



## **Performance Summary**

**Fourth Quarterly and Full Year Report and Data  
(1 January – 31 March 2000 and 1999/2000)**

# Performance Summary

## Fourth Quarterly and Full Year Report and Data (1 January – 31 March 2000 and 1999/2000)

### BACKGROUND

- 1 This booklet contains the detailed information to support the Fourth Quarterly Performance Summary - the final report for the financial year 1999/2000. It focuses on four aspects of the Council's performance:
  - Overall picture and national comparisons
  - Audit Commission Performance Indicators
  - Customer First Standards and
  - Staffing Indicators
  
- 1 This booklet gives performance information on over fifty Audit Commission Performance Indicators (ACPI's) that are of corporate significance. These represent about a quarter of the full Audit Commission data and are the PI's most likely to be of particular value in measuring performance and driving improvement. These indicators are monitored and performance against them is reported regularly to Members. The regularity with which individual items are examined is determined by the nature of the indicator, but most are reported to Council quarterly.
  
- 2 The report also includes the Council's Customer First performance and a range of Corporate Staffing Indicators. These are not broken down by Directorate. However, if there are issues in particular Directorates with an impact on overall performance these are highlighted in the 'comments' box or in this performance summary.

### NATIONAL COMPARISONS for 1998/1999

- 3 At the end of March 2000 the Audit Commission published the *Council Services Compendium for England*, a tabulation of performance indicators for all English local authorities for the financial year 1998/99. This publication shows us how well we were doing in that year and, although it relates to events which are now at least fifteen months old, it is the most recent national comparison available.
  
- 4 The Audit Commission's Compendium of statistics is based on a large number of indicators of which 195 apply to Unitary Authorities such as York. Four main groups of indicator can be distinguished as follows:

- 5 **Not comparable** - Some indicators are not suitable for comparisons. In some cases (for example national figures on the promptness of answering telephone calls) this is because the indicator's definition and measurement method vary greatly from one authority to another. In other cases the indicator gives an absolute figure (for example the number of children's playgrounds) which cannot be compared meaningfully across authorities without a detailed knowledge of the density of housing, availability of rural open spaces, etc. These indicators do give us the chance to monitor trends.
- 6 **Standards** - Some indicators require a Yes/No response. These are aimed at defining a standard approach to an issue and assessing the extent to which councils have adopted that approach. Examples include indicators which show whether authorities have a complaints policy in place and whether the authority complies with best practice advice from the Commission for Racial Equality.
- 7 **Performance** - The largest group of indicators record the amount of service delivered, or results achieved, usually in proportion to some measure of the population or the size of the area served. An example, though not in proportion to area or population, is ACPI indicator F1, the percentage of planning applications decided within eight weeks. Note that larger numbers do not always indicate better performance. An example is indicator B8 which records the percentage of council tenants with high levels of rent arrears.
- 8 **Spending** - Finally, many indicators record the amount of money the council spends on various services. These indicators are usually measured in proportion to population or caseloads. An example is the cost of refuse collection per household. These are listed as a separate category because low spending is not *in itself* good or bad: spending must be judged in the light of value for money *and* the Council's policy goals for the quality of service.
- 9 In all, almost two hundred indicators are required by the Audit Commission (the number has increased each year). Of these, 51 are not comparable, 21 are about achieving set standards, 86 are about performance, and 37 are about spending.

### Comparison Group

- 10 This section of the performance summary assesses how well we compare with two groups of local authorities: Unitary Authorities and all English Councils. The detailed figures are available in the Audit Commissions publications and as spreadsheet files.
- 11 There were 27 Unitary Authorities in 1997/98 and 46 in 1998/99. Some caution is therefore needed in making statements about *changes* in our quartile position between the two years. Our relative position can rise because of improved performance, but it would also rise if the new Unitaries were consistently weaker than the existing Unitaries.

