

Corporate Assessment Report

April 2006



# Corporate Assessment

**Brent London Borough Council**

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

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

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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 Brent Council is performing well overall. The Council is ambitious and is working hard to maintain community cohesion and improve quality of life for all its residents. It is realistic that it will take time to deliver the improvements communities' desire, but well-founded plans in areas such as regeneration add substance to ambitions. The Council is improving services well and consistently across many priority areas. Challenges remain to continue to improve the life chances for those in the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 6 Brent is an outer London borough which experiences many inner London problems. It is one of only two local authorities serving a population where the majority of people are from ethnic minorities. A more affluent North of the borough contrasts with the higher deprivation of the South. Overall the Council has a strong focus on meeting the needs of all its communities with an aim of ensuring everyone has a high quality of life and can fully participate in society.
- 7 The Council's ambitions are clear. It has made good progress since a period of instability during the 1990s and is now successfully turning its attention more to the needs of local communities and partnership working. Ambitions reflect residents' views and national priorities, for example the shift towards improving street cleanliness.
- 8 The Council's capacity to deliver its ambitions is generally good and is supported by a sustained focus on what matters. Spending decisions match priorities and are supported by robust financial management and good financial standing. In some areas plans are not underpinned by clear short, medium and longer-term priorities and this limits their clarity. Recent improvements in human resource (HR) management are encouraging, but gaps in strategic HR and workforce planning and development make it difficult to support organisational change.
- 9 The Council demonstrates strong community leadership through councillors, officers and partnership working. Councillors are very active in their communities, championing residents' concerns and acting as local ambassadors. Relationships with partners are strong, and this is leading to demonstrable improvement in outcomes across some of the local strategic partnership (LSP) thematic areas. Partnership performance management is recognised as an area for improvement, and is being progressed through a revised LSP constitution and local area agreement (LAA).
- 10 Political and managerial leadership is good. There is strong political and officer consensus on what matters most with an intrinsic emphasis on diversity and professionalism across all levels of the Council. Underperformance is seen as a collective responsibility and this is helping to improve services. However, there is scope to further strengthen councillor involvement in performance management and monitoring the delivery of strategies.

- 11 There is a good focus on users and equality. The Council supports local democracy and makes decisions based on good community intelligence. Good use is made of area consultative and service user forums, but there is scope to further improve local area consultation. Community cohesion is an important priority and is mainstreamed into service delivery, for example through regeneration activity. There is strong dialogue with communities and the attention paid to celebrating differences in the community.
- 12 The Council's approach to achieving value for money is a strength. It has successfully targeted investment in poorly performing services and has achieved notable improvements in service performance and outcomes as a result. The improvement in service performance has been achieved whilst maintaining relatively low costs and council tax levels. There is still scope to more consistently integrate resource and performance management data.
- 13 Good improvements in service performance are amongst the Council's achievements. There is a clear focus on the most deprived areas and addressing inequality, although outcomes in some areas do not match its ambitions. Linkages between ambitions and delivery, particularly action planning processes for crime and disorder and health, and in developing an overall strategy for older people are weak.
- 14 The Council has a strong approach to sustainable communities and transport. Regeneration activity has delivered good outcomes especially in its priority neighbourhoods such as Church End. Good progress is being made in increasing the numbers of decent and affordable homes. The quality of the environment is improving but often from a low base. Challenges remain including its strategy and outcomes for non-regeneration activity and limited progress in reducing the number of families in temporary accommodation.
- 15 Some progress is being made in reducing crime and improving community safety. Partnership working is effective, although revised performance management arrangements are still relatively new. There have been overall reductions in burglaries and motor vehicle crime, in the number of road traffic accidents and in the fear of crime in its priority wards. However, some plans are not clear, overall crime rates remain high and business and emergency planning arrangements need improving.
- 16 While there are strengths in the approach to develop healthier communities, progress has been slow. The Council and partners have achieved improvements in some areas such as cancer rates and heart disease. It has also been successful in promoting healthier lifestyles within its own workforce and within its schools. However, it still has some way to go though to develop an overall strategy.
- 17 The Council successfully delivers good social care services and other activities from which older people benefit. There is, however no specific co-ordinated coherent range of services with a focus on addressing independence and well being of older people across the borough.

- 18 The Council and its partners have achieved good outcomes in a number of children's services. This includes the contribution of services in helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve and to contribute to society. Challenging ambitions for children and young people have been developed and are set out in the draft children and young people's plan.

## Areas for improvement

- 19 Whilst the Council is increasingly turning its attention to partnership working there is scope to improve how it works with others to achieve its ambitions. The LAA should be used as a catalyst to streamline and strengthen partnership working. In particular, the Council could further improve its efficiency and effectiveness by exploiting opportunities through joint service provision, and enhancing joint performance management, risk management and information sharing arrangements. It should also review the effectiveness of working arrangements with the voluntary and business sectors to ensure they add sufficient value. These improvements will enhance the Council's capacity, by ensuring ownership of joint plans and the helping to translate strong leadership and working relations into measurable outcomes.
- 20 The ability to deliver strategic priorities is hindered by some of the Council's plans being either undeveloped or lacking clear targets. This means they appear as statements of intent rather than demonstrating clear measurable outcomes. The Council needs to improve the clarity of some short, medium and longer-term plans. In particular, improve action planning to better focus on measurable outcomes. This includes plans to address health inequalities, older people services, plans to improve anti-social behaviour and the homelessness strategy. The Council should also improve internal engagement and communication by strengthening staff upward feedback mechanisms and further addressing remnants of silo working which can lead to inconsistencies.
- 21 The Council is now addressing weaknesses in its corporate HR function but it will take time before it is sufficiently supporting organisational change. The Council needs to press forward with implementing a clear strategic approach to HR by implementing the new HR strategy and improving workforce planning. This includes adopting a more consistent approach to training and development, and ensuring it acts by example to promote equalities and opportunities internally particularly at senior levels and for teachers and thereby being more representative of the communities it serves.
- 22 There has been slow progress in developing a clear approach towards tackling health inequalities and this is limiting the Council's ability to make sufficient progress on narrowing health inequalities and health improvement. The Council needs to improve its approach by clearly defining how its role contributes to partnership working. This includes developing a set of robust objectives and targets which will be used to improve strategic relations with Brent teaching Primary Care Trust (tPCT). This will help ensure the Council makes a more systematic contribution to addressing health inequalities.

