

Corporate Assessment Report

February 2006



Corporate Assessment Report (Pilot)

London Borough of Sutton

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Introduction to the pilot inspection report

This report is the result of a 'pilot' inspection, undertaken by the Audit Commission to test its methodology for CPA.

As you will be aware, Sutton and the Audit Commission are 'public authorities' for the purpose of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the FOIA'). We will both be required to provide individuals with information that they request, subject to any exemption that may apply. A request could potentially include this report. Given our legal obligations under the FOIA the Commission is not in a position to guarantee confidentiality. However, we will be entitled to withhold information in circumstances where disclosure would harm our ability to undertake our statutory functions (section 49A of the Audit Commission Act 1998). We will consult with you on any request that we receive, and would be grateful if you would also consult with us should Sutton receive a request for information that you have received from us in connection with this report.

Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of council activities. It assesses how well the council's understanding of local people and places translates into its ambitions and priorities, and what, in practice, the council is achieving. Achievement is considered within the following shared priorities:
 - sustainable communities and transport;
 - safer and stronger communities;
 - healthier communities;
 - older people; and
 - children and young people.
- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other achievement themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.
- 4 The JAR covers all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes.
- 5 Prior to the corporate assessment, the council undertook a self-assessment using the CPA 2005 key lines of enquiry. The corporate assessment team has used this self-assessment to inform its on-site work and its overall conclusions and judgements.

Executive summary

- 6 The London Borough of Sutton is performing well, consistently above minimum requirements. However, it faces challenges in terms of capacity to deliver its priorities. It also has further work to do to ensure that some of its internal processes, such as performance and risk management, are fully effective and consistent in the organisation.
- 7 The council is providing strong community, political and managerial leadership. It has an open culture with good working relationships between councillors, officers and partners. The council is working effectively with its partners in the local strategic partnership to achieve the clear and challenging ambitions set out in the community strategy. The council is also using partnerships to help deliver its own strategic plans. Priorities are based on a sound understanding of local needs, which has been developed with the help of some effective research and consultation exercises. However, the council does not have a corporate consultation strategy in place.
- 8 Local ambitions take account of both national and shared priorities. Focus on cross-cutting issues such as sustainability and community engagement is maintained through the corporate planning framework and in other ways such as performance committees and the broad portfolios of lead councillors. Shared priorities, in particular, are benefiting from closer partnership working, for example, in the areas of community safety and health and social care.
- 9 The capacity of the council is enhanced by sound financial management and capable councillors and senior officers. However, capacity is stretched both in terms of financial and human resources. In some areas, such as social services where there have been long standing recruitment and retention issues, staff members feel under pressure. In the corporate centre, progress in policy development and implementation, such as the work on values, is being delayed owing to limited resources. The council is developing its approach to councillor development and training, but there is scope to improve participation.
- 10 The council does not have a consistent, systematic approach to ensuring value for money. Apart from the annual budget round consideration of efficiency savings, the large numbers of services that are provided in-house are not routinely challenged. Best value reviews have not had a strong focus on value for money.
- 11 The council has been slow to respond to some problems, such as the weaknesses in social services in the past. A lack of robust performance management contributed to this particular delay although the council is now implementing new systems in this service area. The council has a well established performance framework in place but implementation is inconsistent. Systems that need strengthening include more rigorous target setting, better use of performance data to challenge lead councillors in scrutiny meetings and clearer links to ensure that performance data relating to cross-cutting priorities is fed into the performance cycle.

- 12 The council can demonstrate significant achievements in relation to a number of the shared priorities. For example, it has led a major regeneration project of a run-down housing estate in the south east of the borough, without the help of Neighbourhood Renewal funding. The project has resulted in new homes, jobs, schools and transport, as well as a major leisure, sport and recreational centre. Other achievements include strong performance in environment services, such as waste management and recycling. Close working with the police is resulting in effective joint tasking. This approach is making a real difference to local people; for example, street crime and burglaries continue to reduce and noticeable action is being taken against anti-social behaviour.
- 13 Children and young people's services are successful in a number of areas such as helping pupils achieve good academic progress at the majority of schools. The council provides an effective youth service and there is good promotion of healthy eating and exercise. However, while arrangements for children's social care and protection are adequate, the council and its partners do not secure consistently good outcomes.
- 14 For some shared priorities, investment is taking place but strategies and initiatives are too new to assess the real impact for local communities. For example, the closer inter-agency working to address health inequalities is too new to assess outcomes. Services for older people include some joint, targeted projects but the development of a more strategic, holistic approach is at an early stage – in common with many other councils. The council has undertaken the preparation needed in the lead up to a tenants' ballot on the formation of an arm's length management organisation (ALMO) and the transfer of some housing to a housing association. But at present, 62 per cent of the council's housing does not meet the decent homes standard and, therefore, it will be a considerable challenge to meet the government's target by 2010. The supply of affordable housing is also failing to meet government targets and local needs. However, the supply is increasing despite significant constraints such as the lack of suitable land for development.
- 15 Many of the council's achievements show a strong user focus. For example, it re-modelled its street scene services in response to negative feedback from the public. It has been successful in enabling many of its services, such as the issue of library books, to be delivered electronically, and has introduced accessible information points throughout the borough. The development of its customer services functions has not only resulted in improved quality of service to customers but has also saved approximately £300,000.
- 16 The council has made a number of improvements to its management of equalities and diversity, but it has more to do in this area. Investments include the new appointment of a corporate equalities officer and new monitoring software. However, the council's workforce is still not fully representative of the local community, particularly at senior levels. In addition, partners consider that the council could be doing more to fully understand the experiences of black and minority ethnic communities. Equalities and diversity, and Human Rights Act implications are not routinely considered in council policies and plans.

Areas for improvement

- 17 The council should focus on the following areas in its improvement planning.
- Developing a more systematic, rigorous approach to ensuring value for money, that builds on the investment the council is making in its procurement processes.
 - Using performance management consistently and effectively to maintain an overall view of performance against high level ambitions and cross-cutting issues, and to drive continuous improvement, such as through better target setting and a more focused use of performance information.
 - Strengthening organisational development by:
 - building on equalities and diversity initiatives by ensuring that the needs of all sections of the community are fully considered;
 - reviewing and reconfiguring, if necessary, capacity at the corporate centre to ensure the more speedy and timely completion of corporate policy developments; and
 - ensuring that proposals for improving councillor development and training are implemented.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score
What is the council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	3
What is the capacity of the council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
* Overall corporate assessment score		3
Key		
1 - below minimum requirements - inadequate performance 2 - at only minimum requirements - adequate performance 3 - consistently above minimum requirements - performing well 4 - well above minimum requirements - performing strongly		

