

Corporate Assessment Report

April 2006



Corporate Assessment

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

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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 seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

- 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 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. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report.

Executive summary

- 5 Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council has a strong focus on working in partnership with other organisations and groups in the borough to deliver real improvements in the quality of lives of its residents. Its work with the Trafford Partnership in developing a new Community Strategy *Trafford 2021: a blueprint* together with a focus upon performance management puts it in a sound position to go forward to achieve its ambitions. It is improving the way that it works in a number of key areas. But many of these changes are very recent and yet to have significant impact despite the early promise that is evident. The Council has taken steps to improve capacity in significant areas. These range from the appointment of a new Chief Executive to taking a stronger grip upon its finances, but capacity remains a crucial area for further improvement. Overall, the Council's performance is adequate.
- 6 The vision and ambitions for the area in the new community strategy are clear. They aim to create a thriving, prosperous and culturally vibrant borough at the heart of the Manchester City Region and celebrated as the enterprise capital of that region. The community strategy was launched as planned on 19 January 2006 following work by 11 theme groups. Action plans supporting the strategy vary in their detail across the theme areas. It is too soon to judge firmly the effectiveness of the new ambitions in the strategy. The Council's current Corporate Plan and its medium term corporate objectives have not been updated but plans are in place for their revision.
- 7 The Council provides effective community leadership. Partners report that this is an area of improvement and value the clarity that the Council has about its own priorities. The Council is adept at working effectively with the private sector to deliver significant projects that have benefited local communities. These relationships have been sustained through time and enable the Council to point to a considerable track record of achievement in creating employment and improving infrastructure. The borough is very diverse culturally, economically and ethnically. The Council acknowledges that it has more to do to ensure that all communities benefit from these initiatives.
- 8 There is strong political leadership from the administration and it has pursued its objectives determinedly. Although there are mechanisms for engagement between all the parties on the Council, opposition groups are not always formally represented on key bodies such as the Trafford Partnership. A more structured approach to councillor training and development is about to be launched.
- 9 The Executive Management Team provides a clear focus for leadership within the Council. The Chief Executive has had a considerable impact upon the organisation and is providing visible leadership to the officer structure as a whole. His plan to meet all staff in his first year is on course and his regular meetings with staff groups across the Council are well-regarded.

- 10 The Council is committed to ensuring that it focuses appropriately upon the service user's perspective. It has established various partnership bodies upon which users are represented. These can be area based, such as the Gorse Hill Transport and Community Plan partnership, or more service specific like the Older People's Partnership. The Council has invested in additional capacity to strengthen its approach to user focus and diversity, but is yet to fully reap the benefits of this investment. Trafford Direct provides the users and potential users of services with a valuable first point of contact for accessing Council services but the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) element of this initiative is yet to be fully and consistently realised. A community cohesion, equalities and diversity officer has recently been appointed and this is beginning to have an impact on the Council's work and processes. Producing a race equality scheme and engaging fully with the 'hard to hear' groups in the Borough are progressing but are behind schedule.
- 11 The Council's approach to securing value for money has been recently assessed by the appointed auditor as exceeding minimum requirements. This reflects the Council's low council tax coupled with its delivery of services that are at least adequate, if not better. Moreover, the Council's innovative work with a private sector partner has shown that it is serious about pursuing further improvements in performance, in the planning function for example, along with cost improvements. This partnership has already achieved its target level of savings (around £2 million) for the Council.
- 12 Overall, the Council performs well in the delivery of local services. But dealing with inequalities and their impact is an area needing improvement across all the theme areas. It has a significant track record in improving the local environment and economy. These achievements are yet to be matched in housing, particularly in relation to the amount of affordable housing, and transport. The delivery of safer and stronger communities is strong, particularly in relation to partnership working. Crime levels are falling but the fear of crime remains an issue. Community tensions are reportedly low and local partnerships are effective in promoting understanding and tolerance. Health inequalities remain an issue. There is a difference of ten years in life expectancy between the most and least affluent parts of the borough. The Council and National Health Service (NHS) partners locally have some effective arrangements to address these issues, but the Council acknowledges the need to further improve partnership working in this area so that it is as effective as partnerships in other priority areas. Older people's services have undergone and are undergoing considerable change and more action is planned to address older people's issues beyond social and health care. The Council has a significant track record of achievement in educational attainment for eleven year olds, at GCSE and A levels. In addition there is success too in improving children's performance between the ages of 11 and 14. But some services for more vulnerable children are inadequate.

Areas for improvement

- 13 The Council has challenging decisions to take in the near future, so that it is clearer about its own ambitions and prioritises its activities towards their delivery. To provide a firm basis for these decisions, the Council needs to revise its Corporate Plan in the context of the new Community Strategy and the developing Local Area Agreement, and to revise its Medium Term Financial Plan to clearly link resources to priorities. These key documents will then provide clarity and focus within the Council as to what its contribution to the delivery of the objectives in the Community Strategy will be, and how this will be delivered.
- 14 The Council has a number of significant strategies and plans under development. These need to be finalised as quickly as possible in order to provide greater clarity and certainty, both to the Council and partners. The Council and its partners needs to develop detailed action plans to support the success measures in the new Community Strategy. The Council also needs to be clear about how it will measure the impact of its actions in specific areas, and to ensure that this is built into the existing strong performance management arrangements.
- 15 The Council has already taken action to address the issue of capacity in some key areas and capacity is strongest within the Children and Young People's service. However, it needs to take action to ensure that it obtains greater benefit from the capacity that it has. It can do this by:
 - improving governance and decision-making arrangements in the Executive;
 - ensuring that scrutiny is enhanced to provide more effective and earlier challenge in policy development;
 - delivering its action plan in response to the District Auditor's use of resources work;
 - developing action plans to implement its *People Strategy*;
 - implementing a systematic councillor development programme; and
 - making sure that learning and good practice is shared consistently across the Council, particularly when generated through its work with external partners.
- 16 Beyond these specific actions the Council must ensure that it delivers on the plans and activities that it already has underway across a range of areas to address inequality and disadvantage. In particular it needs to:
 - finalise key strategies rapidly - particularly those that have been in draft for some time, such as the recycling strategy;
 - make rapid progress on transport and affordable housing;
 - measure the effectiveness of actions being taken to reduce health inequalities, and adjust plans and programmes where necessary;
 - support its planned work with older people beyond health and social care issues through completing its action planning; and
 - improve its provision for housing vulnerable young people leaving care.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	2
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
Overall corporate assessment score**		2
*Key to scores		
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 the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on 5 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