## 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	3
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
<b>Overall corporate assessment score**</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>*Key to scores</b>		
1 – below minimum requirements – <b>inadequate performance</b>		
2 – at only minimum requirements – <b>adequate performance</b>		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – <b>performing well</b>		
4 – well above minimum requirements – <b>performing strongly</b>		

### \*\*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

- 23 The London Borough of Brent is in outer London. Many of Brent's residents experience high levels of deprivation and this characterises the area as an outer London borough that faces inner London problems. The South of the borough is generally more deprived than the North.
- 24 The Borough's population consists of 267,700 people and is rising at a steady rate. Brent is one of only two local authorities serving a population where the majority of people are from ethnic minorities (55 per cent of the population are from black and ethnic minority communities). In addition, the population of black and minority ethnic heritage is growing faster than any other group. This rises to 74 per cent for children at the Council's schools. Over 130 languages are spoken with Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali and Urdu the majority community languages. There are fewer older people resident in Brent compared to national averages, with 15 per cent of the population aged 65 years and over compared to a national average of 20.7 per cent. The proportion of young people broadly mirrors national trends.
- 25 Of the outer London boroughs, Brent is the most densely populated, at 61 persons per hectare compared to an outer London average of 35.2 persons per hectare, and an inner London average of 78 persons per hectare.
- 26 Unemployment stands at 4.4 per cent and is above regional average. Overall, it is the 81st most deprived borough in England. Five neighbourhoods fall within the top 10 per cent most deprived in the UK, these being South Kilburn, St Raphael's/Brentfield, Stonebridge, Harlesden, and Church End. Extensive funding including neighbourhood renewal funding (NRF) and New Deal initiatives are being used in these priority wards to support regeneration. The unemployment levels in these wards are nearly double the borough average.
- 27 The area has good quality transport links both to central London and the rest of the country and has undergone significant regeneration in recent years. Central to this is the new Wembley development which will provide a new stadium and wider sports, leisure, cultural and local community facilities.

## The Council

- 28 Brent Council has been led by a majority Labour administration since 1998. There are 63 councillors operating within a leader, cabinet and scrutiny/overview model. There are 35 Labour Councillors, 18 Conservatives and 10 Liberal Democrats. The cabinet is comprised of ten executive members, there are separate overview and scrutiny functions, with overview supporting the development of policy to inform executive decision making. The area consultative forum structure is based on five localities and acts as a forum for residents' concerns and information on Council activities.
- 29 The Council employs 3251 full time and part time staff (excluding teachers). In the financial year 2005/06, its revenue budget is £367 million and its capital programme is £90.4 million. Brent has one of the lowest council taxes in outer London, £929.52 at Band D in 2005/06 compared to the outer London mean of £996.17. Only 3 out of 20 outer London boroughs have a lower council tax.
- 30 The Council's specific ambitions are set out in the corporate strategy 2002-06 which states the vision is:
- Brent will be a borough where all its communities enjoy a high quality of life and will be able to fully participate in society. Brent Council will have a reputation for good democratic accountable leadership, strong partnerships and excellent services. Brent will be a borough proud of its diversity, served by an ambitious, progressive and outward-looking council. Brent will be the home of choice for its diverse population and businesses.*
- 31 The existing corporate strategy is due to be revised once the new community strategy (2006-2010) has been agreed. The community strategy replaces the previous 2002-2008 community plan which has been refreshed earlier than planned following a review of the Partners in Brent local strategic partnership (LSP).
- 32 Partners for Brent is well established and the structure has been updated during 2005 to better take account of priority outcomes and the future local area agreement (LAA). The partnership now includes an LSP executive, a new public service board and the Brent community empowerment network. The Council with its partners has been accepted as a 'single pot' LAA planned for 2006 with the overarching aim to reduce inequalities and improving life changes in the borough. The Council has successfully attracted extensive external funding to support priorities including neighbourhood renewal funding to support regeneration in areas such as Church End.

- 33 The Council's local public service agreement (LPSA) covers a wide range of topics. Some, such as burglary reduction and the condition of highways, are immediate priorities for local people. Others, such as educational attainment in deprived areas and housing for homeless people, reflect the Council's wish to reduce social inequalities. Overall, the Council is making progress with most of the stretch LPSA targets although performance against the robbery target is less positive.
- 34 There have been significant changes to management structures in recent years including ongoing changes to take account of the new requirements for children's and young people's services. In addition, the Council's housing stock was transferred to an arms length management organisation (ALMO) Brent Housing Partnership in 2002. An inspection rated the service as Excellent with Excellent prospects for improvement.

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

### Ambition

- 35 The Council is performing well in this area.
- 36 Brent is an ambitious Council and has a well articulated desire to improve the area for all its residents. The ambitions have developed to reflect the significant progress the Council and partners have made in recent years. There is a strong focus on priority neighbourhoods, community cohesion and delivering high quality services.
- 37 An in depth understanding of the problems and opportunities Brent faces is translated into a clear set of challenging ambitions. These balance the needs of all sections of the community, for example regenerating priority neighbourhoods whilst striving for excellent services for all residents irrespective of where they live through initiatives such as improving the overall housing stock and ward working.
- 38 The Council demonstrates strong community leadership through councillors, officers and in its partnership working. The Council plays its part within the sub-region, as an active member of the West London Alliance using it to pilot a community cohesion pathfinder project. In addition councillors are very active in their communities, championing resident concerns and acting as local ambassadors. For example, it has taken a leading role in the high profile 'not another drop' campaign to address high levels of gun crime. The Council is further strengthening community leadership through the roll out of the ward working programme. This initiative reinforces local democracy and partnership working and is helping connect with the most isolated groups through a stronger focus on community engagement.
- 39 Strong internal and external leadership is shown in constructive partnership working. The Council whilst encouraging others to take the lead is often the main driver. A good example is its role in the redevelopment around the new Wembley stadium. The Council has effectively used its influence to lobby and gain buy in from major developers and local partners for a substantial mixed development. This is helping ensure the Council's vision is owned and communicated to key stakeholders and the community. Partners for Brent has good leadership with partners valuing the importance of both the board and its supporting theme groups. The Leader chairs the Partners for Brent LSP board, and the Chief Executive chairs the crime prevention strategy group. However, the ability to deliver some of its ambitions may be restricted due to capacity shortfalls with partners.