*** Rules for determining overall corporate assessment score**

Scores on five themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

Context

The locality

- 18 The London Borough of Sutton is located on the southern boundary of Greater London. It has over 400 hectares of open space and the most trees of any London borough. Despite its leafy appearance, however, the borough has some pockets of deprivation – particularly in some of the northern wards. The council is not eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund so improvements rely on the realignment of mainstream funding or other sources of external funds.
- 19 Between 2002 and 2004, the population increased by 1 per cent to 180,940 (2004 mid-year estimate). Of this total, 10.95 per cent are people with disabilities and 10.93 per cent are from black and minority ethnic communities. The largest minority ethnic groups are black (2.6 per cent) and Indian (2.3 per cent). Sutton has the eighth highest percentage out of all the London boroughs of households containing married families with two or more dependent children. It also has a high percentage of one-person pensioner households. Life expectancy for men is above the national average at 76 and for women is average at 81. According to the 2001 census, people in Sutton feel that generally they enjoy good health. Responses from Sutton residents compare favourably with national averages – 71 per cent described their health as ‘good’ compared with an average of 68.8 per cent for England and Wales.
- 20 Sutton has a higher proportion of owner occupier and lower proportions of private and social rented housing compared with the averages for London and south-west London. Affordability is identified as the top priority in the council’s housing strategy. Although house prices are lower than the London average, costs of a one bedroom flat compared with the average household income show that the ability to purchase a property is out of the reach of many local people. The council owns around 8,000 homes, which comprise 10 per cent of Sutton’s households. A large proportion of council-owned homes - 62 per cent - fail to meet the government’s decent homes standard. The council aims to meet the standard, by the 2010 deadline, as a result of forming an arm’s length management organisation (ALMO) for the majority of the stock, and a stock transfer to a housing association for the Roundshaw Estate.
- 21 Sutton has the second lowest crime rate in London. The overall burglary rate has gone down 19 per cent over the last four years. Street crime has reduced by 33 per cent over the last year. Reporting of racial incidents has improved, as has race crime detection. Sutton has a low incidence of trafficking in controlled drugs.

- 22 Unemployment rates, at 2 per cent, are among the lowest in London. Over 60 per cent of the resident workforce is classified as professional, managerial or skilled non-manual. Over 80 per cent of businesses are small or medium-sized enterprises; retail and wholesale is the largest employment sector, accounting for 25 per cent. The Wandle valley corridor runs through Sutton from central London out towards Gatwick airport and is one of four major development opportunities in London, particularly for manufacturing.
- 23 Transport links into central London are good and there is easy road access to Gatwick and Heathrow airports. However, travelling across south London is more difficult and the South London Partnership, as well as the Sutton Partnership, is pressing for public transport improvements, such as extensions to the tram service which links nearby Croydon and Wimbledon.

The Council

- 24 The council has 54 members. The Liberal Democrats hold 43 seats and have been the majority party since 1986. The Conservatives have eight seats and Labour has three. The council introduced a leader and cabinet model in 1999. The ten-member strategy committee (the executive) is politically proportional, with the majority group members holding portfolios. There are six performance committees, responsible for oversight, policy development and scrutiny of performance and decisions. In addition, there are four area committees with decision-making powers.
- 25 The corporate management team consists of the chief executive, the four strategic directors for community services, resources, environment and leisure, and learning for life, and the executive heads of corporate strategy and legal services (monitoring officer). The chief executive recently left the council for another appointment and, in the meantime, a former chief executive is covering the vacant post on an interim basis. The council employs a total of 5,819 people (4,372 full-time equivalent). The agreed revenue expenditure requirement for 2005/06 is £215.9 million. The council element of the overall council tax level for the borough rose by 4.8 per cent between 2004/05 and 2005/06. The overall level for Band D is now £1,238.49, with the council element of this set at £983.91.
- 26 The council is a member of the South London Partnership which includes seven south London boroughs as well as representatives from transport, health and business. The Sutton Partnership (Sutton's local strategic partnership) was formally established in April 2004. This board replaces an earlier partnership, the Sutton Borough Forum. Membership includes representatives from the health trusts, police, education and training, business, older people's services and partnerships such as Safer Sutton. The voluntary sector is represented by the Sutton Centre for Voluntary Service, an umbrella organisation for local voluntary groups, and through community engagement network representatives for disabilities, children and families, youth, black and minority ethnic groups.

27 The Sutton Borough Forum produced the first community plan in 1999. Subsequently, this was developed into a community strategy. The draft for 2005/08 sets out the partnership's ambitions under eight broad themes:

- developing strong and active communities;
- encouraging enterprise and employment;
- creating safer communities;
- improving health and well-being;
- investing in children and young people;
- improving housing;
- developing a cleaner and greener environment; and
- valuing Sutton's older people.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

Ambition for the community

- 28 The council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements.
- 29 With its partners, the council has established clear and challenging ambitions for the area and its communities through its community planning process. The first community plan was drawn up in 1999. The 2003/07 community strategy has recently been revised to cover the period 2005/08 and takes account of the new local public service agreement (LPSA) for 2005/08. The Sutton Partnership's vision is 'to improve the quality of life for all the people in the London Borough of Sutton, now and for future generations'. To support this vision, the partnership has agreed eight overarching themes that are set out in the new community strategy and are listed in paragraph 27 of this report. Underneath each theme, detailed priorities and actions are set out in the community strategy action plan. Overall, the strategy aims to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.
- 30 The community strategy, together with the council's annual report and best value performance plan, set out the vision and values that guide the council's work. The council's annual report sets out its vision which is 'to build a community in which all can take part and all can take pride'. This vision is supported by five core values. The council aims to deliver its vision and values through five corporate goals which align well with the community strategy themes. The five corporate goals are:
- promoting environmental sustainability;
 - promoting social inclusion;
 - promoting economic and community well-being;
 - promoting life-long learning; and
 - promoting a prudent and well-managed council.
- 31 Strategies that support the council's corporate goals include clear, high-level aims for different service areas. For example, annual updates to the environment statement set out the ambitions for environmental improvement both within the council and the community. The crime and disorder strategy has clear aims to make Sutton the lowest crime borough in London. The 2005 transport local improvement plan includes challenging ambitions, particularly for traffic management and school travel plans. Such clearly stated intentions help stakeholders to understand how the council, with its partners, is aiming to improve the quality of life of local people.

