Economic and community regeneration

Learning from inspection
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, housing, 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

The aim of ‘regeneration’ in general is to enable communities that have suffered from economic, social and environmental decline to ‘work’ again. Although all local authorities have a duty to produce a community strategy that addresses economic, environmental and social well-being, contexts vary enormously across the country. Therefore, councils take very different approaches to their role in regeneration: some may focus on physical regeneration while others may prioritise economic regeneration. This briefing sets out the Commission’s current knowledge based on over 60 inspections of local authorities’ economic and community regeneration activity.

The findings from inspections are on the whole positive, with 73 per cent of councils judged to be good or excellent and 61 per cent with either excellent or promising prospects for improvement.

Analysis of the inspection reports shows that the most common recommendations involve the need for:

- clearer, evidence-based aims and priorities;
- performance management and better monitoring of outcomes;
- inclusive, imaginative involvement of communities and users; and
- the development of project management and partnership skills.

Against this backdrop, the inspection programme has identified a number of examples of notable practice, where local authorities have been tackling these issues successfully. These case studies from Hartlepool, Sheffield, County Durham, Caradon and Amber Valley show how councils operating within different contexts can facilitate economic regeneration.

Councils that are doing well on regeneration share a number of characteristics:

- they are clear about why they are involved and what they hope to achieve;
- they draw up a socio-economic profile and consult the community to develop an understanding of local needs;
- they have outcome-based aims, targets and performance indicators;
- they use economic development to tackle deprivation;
- they add value within partnerships;
- they seek user feedback to inform their performance management; and
- they collect evidence of step-change improvements, for example, in employment, the use of public space and neighbourhood renewal.

Further work is needed to develop our understanding of regeneration. We need to find out how to take account of the interplay between economic, social and environmental factors and how councils can manage these tensions to deliver sustainable...
communities. The Audit Commission is therefore building on this briefing with further research into ‘Sustainable Communities: People and Places’, the results of which will be available in spring 2004.

There are no universal solutions to the problems of deprived areas and no guarantees of success. But the Audit Commission’s inspections have identified encouraging examples of local authorities of all types and sizes that are making a difference. The Audit Commission commends these examples to other local authorities, to explore in partnership with their stakeholders how far these solutions are applicable in their own circumstances.

Introduction

1 The concentration of deprivation and lack of opportunity in particular places has many complex causes, in particular, economic restructuring, the decline of community activity and poor-quality public services. It has equally complex consequences, such as a growing fear of crime and increasing disaffection among young people. These, in turn, reinforce the problems facing deprived neighbourhoods as those people who have the power to choose where to live, work and invest go elsewhere.

2 A major factor in effecting change in deprived communities is the local capacity to bring together the skills, know-how, assets, services and spending of individuals, grass-roots and voluntary groups, businesses and the public sector.

3 The aim of ‘regeneration’ in general is to enable communities that have suffered from economic, social and environmental decline to ‘work’ again. Although all local authorities have a duty to produce a community strategy which addresses economic, environmental and social well-being, contexts vary enormously across the country. Therefore, councils take very different approaches to their role in regeneration: some may focus on physical regeneration while others may prioritise economic regeneration. Overall, regeneration will also be more important in some councils than others depending on the economic, social and environmental context.

4 The purpose of this briefing is to share the Commission’s current knowledge on local authorities’ economic and community regeneration activity. It highlights the key lessons learned from over 65 Audit Commission inspections of English local authorities’ activity in regeneration (Appendix 1). The focus is primarily on economic and community regeneration rather than environmental regeneration. However, many of the lessons highlighted in this briefing are applicable to environmental regeneration, and the Audit Commission will take these insights into its programme of research into ‘Sustainable Communities: People and Places’.

5 This briefing is aimed mainly at managers and staff working on regeneration in local authorities. However, it also has wider messages that are relevant to local authorities’ partners, who may be involved in joint strategies and specific regeneration projects.
It is not an exhaustive guide but is intended to highlight areas commented on by inspectors at a local level. Its main objective is to illustrate how local authorities operating within different contexts can facilitate regeneration. In addition, the briefing highlights the critical success factors for achieving successful regeneration and the shared characteristics of local authorities that are doing well, particularly on economic regeneration.

The inspection framework

This section outlines the Commission’s inspection framework for regeneration. It does so in order to explain the differences that exist between regeneration and the delivery of statutory services that need to be recognised in inspections. In this context, it outlines the main themes covered by inspectors.