### Quartile Results

- 12 The tables in the Commission's publications mean that we can categorise York's performance on each indicator in various ways:

- **Top quartile** - Performance Indicators where our performance is in the best quartile for Unitary Authorities.
- **Bottom quartile** - Performance Indicators where our performance is in the worst quartile for Unitary Authorities.
- **High spending** - where our spending puts us in the top quartile with other high spending councils.
- **Low spending** - where our spending puts us in the bottom quartile with other low spending councils.
- **Non-compliant** - where, on a specified standard, York is not achieving the standard but most other councils do.

**13** Overall, the results show a slight improvement in our performance in the Unitary league between the two years. The number of top quartiles achieved has risen, the number of bottom quartiles has risen (but only slightly), and instances of high spending have been reduced.

York's position	1997/98	1998/99
Top quartile	20	26
Bottom quartile	14	16
High spending	6	1
Low spending	9	10
Non-compliant	2	2

**14** The same comparison can be made with all English councils. This is a little less meaningful, because the variety of councils is much greater, but gives the table on the next page showing a smaller change but still in the direction of improvement.

York's position	1997/98	1998/99
Top quartile	21	24
Bottom quartile	19	17
High spending	5	2
Low spending	8	8
Non-compliant	2	2

## High performance

**15** **York is very much a low-spending council.** The first point to be made is that, in both financial years, our overall spending is near the bottom of the bottom quartile for Unitary authorities. York spends far less than most other Unitary Authorities. (Comparison of this indicator with *all* English districts is not helpful: the picture is dominated by a large number of Shire-district councils which have many fewer functions and therefore much lower spending.)

**16** Compared with other Unitaries, we achieve a good showing in a number of fields:

- We pay invoices promptly.

- We are also prompt in our assessment of applications for Council Tax benefits, and this in spite of the fact that administration costs are low.
- Similarly, we achieve good coverage on the environmental health inspection of premises and yet keep our costs low.
- We have a good level of provision on nursery places.
- Our school pupils achieve good results on key stage tests and in GCSE's even though our overall spending on Education is low.
- Finally, we are much better than average at helping older people (and others) to live in their own homes rather than in hospitals or elderly persons' homes.

## Areas for Improvement

1 The main areas of (relative) weakness are as follows:

- We do not achieve compliance with the CRE codes on **equality issues**. This may be more a matter of failing to comply with a *definition* than with any deficiency of *performance* in service delivery.
- We do not do well on **missed refuse collections**. However, the failure rate is a small proportion of the total number of pick-ups (less than one in a thousand).
- Our performance on responding promptly to local land **searches** is poor, and the charge for the service is high.
- We do not attract many people to use our **library** service.
- Finally, our performance on **street lighting** and repairs to pavements is weak.

## Changes

1 In most areas there are only slight shifts between figures for the two years. The two exceptions are both improvements:

- We now deal promptly with **planning applications** after a number of years in which we did much worse than average.
- We now offer **single rooms** to all new residents of elderly persons homes. We used to be near the bottom of the league for this and are now in the leading pack at 100%.

2 The Audit Commission's Compendium report (and other information on national statistics) is available to Councillors on request. It is also available on the Internet at the Audit Commission website:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/ac2/Plfirst.htm>

## LOCAL RESULTS for 1999/2000

3 The annexes to this summary show, for each indicator, a block of information which, in the most complete cases, covers the following points.

- An indicator reference number and title;
- A brief description of the indicator;

- A note of whether the target performance for 1999/2000 was achieved;
- Comments, supplied by Directors, explaining performance levels and actions being taken;
- A symbol (① ② ③ or ④) showing how York's performance in 1999/2000 compares with the quartile positions of Unitary Authorities for the full year 1998/99;
- An arrow (⇒ ↑ ↓) showing the current trend in performance, year on year;
- Reporting frequency as suggested by Directorates;
- The target (if any) set for 1999/2000;
- The target set for that indicator in the Best Value Performance Plan;
- The Council's performance in recent years;
- Performance over the four quarters of this year; and
- The range of performance of Unitary Authorities in England (where this is known) using figures for 1998/99 issued recently by the Audit Commission.