- 40 Realism is provided through a range of strategies and plans which are underpinned by sufficient capacity and strengthened performance management arrangements. These support wider ambitions to improve quality of life for residents through low levels of crime, healthy living, and improving life chances for children and young people. Councillors, partners and staff have a good understanding of these ambitions and are realistic that it will take time to deliver many of the improvements that communities desire.
- 41 This is particularly the case through the well-founded 20-year regeneration strategy, which focuses on diverse and deprived communities, aiming to reduce the gaps between Brent's most deprived communities and the rest of London, and address unemployment, and income levels. For example, a target by 2021 to have none of Brent's wards within the 10 per cent most deprived in the country, and supporting interim targets to move South Kilburn and St Raphael's out of this category by 2011. Realism is further provided through the crime, disorder and misuse of drugs strategy which has a target to reduce crime by 20 per cent by March 2008 compared to 2003/04. However, there is scope to further improve the clarity of long-term ambitions which underpin the community strategy (2006-10) and the corporate strategy (2002-06). This is largely in older strategies which are steadily being reviewed and refreshed.
- 42 A comprehensive approach to community engagement, based on extensive research and analysis is used to inform the ambitions. The corporate consultation strategy has been revised and reaffirms a commitment to strengthening local democracy. The Council has been instrumental in developing and sharing the effective community network website Brent Resource and Information Network (BRAIN) [www.brentbrain.org.uk](http://www.brentbrain.org.uk). The Council shares consultation information with partners and plans are in place to better co-ordinate this.
- 43 The Council has adopted a careful and considered approach to understanding the short and long-term needs of all its community groups and uses this information to inform service delivery. There is regular use of area consultative and service user forums such as those for black and minority ethnic groups and youth groups. For example, young people and families are involved in neighbourhood renewal housing projects. This ensures decisions are based on good community intelligence.
- 44 The clarity and accountability for delivery of partnership ambitions has improved markedly with the new community strategy (2006-10) and the 2005 LSP improvement plan. These enhancements ensure partners and the Council share a common purpose, for example working together to support community cohesion, establishing clear priorities to address worklessness and improving the quality of housing. This supports productive partnership working by providing clear, challenging, realistic and prioritised ambitions, for example, developing community leaders from BME backgrounds to support improvements in community cohesion and diversity. A LAA is to be established during 2006 and the Council is working ambitiously with key partners to ensure the agreement is fit for purpose, and that it addresses Brent's most pressing needs as well as providing a clearer focus for the Partners for Brent LSP.

- 45 Partnerships with non statutory agencies including those in the voluntary and business sector are broadly effective. There is active participation on Partners for Brent by the business sector and Brent association for voluntary action (BRAVA). A voluntary sector compact has been agreed and recently reviewed but there is scope for it to add more value. The Council encourages the voluntary and business sectors to give their views and supports them at all levels where possible. This is especially the case in locality based initiatives such as Stonebridge and Harlesden neighbourhood renewal areas.
- 46 There is a willingness to take difficult decisions whilst balancing competing demands in order to address areas in need of improvement. This includes positive work with communities to address residents concerns about car parking for the temple in Neasden, and taking unpopular decisions such as not funding Kingsbury Pool.
- 47 In addition, senior officer and councillors place a strong emphasis on diversity and professionalism and this permeates across all levels of the Council. Addressing underperformance is seen as a collective responsibility and has led to significant improvement across many services, for example, working with the contractor to improve environment performance and improving the star rating for social services.

## Prioritisation

- 48 The Council is performing well in this area.
- 49 The Council is successfully focused on what matters for local people and has not been distracted. There is strong political and officer consensus on what matters most and this ensures a focused and proportionate approach to improving services which is closely aligned to partners' ambitions set out in the community strategy. This is underpinned by a strong regeneration strategy which is fundamental to addressing deprivation in parts of the borough.
- 50 The corporate strategy (2002-2006) sets out five priorities which are given equal importance, these are:
  - Supporting children and young people;
  - Promoting quality of life and the green agenda;
  - Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods;
  - Tackling crime and community safety; and
  - Achieving service excellence.
- 51 These priorities link well to the community strategy, for example the focus on regeneration, community safety, and improving the quality of the environment. Whilst the corporate strategy priorities have remained constant, the emphasis within them has shifted to respond to Council, resident and partner concerns.

This is illustrated by the change in focus from improving core services such as social services during 2002/03 to a recent move towards the public realm agenda in particular street cleanliness, sport and leisure and also the children's and families agenda.

- 52 A rigorous prioritisation process directly supports this investment in priority areas and is helping improve quality of life and supporting children and young people. Central to this is an annual budget process which uses challenging officer/Councillor away days to focus investment in priority service areas, for example, targeting additional funds to improve the cleanliness of streets. This approach ensures priorities are reviewed, updated and reflect the views of partners, residents' and national priorities.
- 53 There is a well planned approach to match resources to priorities to eliminate unnecessary spending. The priorities are used to establish spending and resource allocation decisions. A three-year financial strategy is linked to key strategic objectives and this ensures that there is a clear link between financial planning, Council priorities and the delivery of three-year service development and operational plans.
- 54 The prioritisation process is helping the Council target additional resources at priorities. This includes supporting year on year increases in funding for social services and education since 2002/03 and in 2005/06 allocating £3.3 million of funding for improvements to street cleaning, recycling, pavements, roads and parks. Also £10.8 million revenue and almost £16 million for capital works is being used to support education priorities.
- 55 The Council is also funding improvements in the way it works with investment in staff training and development as well as more localised initiatives to reflect residents' views and support diverse communities such as funding neighbourhood wardens to improve fear of crime, addressing affordable housing in South Kilburn and Wembley, and targeting underachieving black young people at school. However, the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) does not sufficiently address joint plans with partners which limits the clarity of partners' contributions.
- 56 There is a good planning framework to support priority areas with particular strength in plans seen as critical to achieving the ambitions. Well founded three-year service development plans (SDP) and supporting operational plans translate the ambitions and actions into a deliverable framework which links back to councillor priorities and the MTFS. These generally have SMART targets which are outcome based. Examples include the Improving Brent action plan 2004/06, the regeneration strategy, the supporting people strategy and private sector housing strategy. A draft children and young people's plan is due to be in place by April 2006. This clarity helps direct resources to improve key priorities.

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- 57** However, some action plans and strategies are either undeveloped or lack clear targets and appear as statements of intent rather than demonstrating clear measurable outcomes. Whilst this is a weakness it is generally not in key priority areas. Gaps in plans to address health inequalities, older people services, the homelessness strategy and plans to improve anti-social behaviour limits the ability of some services to clearly define resource requirements, milestones and target outcomes.
- 58** There is good involvement of stakeholders in service planning. This is stronger in areas characterised by locality based initiatives, for example in neighbourhood renewal areas (NRF) but there is generally a good awareness of the needs and wants of local communities. This was further strengthened during 2004 through the ward working programme. In 2005 the Council's own resident satisfaction survey found 61 per cent of residents felt well informed by the Council (up from 55 per cent in 2003/04).
- 59** Councillors, staff and partners have a clear understanding of the priorities. The leader and chief executive hold corporate strategy road shows in each service to up-date staff on priorities, performance and ambitions. Internal briefings such as Insight and core briefing are well regarded. The Council is working hard to sharpen its approach to communication and consultation with a new consultation strategy now developed. This aims to improve upward feedback and further address some remnants of silo working in the Council that leads to some inconsistencies in engagement and communication.