The inspection framework for regeneration differs from that of more traditional service-based inspections. This is because regeneration is not a ‘service’ as such: it brings together a range of functions and services through new and different ways of working. While delivering mainstream services is statutory, facilitating regeneration is discretionary. Therefore, local authorities have different roles and responsibilities when delivering council services to those they have when facilitating regeneration. In addition they operate within different contexts, for example, when delivering council services, local authorities’ success is measured against national service standards and best value performance indicators (BVPIs). In contrast, when facilitating regeneration, success for the most part is measured against locally determined outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1

Differences between delivering council services and facilitating regeneration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of council service delivery</th>
<th>Characteristics of regeneration activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statutory functions</td>
<td>Discretionary functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National service standards and BVPIs apply</td>
<td>Locally determined outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service plans required</td>
<td>Inter-agency strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of delivery</td>
<td>Leadership of partnership processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of services</td>
<td>Co-ordination of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-focused</td>
<td>Wider community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions drive activity</td>
<td>Partnerships negotiate activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Commission
The Audit Commission's inspection framework and detailed methodology accommodates organisations’ different interpretations of regeneration. It also takes account of the fact that economic regeneration in particular is both an outcome and a process that is concerned with strengthening the local economy in order to increase economic prosperity and employment opportunities for all residents.
11 Economic development and community regeneration have often been the focus of inspections to date. The term 'economic development' is often used by local authorities to refer to a specific function or unit that is provided by the council (often in partnership with other agencies). Early best value reviews tended to focus on reviewing the activities of such units, taking a function-based approach. However, more recent best value reviews and inspections have been scoped more widely, reflecting the council's broader strategic role in regeneration.

12 The variety of local approaches to economic regeneration is reflected in the many themes that inspections have covered. They have looked in particular at:

- community leadership of regeneration through local vision, co-ordination and capacity building;
- local authority partnership working with central government, regional development agencies and other public, private, voluntary and community organisations;
- ensuring that a council's mainstream services contribute to regeneration through its community strategy, local neighbourhood renewal strategy and corporate plans; and
- managing services and projects that specifically support regeneration.

13 Each of these themes has been assessed in the context of the key aspects and building blocks that underpin the inspection framework.

Findings from inspections to date

14 This section outlines the general lessons that can be drawn from these themes. It looks at:

- assessments of local authority performance;
- the balance of notable practice under the four key aspects of regeneration; and
- the different ways of delivering economic regeneration.

Assessments of local authority performance

15 The findings from inspections are on the whole positive, with 73 per cent of councils judged to be good or excellent and 61 per cent with either excellent or promising prospects for improvement (Exhibit 2, overleaf).
Exhibit 2
Inspection judgements on regeneration
Seventy-three per cent of councils have been judged to be good or excellent and 61 per cent have either excellent or promising prospects for improvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall performance</th>
<th>Poor (0 star)</th>
<th>Fair (1 star)</th>
<th>Good (2 star)</th>
<th>Excellent (3 star)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent prospects for improvement</td>
<td>Blackdown with Darwen, Darlington, Easington, Sheffield, Manchester</td>
<td>Amber Valley, Chichester, Cumbria, Rugby, Tynedale, Blackpool, Carlisle, Doncaster, Durham, Greenwich, Halton, Herefordshire, Kenilworth, Manchester, Mid Suffolk, Oldham, Newcastle Under Lyme, Redcar &amp; Cleveland (2), South Hams, South Lakeland, Tameside (2), Wandsworth, Wigan, Wirral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promising prospects for improvement</td>
<td>Maidstone, Barnsley, Congleton, East Riding of Yorkshire, Ellesmere Port &amp; Neston, Wansbeck</td>
<td></td>
<td>Serco, Lancashire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely prospects for improvement</td>
<td>Crawley, Devon, Calderdale, Ipswich, Allerdale, Fenland, Hampshire, Lewisham, Mid Sussex, Selton, Surrey Heath</td>
<td>Kerrier</td>
<td>Knowsley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Commission
The balance of notable good practice under the four key aspects of regeneration

16 The Commission has analysed notable practice identified by inspectors in each of the key aspects of the methodology (Exhibit 3). Of the 176 examples of notable practice recognised in inspections, more than one-half focus on interventions under the Commission’s ‘strong, diverse economy’ aspect of regeneration. This probably reflects the priority placed on this issue by the types of authorities inspected to date: over one-half of the inspections have taken place in councils in Northern England, many of which are facing industrial or economic decline. However, it highlights the need for local authorities and their partners to reflect on the balance that they seek to reach between promoting growth relative to promoting equity in access to the benefits of growth. It also reinforces the importance of linking economic regeneration to social and environmental regeneration for a balanced approach to improving community well-being.