- 1 For some indicators some elements of the block will be missing. For example, the Customer First indicators are all local to York so, for these indicators, no "quartile comparison" figures are available.
- 2 Since the third quarter edition of this report new comparative information has been issued by the Audit Commission. The Quarter 3 edition relied on interim estimates of quartile positions. This edition replaces the estimates by the final Audit Commission figures and, in most cases, this has led to slight changes in the Audit Commission's quartile bands compared with the previous report.
- 3 **A note on definitions.** The national performance indicators are defined in an annual document - *The Publication of Information Direction* - which specifies in great detail what each indicator means. The full definition can be as short as a paragraph but is, for some indicators, a full page of text. The definitions given in the annex are summaries of the full definitions. A full understanding of the figures will sometimes depend on the detail of the definition.
- 4 The government issues a new *Direction* every year - new indicators are added, some are deleted, and definitions are changed to improve comparability. The quarterly reports have been kept in line with these changes in most cases. This means that the comparisons with other authorities are meaningful but, in some cases, this is at the expense of meaningful comparison from year to year.
- 5 **A note on averages.** The way in which quarterly figures are consolidated to arrive at a full year figure varies from one indicator to another, depending on the details of its definition. The four quarterly figures are sometimes added to give a total for the year, sometimes averaged, and sometimes the figure for the final quarter is the figure for the whole year. The full year figure is not, therefore, always a simple average of the quarterly figures.
- 6 Wherever possible the indication of trend is based on the difference between the final figure for 1999/2000 and the figure for the previous year. By making

comparisons over a twelve month period we hope to avoid any merely seasonal variations from quarter to quarter. In some cases the trend is shown as “stable” despite small changes in performance, where these are smaller than variations in the accuracy of the measurement in question. The “current performance” refers to the final figures for 1999/2000 assessed by reference to Unitary Authorities.

### Performance against targets

- 7 The annexes contain 75 indicators. Some of these have targets and against the targets for 1999/2000 our achievements run as follows:

Hit target	19
Missed target	16
No target set	40

- 8 For a large number of indicators targets were not set in 1999/2000. This practice has changed dramatically with the introduction of the Best Value Performance Plan. As required by the new Best Value regulations, the BVPP sets out over 100 indicators with targets. For the next edition of the BVPP we will be required to increase this further, to about 200 targeted PI's.

### ACPI Results - Good Performance

- 9 **Rent collection** (B7 and B8) was an area of worsening performance in the third quarter, but much ground has been recovered in the closing quarter. Both the proportion of rent collected and the frequency of large rent arrears cases ended the year at improved positions with respect to last year. The collection figure is now back in the top quartile. Large arrears cases are now approaching average for Unitary Authorities, though they are still worse than our local target (and that target is modest). A separate report to the Executive is awaited on these indicators.
- 10 The performance on **Planning Applications** (F1), which improved markedly in the first half of the year, continues to improve and is now a top quartile result compared with bottom quartile in previous years. However, the final performance was still a little below the target set for 1999/2000.
- 11 There has also been steady improvement in dealing with **road repairs** promptly (P2a). Performance is now in the second quartile and a continued trend of improvement may well bring the indicator into the top quartile band next year.

### ACPI Results - Areas for Improvement

- 12 The trend on **re-letting empty council houses** (B3) continues downward. The time taken to re-let properties is longer than for 1998/99 and well below the target figures. There has, however, been a late reduction in the *number* of empty properties. A separate report to the Executive is awaited on these indicators.