- 17 The borough of Trafford is located on the south west of the Greater Manchester conurbation. It is an area of stark contrasts, from the densely populated areas of Old Trafford in the north to the rural south and west. It contains the internationally recognisable homes of Manchester United Football Club, Lancashire County Cricket Club and the Imperial War Museum North. There is good access to important transport routes including the M62 and M60 motorways, the Manchester Ship Canal and Manchester Airport.
- 18 Overall the borough is relatively affluent and there is considerable economic activity. It is ranked 136th out of 354 in relation to the most deprived districts in England. However, this picture masks considerable inequalities: 16 per cent of the population of almost 213,000 in the borough live in the most deprived wards in the country.
- 19 There is a long history of significant economic activity in the borough. Trafford Park was established as an industrial park at the end of the 19th century and now provides employment for over 40,000 people. Manufacturing, engineering and logistics continue to be important but the focus is now on food, drink, paper and printing rather than traditional industries. Fuel storage and distribution facilities within the borough mean that it has strategic importance for the region. The Trafford Centre was opened in 1998 and is an important regional shopping centre.
- 20 Overall, the borough has relatively low levels of unemployment (1.7 per cent against a regional average of 2.1 per cent), free school meals among secondary school pupils (12 per cent against a regional average of 20 per cent) and receipt of benefits (12.2 per cent against a regional average of 15.8 per cent). But this picture masks significant inequalities of opportunities and life experiences that the Council has committed itself to address.
- 21 Approximately 13.1 per cent of the borough's population are from a wide variety of ethnic groups other than white British. This is higher than the regional comparison (7.8 per cent). The borough's black and minority ethnic (BME) population tends to be concentrated in the three most disadvantaged wards.
- 22 Educational attainment in the borough is the second highest in England. Levels of crime have fallen in recent years but fear of crime remains an issue, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour.
- 23 Housing costs within the borough are among the highest in the region (the average house now costs up to seven times the average income within the borough) and this is creating problems in some areas, particularly in ensuring that there is sufficient affordable housing for key workers.

The Council

- 24 The Council has 63 councillors representing 21 wards. Currently the Conservative Group has overall control of the Council with 40 seats. The Labour Group has 20 seats and the Liberal Democrats 3. The current administration was elected in June 2004.
- 25 The Executive consists of eight councillors drawn exclusively from the Conservative Group - the Leader of the Council, together with seven portfolio holders. The Executive portfolios are: Children and Young People's Services; Community Services and Social Care; Finance; Environmental Services; Technical Services; Culture and Communications; and Strategic Planning, Property and Prosperity.
- 26 There are four scrutiny committees chaired by non-executive councillors (three from the Conservative Group and one from Labour). These cover Education, Community, Technical, and Pivotal and Overview. The last deals with strategic business and financial issues. There are other committees dealing with specific statutory functions such as planning, licensing and public protection. There are also area boards for Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston. The area boards provide a forum in which local issues can be discussed but their format is under review as the Council considers the future of neighbourhood structures.
- 27 Executive Management Team (EMT) comprises: the recently appointed Chief Executive; the Deputy Chief Executive who leads on a range of environment, regeneration and corporate issues; and two Executive Directors responsible for Children and Young People's Services and for Community Services and Social Care. The Directors of Environment and Finance are also on EMT together with the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- 28 The Council employs some 5,148 people (excluding school based staff). It transferred its housing stock to the Trafford Housing Trust in 2005.
- 29 The Council's gross revenue budget for 2005/06 is £353 million and there is a capital programme of £45 million. The Council has one of the lowest levels of council tax in England and has a history of low council tax levels. Its scope to now increase council tax is constrained by the capping regime. The council tax increase in Trafford for the 2005/06 financial year was 5.49 per cent.
- 30 The borough's overall affluence means that it is not eligible for major funding streams such as the neighbourhood renewal fund. The Council's regeneration work is dependent upon its ability to work productively with the private sector to ensure that community improvements are achieved alongside commercial considerations. Its relationship with the private sector is therefore of particular importance to the achievement of its objectives.
- 31 The Trafford Partnership is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the borough and is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. The Partnership brings together representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and all are represented upon its Board. The Council is in the process of negotiating a local area agreement, with the intention this will be concluded by April 2006.

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

Ambition

- 32 The Council's performance in this area is adequate.
- 33 There are clear and challenging ambitions for the area in the Community Strategy - *Trafford 2021: a blueprint* (the Blueprint) launched on 19 January 2005. These have been developed in partnership with all key stakeholders, led by a revitalised local strategic partnership (the Trafford Partnership) after a comprehensive review of the state of Trafford. The Council revised its existing Corporate Plan in 2005 contributing to the development of the Partnership and the Strategy. It has yet to consider its own ambitions and revise its Corporate Plan in the light of the new Community Strategy but plans to do so in April 2006.
- 34 The Blueprint sets out the following vision for the borough:
- '...thriving, prosperous and culturally vibrant. A Borough at the heart of the Manchester City Region celebrated as the enterprise capital of the region and home to internationally renowned cultural and sporting attractions'*
- 35 The Council and its partners share clear ambitions for residents, businesses and visitors that support the vision for the borough. The Blueprint is constructed around four theme areas - live, learn, work and relax. In each of the theme areas a number of high-level actions and broad success measures are set out. Examples include *'Recognise and celebrate cultural diversity'* measured by *'Greater integration of confident, successful, diverse communities'*, and *'Achieve a better balance and mix in the housing market between availability and demand'* measured by *'There will be more affordable housing and fewer empty properties and better provision for older people'*. However, the partnership has not yet defined these outcomes in detail or comprehensively as a basis for measuring success, and has still to develop detailed plans to show how they will be achieved and what they mean for services delivered by partners.
- 36 The launch of the Blueprint displayed positive elements of community engagement and partnership working. It provided an accessible and engaging way of communicating with the audience and was well attended by partners who demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment to the strategy. Members of the Trafford Partnership are clear about their roles.