Exhibit 3
Notable practice examples under each of the four key aspects of regeneration

The Commission has analysed notable practice identified by inspectors in each of the key aspects of the methodology.

| Inclusive, cohesive communities | 10% |
| Vibrant town and district centres | 19% |
| Strong, diverse local economy (rural and urban) | 52% |
| Quality jobs and decent incomes for all | 20% |

Source: Audit Commission

Different ways to deliver regeneration

17 The Commission's inspection programme also looked at notable practice in the different ways that regeneration, and especially economic regeneration, can be delivered. It identified a number of different interventions that councils could promote (Table 2, overleaf). Councils can play a role both in providing services and in commissioning activity from other partners. Councils can also act as community leaders, bringing partners together and providing a leadership role in facilitating activity to deliver change on the ground. Of the different roles they could play, ‘working in partnership’ and ‘providing direct assistance’ are the two most common approaches being applied relatively successfully by councils. Inspectors found
considerably less notable practice in relation to councils using their co-ordinating and commissioning roles effectively. Further research is needed to find out how authorities decide which intervention is most appropriate at different times.

Table 2
Ways of intervening under the four key aspects of regeneration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Strong, diverse local economy (rural and urban)</th>
<th>Quality jobs and decent incomes for all</th>
<th>Vibrant town and district centres</th>
<th>Inclusive, cohesive communities</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working in partnership</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct assistance</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct assistance and partnership</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordinating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioning and partnership</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership and co-ordination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified/Not applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>176</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Commission inspection reports

Overall findings

Analysis of the inspection reports shows that the most common recommendations are the need for:

- clearer, evidence-based aims and priorities;
- performance management and better monitoring of outcomes;
- inclusive, imaginative involvement of communities and users; and
- the development of project management and partnership skills.

The inspection programme has identified a number of examples of notable practice where local authorities were tackling these issues. The following section sets out some case studies that illustrate this practice.
Case studies of notable practice in regeneration

These case studies illustrate how local authorities can combine the building blocks of effective regeneration activities in order to meet their area’s needs and priorities. The examples consider the different geographic contexts within which local authorities operate and the impact that this can have on local activity.

Case study 1
Hartlepool Borough Council

Context
At the time of its inspection in 2001, unemployment in Hartlepool was 8.2 per cent, which was above both the regional and national averages, 6.6 per cent and 3.5 per cent respectively. Hartlepool also suffers from high levels of multiple deprivation with 56 per cent of the borough’s population living in the 10 per cent most deprived wards in England. On this measure, Hartlepool is the eleventh most deprived district in England.

Hartlepool Borough Council’s Economic Development service was assessed by the Audit Commission as an ‘excellent’ (three star) service that has excellent prospects for improvement.

Vision for Hartlepool
The corporate vision of Hartlepool Borough Council is...

to work with others to support and develop a vigorous and diverse local economy and to get Hartlepool people into jobs.

Underpinning this are the Economic Development Team’s aims, which address two of the key aspects of economic regeneration: a strong, diverse local economy and quality jobs and decent income for all.

Aim 1: Creating the conditions for job growth
Hartlepool encourages job growth by focusing on a series of aims that reflect the building blocks that make up a strong, diverse economy. It does this by ensuring that a good choice of sites and buildings exists for businesses in Hartlepool; it is encouraging inward investment; the council is supporting businesses by offering advice and support; by ‘growing the tourist sector’ the council is supporting sector development; and underpinning these aims are regional and local partnership working.

Aim 1: Ensuring a good choice of sites and buildings for businesses
The Council ensures that a good choice of sites and buildings for businesses is provided by managing the Brougham Enterprise Centre, which provides affordable accommodation and on-site business advice. In addition, the Council is helping to improve the industrial estates in the town. It supported the refurbishment of the...
Oakesway Industrial Estate with Single Regeneration Budget funds. By providing direct assistance and working in partnership the Council is achieving this aim.

**Aim 2: Promoting the town as an investment location**
Inspectors were told by businesses that Hartlepool is now more attractive to inward investors because of the redevelopment of the Marina and the town centre. They also found strong partnership working between the Council and the Tees Valley Development Company, which is responsible for promoting the area to inward investors. In addition the Council plays an important role in securing finance for property refurbishment and investment; inspectors commented that the service acts as a catalyst to bring the public agencies and the private sector together to smooth the path to successful investment.

**Aim 3: Supporting businesses in the town with advice and finance**
The economic development service works closely with other business support agencies, such as Business Link Tees Valley, the Hartlepool Enterprise Agency and City Centre Training (a business advice agency). The service also provides help to existing businesses to help them to grow through financial assistance, and provide advice and guidance in partnership with other agencies. Inspectors found that the service has a clear view of its place in the business support market. Businesses know who to approach for advice, and the agencies work well together to give businesses the right support at the right time.

**Aim 4: Growing the tourist sector**
Tourism promotion is a recent initiative. The economic development service is aware that despite the success of joint marketing initiatives, such as a recent visit by the BBC Holiday Programme, tourism promotion needs further examination. The service has commissioned a consultant to draw up a tourism strategy to ‘develop the visitor economy, thereby creating jobs and at the same time making the town more attractive and offering more facilities for its residents’. The service has produced a clear brief for the consultant that closely matches its economic aims.