- 32** Councillors have strong ownership of the council's improvement agenda and are developing a longer-term view. Senior councillors recently agreed a ten-year vision for the area that will bring together a range of key issues, such as the redevelopment of Sutton town centre and the delivery of the borough's waste strategy. However, this longer-term approach has not yet fed through into the wider arena. Key documents set out the aims for the medium-term future, but the council's vision, and that of the Sutton Partnership, for the longer term (five to ten years) are less clear. As noted above, both the community strategy and council's corporate plan include broad vision statements. But neither document spells out to local people what noticeable differences they can expect in the long-term future.
- 33** The council undertakes some effective consultation with local communities and is developing its research and data sharing with partners. The new community strategy indicates a strong focus on partnership data collection and analysis, and the sharing of existing data is improving. For example, an update report on the voluntary sector compact shows that previously demographic data had not been shared; but now plans are in place to share and publicise the Sutton Atlas, a database of demographic and other useful local information. Consultation and research undertaken to draw up the northern wards neighbourhood renewal strategy indicates a sound approach. For example, the strategy is based on an analysis of the priorities contained within existing business plans of organisations working in the area, consultation with various council service teams, and workshops run with relevant local forums and reference groups. By adopting such approaches the council, with its partners, is ensuring that there is a shared understanding of local needs.
- 34** Within the council, there is no overall corporate consultation strategy to set the context for the various consultation exercises being carried out. Without such a strategy, the council cannot be sure it is making the best use of its resources, as well as all the information it and its partners collect. The council has been indicating the need for such a strategy for several years; for example, the intention to develop one 'to bring value and focus to this work' was stated in the 2001 version of the council's constitution. In October 2004 an external consultant's report on consultation on sport and leisure services also recommended the need for a corporate strategy that would set the context for service-based plans for ongoing consultation.
- 35** The council demonstrates strong community leadership through its ability to work in partnership with a range of organisations and with different sections of the community. Relationships with partners are open and positive. The council is genuinely committed to community engagement and has devolved some decision making to areas; for example, through its area committees. The work of the community engagement performance (scrutiny) committee illustrates the willingness of the council to try various ways of involving different groups - such as businesses and vulnerable groups - at the forefront of service developments. The council also supports special forums to ensure links are strengthened with particular sections of the community; for example, the Sutton Seniors' Forum and the youth parliament.

- 36 The council engages actively with the community but it has more work to do to ensure that all groups feel equally well involved and understood. Key stakeholders and partners feel that the council could be doing more to fully understand the experiences of the black and minority ethnic communities. These communities are scattered across the borough and it is difficult for community representatives to attend all the council and voluntary sector consultative forums. The large number of groups and of ways the community can make its voice heard is causing some confusion to the public, partners and staff.
- 37 The council is using the enhanced capacity provided through partnerships to help deliver its ambitions. For example it is working proactively with neighbouring councils in a number of key areas, such as waste management and staff recruitment. Implementation of the voluntary sector compact is helping the council, together with its statutory agency partners, to maximise the opportunities for voluntary and community groups to help deliver front-line services, such as a scheme to support vulnerable people who need help maintaining their gardens. Working relationships with health partners have improved and the council is actively contributing, for example, to the complex decision making around hospital provision and the re-structuring of services for people with learning disabilities. Relationships with the primary care trust (PCT) have been strengthened by the secondment to the PCT of the council's strategic director for community services, to manage the integration of health and community services for adults. All these developments are enabling the council and its partners to make better use of available resources, including finance and people, to deliver the priorities linked to the community strategy themes.

Prioritisation

- 38 The council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements.
- 39 The council, with its partners, has agreed clear priorities to support its overall ambitions. As noted in paragraph 29, each community strategy theme is underpinned by priorities that are set out in the community strategy action plan. Within the council's own strategic documents, the five corporate goals are supported by targets that link to the community strategy. These targets are listed in the annual report and are further developed within the annual corporate action plans that support each of the corporate goals (see paragraph 43).
- 40 Priorities reflect national policy frameworks. For example, the Sutton Partnership has reviewed its community strategy to take account of the new LPSA targets. As a result of this work, it added an eighth theme to its earlier list to take account of the new shared priority of services for older people.
- 41 Council priorities reflect local needs assessment stemming from consultation and research findings, but some base information is limited. For example, data on service take-up, that could inform decisions on future priorities, is lacking. In addition, as noted in paragraph 36, the council could do more to ensure that priorities address the needs of minority ethnic and other specific groups.

The draft corporate equalities and diversity action plan is focused on the chief executive's group. Although other groups have had an input to the plan via a champions' group, the action plan does not set out how service groups will promote equalities and diversity.

- 42 The alignment of lead councillor portfolios and performance committees to the corporate goals assists in the delivery of priorities. Broad portfolios help lead members to take a more holistic and cross-cutting approach – such as in planning. Senior officers work closely with lead councillors in determining targets within directorate business plans. For example, in the environment group they hold joint discussion exercises to assist in action planning.
- 43 The council has robust strategies in place to support its priorities. Its corporate planning framework uses the 'bookcase model', which is a visual representation of the various levels of strategic planning and how they fit together. The framework shows the range of plans that underpin the council's overall ambitions and values. For example, the second level of the model consists of annual corporate action plans for each of the five corporate goals. Other levels include both plans required by government and local plans, such as the council's three-year financial plan. Examples of sound local strategies include the northern wards regeneration strategy and the transport local improvement plan. Environmental sustainability priorities are supported by a strong cross-cutting approach. For example, environmental impact is considered in business and team plans. The council also uses its planning framework effectively to further its strategic aims. The local development framework and the supplementary planning guidance on building affordable homes and designing out crime are examples of planning guidance that link together and support the council's overall ambitions and priorities.
- 44 The council can demonstrate strong links between corporate priorities and budget decision making. Through the annual efficiency savings exercise, the council achieves efficiencies in its activities and allocates the gains to its priorities. Within service areas, disinvestment from lower priorities also takes place, such as the decision in social services to raise the eligibility criteria for home and day care. However, at the corporate level it is not clear how the council will achieve some of its important future plans. For example, it does not yet have a clear strategy for reconfiguring resources to ensure the delivery of its northern wards regeneration policy.
- 45 The council has a good track record of allocating resources to support service improvement. For example, it has allocated an extra £300,000 to achieve changes in its street scene services, following negative feedback from the public. It has assigned significant extra resources to support special educational needs. A combination of external funding and council finance has been used to develop the cultural and leisure facilities at the Phoenix Centre, with the aim of reaching out to a wider range of users.