- 37 The *State of Trafford Report* agreed in November 2005 provides a clear, comprehensive and accessible analysis of performance and quality of life indicators. It provides a sound basis for a shared understanding of local needs among partners, against a backdrop of very good outcomes overall. It demonstrates awareness that narrowing the gap in areas of inequality is where the partnership's activities need focus. However, some partners are concerned that the Council does not always look below the headlines of good performance to see whether there is important unmet need. For example, although levels of education achievement for most children are high, for a small number of children, including looked after children, the arrangements for education are inadequate. Similar concerns exist in relation to employment, the economy, access to jobs and transport. The Council has not always recognised unmet need in its plans but it has recently committed itself to doing so publicly in the Community Strategy.
- 38 The Council has made good use of work to analyse local needs and identify strengths, areas for improvement and gaps in service provision in developing some aspects of its own ambitions, set out in the Brophy Report. In addition, as part of its Race Equality Scheme, the Council has undertaken an audit of the impact of current service provision on black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. This work has fed directly into the draft *Children and Young People's Plan*, which is currently subject to consultation.
- 39 The Council and its partners have a clearly expressed ambition in the *Economic Development Plan* of extending wealth creation further, based on an assessment of economic drivers in the region and joint working with key stakeholders. The plan sets out well the strengths, challenges and priorities for Trafford's economic development including raising Trafford's profile and reputation as a strong economic force and setting an ambition of becoming the 'Enterprise Capital' of the sub region. However, as detailed actions have not yet been worked out, it is not clear how realistic these are or whether some of Trafford's ambitions may clash with those of some of its partners in the sub-region although there is evidence from the Council's involvement in a range of sub-regional structures that potential clashes may not be significant.
- 40 The Council is an effective partner and has good relationships with the private sector. Given the Council's resource position, it has recognised at an early stage that maintaining and building on these relationships is very important to ensure that sufficient resources are available to deliver its ambitions. Key partners compare Trafford positively with other local authorities of whom they have experience. They state that the Council does not dominate local partnership bodies, and other partners play a leading role where appropriate. Better partnership working has led directly to improved outcomes, for example the Council being able to negotiate nomination rights agreements with registered social landlords (RSLs).

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- 41 The Council recognises the potential benefits from a strong Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA), and that its lack of involvement until recently has prevented it from fully benefiting from this partnership working. It has now become more active in seeking to influence key decisions to secure the full benefits of AGMA membership. Work such as preparing the Regional Spatial Strategy appears to have been effective, although this is yet to be signed off by the Government Office for the North West (GONW).
- 42 Opposition councillors' ability to contribute to effective decision making has been weakened as they are not given a place on all local regeneration bodies in the areas that they represent and there is uncertainty over the future of the Area Boards. The Council has invested in developing a Community Leadership and Neighbourhood Support File for councillors to assist them in delivering local leadership. This process has been consultative, involving both councillors and officers but the planned next stages involving residents and impact assessments are yet to happen. It is too soon to form a judgement on the effectiveness of this approach in securing visible improvements across all wards.

Prioritisation

- 43 The Council's performance in this area is adequate.
- 44 The Council's various plans and strategies do not fully align with the new Community Strategy and will not do so until it completes its next business planning round. The Council is actively progressing this work but current activity in priority areas to achieve this alignment has yet to have a consistent and measurable impact. Moreover the framework of council objectives and priorities is complex, being an amalgam of existing and developing priorities that are all still relevant to various parts of the Council's planning framework.
- 45 The Council has prioritised and balanced local priorities against the national shared priorities. Its current 11 medium term corporate objectives are set out in the Corporate Plan. These reflect national shared priorities as well as reflecting the clear local priorities set by the administration to deliver its key aim, '*To improve the quality of local services for all people in Trafford*'. These local priorities fall under five main headings: crime reduction; education provision; town centre regeneration; highways/pavements repairs and maintenance; and improving the performance of the Council. They provide a clear focus for corporate planning and performance management processes.
- 46 The administration took prompt action during 2004/05 to deliver its new improvement priorities, which included budgetary control and performance management. An example is highways maintenance; the Council has increased the budget and restructured the programme to address priority areas. Similar success has been achieved in tackling high spending on out of borough placements for children. However, while the Council has taken several short-term actions to deliver its immediate priorities, its track record on finalising significant long-term strategies is less persuasive - for example, in waste management.

- 47 Economic development and regeneration is a high priority and the draft unitary development plan (UDP) clearly sets out the Council's ambitions and priorities for the local economy, including developing the borough's main town centres, and a set of actions by both public and private sectors to achieve them. Major sustained public and private investment has delivered a number of clear and beneficial outcomes and improvements in the local economy. Further developments are planned with a total value of around £320 million. Some of these are already underway, although others are at the planning stage and the outcomes less certain.
- 48 The Council's approach to setting clear priorities for transport and congestion has been mixed. Priorities within the borough for transport and congestion are set through the adopted joint Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan (LTP2) and its supporting documents and strategies and reflected in Trafford's Economic Development Plan. Tackling congestion is a key aim for the Council. The Council's draft outline Transport and Road Safety Strategy attempts to consolidate LTP2 priorities at a borough wide level though this plan and associated targets need developing further to become a fully effective local plan.
- 49 Medium term financial planning is developing, but is at an early stage. The Medium Term Financial Strategy only dates from June 2005 and has therefore had a minimal impact to date upon the direction of resources towards priorities. It contains a useful analysis of the particular problems facing the borough, and has been helpful in providing a more detailed context in which to discuss the 2006/07 budget. However, the Strategy does not clearly set out how it assists the Council in the delivery of its priorities and is therefore of limited use in providing clear strategic financial leadership to the Council's activities.
- 50 The Council's capital strategy is adequate. It makes some links to the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan, but does not show fully how it will help to meet local and council priorities. The strategy includes broad details of consultation arrangements but these do not clearly indicate how major partners will have an impact on important capital developments. It outlines key areas to be taken into consideration when deciding on capital projects, including proposals in relation to a medium term investment strategy. A detailed project appraisal system was agreed in September 2005 to assist councillors to make decisions and ensure that capital investment reflects Council objectives. This was used for the first time in the 2006/07 budget setting process and its impact is yet to be assessed.
- 51 The communications strategy is comprehensive, concise and clear. It relates well to overall ambitions and priorities, and sets out clearly how and why the Council will communicate with its stakeholders. The planned actions within the strategy are very high level, for example to communicate in a clear and consistent fashion, to learn from feedback and ensure communications are part of performance management. Detailed action plans to show how the priorities will be met have yet to be drafted.