**(B) Ensuring that Hartlepool residents are best placed to get the jobs created**
The Council has a good range of programmes linking local people to job opportunities. These programmes achieve good outcomes and are well-regarded by participants. This provision is underpinned by consistently improving schools, a community-based adult education network and a well-managed further education college.

The service operates four schemes:
- **Jobs Build** – the initiatives under this scheme include subsidies to employers in order to increase employment and training opportunities for the residents of a Single Regeneration Budget area.
- **Targeted training** – this includes short courses that are tailored to the recruitment needs of employers or to areas of labour market demand.
- **Women’s opportunities** – provides support for women seeking to re-enter the labour market via training, employment or self-employment.

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2. This is linked to the New Deal.
Intermediate labour market – provides work-related training in order to get long-term unemployed people back to work.

Inspection findings
Inspectors assessed the service as excellent. Users are very satisfied with the service they receive – unemployment levels have reduced and investment in the area has increased. Inspectors concluded that the service has many positive features, including:

- clear and challenging aims that are shared by residents and stakeholders;
- strong leadership with a consistent and sustained focus on driving down unemployment;
- good partnership working and a pragmatic approach that makes the most of opportunities;
- a business-friendly approach across the Council and a rapid and flexible response from the service, which businesses appreciate; and
- proven schemes for getting local people into jobs, which are well regarded by trainees and employers.

Inspectors judged that the service will improve further because the council has conducted a thorough and challenging best value review and has partnerships and management systems in place to deliver continuous improvement. There were a number of positive features including:

- a good performance management process, which is focused on outcomes;
- an ambitious improvement plan, which will make a major change to the service’s approach to creating a knowledge-based economy;
- a local strategic partnership, which has been used to take important regeneration decisions and has a clear strategy for the economy; and
- a strong track record in improving important services, such as education.

Hartlepool Borough Council’s inspection score can be attributed to the Council having illustrated clear, evidence-based aims and priorities. In addition, the strong performance management systems have helped the Council to achieve these aims. It has also demonstrated good project management and partnership skills.
Case study 2
Sheffield City Council

Context
Sheffield is the fourth largest city in the UK. It has a population of just over half a million, of which nine per cent are from ethnic minority communities.

Sheffield, and the surrounding area of South Yorkshire, lost many jobs in heavy manufacturing and mining in the 1970s and 1980s and Sheffield’s unemployment rate has been above the national average since 1981. This has left the economy in a fragile condition with many jobs in vulnerable industries and too few jobs in the new growing industries. But in the last few years the economy has started to improve, driven largely by growth in the service sector, and there have been significant reductions in unemployment, especially in the more deprived neighbourhoods.

Almost one-third of Sheffield’s population live in the 10 per cent most deprived wards in England. These are located in the north and east of the city and contrast sharply with the affluent wards of the south west of the city. When consulted about the community plan, local people gave top priority to job creation.

The Council took a thematic approach to reviewing economic development. Sheffield First (the local strategic partnership) takes overall responsibility for economic development, with the council playing a leading role. Various council departments and partner organisations, like Sheffield One (the urban regeneration company), carry out aspects of the economic strategy. This costs the council £1.1 million a year.

The Audit Commission inspected Sheffield City Council’s approach to economic development and assessed it as ‘good’ (two star) with ‘excellent’ prospects for improvement. The Council has taken the lead in developing a clear economic strategy for Sheffield. The economic strategy is a major strand of the Sheffield City Strategy (the community plan).

Vision for Sheffield
The vision for Sheffield is...

Sheffield becoming a successful distinctive city of European significance, with opportunities for all.

The economic vision for Sheffield is...

Sheffield becoming the core city of a balanced, diverse and sustainable high-growth economy in South Yorkshire by 2010, recognised as a growing European centre for high technology manufacturing and knowledge-based services and offering opportunities for the whole community.

To achieve the vision the strategy sets out six key priority areas:

- creating a city centre of European significance;
- harnessing the strengths of knowledge institutions;
- developing dynamic business clusters;
• providing the skills that a modern economy requires;
• making the best use of Sheffield’s assets; and
• connecting Sheffield to the world economy.

Inspectors found a number of examples of notable practice that contribute to meeting these priorities. They cited:

• Sheffield’s innovative move in the 1980s to develop its capacity in the creative industries (starting with Red Tape Studios), which has developed into an economic strength where 7.2 per cent of Sheffield’s working population are employed in this sector, well above the national average of 4 per cent; and
• speculative office and industrial building near Junction 35 of the M1, which is evidence of rising investor confidence.

A series of improvements have taken place in the city centre. These provide evidence that the aims set out in the city’s vision have been achieved. Successes include:

• the addition of major new facilities in the Winter Gardens, the Peace Gardens and the Millennium Galleries;
• the boulevarding of city centre key routes to ease traffic flow and enhance the city centre environment;
• the creation of ‘Gold Routes’ in the city centre to improve traffic flow; and
• a growth in city centre living from 6,500 residents in 1999 to 8,200 in 2002.