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- 46 Council policies and plans do not fully support the delivery of corporate priorities in all cases. Business plans are written to a common template but the quality is variable. Targets are often descriptions of activities or inputs, rather than focused on outputs. As noted in paragraph 71, targets are not always specific, measurable, achievable, relevant or time-bound (SMART). In addition, there is scope for improving the links between the plans and clarifying how service objectives link back to higher-level priorities.
- 47 The council is communicating well with its partners who understand and support the council's key strategic objectives. The council is also working to improve its communication with the wider community. It has put additional resources into this, restructuring and expanding the communications department. It has also re-launched the council magazine 'Sutton Scene'. The council has good relationships with the local media which welcomes, in particular, the advance briefings that are arranged by the council's press office.
- 48 Communications with staff are less effective, with the result that their understanding of corporate goals and targets is variable. In the 2004 staff survey, 38 per cent of respondents were not aware of the council's vision and 42 per cent were not aware of the community plan. Some staff believe that, while the high-level vision and sense of direction is well communicated, councillors are less clear about what they will and will not do to achieve those ambitions. Staff are also concerned that public expectations are sometimes raised beyond the council's ability to deliver given resource constraints.
- 49 The council has processes in place which aim to improve internal communications. For example, it holds annual corporate road-shows. Group newsletters include a common corporate news section. In addition, groups are implementing their own initiatives such as the 'future directions' seminars in the environment directorate.
- 50 The council is sometimes slow to take the necessary action to deliver its corporate goals and community strategy priorities. For example, the council was slow to tackle long-standing under-performance in social services. Although 2004/05 performance information for social services indicates recent improvements, change is taking longer than was anticipated by councillors owing to the complexity of the issues involved. Some plans that form part of the corporate planning framework are new or in draft, such as the economic development framework. In other areas of corporate policy development, work has commenced but progress has been slow. For example, work to review, update and communicate the council's core values started at a workshop in June 2004 but the outputs were not considered by the strategy committee until March 2005 and an action plan has only recently been produced.
- 51 The council is taking appropriate steps to ensure equalities and diversity priorities are delivered but it has more to do in this area. For example, it has appointed a corporate equalities officer to provide support to both corporate and service teams and there is a diversity champions group with representatives from all groups.

It has purchased new monitoring software to help it achieve its aim of getting to level 3 of the equality standard for local government by the end of 2005/06. Equalities impact assessments are included in business plans, although there is no clear process in place yet to monitor the quality of these assessments or to co-ordinate a corporate overview of developments. The Human Rights Act (HRA) is listed within the draft equalities and diversity action plan as a relevant piece of legislation, but there are no references to the human rights implications in key corporate strategies. Neither the business plan template nor the standard format for committee papers requires an assessment of legal implications or the HRA in particular. This means that the council may not be fully aware of the implications of its decisions.

What is the capacity of the council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity

- 52 The council's performance in this area is adequate, at only minimum requirements.
- 53 The council has established a climate of openness, mutual respect and shared aims in which it operates its political and managerial leadership. Relationships between councillors, and between councillors and officers, are good. Regular joint meetings, involving lead councillors and senior officers, as well as some shared training, help increase understanding of each others' roles. The council benefits from capable councillors and officers. Senior managers provide effective managerial leadership to the organisation and are generally well-regarded by councillors, staff and external stakeholders.
- 54 Roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers in terms of accountability and taking decisions are clear. The council can demonstrate examples of effective decision making; for example, in matching budget decisions to corporate priorities. The mixed party membership of the strategy committee helps achieve consensus on major strategies, such as the decision to pursue the ALMO option for housing. The scrutiny process assists in ensuring accountability and securing service improvement (see paragraph 75).
- 55 The council's has well established arrangements for risk management but these are not yet fully effective in informing decisions consistently. The structured reporting and reviewing of risks by councillors is limited. However, the council has had a risk manager in post for over five years and a risk management policy, strategy and action plan has been in place since May 2000. CMT members are conscious of the need to manage risk in their activities, and revised guidance has recently been produced. In line with this, work taking place on the leisure pricing structure models and quantifies the risks of introducing the new structure as part of the business-planning process.
- 56 An ethical framework is in place and councillors and officers adhere to the standards set. However, the standards arrangements are not easily accessible – the code of conduct is hard to find on the council's website and, for internal use, the intranet does not include the most up-to-date version of the constitution. The standards committee does not yet take a pro-active role, in regard to training, for example. A very short input on standards was included in the last councillor induction programme but this has not been followed up by more in-depth sessions. None of the training on offer is compulsory and some councillors may not have received any training on standards - training records do not show this information.

- 57 Most councillors engage in some training and development during the year but there is scope to improve participation. For example, only half attended recent training sessions on planning - even though all councillors make planning decisions as members of area committees. A special Saturday development day, presented as one of the main training events of the year, was attended by approximately 50 per cent of councillors. Events are planned by a member development group, using self-assessment forms completed by individual councillors. These forms highlight skills useful for particular committee roles but there is no direct link with corporate goals. A member development policy was drawn up in April 2004, but some proposals have not yet been implemented, such as a published annual member development plan.
- 58 The council provides a wide range of staff training and development opportunities at both corporate and group levels. In some groups plans have also been drawn up for individual service teams. Some, but not all, of these plans show a clear link with individual needs identified through staff appraisal. The corporate training programme includes management development, which has been well attended. Diversity training was rolled out during 2004 and by the end of the year over 1000 employees and most councillors had participated. The council achieved corporate Investor in People status in June 2004. Learning from other councils is encouraged.
- 59 The positive working culture among the political and managerial leadership of the organisation also extends to other levels. Relationships between the trade unions and management are constructive. Staff morale is fairly good, although it is being adversely affected in teams where workloads are causing pressure – such as in social services, where recruitment and retention is a recurring problem. The 2004 staff survey showed that 69 per cent of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with their jobs. Staff turnover overall is low compared with other London boroughs, thereby helping to ensure continuity and the retention of skills.
- 60 Workforce planning is at an early stage of development. A first workforce plan has recently been drafted in response to an Office of the Deputy Prime Minister requirement. A new HR strategy has also been drafted, but it does not include a clear analysis or prioritisation of key HR issues facing the council. A comprehensive range of HR policies is in place but limited capacity in the corporate HR team is making it difficult for officers to ensure that these are regularly reviewed and updated.
- 61 Officer capacity, in terms of workload, is stretched in some areas. For example, capacity is limited for policy development at the strategic centre, in corporate human resources, and in procurement. Flexible working is helping to increase capacity in some areas, such as customer services. The council is piloting the 'Nomad' project, a European Union funded initiative to improve service efficiency using wireless communication. An aim is to extend flexible working through the use of mobile electronic systems for conducting social care financial assessments. Such initiatives should help the council make better use of its staff resources.