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- 52** The Council is not fully effective in its use of information and intelligence for regeneration activity, although it has given some attention to the issue. This shortcoming was identified in the Commission's inspection of economic development. As a result, its decisions in this area have not been based on the best possible information which could undermine the quality of decision making. The Council recognises this as an issue for partners as well as itself, and is working with partners to improve the use and sharing of information.
- 53** The Council is committed to addressing economic inequality and has taken steps to ensure that it uses its influence appropriately to target development and investment at those areas of greatest need. The developments around Salford Quays, Trafford Park and the Trafford Centre are examples of this; and future plans, which are not yet in the public domain, are consistent with this approach. But the Council has yet to develop a neighbourhood renewal strategy, although it has plans to do so. This weakens the Council's overall approach to addressing disadvantage. Given the Council's commitment to close the gap between the most and least affluent, this is a serious shortcoming.

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

Capacity

- 54 The Council's performance in this area is adequate.
- 55 The Council's capacity is mixed. It has strong political and managerial leadership and has significantly improved senior management capacity. However, scrutiny is only beginning to have an impact in examining the work of the Executive; its financial position is weak and the Medium Term Financial Plan is not yet fit for purpose; its human resources are not adequate in many important respects (work force planning for example); and councillor development is not adequate.
- 56 Political leadership is strong and has acted decisively in identifying and pursuing priorities, but at the cost of creating weaknesses in the way decisions are reached and their implementation monitored. The Executive's minutes show high levels of delegation to individual Portfolio Holders, for some quite major and strategic decisions and policies such as the programme of property disposals, but there is no evidence of reporting or monitoring the quality of such decisions. In addition the use of the procedures for urgent business for the Executive to formally agree decisions already discussed in the private briefing that precedes it reduces the transparency of the decision making process. Weaknesses in governance arrangements create risks to the Council's ability to deliver and demonstrate effective stewardship of public funds.
- 57 The Council has taken significant action to address shortfalls in senior officer capacity over the last year. This has included appointing a permanent Chief Executive and making other appointments in HR, Finance, Communications, Equalities and Diversity and Procurement. Although there is strong and positive evidence of the impact of the Chief Executive, many of the other appointments are recent and have yet to have a consistent impact.
- 58 Executive Management Team works well and provides strong managerial leadership. The effectiveness of this team has improved considerably over the past year. Decision making at this level is now streamlined and benefits from financial and legal input. Senior managers report that this team now works better. The additional capacity created through this team is enabling the Council's corporate leadership to fulfil its role much more effectively than was the case recently.

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- 59** The Council is very clear about its aspirations for developing leadership and leadership capacity within its management structure. A significant amount of work has already happened and a draft strategy is being worked on to bring together existing and new activity into a coherent approach. Increasing the effectiveness of leadership is recognised and understood by the Council as being crucial to its ability to harness its resources effectively.
- 60** The role of scrutiny in effectively holding the executive to account is limited. The minutes of scrutiny meetings show an emphasis on oral presentations with frequent requests for more information. Scrutiny is carried out late in the decision and policy making process, suggesting limited opportunity to influence it or to secure performance improvements - for example, budget scrutiny meetings in February. Several committees have lengthy and unfocused agendas, make few clear recommendations, and duplicate other work. There are, however, recent examples of effective scrutiny - the recycling review, for example - that have had an impact but these are not consistent. The Council is undertaking a comprehensive review of scrutiny. The weaknesses in the effectiveness of scrutiny mean that opportunities are being lost to secure better quality decision making through harnessing a wider range of knowledge and experience.
- 61** The financial position of the Council is adequate. It has historically set low levels of council tax, and has little scope to significantly increase the tax without breaching the capping limits set by Government. The District Auditor has expressed concern about the falling level of reserves and their use to support overspends (£12.6 million in the three financial years from 2001/02 to 2003/04). The Council has set a target level for reserves for 2005/06 (5 per cent of the non-school budget) based upon the Commission's assessment framework for CPA 2002 but it has now risk-assessed whether its strategy for reserves remains appropriate. It forecasts that it will have general reserves of £12.4 million, about £6.9 million above the target level at 31 March 2006. The risk assessment, coupled with the improving budget management, has put the Council in a better position to utilise surplus reserves in 2006/07 to pursue its objectives.
- 62** Responsibilities for financial management are clear and the section 151 officer has the opportunity to provide ongoing strategic financial advice to EMT and to policy development more generally. There is significant delegation to Integrated Business Units (IBUs) in Directorates and this ensures that financial management operates closer to operational decision making. The Council has significant actions to take in response to the District Auditor's use of resources work. It does not know if its partnership activity consistently has effective financial management; it does not review the financial performance of all partnerships (there are arrangements in place for pooled budgets with NHS organisations); nor has it mapped fully the partnerships within which it works. This means that the Council does not know if public funds are achieving the objectives set.

- 63 The Council's approach to financial monitoring is adequate with greater control now being exercised over finances. As well as routine monitoring by budget holders, the Executive receives monthly reports detailing areas of under and over spending, with supporting information including planned action. These reports summarise the outcomes of the individual meetings held between Portfolio Holders and Directors which focus upon finance and service performance. The recently announced financial settlement for 2006/07 is worse than expected. Spending pressures remain and the most recent monitoring report for performance in 2005/06 identifies a range of actions to address these. It also shows that service expenditure overall will be some £0.3 million below budget. Active budget management to avoid any overspending helps to prevent significant risks to achieving the Council's objectives and priorities, given the weakness of its medium term financial planning.
- 64 The Council has obtained additional capacity through the skilful use of external consultants. Their income is dependent upon generating cost efficiencies for the Council before their fee is triggered, ensuring that the Council has first call on the savings generated by their work. The learning obtained through the consultancy's work in areas such as planning is now also being deployed elsewhere in the Council to secure additional improvements in performance and cost reductions. The contract is continually monitored by the Council's senior management to ensure that additional work is relevant to the council's key priorities.
- 65 The Council's procurement strategy is weak. It proposes a set of clear ambitions to enable the Council to become more effective in the way in which it purchases goods and services. However, it does not set out actions clearly or include overall measures. This makes it difficult to see what the strategy's overall impact will be.
- 66 Important aspects of the Council's approach to human resource management are weak and recent improvements have yet to have a significant impact. The Council has only just agreed the people strategy and has yet to prepare detailed implementation plans. In some services, such as Children's and Young People's Services, it has improved capacity but in the absence of an over-arching strategy has not done so consistently. The Council has started workforce planning, but has not yet assessed its staff capacity against future needs (for example, one-third of the workforce will retire over the next 15 years). The Council therefore cannot be sure it has the capacity needed to achieve its ambitions.
- 67 The Council supports several initiatives to address issues of diversity and equality. However, it is not yet able to assess or demonstrate the impact of these initiatives on corporate performance around diversity and equality, nor can it point to improvements achieved for local people as a result. Lack of capacity in key areas has meant that the Council is ten months behind schedule in producing a new Race Equality Scheme, so is not meeting the legal requirement and is unable to demonstrate its commitment to addressing race equality.