In addition, the Council has taken steps to make sure that economic prosperity benefits those in deprived neighbourhoods. Some of these initiatives are innovative and closely focused on meeting the needs of deprived communities. For example:

• **JOBmatch** is a Single Regeneration Budget scheme that is managed by Sheffield First for Investment (its purpose is to link people without work to the jobs being created through inward investment and expanding indigenous employers).

  **JOBmatch:**
  – works with businesses to establish what their skill needs are;
  – arranges with training suppliers for appropriate training to be made available; and
  – through job/interview guarantee schemes, matches local people to those jobs.

• **JobNet** is a community-based project. Its purpose is to identify and support individuals to apply for the jobs identified by JOBmatch. JobNet also works across the public sector to develop intermediate labour market initiatives that are tailored to each organisation’s needs in order to create a bridge to employment for people without work in deprived areas.

Sheffield’s knowledge-based economic strategy requires a well-educated workforce. The Council faces significant challenges in achieving this and, as a priority, has been working to improve education for 14-19 years olds, particularly among students from the most deprived neighbourhoods in the north of the city. The city has made identifiable improvements in this priority area. For example, the percentage of
students achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE has increased from 36.3 per cent in 1999 to 41.4 per cent in 2002. The highest increase has been in schools in the most deprived wards. Furthermore, two of Sheffield’s schools, which are Fresh Start schools, have moved from a position of declining rolls to having waiting lists. None of Sheffield’s schools is now in special measures. Finally, in order to raise the aspirations of schools and students, the Council is building a new £10 million sixth form college in the north of the city – an area where no such provision exists currently.

**Inspection findings**

Inspectors assessed the Council’s approach as ‘good’ because of the following features:

- partners are positive about the importance of the Council’s leadership and feel optimistic that prospects for the economy are improving;
- the Council’s efforts to extend the benefits of prosperity to people in deprived areas through the JOBmatch, JobNet and the construction compact are good and have begun to show results;
- the Council has a track record of innovation and achievement in community regeneration, and mature and effective community organisations and networks link into the city’s economic partnership activity;
- the Council has played a leading role in developing a clear economic strategy and in setting up partnerships and delivery arrangements for economic development in Sheffield;
- the new economic strategy, including the city centre masterplan, is challenging in all respects and it is well supported by key stakeholders; and
- corporate and inter-agency work on the economy at the strategic level is good.

Inspectors assessed the Council’s prospects for improvement as ‘excellent’ because, among other things, the best value review resulted in two good plans: a draft economic strategy setting out a clear vision for Sheffield’s economy and an improvement plan detailing the improvements needed to implement the strategy. Responsibilities and targets were clearly set down and progress in implementing the improvement plan has been good. Again, having clear, evidence-based aims and priorities can lead to successful regeneration.

In addition, partners are very supportive of the economic strategy and the confidence of the private sector in the Council is increasing. Sheffield City Council has demonstrated strong partnership skills and project management in the development and delivery of the JOBmatch and Jobnet schemes.
Case study 3
Durham County Council

Context
County Durham is situated between the Tyne & Wear conurbation to the north and the Tees conurbation to the south. The population of 488,000 is static but the number of households is growing. People from minority ethnic communities make up less than 1 per cent of the population. Unemployment has fallen in recent years, but at 6 per cent, it remains above the national average of 3.8 per cent (January 2002). In addition, 44 of the County’s 149 wards are in the 10 per cent most disadvantaged wards in the country.

The Audit Commission inspected Durham County Council’s Economic Development and Regeneration review in April 2002. The council was assessed as providing a ‘good’ two star service that has promising prospects for improvement.

Vision for Durham
Durham County Council’s mission statement is...
To make County Durham the best place in which to live, work and bring up a family.

It has a number of corporate aims:
• building a strong economy;
• developing lifelong learning;
• promoting strong, healthy and safe communities; and
• looking after the environment.

The aims of the Economic Development and Planning Department are set out in the draft departmental operational plan for 2002/03. Inspectors found a number of examples of notable practice, each of which contributes to meeting these aims:

Aim 1: To create a diverse and robust employment structure with high-quality occupations
The County Durham Development Company (CDDC) is the inward investment and local business support arm of Durham County Council. It aims to help both inward investors and local businesses from the initial enquiry through to project completion and beyond. It promotes inward investment, provides aftercare, offers financial assistance to growing manufacturing companies and undertakes trade development activities.