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

### Capacity

- 60 The Council is performing well in this area.
- 61 Officer and councillor working is effective. Roles and responsibilities between councillors and officers are clearly understood. There is a deep rooted and productive emphasis on working together, having open debate, and upholding professional standards. This is exemplified by the unified approach to service improvement taken by the chief executive and the leader. These standards are well supported by decision making processes which are clearly set out in the constitution and are understood and adhered to.
- 62 Executive councillors reflect the community they serve and act well as the local face of services. Councillor development is good, supported by an effective personal development and review process. However, not all political parties are sufficiently engaged and this potentially limits the ability for all residents to be fully represented in the democratic process.
- 63 Decision making is open and transparent. Executive and area consultative forums are open to the public and questions are encouraged within a structured process leading to effective decision making. The Council's approach to overview and scrutiny has a number of strengths including the overview committee, performance and finance select committee, and supporting task groups that provide internal challenge. These meetings are well chaired, supported by officers and address priority issues. There are good examples of impact in terms of policy development in waste management and health scrutiny work on tuberculosis. However, a small part of the overview and scrutiny process, namely the scrutiny panels is not sufficiently contributing to service improvements and would benefit from more consistent officer support and more focused agendas. In addition, there is scope to improve councillor involvement in high profile preliminary discussions.
- 64 Strong and very well regarded leadership is exercised by the chief executive and corporate management team (CMT) and staffing capacity overall is good. The Council has changed dramatically in the past few years and it has successfully taken staff with them. Staff surveys confirm good morale and a commitment to working for the Council. The workforce is stable with the Council regarded as a listening organisation and a good place to work. Staff management and development training is extensive, with 90 per cent of all managers having completed a senior managers development programme.

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- 65** Sickness absence has improved markedly with a significant fall in the number of days lost due to sickness absence from 11.4 in 2002/03 to 7.3 in 2004/05, achieving best quartile position. The Council was awarded a work-life balance award in 2005, and encourages flexible working where possible. Staff see flexible working as contributing to service improvements for example in the staffing of one stop shops.
- 66** While the Council has been slow to address weaknesses in its corporate human resources (HR) function this is not standing in the way of good HR outcomes and is not impacting on service improvement. External support has been used to produce a new strategy and it is working hard to implement a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to HR and workforce planning. In addition, training is not fully supporting corporate priorities with some examples of different sections taking their own approach. These issues are important as without a clear strategic approach to HR and workforce planning and development it will be difficult to support organisational change.
- 67** Overall the Council workforce broadly reflects the ethnic background of its highly diverse communities, particularly for staff in front line services. The Council openly values diversity and is committed to equal opportunities, including establishing four diversity staff forums. The Council recently achieved level two of the equalities standard and is aiming for level three by September 2006. There is steady progress to increase the level of BME staff and women in senior management positions, but it could still do more to promote equalities and opportunities internally, for example the number of BME teachers.
- 68** The financial capacity and financial management of the Council are good. Brent has relatively low levels of resources and works well within them. There is an effective risk based strategy for using resources. Councillors are well aware of the need to be mindful of committing the Council to contracts and strategies that could harm its financial health. In a similar fashion, the primary consideration for the capital programme is that it has to be affordable. Brent has used its prudential powers but has ensured this is affordable and the revenue consequences are fully allowed for in the MTFS. Levels of reserves are rising following a period where they were classed as not being at an adequate level. Brent is able to attract considerable external funding as a result of high levels of deprivation, including NRF monies and is using this to effectively support priorities. This includes approximately £33 million in regeneration funding in 2004/05.
- 69** The Council performs well in terms of achieving good value for money. It has successfully targeted investment in poorly performing services and has achieved notable improvements in service performance and outcomes as a result. The improvement in service performance has been achieved whilst maintaining relatively low costs and council tax levels.

- 70 Risk management arrangements are delivering positive outcomes and continuing to improve. The risk management strategy has been in place for more than a year and is becoming embedded as part of the service development plan process. The risk register is now used, updated and monitored and for example, monthly monitoring by the strategic finance group takes place of financial hot spots. The risk management process is less explicit in terms of partnership risks.
- 71 Brent is at a relatively early stage of implementing a strategic approach to procurement and managing its assets and is currently revising procurement practices in order to standardise its approach to major procurement. The Council adopts a mixed economy approach and can point to examples of using procurement practices to deliver improved value for money including delivering £1 million savings through a review of the social services homecare contract and joint work with the West London Alliance (WLA) to make savings on stationery orders. There are examples of joint service provision of assets or services, for example trading standards and adult mental health services, but the Council is not utilising all available opportunities to enhance its capacity.
- 72 ICT and e-government resources are effectively supporting service delivery, with staff confident that IT is improving. The Council is making good progress on e-government, and is in the best quartile in the percentage of its interactions with the public which are capable of electronic service delivery. It is innovative in its approach, for example the BRAIN website and there are good examples of ICT helping to support diverse groups including work with the WLA to improve website accessibility for people not using English as a first language. The Council has six one stop shops that, with a contact centre, provide good access, high service standards and a good range of relevant information.
- 73 The Council works well with partners to enhance its capacity. This includes maximising opportunities for local residents through the Wembley regeneration which includes £21 million community gain with £9 million for a new school, a new healthy living centre and rail/underground station improvements. Relationships with partners are strong and this is supported by the recent LSP 'green' rating which confirms demonstrable improvement in outcomes across most thematic areas. The Council has developed a revised LSP constitution and is strengthening opportunities for partnership working through the LAA, though it is too soon to assess the outcomes from this as yet.

## Performance management

- 74 The Council is performing adequately in its approach to performance management. Brent is making good progress towards being a performance driven organisation. The Council has shown a sustained commitment to developing a stronger, more inclusive approach to owning, managing and monitoring performance at all levels over the last three years. These changes have resulted in tangible improvements to a number of services.