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- 68 ICT and e-government are used well to support the delivery of priorities, and to deliver services in new ways. Efficiencies enabled through ICT have led to improved financial management, streamlining of services and more cost-effective procurement processes. The council is aware of the potential of ICT and e-government to further improve service delivery and innovation, and has plans to exploit this potential. Its investment in Trafford TV is a good example of this innovation. It is making good progress towards meeting e-government requirements and enabling more transactions to be done electronically, and has achieved or will shortly achieve national targets.
- 69 Councillor development is weak. Funding has been obtained to deliver training and development for councillors, but this is still at the stage of assessing needs. A councillor development framework has only just been developed. This work has been entirely councillor-led - to the credit of the councillors involved in taking a lead on this issue - and it is of concern that the Council has not supported this work. The proposals for a more structured approach will be piloted and voluntary, which may leave some councillors still not effectively developing the right skills for their role in a comprehensive and systematic way.

Performance management

- 70 The Council performs well in this area.
- 71 The Council's focus on performance management has enabled it to make significant improvements. Since 2002/03, 66 per cent of key performance indicators for education, social care, housing, environment, capacity and culture have improved. The Council has taken effective action to address areas of significant underperformance. In planning, for example, this focus has led to performance moving from the worst 25 per cent 18 months ago to now exceeding national standards in all three core performance indicators. Trafford Direct (the Council's customer service provider) has increased its performance in call answering and now has call abandonment rates that match the best performance in the private sector.
- 72 The Council approach to external challenge is good. It set up a Performance Improvement Board in summer 2004 with an external chair and with other external representatives. This was innovative and extremely challenging, marking a change in organisational culture. Benchmarking is an important part of this challenge process and led, for example, to an increase in investment to ensure that the borough has Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant road crossing. This new openness to external challenge has helped the Council to focus more clearly on improving performance.
- 73 Political commitment to performance management is good. As well as opening the Council up to greater external challenge, the Leader and Portfolio Holders have had a sustained focus on performance management. All Portfolio Holders meet with Directors on a monthly basis to discuss operational and financial performance using information generated from the Council's performance information system.

These meetings have led to the redirection of resources when necessary, for example in highways, and to improvements in operational performance in areas like recycling and the management of sickness absence. Sickness absence reductions are on target across the Council and in Trafford Direct, for example, rates have nearly halved.

- 74 Portfolio Holders are engaged and committed to improving services and outcomes for local residents. They use a range of methods to understand and focus on performance, including regular away days to discuss both the budget and performance, and joint away days with the senior management team. Portfolio Holders also engage directly with front-line staff to understand the operational requirements of the work they do, and gather feedback formally and informally from residents which they use to shape services. This focus by councillors is appreciated by staff.
- 75 The Council's approach to service planning is good. All services produce consistently structured plans that link clearly to the Corporate Plan. They evaluate previous performance and include detailed actions for further improvement. They form a sound basis on which the Council can further improve services.
- 76 Managerial leadership on performance management is good. The senior management of the Council meets as a performance board of EMT to focus upon performance against the corporate performance improvement plan (CPIP), LPSA achievement and the Council's beacon indicators. The CPIP contains 300 actions. The Council has delivered over 90 per cent of these on or ahead of schedule. The EMT Performance Board examines areas of poor performance, as revealed by monitoring information, to ensure that remedial action is planned or being taken. This process is very effective and has resulted in improvement in previously under-performing areas such as the preparation of special educational needs statements and environment services. The Board also considers areas of good performance to highlight developments that may provide relevant learning for other aspects of the Council's operations.
- 77 The Council makes good use of performance information to drive improvements and deliver real and sustainable improvements in performance. In social care up to date information is automatically loaded daily into a suite of performance indicators (known as the performance cockpit). This information has been used to redirect resources to address problems as they have emerged and before they become significant. A good example of this system is the Council's performance in dealing with the discharge of older people from hospital, which has resulted in the Council never being financially penalised for delays. The performance cockpit system is being extended across the Council.
- 78 Ownership of performance management is good across the Council. The Performance Champions' group provides an effective ongoing challenge across the Council in key areas such as communications and leadership. This ensures that effective performance is seen as everyone's responsibility, not just a management issue.

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As part of the Council's performance review and development process, every member of staff now has personal targets that are regularly reviewed. However, coverage of the review process is not yet complete, and its focus is on identifying development needs rather than on managing individual performance.

- 79** Scrutiny is adequate but does not focus sufficiently on value for money, nor does it contribute well to ensuring that knowledge about performance is used to drive continuous improvement in outcomes. There has only been one comprehensive discussion on PIs, when councillors felt overloaded with information; and the thematic committees tend not to consider the relevance of PIs to their work in any systematic way. Furthermore, few scrutiny committees actually published any findings until December 2005. These recent reports are good and have covered important issues such as youth nuisance and recycling, and have therefore – unlike previous work – helped the Council learn and improve. Proposed changes to Scrutiny are being consulted upon and have yet to be implemented.

What has been achieved?