CDDC works in partnership with a wide range of other organisations including the seven district councils in the county, the Business Link network, One North East (the regional development agency) and the Government Office North East, in order to achieve its objectives and to ensure that the best investment opportunities are offered to businesses. The council acts as a facilitator and co-ordinator with partners, especially in attracting funds such as Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and the European Union (EU) Single Programme for business support and infrastructure.
Local companies that have used the services provided by the Council speak highly of the support they have received in identifying financial assistance and premises and with ongoing contact. Furthermore, since 1987 nearly 300 UK and overseas companies have invested in new facilities or expanded their business operations within the County.

**Aim 2: To foster an enterprise culture which creates competitive businesses and contributes to economic regeneration**

The service has comprehensive information resources and an in-house research capacity that enables it to provide statistical advice and information to support decision making, both within the council and to other organisations and partnerships. This information can be used to support funding requests from both central government and the EU. The team circulates unemployment figures on a monthly basis and produces employment estimates and population projections. The Council hosts a regular business sounding board, which gives businesses the opportunity to comment on the service they receive from the council and on wider issues affecting them and the local economy. In this way, hard statistical information is supplemented by softer, but often richer information to give a more complete picture of how services are impacting on business competitiveness.

**Aim 3: To create an adaptable and skilled workforce**

The strategic approach taken by the council supports other organisations with their skills agenda and they are a respected partner (and sometimes secretariat) in the Lifelong Learning Partnership and in the Education and Skills Sub-group of the County Durham Economic Partnership. The council’s research and intelligence unit supports bid development and helps to target resources to the areas of greatest need. The seven District Local Strategic Partnerships and sub-groups all have County Councillor and Chief Officer representation and the intention is ‘to bend’ main programmes better to meet local priorities and needs. The council is a direct provider of education, has strong relationships with other direct providers of learning and skills and is successfully co-ordinating and facilitating the attraction of SRB, EU and ‘single pot’ funding for education and training initiatives.

**Aim 4: To create the physical conditions necessary to enable flourishing economic activity**

The Council has, in partnership with its District Councils and the Regional Development Agency, achieved full coverage of industrial sites for most needs across the county, including enterprise zones and the large inward investment site at Heighington Lane.

The County Council has, in partnership with district councils, provided workshop units developed in locations where the market fails to provide them, for example, in some rural areas. Incubator units to encourage specialist sectors have also been developed in partnership with the district councils.
Inspection findings
Inspectors considered this to be a ‘good’ service for a range of reasons. The most significant include that:

- its aims link clearly to the corporate, sub-regional and regional aims, are challenging and are delivered through operational plans and targets;
- it provides strategic leadership in identifying and addressing priorities;
- it designs and influences structures and processes to meet changing needs;
- it delivers projects with partners; and
- it has adapted its own processes and structures to better participate in new local strategic partnerships and to be able to bend mainstream programmes to community priorities.

Inspectors concluded that the service has promising prospects for improvement because the best value review was undertaken effectively and revealed important issues; and the improvement plan addressed those issues in a realistic and appropriate way.

Durham County Council is skilled in partnership working and project management. The Council’s performance management systems have enabled it to develop clear, evidence-based aims and priorities.

Case study 4
Caradon District Council

Context
Caradon District Council is one of six districts in Cornwall. The district’s population increased from 67,700 in 1981 to 81,600 in 1999. This rise of over 20 per cent was one of the highest increases in the south west region. The minority ethnic population is under 1 per cent. The area has a high percentage of small businesses and many people in self-employment. Almost one-quarter of residents work in Devon, mainly in Plymouth. Caradon is one of the least deprived areas in Devon and Cornwall (based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2000). The area has a high-quality environment, with 72 per cent of the district covered by a range of landscape and environmental protection policies.

The Audit Commission inspected the council’s cross cutting review of community and economic regeneration in September 2001. Inspectors assessed the council as providing an excellent (three star) service that will probably improve further.

Vision for Caradon
The council’s vision is...

Improving the quality of life in south east Cornwall.

Its mission, backed up by a series of key principles, is that...

The council, in partnership with others, will seek to initiate clear, widely understood and accepted strategies that improve the quality of life of the resident population of south east Cornwall and are fair, effective, cost efficient and sustainable.
Through consultation, the Council defined three strategic aims, under which a number of initiatives are underway.

**Aim 1: To increase economic prosperity**
The Council uses its economic infrastructure to support its aim of increasing economic prosperity. The Council has increased its property portfolio of industrial units from almost nothing to 77 over the past 15 years. It has committed more officer support to business development opportunities and has a forward development programme, which enables a local business to move up to larger industrial units as it becomes more successful. The Council’s employment units have a high-occupancy rate of 94 per cent: some similar rural areas often struggle to achieve 65 to 70 per cent occupancy rates. Rental levels are reviewed to ensure that a balance is achieved between ‘fair’ rents and businesses’ ability to afford them and remain competitive.