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- 62 The workforce is not yet fully representative of the local population but there has been some improvement in recent years. Overall, 7.6 per cent of the council workforce is from black and minority ethnic communities, but this is less than the figure for the borough population as a whole, which is 10.93 per cent (2004 mid-year estimate). The percentage of disabled people employed by the council has increased from the very low figure of 1.3 per cent to 4.3 per cent, but is still low compared with the community profile. The council is taking steps to address diversity issues, as noted in paragraph 51.
- 63 Strong partnership working is extending capacity to deliver priorities. However, some external partners are frustrated that the council sometimes seems unwilling to take risks or to change its arrangements for progress to be made. The council is beginning to address governance issues and accountabilities when it reviews partnerships. Examples of closer or joint working with other agencies, such as the police and health trusts, are noted in the achievement sections of this report. The council is also actively pursuing joint procurement opportunities with neighbouring councils; for example, shared recruitment services and waste management.
- 64 Although the council has delivered some major projects effectively, this good practice is not applied consistently in all areas. For example, the project to replace the social services client records system indicates some weaknesses in the council's procurement and project management arrangements. This project exceeded its deadlines and budgets, and as a result was the subject of a scrutiny review. The cost of the project has increased from £0.7 million to £2.6 million, resulting from weaknesses in project management, and the council under-estimating the initial costs. However, the council has learned from this and is investing in improving its corporate procurement processes. It has drafted a new corporate procurement strategy which overlays current systems and aims to establish corporate sources of advice and smoother, more efficient procedures. This new approach should help, for example, address the differences in the way departments and sections commission and deal with voluntary sector services. Partners report that the effectiveness of commissioning often depends on the initiative and knowledge of individual officers rather than on a consistent, informed council approach.
- 65 The council does not have a systematic, rigorous approach to ensuring value for money. Apart from the annual budget round consideration of efficiency savings, services are not routinely challenged - unless they are not performing well or costs are obviously and significantly high. The council has a large number of services that are provided in-house and these have not been systematically examined to ensure they are providing value for money. Best value reviews have not had a strong focus on value for money although improvement plans have included actions that have resulted in some efficiencies; for example, the changes to the way the property service is managed and delivered. In addition, specific improvements within individual services indicate that managers are generally aware of the council's core value to provide 'high quality, cost effective services'. For example, customer service improvements have resulted in approximately £300,000 in savings.

- 66 The council has strong financial management overall and has implemented improvements where necessary. For example, until last year the social services budget was overspending and officers and councillors lacked sound information to monitor this effectively. Staff capacity was increased by recruiting senior managers with budget management skills and experience. In response to these changes and to address particular service weaknesses, the council increased the base budget for children and adult services by £2.7 million for 2005/06. It also identified efficiency savings of £1.4 million for these services, making a net increase of £1.3 million overall. The most recent auditor's scored judgement (2004) indicated that the council had sound financial systems in place.
- 67 The council aims to be 'a prudent, well-managed council' and it is managing to stay in budget although resources are stretched. For example, despite base budget increases, spending on children's social services is £2 million below the government guideline figure, which limits the council's capacity to implement the improvements to children's care services which it has identified. The council does not benefit from access to major external grant streams such as neighbourhood renewal funding and has had to rely on realigning its own resources to deliver its key regeneration projects.
- 68 The council has made good progress in implementing e-government, in line with both national and local priorities. Successful investment has put the council in the top 25 per cent of councils, with 85 per cent of its functions 'e-enabled'. The council's website is well structured, easy to use and enables the community to interact with the council, but the content could be more customer-focused with better sign-posting for non-English speakers. Libraries are an example of a service where the council has improved the service by extending the use of IT; in this case by allowing people to register their book requests and withdrawals electronically. As a result, the council has extended opening hours, without increased staffing or extra cost.
- 69 The effectiveness of IT as a support tool for staff is variable. Staff report difficulties because systems break down or are not well integrated, or they have problems in accessing IT from remote sites. The council is planning to upgrade the intranet but currently it is a poor quality resource for managers and staff. It is not well laid out and much of the content is ad hoc and out-of-date. Key policies, such as the communications strategy, are missing.

Performance management

- 70 The council's performance management is adequate, at only minimum requirements.
- 71 The council has a well-established performance management framework in place but implementation is inconsistent. This is reducing the impact of performance management on the way people within the organisation work. The links between the different levels of the corporate planning framework are not clearly demonstrated in all plans. In addition, targets are not always SMART.

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Higher-level goals are not being translated consistently through to the bottom level of team plans and individual appraisal targets, and staff feedback indicates that the system does not give them a good overall view of performance. The council recognises that the staff appraisal system has a number of weaknesses, which have been identified through staff surveys and the work of scrutiny. In response, it has initiated a two-year project to review and revise the corporate appraisal scheme.

- 72 Performance indicator (PI) results, together with other comparative data, suggest that more robust arrangements are needed to achieve continuous improvement and to ensure that performance management has a significant impact on service outcomes. For example, in 2003/04, 49 per cent of PIs improved while 51 per cent showed no improvement. In 2003/04, of the council's 71 performance plan targets, 46 per cent were achieved, and of those not achieved, 55 per cent showed no improvement.
- 73 Target setting lacks consistent rigour. Targets within some plans are not well defined and some targets are not sufficiently stretching. The annual report sets out very clearly what has been achieved throughout the year, and is open about what has not been achieved. However, it does not always demonstrate what the council will do to tackle missed targets, such as staff absence. New annual targets do not always take account of instances where the previous year's target has not been met.
- 74 Councillors and partners have access to a range of useful information to inform them of performance. For example, lead councillors receive well set out and easy to read reports on local and national indicators. However, in relation to cross-cutting issues, performance information and targets are less well developed, making it more difficult for the council to assess its effectiveness in delivering these key priorities. For example, information on library usage does not show how well the service is engaging with different sections of the community. Data on the take-up of leisure facilities does not exist in a form which can be used to illustrate how the council is tackling health inequalities.
- 75 The council has an open culture with a scrutiny process that is focused on performance against priorities. For example, one performance committee focuses on community engagement. Where performance in a particular area has dropped considerably, there are effective scrutiny mechanisms in place to deal with these - such as strategy committee advisory groups and topic investigation groups. These groups have a clear remit and are time-limited, and have successfully reversed performance trends in some cases; for example, in social care, school property support, street scene and housing. However, the large number of different councillor-led groups that deal with performance issues means that lines of accountability are complex and confusing. This makes it more difficult for the council to be sure that the right data is getting to the right group.