- 80 Overall the Council performs well in this area.
- 81 The Council's current corporate plan and objectives reflect the previous community strategy and the impact of the five national shared priorities upon the Council's services. It plans to reformulate its priorities and the corporate plan in the next business planning cycle in the light of the new community strategy. Our assessment of achievement is therefore made in this context.
- 82 The Council has particularly focused upon the safer element of the safer and stronger shared priority. A lot has been achieved in this area, in terms of reducing overall crime levels, dealing with anti-social behaviour and addressing drugs issues. But fear of crime remains a concern to local people.
- 83 In children's and young people's services the Council has remained focused upon academic attainment and its schools perform strongly in national comparisons. However, significant areas of services for vulnerable children and young people perform poorly, including housing for young people leaving care. Major initiatives are underway in local service integration; the Children's Centre in Partington, for example, is already having an impact in an area of disadvantage.
- 84 The Council has capitalised on the considerable wealth and economic strength of large parts of the area, particularly through its attention on building and maintaining partnerships with the private sector. It has also focused on improving the quality of its open spaces and their quality has achieved national recognition. Although transport is a particular local priority as part of the Council's plans for reducing inequality within the borough, progress here has had less impact.
- 85 Achievement in the healthier communities and older people's shared priority areas has been mixed. There is strong partnership working in both areas, with both public and private sector partners. A range of initiatives has been launched to improve health but arrangements to measure their effectiveness are underdeveloped. Significant changes have been made to some services for older people, including implementing difficult decisions to close some facilities. Resources have been reinvested to help services better meet users' needs. But integrated service and delivery planning with health partners is not yet fully developed.
- 86 Progress is less marked and consistent in the lessening of disadvantage and its impact. The Council's performance is variable across the five shared priorities, and its areas of weaker performance (such as health improvement) do not yet match its best performance in areas of strength (such as educational attainment). Furthermore, within areas that are performing well overall, there are significant areas of weakness - for example, aspects of housing, transport and services for vulnerable children - which tend to most affect the disadvantaged sections of the community. The Council is clear about what it and its partners need to do, but detailed planning and implementation is yet to happen consistently in these and other significant areas, such as securing healthier communities.

This unevenness in performance could undermine the Council's ability to deliver its contribution to the vision for Trafford, ensuring that by 2021 all residents enjoy, *'the highest quality of life in a safe, clean, attractive and sustainable environment with an excellent education system and first-class services'*.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 87 The Council's achievements in relation to its ambitions for a sustainable economy and labour market are mixed. There is a strong, shared ambition expressed in the new Community Strategy for the area to become the Enterprise Capital of North West England and historically, performance has been strong. Developments at Trafford Park and the Trafford Centre have created thousands of jobs. However, the *State of Trafford* report shows that rates of growth in Greater Manchester as a whole are now exceeding Trafford's, and there are now 5,000 fewer people economically active in Trafford than in 2000. Nonetheless, VAT registration rates are still high and rising. Successful economic growth has resulted in increased traffic congestion and pressure on housing, especially affordable housing. Partners and the Council acknowledge that these pressures may act as a constraint on the Council's future ambitions if not addressed.
- 88 The Council has a strong track record of working in partnership to attract substantial investment from the private sector, and has made effective use of its own asset base to support this, for example at Sale Waterside. Its inability to access public sector funding streams has not prevented it from securing real improvements to parts of the borough through such partnerships. There are clear plans for each of the borough's distinct town centres, although some are more advanced than others. There has been better engagement with partners at a strategic level and agreement reached on a new economic development plan by the Trafford Economic Alliance (the cross-sector partnership in this area). However, as yet there is no implementation plan for this, so the Council cannot demonstrate how the plan will achieve its ambitions for the local economy.
- 89 The Council has made less progress in achieving its ambitions for ensuring all residents can benefit from economic growth and access the jobs being or planned to be created. The Council and partners acknowledge that much remains to be done to tackle the pockets of extreme disadvantage in the borough. The Commission's regeneration inspection found that the Single Regeneration Budget programmes (2003 and 2004) had mixed achievements, and that disadvantaged areas were not catching up with the rest of the borough. The absence of consistent progress in this area is a significant risk to the Council's ambitions.
- 90 The Council and its partners' achievements in housing are not consistent. The Council successfully transferred its stock of nearly 10,000 homes in March 2005 to Trafford Housing Trust, which expects to meet the Decent Homes target for this stock. However, partnerships in housing generally are weak; there is limited co-operation between housing partners; and the Council has lost key strategic personnel in this area.

Partnerships in housing are currently being reviewed to build upon the examples of successful partnerships used for Joint Commissioning and BME Service Improvement. The Council acknowledges that in 2004/05, stock transfer was the primary focus to ensure a smooth transition. Since transfer and under Community Services and Social Care, the team structure has been reviewed and focus given to priority areas of work. Homelessness is reducing except in BME communities (a trend seen nationally).

- 91 The shortage of affordable housing is a key priority and the Council is on track to meet its LPSA target on affordable homes but on current trends supply will not match predicted demand. It has secured £1.5 million from a regional allocation for developing shared ownership called Trafford Homestep. Affordable housing targets are set by the shared priority group at between 25 and 25 per cent against a Greater Manchester average of 25 per cent. Due to market conditions and high demand in the borough the Council recognises this target is challenging and this could take five years before outcomes are seen. The severe shortage of appropriate, affordable housing is a significant risk to the Council's plans across all its priority areas.
- 92 The Council is performing well in delivering its ambitions for the local environment. It has a strong record over several years of supporting and investing in its parks and open spaces, and the outcome of a pleasant, high quality local environment are recognised by local residents. Eleven of Trafford's parks have been awarded green flags, the highest number awarded for a local authority outside of the London area. The Council works well with local community groups on a wide range of environmental improvement initiatives, and successfully secures developer funding for such projects.
- 93 The Council has rapidly improved its progress to meeting recycling targets, through a successful contract with a private sector partner. It is on track to hit its stretch LPSA target of 19.8 per cent recycling this year. Informed by the GM wide strategy, the Council developed a draft Waste and Recycling Strategy during the summer 2005 to inform both short and longer term priorities. Having focused recently on delivery the short-term measures and recycling targets, a review of the strategy is now needed. The Council works well with local and regional partners to improve the environment. Examples include the PFI project for a new Greater Manchester waste disposal service which has been commended by DEFRA, the Greater Manchester campaign on climate change, a range of innovative energy-saving projects in its own and private sector developments such as the 'green' development at Stamford Brook.
- 94 The Council's success in achieving its ambitions for transport is mixed. There is poor air quality along the major roads (not uncommon in urban areas) and in the north of the borough, and growing concern about congestion problems at peak periods. Some parts of the borough are poorly served by public transport and this creates a barrier that prevents access to jobs, training and recreational activities which the Council and its partners are seeking to address.

The Council is aligned to LTP2 as the strategic transport plan for the conurbation and this contains clear, albeit very high level, objectives for securing expansion to Metrolink and quality bus and public transport corridors to improve public transport in the area. GMPTE are in the process of programming work to improve Metrolink stations and maintenance on the infrastructure. Though not required, the Council is also advancing its own local Transport and Road Safety plan to reflect elements of LTP2 and its associated targets at the local level and this is currently in draft form. It also does not have a clear strategy for increasing walking and cycling. The draft local transport strategy refers to plans to increase cycling and walking, and to develop School Travel Plans and Quality Transport and Bus Corridors. However, it contains no detail or targets for these areas and so it is unclear how the Council will measure progress and outcomes.