**Aim 2: Develop sustainable communities**
To develop its aim of developing sustainable communities, the Council has provided joint funding with the then local health Primary Care Group and the area’s Groundwork environment trust for a community development worker. This is also funded through a health action zone and the national lottery. Business views on training priorities are also sought. The Council is involved in local initiatives to develop the opportunities available through the Small Business Service and the Local Learning and Skills Council.

**Aim 3: To enhance and protect the environmental, cultural and economic opportunities of local distinctiveness**
To further its aim of community regeneration, the Council has helped to establish a number of local forums. These are now set up for each of the five towns, for fishing and for a number of rural initiatives. The Council supports these in a number of ways, including officer attendance at meetings and grant aiding administrative costs. A good example of how a town group can come together to develop a needed local facility is the Liskeard Citizens Advice Bureau. Here a capital project of nearly £200,000 was achieved with many partners involved. Nearly 90 per cent of the total capital funding was generated from partners outside Caradon.

**Inspection findings**
Inspectors believe that Caradon District Council provides an ‘excellent’ (three star) service. It demonstrates:

- a shared commitment from stakeholders;
- a high degree of partnership working;
- effective use of external funding; and
- good performance in comparison to others.

Inspectors felt that Caradon District Council’s service will probably improve. It is able to demonstrate:

- a strong commitment to delivering improvements from councillors and staff;
- robust processes and performance management being put in place; and
- resources being identified to support agreed actions.
Caradon District Council’s approach to regeneration illustrates strong partnership skills that have enabled the Council to deliver on its aims and priorities. Since Caradon District Council’s inspection in 2001 the Council has been named as a Beacon Council in the ‘Supporting the Rural Economy’ category of the national awards.

Case study 5
Amber Valley District Council

Context
Amber Valley is a Borough Council in the heart of Derbyshire in the East Midlands of England. The population is approximately 119,000 of which 0.6 per cent are from minority ethnic communities.

During September 2001, the Audit Commission inspected Amber Valley Borough Council’s regeneration thematic review. The Council was assessed as good (two stars) with promising prospects for improvement.

Vision for Amber Valley
The Council’s regeneration portfolio has an overall objective stated in its Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) 2001/02 and Corporate Plan for 2001–2004:

Regeneration policies will seek to make the borough attractive to industry, both retail and manufacturing, encourage tourism, support rural economies and by such measures promote employment within the Amber Valley.

Underpinning this objective are a number of regeneration aims, from four of which inspectors identified notable practice:

- providing a framework that maximises employment opportunities for local people;
- supporting and developing inter-agency partnership working;
- protecting and enhancing the borough’s heritage and promoting its development as a visitor destination; and
- providing a framework for vibrant, safe and attractive town centres.

Aim 1: Provide a framework that maximises employment opportunities for local people
The Council is improving access to skills training via links to South East Derbyshire College that serves young and adult learners.

Four industrial estate management groups – Heanor Gate, Bailey Bridge, Codnor Gate and Meadow Lane – have successfully supported small to medium-sized enterprises. The estates are well presented and the Council has developed a series of industrial estate master plans for environmental improvement.

Aim 2: Support and develop inter-agency partnership working.
The Council is the lead member of the Amber Valley Partnership, the principal strategic body within the borough that includes representatives from a wide range of organisations. The Council draws people and organisations together and provides administrative and grant application support.
Aim 3: Protect and enhance the borough’s heritage and promote its development as a visitor destination
Renovation and conservation work has been undertaken in the town and village centres. These include re-paving in Heanor shopping areas, external work on houses in Ironville and the preservation of historic buildings in Belper.

Aim 4: Provide a framework for vibrant, safe and attractive town centres.
The Council’s customer focus on regeneration activities is integrated with its partners in the Amber Valley Partnership. This provides a consistent focus on the involvement and empowerment of Amber Valley residents across the variety of organisations and the projects or activities being delivered in the borough. Examples include:

- local people, who are being empowered to identify and drive improvements for their areas, for example, Ironville and Langley Mill; and
- Shop Watch and Pub Watch in the town centres, which together with CCTV, increase security and safety.

Inspection findings
Inspectors felt that the services provided were good for the following reasons:

- The Council is taking an enabling leadership role and is working closely with residents and organisations in the District. There has been a real shift from Council service-led strategies to community-based strategies.
- Clear aims and objectives exist to deliver practical outcomes for the communities in Amber Valley.
- The Council's customer focus consistently involves and empowers Amber Valley residents and businesses.

Innovation is apparent in the Council’s work and partnerships. It involves renovation and conservation work in the town and village centres, and four successful industrial estate management groups for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Inspectors believe the service is probably going to improve because:

- regeneration is a Council priority for Amber Valley and there is a clear political consensus about the importance of regeneration to achieve a sound economic basis for the future of the District; and
- throughout the work of the Amber Valley Partnership there is an emphasis on the involvement of local people. One of the outcomes of this is the high quality and quantity of volunteers.