**22 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 75** There is a clear emphasis across departments on setting challenging performance targets and more consistently tackling under performance. While there is still some way to go, the Council has been largely successful in instilling the right cultures and values rather than solely implementing systems which are not effectively used. This has led to performance management being at the heart of decision making and is helping drive achievement of priorities.
- 76** The improved approach to performance is yielding satisfying results. Officers and councillors work well together illustrating a collective responsibility to improve performance by offering corporate support and intervention where necessary. This includes the improvement board, the strategic performance group and bringing under performing areas under special measures. These have driven noticeable improvements in performance in revenues and benefits, and waste management. Perhaps most notable of all is the strong rise across performance indicators, with an overall 79 per cent improving between 2002/03 and 2004/05. The clear emphasis on working together to address areas in need of improvement is driving up service performance and helping the Council meet its priority of achieving service excellence.
- 77** Comprehensive performance management reports are regularly produced and used effectively at different levels across the Council. Progress against targets is regularly monitored by various officer and councillor groups. The improving Brent monitoring report demonstrates that the Council is making good progress across the range of services, using traffic light analysis and developing clear plans for areas rated as red. The Council monitors 60 critical service indicators through the 'vital signs' report and councillors are actively involved in monitoring performance through the executive, scrutiny, task groups and their portfolio responsibilities. Many executive councillors have a good understanding of their role in monitoring performance although their roles are less developed in managing performance and improving value for money of services.
- 78** The Council effectively uses knowledge and information to drive up performance. There is constructive use of consultation, user satisfaction information, and complaints data to review and improve service performance, although it could be more extensive. This is used to influence policy such as the introduction of the big clean up campaign following user dissatisfaction with street cleanliness.
- 79** The Council seeks to learn from good practice externally and targets additional support to areas in need of improvement, for example on bottom quartile performance indicators. This demonstrates a constructive use of information in order to learn and reflects a high degree of self awareness. To date external challenge has been used to initiate improvements to performance management in partnerships, address previously slow progress to improve strategic human resources and tackle underperformance across waste management. Limited use is, however made of trend analysis and benchmarking.

- 80** Reporting of performance is open and transparent. Meetings invite public participation, there is a good range of Council newsletters including the widely distributed Brent magazine, the website is well regarded, and customer feedback is prominently displayed in the one stop shops. The Council is aware of the need to improve its image and establish a consistent corporate identity and further improve how the website is managed. Overall this shows that sharing performance information is an integral part of how the Council works.
- 81** Financial management is good and well embedded. Budget monitoring at service level is comprehensive, with the strategic finance group (SFG) having a prominent role in reviewing whether savings have been achieved. Any variances in budget are addressed effectively, such as a social service over spend in 2002/03. There is also effective financial monitoring through executive and the performance and finance select committee. In total there are approximately 30 key indicators agreed with councillors that drive the budget and these are set to reflect key priorities. There is still scope to more consistently integrate resource and performance management data. This is important so that resources follow priorities in securing value for money as well as improved performance.
- 82** A strong service and business planning structure is in place, with a standardised process to inform three-year service development plans, linked to annual service and individual staff development plans. Target setting is based on a good balance between national and local indicators and is in line with its stated community priorities. There is an employee performance and development scheme, with an emphasis on setting measurable targets to ensure that performance management is integral to how staff work, for example, developing appropriate leadership skills for middle managers. Challenges remain in terms of achieving consistently robust SMART action planning to support delivery of priorities and successfully implementing a bespoke IT system as part of the next stages of performance management.
- 83** Corporate performance management arrangements are supported by a comprehensive training toolkit. This provides a clear framework to assist staff and managers deliver stronger and more consistent performance management. However, the current approach is heavily reliant on bespoke training and support from corporate policy officers. While the Council believes that a one size fits all approach to improving performance management would not be appropriate this could limit the ability to consistently improve performance management across services.
- 84** There is a well publicised, user-focused and supportive system for service users and staff to submit complaints. There have been good reductions in overall service user complaints to a current lowest figure in six years, and improvements in complaint handling acknowledged by Ombudsman. There is still scope for further improvements including satisfaction with complaint handling.

**24 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 85** Arrangements for partnership performance management continue to develop. The Council is building on the 'Green' rating for the performance of the LSP by Government Office and there are signs of continuing improvement with the LSP improvement plan strengthening accountability and ownership across areas such as worklessness and housing. In addition, there are enhancements to how the crime and disorder partnership is managed and also changing the focus of the children and young people's strategic partnership board. Some information is routinely shared with partners but could be more systematic.
- 86** The Council is working through the local public services board to support the new performance management and monitoring framework for the LSP. It is also using the LAA as a key driver to strengthen performance management arrangements and is developing a partnership action plan to enable better comparison and evaluation of shared processes, costs and outcomes. This is an important development if the Council and its partners are to be in a better position to proactively compare and evaluate their contributions and achieve shared priorities set out in the community strategy.

## What has been achieved?

- 87 Brent is performing well overall, with achievement most apparent in key priority areas, regeneration being a particular strength. Its local priorities are in line with national priorities with an ambition to improve the quality of life for residents.
- 88 The Council has a clear focus on the most deprived areas and is successfully addressing inequality, through for example, increased employment rates for people with disabilities, and those from black and ethnic minority communities. It manages to balance its attention on priority neighbourhoods with a drive to deliver high quality services to all residents irrespective of where they live. This is supported by the 79 per cent improvement in performance indicators between 2002/03 and 2004/05, a quarter of indicators are now in the best quartile, but just over half remain in the lower two quartiles.
- 89 The Council has a strong approach to sustainable communities and transport. It has an ambitious vision for regeneration which has delivered good outcomes especially in its priority wards. It has been successful in promoting employment opportunities, and has increased the numbers of decent and affordable homes. Outside of regeneration and the priority neighbourhoods, Council services are improving in areas the public say are important, it is improving the quality of the environment from a low base, delivering a successful ward working initiative, and increasing the use of public transport. The Council has made less progress on reducing the number of families in temporary accommodation.
- 90 The Council is working well with its partners on its ambitions to build safer and stronger communities and is showing signs of making an impact to change the perception that it is a high crime area. Community cohesion is well-founded and incorporated into service delivery and there have been overall reductions in burglaries and motor vehicle crime, in the number of road traffic accidents and in the fear of crime in its priority wards. However, its plans in some areas are not sufficiently clear, violent crime remains high and business continuity and emergency planning arrangements require improvement.
- 91 There are several good examples of the Council and its partners' contributing to promoting healthier communities. It has achieved improvements in areas such as cancer rates and heart disease, and it has been successful in promoting healthier lifestyles within its own workforce and within its schools. It still has some way to go to develop an overall strategy.
- 92 The Council delivers good social care services and other activities from which older people benefit. As yet there is no specific co-ordinated coherent range of services with a focus on addressing independence and well being of older people across the Borough.