Safer and stronger communities

- 95 Tackling crime and making Trafford safe is a key priority of the Council, and is reflected in the new community strategy. Partnership working is strong in this area. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), now chaired by the local police commander, has achieved considerable success in tackling crime and disorder, but fear of crime remains high. The Council and its partners have adopted a new crime and disorder strategy which works well in bringing together strategies for tackling crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour and problematic drug use. The strategy includes challenging targets for further reduction in all categories of crime, and a commitment to undertake borough-wide research into fear of crime to enable more appropriate responses to this issue.
- 96 Achievement in crime reduction is good. Figures for 2004/05 show a reduction in all types of crime over the previous year. Contrary to national trends, violent crime reduced by 2 per cent, and the level of sexual offences remained unchanged. Trafford's reduction in acquisitive crime (such as theft), violence against the person and criminal damage compares well with performance across the North West. Reporting of incidents of domestic violence has increased, in line with aims in the previous crime and disorder strategy. However, the reduction in crime levels is not reflected in residents' fear of crime and perception of disorder is also above average, which together risk undermining confidence in achievements in this area.
- 97 Council activities contribute positively to the achievement of CDRP objectives. Examples include working with the police to target crime hotspots, resulting in reductions in targeting vulnerable older people at home, domestic burglary, juvenile nuisance and damage to public buildings, with no displacement of criminal activity to other areas. In response to residents' fear of crime, the Council with its partners has initiated a number of patrol days to offer public reassurance. Although such initiatives have led to a reduction in crime, neither the Council nor its partners can demonstrate any impact on fear of crime. In contrast, targeted work in a specific crime hotspot area led to considerably improved perceptions of the area, assessed by changes in the numbers of people wanting to leave or move into the area.

- 98 The Council, statutory and voluntary organisations are working together effectively to address anti-social behaviour. The Council is realistic about its inability to sustain a high level of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), and so seeks to limit their use, preferring to use acceptable behaviour contracts or dispersal orders. However, ASBOs have been used to good effect to tackle 'imported' crime by prolific offenders (40 per cent of crime in Trafford is committed by people who are not resident in the borough). Local businesses and residents are positive about specific initiatives, which have reduced anti-social behaviour and juvenile nuisance in their areas.
- 99 The Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) is exceeding targets for the involvement and retention in treatment of problematic drug users, and waiting times in the borough are below average. Consultation with local BME communities identified the lack of services for drug users in Old Trafford, which has since been addressed. The percentage of residents who think drug use or drug dealing are a problem is better than average. The Council has yet to finalise its alcohol strategy, but is consulting with a well-established forum of service users in its development. The Council has taken part in national initiatives around under-age sales of alcohol, leading to a 75 per cent reduction in such sales from targeted outlets. Residents' concerns about people being drunk or rowdy in public places match the national average.
- 100 The Council's planning for emergencies is adequate. It has an up-to-date major incident plan, outlining the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in responding to an internal or external emergency. There are also comprehensive plans to ensure the continuity of key Council functions including ICT in the event of an emergency. The Council's planning in this area is informed by its learning from real and simulated emergency situations.
- 101 Although cohesion is a key objective in the new community strategy, there is as yet no strategic approach by the Council and its partners to achieving it. The Council seeks to build stronger communities at local level by working with voluntary sector partners to address intergenerational issues, by building community capacity in less affluent areas, and by adapting approaches to work effectively in diverse communities. In general terms, residents of Trafford think that race relations in the borough have deteriorated, and a greater proportion of people in Trafford than in most boroughs consider that people risk attack because of the colour of their skin, their ethnic origin or religion. However, the number of reported racial incidents is relatively low and has remained steady since 2003/04. The Council took action on all reported incidents. Generally, community tensions in Trafford are low, and tend not to rise in line with national increases. This puts the Council in a strong position to achieve its ambitions.

Healthier communities

- 102** Health outcomes are improving in Trafford, particularly in comparison with the North West region. Outcomes are comparable to national performance in some key areas but they remain behind in a significant number of others. However, while the Council does much to address health issues generally, it has not yet adequately focused on health inequalities as a priority, which remains an issue for those from the poorest families.
- 103** The Council demonstrates a strong commitment to partnership working and has in place a number of effective partnership arrangements across Trafford's health economy. These partnerships work well in terms of developing strategies and plans specific to service development. A strong infrastructure is in place to facilitate partnership working on health issues. This includes the LSP, formal section 31 Partnership Boards, a Shared Priority Group, the Children and Young People's Services limited company board, and numerous officer-led subgroups responding to specific government initiatives. However, there is no overarching Improving Health Strategy or strategic forum to bring these separate strands together. As a result, the Council and stakeholders do not have a clear and shared vision for achieving healthier communities in Trafford.
- 104** The Council and both PCTs for the borough have set up the Healthier Trafford Partnership, and have jointly appointed the Director of Public Health. The partners have a good working relationship that has served Trafford well, demonstrating a clear commitment to improving the health of all communities. The *Public Health Strategy*, formally approved by the Council and both PCTs in 2005, provides a good analysis of the health data for the borough. But it does not set local outcome targets nor detail how the strategy is to be delivered. This makes it difficult for the partnership to drive forward the public health agenda.
- 105** The Council has longstanding partnership arrangements in place with regard to mental health, learning disabilities and the community equipment service. These are effective and result in improved services to users. Service improvement in Adult Services can be evidenced in a range of performance indicators, and further improvements are being sought, particularly in relation to primary mental health, disabilities and carers' services. A draft *Carer's Commissioning Strategy* is in place and is subject to consultation. It has yet to have an impact upon services provided by the Council and its partners.
- 106** Progress in reducing health inequalities has been mixed. The Greater Manchester Directors of Public Health have put in place an agreed action plan aimed at tackling health inequalities in response to *Choosing Health*, as well as gaining formal agreement from the Greater Manchester PCTs to ring fence the available funding in support of it. This supports the development of a more preventative service in Trafford, and the Council and its partners have worked effectively to develop a broad range of initiatives designed to bring about improvements in the health of local people. They are aware of the difficulties in measuring the impact of these and other initiatives.

