity to innovate with things like art and culture. But we always remember from the start that the outcome of everything we do must improve the quality of life for local people. We also ensure that local people are aware of that aim, so they can see the direct benefits, and are involved in the process through a range of methods – from education programmes for all ages to involve them in the arts, through to the many forms of partnership and community representation on the boards that decide how regeneration money is spent.” (Chief Executive Mr Les Elton).

The council is not complacent and acknowledges those areas where it still has work to do, for example, engaging sectors of the community that are harder to reach and to hear, and in its strategic use of procurement.

Sources: Gateshead Council and Audit Commission

Case study 4
Performing well in an area of high deprivation: London Borough of Camden
Camden is a borough in inner London. Twenty seven per cent of its residents are from minority ethnic communities, and 43 per cent of its residents live in council homes. Large numbers of people move in and out of the borough each year. The borough is the 56th most deprived council in England, and describes itself as the most ‘polarised’ borough in London, having extremes of poverty and wealth within its boundaries. Unemployment rates are now less than 5 per cent compared to 15 per cent in 1993.

Camden Council sees itself as a community leader. It has set itself ambitious targets to reduce inequalities, to build stronger communities and to modernise services that cut across organisational boundaries.

Its community strategy contains objectives and targets that are shared with other key agencies and that were developed on the basis of comprehensive and inclusive consultation. The strategy reflects Camden Council’s commitment to community involvement and empowerment, and its priorities reflect both the national agenda and local priorities. This document is widely understood throughout the council and is seen by its leadership as providing the framework for everything that the council does. It is this strategy that keeps the council focused, together with clear political and managerial leadership.

The council also has high levels of capacity because it has ‘got the basics right’: it has a stable financial position, a culture of managing its performance, and good core services. Officers and members are highly capable and they enjoy good working relationships.

Sources: Camden Council and Audit Commission
The benefits of CPA

CPA represents a considerable investment on the part of councils, Government, the Commission and other regulators. Developing the CPA framework, consulting and communicating with councils, drawing together the range of performance information, carrying out corporate assessments and pulling everything together in a single framework has cost around £10 million. This is the cost to the Commission alone, which has been absorbed in the overall audit and inspection fee, by re-directing auditors’ and inspectors’ time (rather than carrying out stand-alone best value inspections or ‘value-for-money’ auditing, their time has instead been spent on CPA). And a significant part of the cost – around £4 million – was met by central Government in the form of a direct grant to the Audit Commission.

It is crucial that this investment now pays off. CPA has already resulted in a number of benefits for councils and for local people, and these will be added to in future years. The MORI survey of officers and councillors shows that around two-thirds (67 per cent) think that CPA has already benefited their council, and 65 per cent think that it will be of benefit in the future. The benefits so far have included:

- **Pulling together a range of information in one place, for the first time.** By itself, this is a positive development, and it provides a baseline against which future improvements can be measured.
- **The self-assessment stage.** Posing four simple but challenging questions has helped councils to re-think their ambitions and how they are achieving them.
- **The involvement of peers.** The peer officers and members in the corporate assessment teams have learnt from their visits to other councils and have taken new ideas and approaches back to their own councils.
- **Reinforcing momentum for change.** Officers and councillors told MORI that CPA had helped them to focus attention on issues and ensure that difficult decisions were taken. In many cases it has strengthened and reinforced changes that were already underway.
- **Identifying where councils need additional help.** A majority of councils will now look to other organisations for help in addressing the issues raised by CPA. These organisations include other councils, the Improvement and Development Agency, private sector consultants, and their auditors and inspectors.

At a national level, as part of a wider agenda for modernising local government, CPA has already started to re-build trust between central and local government, and has led central Government to relax the requirements on councils to obtain prior approval for local changes, and to offer additional freedoms and flexibilities (some of them included in a draft bill), to top-performing councils.
Where next for CPA?

40. Following the publication of the assessments for single tier and county councils on 12 December 2002, CPA will continue to develop in a number of ways.

Improvement planning

41. The categories into which single tier and county councils have been placed (excellent, good, fair, weak or poor) are not ends in themselves – they are a means to further improvement. A programme of improvement planning is now taking place with each council, which includes:

- **performance improvement activity by councils themselves**: a council’s strategies for building on its strengths and tackling its weaknesses, taking account of the findings of CPA about the council’s performance on key services and its ability to improve. This is not about the production of a new plan but about prioritising the actions that are included in existing strategies and that are most important to future improvement.

- **action led by inspectorates, regulators and auditors**: planning and agreeing a co-ordinated and proportionate inspection and audit programme; and

- **action orchestrated by Government in response to the CPA categories**: the allocation of packages of measures as appropriate by central Government, including freedoms and flexibilities, provision of targeted support, and intervention measures where necessary. The Government has recently published further details of its proposals in this area.

42. This is the crucial stage for ensuring that the investment made in CPA produces real benefits that the public can recognise. Councils, inspectorates and Government each have a part to play in making this improvement happen.

District councils

43. The Commission has recently consulted on how to extend CPA to the 238 district councils in England. The Commission’s preferred approach recognises the fact that district councils are different to single tier and county councils. We propose to repeat some elements of the approach that we used in the first phase of CPA. However, we have made changes to reflect the different range of services that district councils deliver and the nature and impact of community leadership for district councils. The Commission has proposed that CPA in district councils should continue to measure success in delivering high-quality services to local people, using two new, cross-cutting inspections to assess council capacity to deliver in two key areas of district responsibilities – strategic housing and planning delivery (Balancing Housing Markets) and management of the public space (Clean, Green and Safe Public Space). The Commission also proposes to repeat self-assessment, this time strengthened by an external peer challenge review to understand and assess council capacity to deliver against key priorities.
A focus on localities rather than institutions

Over time, the Commission intends CPA to give more weight to community leadership – to how institutions collectively, not just councils, contribute to desirable outcomes for localities. Councils have a ‘community leadership’ role for their areas. This requires them to develop a community plan or strategy working closely with other key local organisations, to bring about shared understanding and common action on the key issues facing the local community. Community leadership also involves championing the needs of the community, representing and promoting it effectively to the outside world, and building capacity within the community to enable it to govern itself and to shape its own future.

Changes in future years

The original intention behind CPA was to pull together for the first time many of the existing inspection judgements, audit opinions, performance indicators and other council assessments to provide a coherent overall picture of council performance. And CPA has deliberately been developed in a relatively short period of time in order to move on quickly to improvement planning and to the provision of support to the councils that need it the most.

For both of these reasons CPA should be viewed as a work in progress rather than as a final statement of the best way to measure council performance. The Commission is committed to reviewing and refreshing CPA in future years in order to improve its usefulness as a tool for improving council performance. And the Commission will keep under review the way in which local factors (including deprivation) are taken into account, and the account taken of cross-cutting services and issues.
A Picture of Performance is also available as a Summary: this one-page document highlights the main findings – a one-minute read, ideal for those who have limited time and/or a moderate interest in the subject area.

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