- 13 On **recycling domestic refuse** (E2), the indicator, in its present form, gives insufficient information. The indicator will be replaced in 2000/2001 by better indicators which show the proportion of waste recycled by different methods (composting, heat and power, etc.). We have not collected such data in the past and arrangements are being made, in agreement with external contractors, for collecting the new information.
- 14 However, it is clear from the Local Agenda 21 review that City of York Council does not recycle as much of its refuse as other, similar authorities. When the new indicators are available, and monitored, we are likely to show up as poor performers on sustainability grounds.
- 15 Performance on **Local Searches** (F6a) is not strong and, although we end the year with performance markedly improved compared with last year, the local target has not yet been achieved. Even when that target is achieved, it will still leave York in the bottom quartile for Unitary Authorities. (Furthermore, the BVPP target is lower still.)
- 16 Similarly, the speed with which **fly-tipping** (J2) is dealt with is poor (bottom quartile) compared with other places and no improvement target was set. The BVPP target for 2000/2001 is still bottom quartile.

## **Customer First Standards**

### **Telephone answering - CF1**

- 17 Performance for this year has matched last year's at 93%. However performance in answering phones has deteriorated in the last quarter with 92% of all calls answered within 20 seconds. Had performance in the fourth quarter not deteriorated there would have been an overall improvement this year.
- 18 The focus for improvement is in Leisure Services and Community Services who both achieved 88%. The detailed statistics over all four quarters show that Leisure Services has peaked around this level of performance and the quarter 3 report suggested there was a deep-rooted problem.
- 19 Community Services has fallen below 90% for the first time. Analysis of their statistics clearly shows the problems are not at 'headquarters' (George Hudson Street) but in nearly all the 'satellite' sites. Among these satellites Yearsley Bridge has achieved only 66%, indicating significant problems.
- 20 Performance by the switchboard has also dropped from 95% throughout the year to 93% this quarter. This is still good performance but as the principal channel for customer contact with the council it needs to return to and remain at the higher levels it has proven it can achieve. The causes for lower performance this quarter need to be investigated and addressed.

## **Responding to letters - CF2**

- 21 With 94% of all letters received answered within the promised time performance has returned to the high levels of the first quarter. This is despite a steady upward trend in the number of letters received. Community Services at 82% attribute performance to staff shortages and sickness combined with teething troubles with the Document Management System. Despite this, performance this year has improved on last year's.

## **Dealing with visitors - CF3 and CF4**

- 22 As with telephone contact this is a key area for generating positive customer perception of the Council. 98% of visitors seen within the target time is a notable performance. There has been a high level of performance throughout the year. This is an area where the Council is performing consistently well, holding steady at 99% this year as for last.

## **Handling complaints - CF5 and CF6**

- 23 As mentioned in previous reports, it is important to remember that the number of complaints is relatively low. However 94% of stage 2 and 100% of stage 3 complaints answered within 10 days represents a high level of responsiveness for the fourth quarter. The improvement in answering stage 3 complaints is marked given the results of the second and third quarters. However, with such small numbers, a handful of complicated or lengthy complaints that cannot be resolved within 10 working days can hold back performance and significantly affect the overall percentages shown under performance. This is clearly illustrated in the fall in performance this year compared to last.

## **Ombudsman complaints - CF7**

- 24 Twenty three complaints about the Council were determined by the Local Government Ombudsman this quarter, with no findings against the Council. This brings the total for the year to 71, down on the 79 for the previous year. The most significant category of determination (in terms of numbers) for this quarter, and for the year is 'no maladministration'. This can be seen as endorsement of staff actions and judgement in many of the issues subsequently handled as complaints by the Ombudsman.
- 25 The Local Government Ombudsman encourages the 'Local settlement' of a complaint during its investigation and there have been 14 of these this year compared to 10 last year. Departments are seeing this as an opportunity to proactively resolve complaints. It would however be beneficial for departments to take the 'local settlement' approach promoted by the Ombudsman and apply it earlier, wherever they can, during our own complaints procedure.

## **Targets on Customer Standards**

- 26 With the exception of CF7, Ombudsman complaints, all the Customer First (CF) performance indicators are drawn from the 'Customer First Contract'. Whilst it is

important to translate the promises made in this contract into meaningful performance targets it needs to be done realistically. Implicit in the promises is 100% achievement; that we will answer all 'phone calls within 20 seconds, see all visitors within 10 minutes, answer all letters within 10 working days giving a full response (not a 'holding letter'), resolve complaints within 10 working days.