Further work is planned to ensure that such information is collated and used both strategically and at a service planning level, but it is at an early stage of development. The impact of these initiatives cannot yet be demonstrated consistently and means that the Council and its partners cannot be sure if their investment is sound.

- 107** The national agenda arising out of *Commissioning a Patient Led NHS* is already affecting the Council's plans. The Council's senior management is taking a leadership role in ensuring that it has an early opportunity to influence the shape of these changes locally and promote the interests of Trafford's residents.

Older people

- 108** The Council has clear ambitions to improve services for older people. The new Community Strategy sets out a framework for delivering better outcomes for older people. There has been a series of engagement events and work with local organisations to identify a vision and priorities for the next three years. This work is detailed within the *Older People's Strategy* which is currently subject to wider consultation. The Council has recognized the importance of involving older people in decisions about the service they receive. A recently appointed Involvement Officer is already making an impact on the Council's engagement with older people, who are now actively involved in evaluating services. This evaluation forms part of the Council's performance management framework for service providers and has contributed, in the Council's view, to a significant reduction in complaints from users and carers.
- 109** The Older People's Partnership Board will work alongside the Older People's Local Implementation Team (LIT) which has already delivered improvements in a number of service areas, for example home care provision of equipment and waiting times for new care packages, and residential care. In the latter area the Council has closed some of its own homes and has initiated closer working arrangements with other suppliers. The closure process was effectively led, both managerially and politically, and provides a good basis for the Council to move forward with its plans for day care.
- 110** The *Older People's Strategy* clearly demonstrates the Council's awareness of the needs of the broader range of older people and demonstrates a commitment to listening to the community as a whole and to service users, as well as acting on their views. The priorities are outcome focused. They include key issues including making it easier for people to get out and about, providing more information to help people keep active and healthy, helping people feel more valued and safer through inter-generational activities; and supporting people to live healthier, independent lives. However, an action plan setting out delivery mechanisms with measurable outcomes for older people is not yet available.

- 111 An external consultant has recently recommended the Council to develop a Strategic Investors Group as a way of bringing more strategic oversight to current partnership activity. The Council and its partners have endorsed this proposal, since it recognises the lack of joint commissioning on services for older people. These developments are at an early stage and have yet to improve front line services. The Strategic Investors Group will also be tasked with developing Joint Commissioning arrangements across the partner agencies. Currently the Council has a single agency Commissioning Strategy for Social Care Services (including older people), which will provide valuable information for the development of its joint commissioning arrangements.
- 112 Good partnership working has resulted in a range of service developments that are bringing about improvements to the services offered to local people. Formal section 31 partnerships arrangements are in place between the Council and the local Mental Health Trust. These are resulting in a more integrated health and social care service for older people with mental health needs. The effectiveness of the Council's partnership work with the NHS in the acute sector is evident in the area of delayed discharged from hospitals. The Council has also worked effectively in partnership with alternative providers to increase the homecare market and develop a mixed economy, which is better tailored to individual homecare needs. Furthermore, the Council is looking to provide a more specialist service to meet the needs of its BME community. Users now have more choice and are receiving a more flexible service.
- 113 The Council has made effective use of Trafford Direct to improve older people's access to advice and information. Partners speak positively of the Council's approach, particularly a wide range of active community groups for older people (for example the Worthington Friends Group), which clearly recognize the Council's support for maintaining their community activity. The Council is improving the range and quality of its social care services for older people in consultation with users and providers. The development of a more community facing social care service is evident. But these improvements are yet to have a consistent impact for service users. Integrated service planning, delivery and information sharing are noted by the Commission for Social Care Inspection as areas for further work together with developing more ways through which older people can be supported to live at home.

Children and young people

- 114 For the majority of children and young people in Trafford services are good. Most children and young people have high educational attainment rates and access to a wide range of high quality education provision. Considerable progress is being made to harmonise working arrangements between key agencies to ensure that services are provided in integrated ways across the whole borough. The Children and Young People's Service is making effective progress in building structures to deliver good quality services to all children and young people in the borough. The partnership is setting clear priorities for action and there is good evidence of progress in most areas of service.

Examples of improved joint working include the strengthening of child protection arrangements since a previous inspection of social care services, and joint working to create a network of children's centres in the borough.

- 115** The Partnership Board is fully aware of identified gaps in some areas of service affecting a minority of the most vulnerable children and young people. However, the capacity of the Council and partners to improve identified services is good, with strong political and managerial support for continued improvement in these areas. There is a strong record of improvement over the past year or so and the trajectory of progress is in the right direction. The Partnership Board is taking a whole systems approach to both to planning and building capacity. There are good examples of services being provided at lower comparative cost but with improved outcomes for some children and young people.
- 116** The Council is acting as an effective driver to continuous improvement of children's services. It is working well with key partners, particularly the two PCTs. The strong base for partnership working could now be usefully extended, including the engagement of the police in planning and improving some aspects of safeguarding services, and in improving housing arrangements for some vulnerable younger people. There is also scope to sharpen arrangements for joint service commissioning and joint performance management. There are some very good examples of joint local working, including the establishment of eight Children's Centres across the borough. One such centre is already fully operational in Partington and an extended school project and children's centre will shortly be opened in Old Trafford.
- 117** Services to children looked-after, with learning disabilities and who are disabled are adequate and improving. But some aspects of housing are inadequate, which means there is insufficient suitable and safe housing for some young people leaving care. The facilities and accommodation for some groups of vulnerable children and young people are inadequate. The Council has substantially improved arrangements for performance management and case auditing in social care and education, which is now exemplary and has resulted in children being safer.
- 118** The Council shows strong political and managerial commitment to improving children's services. Agreed strategies and action plans to deliver services are joined up. But the understanding of Every Child Matters among all partners and practitioners is mixed. The Council and its partners are working well together to give children and young people a greater voice in the planning of services. The Youth Cabinet is doing an excellent job and councillors are performing their corporate parenting responsibilities well. As a fast developing area, both economically and demographically, Trafford has opportunities to build strong children's services with imaginative vision. The consolidation of the work of the Partnership Board with agreed joint priorities, resources and action supports progress to achieve improved outcomes for all children and young people in more consistent ways, including those who are susceptible to social isolation and exclusion.

Appendix 1 - Framework for corporate assessment

- 1 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.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 9 January to 20 January 2005.
- 4 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.