- 93 The Council is performing well in meeting the needs of children and young people. Historical under funding has been addressed and challenging ambitions for children and young people are clearly set out in the draft children and young people's plan. Particular strengths are the contribution of services in helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve; good outcomes to secure the health of children and young people; and allowing children make a positive contribution to society.

## Sustainable communities and transport

- 94 The Council has achieved well in this area. It has been successful in promoting employment opportunities, increasing the numbers of decent and affordable homes, improving the quality of the environment, increasing the use of public transport and reducing road accidents.
- 95 It has a clear and robust vision for regeneration, and with its partners has made good use of current opportunities from the Wembley redevelopment and other initiatives. The Council is maximising opportunities for local residents and the sub-region through the Wembley regeneration with £21 million community gain including £9 million for a new school, a new healthy living centre and rail/underground station improvements. The Council is now correctly looking to encourage the growth of jobs in the future both in Wembley and in the Park Royal Industrial estate. This includes targets to create over 20,000 new employment opportunities in Wembley by 2021, of which at least 50 per cent will be filled by local people.
- 96 The Council is working well in partnership with its business and community partners to remove barriers to work with priority given to the most deprived areas. Since 2002 over 2,000 local people have been employed in sustainable jobs through Brent in2 Work, and other Council funded initiatives such as the building one stop shop (BOSS) and Refugees into Jobs. It has successfully increased the employment rates for its diverse and disadvantaged communities with over 66 per cent of the sustainable jobs filled by the BME community. The Council has put in place good mechanisms to address the high levels of worklessness but it needs to develop further with its partners plans for 14 to 19 training in order to ensure local people can take advantage of jobs in the future.
- 97 Outside of regeneration, Council services are improving in areas the public say are important. It effectively balances the needs of communities across the whole of the Borough, for example successfully addressing environmental quality through the big Brent clean up campaign and improving recycling from a low base. The Council has also strengthened its approach to town centre management which is resulting in some improvements such as an improved street scene better shops and a developing café culture in Harlesden although it has no overarching strategy as yet.

- 98 The Council makes good use of a wide range of consultation processes. It effectively liaises with a variety of groups to take account of a diverse range of opinions and aspirations in the development and implementation of its ambitions. It makes good use, for example, of area consultation forums to hold the Administration to account for its activities.
- 99 The Council has robust plans for housing which support its community strategy, and its regeneration plans. The housing strategy and business plan are fit for purpose and the ALMO is a three-star excellent performing housing management service. The Council is on track to meet the decent homes standard across all tenures.
- 100 It is also working well with partners to improve the overall housing stock including improving private sector properties and to support disabled people to live autonomously their own homes. The Council works well at a sub regional level and has exceeded the London Plan targets for delivering numbers of affordable homes. There is good joint working with the private sector and RSLs, such as on the Chalkhill estate which has been successfully regenerated.
- 101 The Council has a firm commitment and strong plans to meet the Government target of a 50 per cent reduction by 2010 although as yet it has made only limited progress in reducing the number of families in temporary accommodation.
- 102 The Council's good progress in improving environmental quality is reflected in the most recent residents' survey findings. Levels of recycling are improving and are in the second quartile for 2005, but standards of cleanliness are in the worst quartile. Recent unaudited performance data show improvements in waste collection, recycling and street cleanliness. The Council is working well with the main environmental contractor to improve performance across the entire Borough, with positive initiatives such as the big Brent clean up campaign and the ward working pilot helping raise awareness and commitment to waste minimisation and recycling.
- 103 The Council is preparing effectively for the renewal of the waste management contract although it has not addressed all risks which may affect the sustainability of future improvements.
- 104 The Council works effectively to create and maintain good quality parks, a number of which are green flag accredited. Mapesbury Dell is a good example of the way the Council works to deliver a sustainable small local park. The Council is acutely aware of the important role of parks in improving health, and addressing community safety and has supported them through schemes such as the roll-out of park wardens.
- 105 The Council has a well supported and ambitious transport strategy. It works well at a sub regional and regional level with partners to deliver its transport ambitions and support sustainable communities. Public transport links in the borough have improved, including linking people with health facilities and jobs such as the Park Royal industrial estate. Bus usage has increased as a result.

- 106 The Council has been successful in using its planning powers to secure investment for improvement of roads and pavements especially in its regeneration areas although this has not yet led to an overall improved performance in road maintenance.
- 107 The Council has worked effectively in partnership in reducing road accidents through paying attention to infrastructure and design as well as addressing road safety in schools and supporting cycle proficiency.

## Safer and stronger communities

- 108 The Council is working well with partners to make a positive contribution to an area characterised by pockets of high crime and is making a clear impact in some areas. A range of high profile initiatives is helping reduce fear of crime in priority wards, the LPSA target for burglaries is likely to be achieved, with a 12 per cent fall in the last two years, and there are also falls in theft of and from motor vehicles. In addition, recent initiatives place the Council in a better position to address crime and the fear of crime, for example, the roll-out of ward working is addressing fear of crime by improving the street scene including better removal of abandoned vehicles.
- 109 The Council effectively contributes to partnership working through the ambitious Brent crime, disorder and misuse of drugs strategy. There is an explicit focus on reducing crime and the fear of crime as it is a high priority for local people. The strategy is based on good engagement with communities and there are good links to corporate and community strategies and longer-term Council objectives such as the approach to regenerating communities, improving the cleanliness of streets and the LAA. The Council communicates well with local residents on safety concerns using initiatives such as the BRAIN website, and an informative community safety newsletter. However, in some areas the clarity of the Council's approach is hindered by unclear short, medium and long-term plans. For example, the approach to anti-social behaviour contains many developmental actions and unclear targets.
- 110 The Council takes a leading role in initiatives and can often show the impact. These are helping contribute to a fall in the number of residents perceiving crime to be a serious issue in their area, from 30.5 per cent in 2001 to 24 per cent in 2005, in addition there has been a rise in the number of parents allowing their children to play outside. The Council is contributing to these improvements through involvement in the Brent on track programme to address youth crime, boys2men project providing a preventive service for young black males, and the not another drop campaign to reduce gun crime. It also directly funds wardens' schemes which cover parks, town centres, and housing. The wardens' scheme is helping address issues such as enviro-crime and anti-social behaviour, and was externally judged as making a positive impact in terms of reassuring local people. However, more consistent evaluation will help the Council judge the effectiveness of its contribution in this important priority.