- 76 The council is not using its accumulated knowledge rigorously to challenge poor performance or achieve improved service outcomes. In the case of weaknesses in social services performance, the council did not use the available information to respond early or quickly enough. The council has only recently implemented a more rigorous approach to challenging under performance in around a third primary schools with KS2 cohorts. Performance committees receive a range of reports, including exception and complaints reports, as well as helpful information bulletins. However, scrutiny members do not use these to routinely challenge lead councillors at performance committee meetings, relying instead on responses from individual service managers. This practice reduces the accountability of lead councillors for performance in their portfolio areas.
- 77 Some effective mechanisms are in place for collecting performance information but systems are not yet in place to ensure that this data is fed into the overall improvement cycle. Views are gathered from local people, such as through the corporate customer complaints system and the budget consultation exercise with residents. While some services, such as street cleansing, have been reorganised in response to complaints, information from corporate processes is not yet used consistently across directorates. To address this issue the council is implementing new software that will enable it to use customer feedback in a more pro-active and comprehensive way. There are mechanisms to monitor equalities and diversity issues, but processes for picking these up at various stages of the planning and improvement cycle are undeveloped. For example, there is no requirement for strategy committee papers to include a diversity impact assessment. A further constraint is that the directorates have different performance management IT systems, making it more difficult to share information between different parts of the organisation.

What has been achieved?

Summary

- 78** The council is performing well in its achievement of the shared priorities.
- 79** The shared priorities are reflected in both the community strategy and the council's annual report and best value performance plan. According to the council's corporate planning framework, services are shaped, planned and delivered in order to contribute to the priorities set out in the community strategy, as well as to the council's own corporate goals. However, as noted at paragraph 71, the links between the various levels of plans down to team and individual objectives are not always clear.
- 80** Capacity to deliver the shared priorities is being enhanced through partnership working, although some initiatives are at too early a stage to see visible outcomes for local people. For example, the council is working more closely with health services on joint projects, and council services are promoting healthier lifestyles. But much of the work in addressing health inequalities is at an early stage of development and it is too soon to assess the impact. However, other longer-established partnerships are already making a difference. The close joint working between the council and the police is contributing to improved community safety. Other partnerships, such as the voluntary sector compact, are helping in the delivery of improved services for older people.
- 81** The council and other key agencies are beginning to share performance data as part of their closer partnership working. This will help in the monitoring of achievements and in decision making. However, the council has a number of areas to address in order to ensure that its performance management systems are fully effective in driving continuous improvement in its achievement outcomes.
- 82** The council is performing well in a number of the shared priorities. Its joint work with the police is having a positive effect in reducing crime rates and public satisfaction is increasing, such as in the area of anti-social behaviour. The council is effective at waste management, including recycling, and it is developing plans with neighbouring councils to ensure that progress is maintained. Other contributions to sustainable local communities include partnership initiatives to increase training and job opportunities, and improvements by the council to the local street scene. The council is investing in older people's services and is beginning to work with partners to achieve a more holistic, strategic approach.
- 83** Areas where the council has achieved less in relation to shared priorities include sustainable transport and housing. Only 62 per cent of council-owned homes meet the decent homes standard and the supply of affordable housing falls short of local needs and national targets. However, it has achieved considerable improvements for local people through the regeneration of rundown areas such as the Roundshaw Estate.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 84** The council can demonstrate some significant achievements in the areas of regeneration, waste management and sustainability. It is investing in further developments in these areas as well as in transport and housing. However, 62 per cent of council homes fail to meet the decent homes standard and there is a considerable amount of work to do if the council is to meet the government's target by 2010.
- 85** The council has been active in leading and implementing some significant and well managed regeneration projects. For example, the on-going regeneration of the Roundshaw Estate, now in its ninth year, has resulted in new homes, jobs, schools and public transport, all of which have contributed to making the area a more sustainable community. At the heart of the estate, the £6 million leisure, sport, library and recreational centre, the Phoenix Centre, was opened in Autumn 2004. As a result of deliberate planned actions with partners, the council has turned one of its worst estates into an area that is popular with residents and has reduced crime rates.
- 86** The council has been successful in realigning mainstream funding to support improvements in areas most in need. The borough is not eligible for neighbourhood renewal funding, so projects have been largely financed by the council. Regeneration work in the northern wards area of the borough has focused on work with children and young people and an extra £500,000 has been allocated from core funding to schools in that area. An 'excellence cluster' has also been created to support local schools. A resident-led northern wards forum is co-ordinating multi-agency work in the area and is about to roll out the neighbourhood renewal strategy to other deprived areas of the borough. Part of the forum's remit is to seek external funding to support further initiatives.
- 87** The council is working effectively with a range of partners to develop the local economy and labour market. A training project, funded by the learning and skills council and resulting from the first community strategy, exceeded its targets when completed in December 2004. The programme trained 600 residents in new work skills - 150 more than the target. The council is also working with voluntary agencies to extend opportunities for people with disabilities. For example, through working closely with MENCAP, and breaking down certain jobs into more manageable chunks, the council has been able to employ a number of disabled people to gain experience and develop confidence. The council is also working with local businesses on plans to improve Sutton town centre, but a proposed 'business improvement district' is proceeding slowly.
- 88** The council has a successful track record in achieving its ambitions for the environment over recent years. Waste management is effective with steady year-on-year improvements in recycling and the highest recycling and composting rate in London. The council is on target to achieve its statutory target of 30 per cent for 2005/06. It is working with neighbouring councils on longer term initiatives, such as the joint purchasing of new plant to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Environmental sustainability is given high priority within the council. For example, the council assesses all its services for environmental and other relevant impact. The council is working actively with police and schools to tackle graffiti and this, together with 100 enforcements for graffiti, has achieved a noticeable improvement in the quality of the street scene.

- 89 Linked to its priorities for environmental sustainability, the council is at an early stage regarding its ambitions for green travel. For example, it has recently introduced graduated charges according to the number of cars per household in one of its two controlled parking zones. The council is investing in its transport plans and it has a comprehensive transport strategy in place. It is working proactively with the South London Partnership to promote new transport routes and with the strategic health authority to ensure that proposals such as the proposed extensions to the tram service link into decisions regarding hospital provision.
- 90 The council's management of the housing market is contributing effectively to other shared priorities. For example, its achievements on the Roundshaw Estate and its redevelopment of Durand Close are contributing to regeneration and community safety priorities – as well as improving housing conditions. Its review and remodelling of sheltered housing schemes is resulting in improvements for older residents. Unlike many other social housing landlords, the council carries out annual surveys of its tenants. These surveys show unusually high satisfaction rates amongst black and minority ethnic residents.
- 91 The council can demonstrate achievements against its overall priorities for the local housing market, which are encapsulated in its housing and homelessness policies. For example, the council has a good record in tackling homelessness. It stopped using bed and breakfast accommodation for families in advance of the government deadline. In addition, it has increased supported housing provision, and it has both increased resources for, and achieved improvements in, work to prevent homelessness.
- 92 The supply of affordable housing is increasing but it still falls short of local needs and the government target. Work with housing associations, land release and the use of planning powers and guidance is helping to increase the supply. For example, the Hamptons and Surrey House schemes include planning gain – where the council can ask a developer to contribute to affordable housing or infrastructure improvements - of 30 per cent affordable housing. However, the lack of suitable sites and investment in the borough is constraining the council's achievements in this area.
- 93 Although the council has taken steps to improve housing conditions on some estates, 62 per cent of council homes still fail to meet the decent homes standard. The council is relying on achieving the standard by forming an arm's length management organisation (ALMO) for the majority of the stock and transferring the stock on the Roundshaw Estate to a housing association. In both cases, this will allow access to investment not available directly to the council. The council is tackling these issues late compared with other councils, although it has put considerable effort into consulting with, and raising awareness among, tenants.