- 27 The performance results show that this is not achieved, with the exception of visitors to the council. As the 'target by default' is 100%, a single failure in any of these areas will result in a failure to achieve that target and is demoralising for staff.
- 28 The Access to Services Best Value review will be examining these fundamentals of good service and, following consultation with customers and other stakeholders, will be putting any proposals for changes to members for consideration.
- 29 In the interim there is an opportunity to consider what Customer First targets could be set that are both demanding but achievable. The targets below, for 2000/2001, are suggested based upon historical performance and the need to seek continuous service improvement. They would be for both departments and the council as a whole and can be reviewed at the end of a full year.

<b>Customer First Indicator</b>	<b>Suggested target</b>
CF1 - Prompt answers to telephone calls	95%
CF2 - Prompt replies to letters	95%
CF3 - Prompt service to visitors	100%
CF4 - Referring visitors to correct officer	100%
CF5 and CF6 - Responses to complaints	95%
CF7 - Ombudsman complaints	A reduction

- 30 The last item (CF7) can fluctuate due to such things as 'joint actions' e.g. complaints about admissions to schools where the identical complaint made by six people is counted by the Ombudsman as six complaints. It is suggested that the target should be a year on year reduction in the number of determinations made by the Ombudsman.

#### **Staffing Indicators - Sickness Quarter 4**

- 31 The figures on sickness absence (S1) show a steady improvement for the Council as a whole, although for most Directorates, sickness has been slightly higher this quarter. The table below provide sickness figures by Directorate and also breaks down the Council wide figure in to short and long term.
- 32 The annual figure for 1999/00 was 10.2 days lost per full time equivalent employee (FTE) for 2000/01. As set out in the Best Value Performance Plan, our target is to reduce this to 10 days - this would be top quartile performance. A programme of action is underway to support the directorates' achievement of this target. The programme includes a new policy and forthcoming training for managers.

Directorate	Days lost per full time employee		
	4th Quarter (1 Jan 2000 to 31 March)	3rd Quarter (1 Oct 1999 to 31 Dec)	1999/2000 (1 Apr 1999 to 31 Mar 2000)
Chief Execs	2.7	2.3	9.0
Commercial	4.3	3.9	14.2
Community	4.5	4.3	14.7
Education (LEA)	2.5	2.4	5.7
Education (Schools)	2.5	3.4	7.4
Env & Dev	3.0	3.1	8.5
Leisure	4.4	3.5	13.0
Resources	2.0	2.2	7.0
<b>Council wide</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>10.2</b>
short term	1.8	n/a	4.6
long term	1.5	n/a	5.6

- 54** Employee turnover figures (S2 a, and b) have improved during the third and fourth quarters as these figures now exclude people leaving temporary posts. However, the number of staff leaving with less than 12 months service is an area of concern at 36.5% of leavers for 1999/00. The Organisational Development Unit are currently investigating this.
- 55** Areas of worsening performance include performance appraisals (S4) and accidents at work (S3). These are key areas which are being tackled as part of the 2000/01 work plan for ODU.
- 56** The Council's representation of women in middle management (S5 a, and b) is healthy, particularly at Principal Officer level where women make up 45.4% of employees. However, at Chief Officer level women are still under-represented.
- 57** Representation of disabled people and ethnic minorities is also poor. It is estimated that 12% of the York population have a disability and this is clearly not represented at all levels in Council employment (S5 d, e, and f).
- 58** Ethnic minorities (including people born in Ireland) make up approximately 1.9% of the York population. Whilst we have successfully represented this at Chief and Principal Officer levels, we are far below in the more junior posts (S5 g, h, and i). The data on disabled and ethnic minority staff should, however, be treated with some caution as not all staff have provided this information. All staff will be surveyed this year to improve the data currently held in this regard.

June 2000.