Amber Valley District Council's approach to economic regeneration is inclusive and imaginative in the way that it involves communities and users. Again, key to successful economic regeneration, Amber Valley District Council has demonstrated strong partnership skills.
Conclusions and next steps

As the case studies above illustrate, there is no fixed approach to delivering economic regeneration. Successful councils provide flexible, proportionate and appropriate responses to the different local and regional issues that their areas face. The context and priorities vary in different areas and successful economic regeneration strategies take account of this. However, some general lessons can be drawn from the Audit Commission’s inspections. The Commission has found that notable practice in economic regeneration includes:

- clear, evidence-based aims and priorities;
- strong performance management and monitoring of outcomes;
- inclusive, imaginative involvement of communities and users; and
- good project management and partnership skills.

Underlying these critical success factors, inspectors have found that local authorities that are doing well on delivering economic regeneration share some common characteristics (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common characteristics of local authorities that are doing well on delivering economic regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ They are clear about why they are involved and what they hope to achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ They draw up a socio-economic profile and consult the community to develop an understanding of local needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ They have outcome-based aims, targets and performance indicators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ They use economic development to tackle deprivation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ They add value within partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ They seek user feedback to inform their performance management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ They collect evidence of step-change improvements, for example, in employment, the use of public space and neighbourhood renewal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Commission

However, it is clear that more work is needed in order to develop our understanding of what good regeneration is. The Commission is seeking to address this by carrying out additional research in order to understand how local areas are addressing the issue. This work will link national analysis with the Commission’s local improvement and assessment work, in order to see how areas in different contexts are trying to build ‘sustainable communities’ by managing the tensions between economic, social and environmental activity in their areas.
24 The aim of the Commission’s work on sustainable communities is to:

- inform the framework for comprehensive performance assessments in single and upper tier authorities in 2005/06;
- investigate delivery of the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan;
- enable current inspection methodologies to be updated, in order to take account of new information and learning; and
- identify and disseminate examples of notable practice and tools for improvement that are tailored to the different contexts in which local authorities operate.

25 The results of this work will be available in spring 2004 through a series of themed publications and learning events.¹

26 There are no universal solutions to the problems of deprived areas and no guarantees of success. But the Audit Commission’s inspections have identified encouraging examples of local authorities of all types and sizes that are making a difference. The Audit Commission commends these examples to other local authorities, to explore in partnership with their stakeholders how far these solutions are applicable in their own circumstances.

¹ For more information and a project specification please contact Scott Dickinson on 020 7396 1213 or s-dickinson@audit-commission.gov.uk or Katharine Knox on 020 7396 1243 or k-knox@audit-commission.gov.uk
## Appendix 1: inspection judgements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Prospects</th>
<th>Star</th>
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<th>Report Date</th>
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<td>South East</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Economic Development, Community Development and Voluntary Sector Grants and Community Leisure</td>
<td>27 Dec 2001</td>
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<td>Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social Inclusion Unit</td>
<td>29 Nov 2001</td>
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<td>Surrey Heath Borough Council</td>
<td>South East</td>
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<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community Transport and Shopmobility</td>
<td>30 Aug 2001</td>
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<td>Kerrier District Council</td>
<td>South West</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>10 Aug 2001</td>
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<td>Maidstone Borough Council</td>
<td>South East</td>
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<td>Promising</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Lockmeadow Market and Agricultural Hall</td>
<td>13 June 2001</td>
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<td>Crawley Borough Council</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Economic Issues</td>
<td>21 Aug 2002</td>
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Appendix 2: Audit Commission reports

The Audit Commission has published a number of related reports:


**Learning from CPA briefing 6: Building Capacity Through Partnership**, 30 Jun 2003

**Learning from CPA briefing 5: Managing Performance**, 25 Jun 2003

**Learning from CPA briefing 4: User Focus and Citizen Engagement**, 17 Jun 2003

**Learning from CPA briefing 3: Managing People**, 11 Jun 2003

**Patterns for Improvement**, 3 Apr 2003

**Understanding the relationship between CPA outcomes and deprivation**, 3 Apr 2003

**Learning from CPA briefing 2: Setting priorities and maintaining focus**, 29 Mar 2003

**Learning from CPA briefing 1: Community leadership**, 29 Mar 2003

**Economic Regeneration Performance Indicators**, 12 Mar 2003

**Comprehensive Performance Assessment**, 12 Dec 2002

**A Picture of Performance**, 4 Dec 2002

**Policy Focus: Neighbourhood renewal**, 10 Jun 2002

**Working Capital: Sustainable Communities**, 14 Feb 2002

**A Life’s Work: Local authorities, economic development and regeneration**, 16 Sep 1999

Copies of this report are available at:

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

or to order a printed copy telephone:

0800 502030

Stock code: LOT3108

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