It needs positive ballot results among residents and also, in the case of the ALMO, a 'good' inspection score, to enable it to proceed with these options. The council currently does not have alternative plans should it fail to meet these requirements. The stock will require considerable refurbishment and investment to meet the government's 2010 deadline for the standard.

Safer and stronger communities

- 94 The council is working well with its partners to achieve its ambitions for reducing and preventing crime and the fear of crime, and to making people feel safer. It is investing in its partnerships and implementing changes, in accordance with robust strategies and plans. However, it has more to do to be able to demonstrate improved outcomes for its community.
- 95 The close working between police and council through the Safer Sutton Partnership leads to effective joint approaches to problems. This is making a real difference to front-line performance; for example, street crime is down by 33 per cent over the last year and the number of burglaries continues to reduce. Overall, the borough has the second lowest crime rate in London.
- 96 Over the past year, the council and the police have further strengthened their close working by integrating the police and council community safety teams under a single structure, managed by a police superintendent. This new service includes neighbourhood wardens, crime prevention, the drugs and alcohol team, Safer Neighbourhood Teams, the domestic violence team and police in schools. The partnership has strong plans in place for moving this initiative forward and is benefiting from the support of a wide range of partners.
- 97 The council has good strategies and plans in place to address the community strategy theme of 'creating safer communities'. The new crime and disorder strategy is clear in addressing both national and regional priorities. The strategy also acknowledges local priorities, including tackling fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, and links well with the community strategy. The action plan (currently in draft) which accompanies the strategy sets out a comprehensive programme of action with targets for each area of focus. Having identified the key causes of the fear of crime, the partnership has put appropriate plans in place; for example, to tackle alcohol abuse in the town centre. It is also adapting the introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Teams so that these cover the whole borough from July 2005.
- 98 Community safety issues are integrated into service planning, in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act. For example, service teams are working together to deal with environmental aspects of crime, such as the links between the street scene and fear of crime. This has led the council to prioritise graffiti removal and take enforcement action for fly-tipping. In addition, the council's supplementary planning guidance now includes guidance on designing out crime under the local development framework.

- 99** The council has a clear, strategic approach to anti-social behaviour, having identified through the crime audit that this is a key issue for local people. The crime, disorder, drug and alcohol harm reduction action plan includes actions to reduce anti-social behaviour with specific targets supported by proxy indicators. The council's approach embraces both prevention and enforcement. Approaches to prevention include joint working between crime and youth services, through inter-generation work. Anti-social behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts are used effectively for enforcement and, for example, are contributing to improved residents' satisfaction on the Roundshaw Estate. This approach to anti-social behaviour is reflected in overall crime figures but the more detailed monitoring of outcomes is only just beginning.
- 100** The council, with its partners, is having a positive impact on the reduction of drug and substance misuse. It is working in an integrated way with police and health to take a pro-active approach to drug and substance misuse, linking law enforcement and referral to treatment. Although there is a low incidence of trafficking in controlled drugs, the council has worked to reduce the impact of drugs on the borough through its drug and alcohol team. This team has doubled the number of problematic drug users taking up treatment, three years ahead of its ten-year target. The council's licensing officers have joined the integrated Safer Sutton team, facilitating that team's role in contributing to the reduction in alcohol-related offending.
- 101** The council is well prepared for emergency situations, with a fit-for-purpose emergency plan. The plan has been tested through scenario exercises and the lessons learned have been incorporated into changed procedures.
- 102** The council has a low rate of road traffic accidents compared with other London boroughs and it is meeting its LPSA target for reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on the borough's roads. However, the number of child casualties increased between 2001 and 2003 and in 2004 there was a total of six fatalities on Sutton's roads. The council has invested in road safety training and highways schemes.
- 103** Developing strong and active communities is a key theme in the community strategy, but the council has more to do to follow this through. Its strong aspirations to ensure that Sutton is a cohesive community are clearly demonstrated through the council's approach to scrutiny, the work of its area committees and its range of forums working with key groups within the community. The council has a compact with the voluntary sector in place and has established task groups to oversee its implementation. However, some voluntary sector partners are not yet convinced of the council's commitment, wanting to feel more involved in decision making and understand better how decisions are reached. The council's lack of monitoring data in its services where take-up and reach are important, such as, libraries and leisure, means that it is not able to track whether it is meeting its corporate goal of promoting social inclusion.

Healthier communities

- 104** The council is making significant investments in health and well-being, but it is too soon to assess the impact on the health of the local population. This investment is mainly in the form of support for developing partnerships with other agencies working in the field. Some joint projects are already in place and council services are also promoting initiatives aimed at healthier lifestyles. However, much of the work in this area is at an early stage of development.
- 105** According to the 2001 census, people in Sutton generally enjoy good health. Seventy-one per cent described their health as good, compared with an average for England and Wales of 68.6 per cent. Performance across a range of indicators collected by the London Health Observatory show Sutton as performing better than the average for England as a whole, in the top third of London boroughs and on a par with other outer London boroughs. However, there are pockets of deprivation, for example in the northern wards, which lead to health inequalities in the borough.
- 106** Despite the generally good levels of health in the borough, the council and its partners have highlighted the importance of health and well-being by including it as one of the themes in the community strategy. However, the written strategy and plans to support this theme are at an early stage. There is no single document summarising the strategy for healthier communities and this makes it difficult for stakeholders to fully understand what the council is trying to do. Activities are taking place in a range of areas, but it is not clear how these join up in an overall approach to health, what the expected outcomes are or how these are being measured. Therefore it is not possible to assess what overall impact there has been to date.
- 107** The council has made more progress, with its partners, in developing its plans for dealing with health inequalities and investing in its services for more vulnerable people. As the first stage of a health equality audit, the PCT has commissioned a report for the public health working group, of which the council is a member. When completed, this audit will provide a comprehensive picture of the national policy drivers, underlying determinants, local data and issues, with proposed ways forward for improving the health of groups with the worst health records. In addition, a mental health partnership board was formed in January 2005 with a remit to address the social inclusion of people with mental health needs. Consultation is being planned with a view to reconfiguring mental health services provision. The council is also beginning to address health issues through its own plans. For example, the northern wards strategy identifies future actions aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles, such as a diet and fitness referral scheme and a community development and health course.
- 108** The council is working hard with its partners to deliver more integrated services. Work with the PCT to bring about the integration of social services and health is proceeding with positive support from the council. For example, the council chairs a joint scrutiny committee. In addition, the council is actively engaged in a number of health projects such as 'better healthcare closer to home'.