- 111** The Council takes a proactive lead in the partnership, committing financial and staff resources as required. This includes the chief executive chairing the crime prevention strategy group (CPSG), senior staff attending the recently established Operational Strategy Group. Partnership working is focusing activity on the right areas through for example work with the youth offending team, the youth service, the police, social housing organisations and voluntary groups. The Council is working hard to further improve performance management, data sharing, and accountability across the partnership. Whilst this takes place it could be more systematic.
- 112** The Council has a good awareness of its community safety role and there are good examples of services activity helping to create safer communities, such as environment and housing. The Council directly provides a community safety unit which includes an anti-social behaviour team. However, the Council is yet to complete an audit of how it meets section 17 mainstreaming requirements of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. As a result, there is a risk that important community safety issues may be overlooked and not sufficiently integrated with other Council services.
- 113** Whilst there is a commitment to tackle anti-social behaviour and examples of positive initiatives, it is not brought together into an overarching strategy. The anti-social behaviour unit has a particularly strong focus on preventative interventions rather than using enforcement. This has led to only limited use of tools such as acceptable behaviour contracts.
- 114** There are areas of mixed performance which are not yet reflecting the extensive range of initiatives taking place. Some crime rates remain high, with violent crime rising by 43 per cent in the last two years. The LPSA target for robberies will not be achieved. In addition, perceptions about vandalism, graffiti, and associated quality of life issues are poor.
- 115** Young people at risk of offending have access to a good range of activities to encourage them to re engage with learning and prevent them from becoming involved in crime. While offending rates remain high, the number of young people re offending is reducing with many of them becoming engaged with education, training or starting work.
- 116** There is good partnership working around drug abuse. Working relations with the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) are good and there are positive examples of work through the Drug Intervention Programme and outreach work to engage with young people in respect of drugs including the Positive futures initiative. The Council is developing its approach to managing the night time economy and alcohol. However, at present it lacks a clear strategic approach.
- 117** Partnerships with health, police and fire authorities to reduce accidental death and injury are well established. There are reductions in the number of road traffic accidents. It is important to maintain momentum here with the new stadium due to become fully operational.

- 118 Emergency planning and business continuity arrangements need improvement. Whilst the Council plays an active part of wider London resilience, it is not fully compliant with the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act. It is taking action to improve business continuity arrangements by prioritising crucial services, and overcoming a fragmented departmental approach. Business continuity arrangements with the business sector also require to be strengthened.
- 119 Community cohesion is a clear strength and is incorporated into service delivery. While there is not an overarching community cohesion strategy it is clearly integral in the decisions taken by the Council. The new community strategy adds weight to the strong dialogue with communities and the attention paid to celebrating differences in the community. For example, supporting the Respect festival, planning Diwali and Eid with local communities and integrating diversity into its approach to regeneration. The Council is building on its role as a community cohesion pathfinder and is using the new cultural strategy to further emphasise how culture can strengthen community cohesion. Important challenges remain in terms of addressing community perceptions of race relations and fear of victimisation due to skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.

## Healthier communities

- 120 Tackling health inequalities is not a key priority in the Council's corporate strategy, and it is yet to develop a clear approach towards this agenda. However, there are several good examples of the Council and its partners' contribution to promoting healthy lifestyles.
- 121 At present, there is no co-ordinated health improvement strategy and insufficient reference within partnership strategies to the Council's role and responsibilities. Areas for improvement include developing more consistent SMART objectives and ensuring consistent relationships at strategic level with Brent tPCT. These gaps limit the Council's ability to make sufficient progress in narrowing health inequalities and achieving health improvement.
- 122 There has, however, been encouraging progress with key health indicators. These include increasing life expectancy. Average male life expectancy is now in the second best quartile, increasing from 73 years in 1991 to 76 years in 2003, and average female expectancy is in the third best quartile, increasing from 80 years in 1991 to 82 years in 2003.
- 123 The Council can evidence specific health improvements. It is utilising improvements in parks and open spaces to increase resident participation in physical activity and respond to local concerns about isolation by providing community bus services in three of the most disadvantaged areas in the borough. There are also measurable outcomes from the long standing Health Action Zone (HAZ), infant mortality at 4.3 per 1,000 births, is well below both regional and national averages. The number of deaths per 1,000 residents has also fallen from 14.5 in 2001 to 6.4 in 2003, below the regional average of 7.9. There is, however, no strategic partnership approach to identifying and targeting the communities with the worst health problems.

- 124** The Council makes good use of knowledge and information to inform service development and target health promotion initiatives. It has undertaken geographical information system (GIS) mapping and analysis of health data, including clusters showing health inequalities. Councillors are regularly briefed by Council officers and Brent tPCT on strategies and activity that help promote health improvement and narrow health inequalities. This is assisting councillors in their various roles as decisions makers, ward activists and scrutinisers of performance. Good work has also been undertaken by the health scrutiny panel to improve multi-agency work on sexual health and tuberculosis (TB).
- 125** Objectives for health promotion are not clearly prioritised. However, there is a more robust focus on reducing teenage pregnancy, increased TB screening which is improving access to support and increasing access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) particularly for young men which is resulting in good improvements. The Council with partners plan to use the LAA to continue to focus on reducing teenage pregnancy rates which increased in 2003 and are still in worst quartile at 55.4 per 1,000 females aged 15 to 17 years.
- 126** The Council is successfully utilising a wide range of regeneration programmes to improve the health of its local community, particularly in the most disadvantaged localities. These programmes address interrelationships between income, employment and the effect on people's health. Initiatives such as the decent homes programme target particular health disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Other initiatives include an equity release scheme for older residents enabling them to relocate to more suitable accommodation, schemes to tackle fuel poverty by providing free insulation and improved heating and targeting activity to assist the most disadvantaged to increase benefits take-up rates. These programmes have all contributed to achieving upper quartile position in 2004/05 in the number of private sector homes that have been made fit for purpose. There is also best quartile performance for the number of vulnerable adults supported to live at home at 16.7 adults per 1,000 population.
- 127** The Council has been able to increase staff capacity by reducing sickness absence, creating a motivated and stable workforce that is helping meet its priorities. Employee sickness absence has fallen from 11.4 days in 2002 to 7.3 days in 2005 which is in the best quartile. Early retirements and ill health retirements are also best quartile. It has a dedicated health improvement programme to help staff remain healthy, cease smoking and maintain a work life balance. In 2005 the Council won the 'employee benefits of the year' award for its work/life balance pilot project.
- 128** Council services also provide an extensive range of activity to promote health initiatives for young people, although these are not yet linked to a Council wide strategy on health promotion. Children and young people benefit from many Council activities which in some cases are also diverting them from anti-social behaviour. The Council is increasing its focus on reducing obesity through physical activity and promoting healthy eating.

Activities include using LEA sports advisors to promote physical education in schools and free swimming sessions for young people in Council-run leisure centres during summer holidays. The nutritional quality of school meals has also improved faster than the London average through the 'healthy schools' and 'five fruit/vegetables a day' initiatives.