This project, which is led by the South West London Strategic Health Authority, is aiming to provide better access to the right sort of health provision for local people, with increased opportunities for health promotion and the prevention of unnecessary hospital admissions. Partnerships with other agencies such as Connexions and Circle Surestart are also leading to an integrated approach, for example, in meeting young people's needs for sexual health information and advice.

- 109** Council services are increasing their impact by working cross-sector to support healthier lifestyles. For example, the leisure and parks service supports a range of initiatives targeted at specific groups – such as the involvement of young people in sports programmes. The housing service is implementing its policy of re-housing homeless families in permanent and temporary rented accommodation rather than bed and breakfast, in order to ensure stability and maintain continuity in education and health support. The low crime rate referred to in the safer and stronger communities section of this report contributes to people's sense of well-being, including their mental health. The planned work in priority wards to improve the employability of young people also aims to contribute to their emotional and physical well-being.

Older people

- 110** The council is beginning to work with its partners on an overall strategy for older people. It is implementing some joint and targeted initiatives in addition to basic health and social care provision, but in many cases it is not yet able to demonstrate clear results. The council has plans in place to further improve its consultation with older people, to ensure it has meaningful engagement and to be clear about what are the most important issues to be addressed.
- 111** Older people are not specifically addressed in the council's corporate goals, although their specific needs are identified in some lower-level targets such as 'helping people to live at home'. However, as noted in paragraph 40, the latest version of the revised community strategy includes the new priority of 'valuing Sutton's older people'. Sutton has a higher proportion of older people than the London and national averages, with 18.7 per cent of the population over 60 (2001 census). Currently there are 14.5 per cent over 65 and 30.4 per cent over 50. Projections estimate the numbers over 80 will increase by 10 per cent during the next five years.
- 112** The current service focus for older people is primarily on health and social care, but the council is beginning to move beyond this by developing a more strategic, holistic approach. This is set out in the draft outline framework for an older people's strategy. The draft is sound and comprehensive and encompasses aspects of the national service framework. The council has also taken account of the guidance and advice from the Better Government for Older People in developing the strategy.

- 113** Until recently resources to develop the older people's strategy were limited. The council only allocates one person day a week from the service development unit. This means, for example, that the council has not been able to collect the necessary background data it needs - such as on the relationship between age and ethnicity. However, the designation of a strategy committee member as older person's champion is helping to raise the profile of developments in this area.
- 114** Consultation with older people within the borough has a sound basis and the council is taking steps to develop it further. For example, a consultation plan is in place that includes measures to involve and engage with 'hard-to-reach' groups, including older vulnerable people. The strong local voluntary sector is represented on the Sutton Partnership and includes a range of organisations representing older people's interests – such as, Age Concern and Sutton Seniors' Forum. These links provide a solid platform for consultation. Other forms of engagement are encouraged. For example, a user and carer panel of volunteers provides user monitoring and feedback on homecare services.
- 115** In working towards the achievement of a comprehensive and co-ordinated range of services for older people, the council and its partners are starting from a good base of core activities in health and social care. A number of initiatives using a multi-agency approach have been implemented. For example, joint referral visits take place involving fire, police, benefits and home care services. These services are undertaking joint visits and referrals to ensure that older people receive a fully co-ordinated service which has a strong emphasis on safety, including fire safety and fall prevention. Performance on supporting people at home is improving, and this is helping to prevent hospital admissions. Further support in this area is being given through the secondment of a care manager to a GP practice to help prevent hospital re-admissions.

Children and young people

- 116** Pupils achieve good academic results at the majority of schools in Sutton and ; overall their health is good. While arrangements for children's social care and protection are adequate, the council and its partners do not secure consistently good outcomes.
- 117** The promotion of healthy eating and physical exercise is good. For example, access to council sports facilities on the St Helier Estate is good. Health education in the Children's Circle Surestart and schools is good. Young people usually have ready access to high quality personal support. The follow up clinic waiting times after initial assessment to see staff from the core child and adolescent mental health (CAMHS) team is too long. Partnership work between children's services and the PCT in relation to the health of children looked after is good.

- 118 Arrangements to ensure children are safe in Sutton are adequate. Safety and anti-bullying initiatives are in place, the ACPC is functioning satisfactorily, and there are some good preventative services in the north of the borough. However, there are weaknesses in several areas which have been recognised by the council. There is inadequate criminal record checking of agency and temporary staff, inadequate support and training for case conference chairpersons, and both the timescale for compliance with initial and core assessments and the time to allocate looked after children on the child protection register to social workers are too long.
- 119 Sutton is good at helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve their full potential. Academic progress is good especially at the grammar and denominational secondaries but weak in about one third of primary schools and a few secondaries. Work with potentially disaffected pupils is good. Partnerships between schools, the council, colleges, and a range of other agencies such as Connexions are effective. This extends to special educational needs (SEN) provision, alternative curriculum at ages 14-16 and play opportunities for younger children in the most disadvantaged areas. The quality of nursery education is good. School attendance is better than in similar areas. Very few pupils are excluded from Sutton schools.
- 120 Provision to encourage children and young people to contribute positively within the community is good, and the youth service has been particularly effective in this respect. Children are well supported through the key transitions in their lives, but the transition from children to adult services for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities is unsatisfactory; progress to address the issue has been slow. Despite staffing difficulties the youth offending team is having success in reducing levels of offending. Re-offending rates for looked after children, are comparatively low.
- 121 The range of child care provision and support for younger parents to return to learning and employment is increasing. Education and training opportunities meet the needs of most learners although limited at entry, foundation and level 1 for post 16 learners. Arrangements between the council, the local college, training providers and schools for 14-16 year old pupils to follow a vocational career provide a satisfactory range of options. However, the strategy to co-ordinate education for 14-19 years olds is under-developed. Careers guidance is good. Alternative education provision before school leaving age is effective.

Appendix 1 - Framework for corporate assessment

- 122** This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 123** The main elements of the assessment were:
- a self-assessment completed by the council;
 - the council's improvement plan;
 - the Audit Commission's qualitative assessment of continuous improvement;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data;
 - inspection findings; and
 - the preceding corporate assessment and supporting documentary evidence.
- 124** The assessment for London Borough of Sutton was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 11 to 22 April 2005.
- 125** This report has been discussed with the council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the council.
- 126** The team leader for this corporate assessment was Bill Sanderson.