- 129 The Council works with its partners to provide significant activity to address health inequalities but it is not consistently measuring the impact of this activity. The Council's trading standards section works well in partnership with neighbouring boroughs. The Council and police routinely collaborate on successful campaigns to tackle under-age sale of alcohol, cigarettes, solvents and knives. This has resulted in improvements in community safety, better health and reductions in risk of harm for young people. The new management contract for leisure centres has clear targets to improve access for hard to reach groups. The supporting people programme also includes screening vulnerable people for alcohol, drugs and substance needs, although this is not currently supported by a clear strategy or formal evaluation mechanisms for measuring impact.

## Older people

- 130 The Council provides good mainstream health and social care services for older people. This is not a key Council priority and it is yet to develop its strategic approach for older people as citizens that go beyond the traditional core Council services.
- 131 The Council's social care services are provided through a newly established housing and community care department. Within these integrated services it is developing partnerships for older people to provide a more systematic and enduring change. It has a designated older people's champion, and is making suitable arrangements but the Council has not yet fully embedded its approach to the national agenda.
- 132 The Council's community plan provides little specific prioritisation to older people as this is not a key priority area. But, positive outcomes in areas such as regeneration, the environment and housing all include actions which have a positive impact on older people. For example, within environment and transport there is a priority to improve safety, accessibility and affordability of public transport for disabled people and older people. There is also a priority under regeneration to tackle deprivation and poverty amongst older people.
- 133 The Council is developing a more integrated approach through the older peoples' housing strategy and the joint commissioning strategy. This approach has good linkage and cross over between targets for health, housing and social care, although it is unclear as yet how this has led to improved outcomes.

- 134** The Council has not yet effectively developed its internal review processes to take forward its ambitions for older people. A multi agency health and social care partnership board has been established supported by the older people's local implementation team (LIT), which includes representatives from older people's organisations. Monitoring of existing action plans from this board and the LIT is not, however, consistent or complete.
- 135** The Council makes good use of a range of methods to consult with older people, ensuring that diverse groups are engaged in the process. It works well through existing formal consultation processes such as the pensioner's forum to address issues for older people as well as less formal discussion with service users and representatives. It is appropriately seeking to review its consultation processes to develop a range of preventative services.
- 136** The Council provides a good range of information on services for older people through its one stop shops and through information leaflets. Good use is made of the internet to provide information for carers and family members on pensions and other advice. The Council has listened to older people and made changes to services as a result. Within libraries, in the customer services approach and in relation to information about services, older people's views have made an impact on the service being delivered.
- 137** Older peoples services provided through social services are performing well and are addressing the diverse needs of the community. Free and dedicated swimming, walking in parks and other leisure activities for older people such as tea dances at the town hall also provide a wide range of opportunities for improving health and well-being for older people. Improvements to street lighting and pavements, identified as a priority for older people, have been achieved.
- 138** The Council is also working well with its partners to provide a range of services with positive outcomes for older people in its neighbourhood renewal areas. For example, in addressing barriers to work it has achieved increased employment for older people. It has also used NRF monies to enable increased access to healthy eating for residents over 50.

## Children and young people

- 139** Overall, the council is performing well in meeting the needs of children and young people, although some services need to improve further, building on progress already made. Brent's strategic vision and improvement agenda includes challenging ambitions for children and young people which are clearly set out in the draft Children and Young People's Plan. The council's corporate and community strategies also demonstrate a shared commitment to putting children and young people at the centre of Brent's ambitious economic regeneration in a holistic way. The importance placed on the integration of services is reflected in the establishment of a single Children and Families department from July 2005. Co-ordinated delivery of priority services in disadvantaged localities is already beginning to produce some early outcomes.

- 140 Use of resources and value for money are both good overall. The Council has acknowledged historical underfunding in social services and education and has addressed this since 2002/03 by year on year increased funding. Joint commissioning and pooled budgets are at an early stage of implementation.
- 141 The combined work of local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Health promotion work is achieving some success through greater understanding of cultural issues influencing uptake, and is beginning to engage hard to reach groups. The Healthy Schools programme is a major vehicle for effective co-ordination of health promotion programmes for children and young people. The positive promotion of mental health is given high priority. A more accessible approach to health checks for looked after children is beginning to lead to better uptake. There is a well-resourced child development service with effective multi-agency working to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families.
- 142 The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate with some significant strengths. The newly established Local Safeguarding Children Board is raising the profile of child protection issues. Social care services are now well managed and front line services have shown consistent improvement, but continued progress is needed on recruitment and retention of permanent staff. The Referral and Assessment Service is now working effectively to ensure children are safeguarded but is not consistently able to assess the needs of other children in need and their families promptly. Staff across agencies are generally well trained in child protection work, and agencies are now working very well together to safeguard and improve outcomes for children. Partner agencies are developing pilot integrated services programmes to offer support to families at an earlier stage. Looked after children are adequately safeguarded within their placements, but many are placed at a distance from Brent. Some good services are in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but the social work team is not currently meeting families' support needs in a timely way.
- 143 The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good. Good advice and guidance is available to parents. Schools and early years settings receive good support, and the council makes good use of national strategies to improve pupils' attainment. Pupils generally make very good progress in school and attainment is above national averages, although certain groups of children underachieve, such as looked after children. Many children and young people enjoy life and are proud of Brent's diverse community. There are not currently sufficient leisure and recreation opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

- 144** The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Local services are very effective at helping children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people increasingly feel that their views are taken seriously at a strategic, local and personal level, but there is insufficient feedback on decisions made on their behalf. Consultation with minority groups and vulnerable young people is systematic and supportive action is taken as a result. Looked after children's cultural needs are considered when placements are made, but some experience too many changes of school, affecting their achievement over time. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are being involved well, through the Youth Forum and school councils. Good preventative programmes reduce young people's involvement in anti social behaviour and support them to re-engage with education programmes. Although youth offending figures are reducing, the rates of offending are still high and above the national figure.
- 145** The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Young people in Brent schools make good progress at GCE Advanced level, although attainment remains below national averages. The proportion of children and young people continuing in education at 16 is higher than average and many continue in higher education. There are good partnership arrangements to support transition for vulnerable groups into education employment or training, with good success rates. However, the overall strategy for 14-19 education and training and collaborative partnership working is still in development. Partners are starting to work towards cohesive and comprehensive provision, but there is insufficient reliable information and data to inform planning. Well developed strategies are in place to regenerate the most deprived neighbourhoods and improve the economic prospects for families and young people. Suitable housing for families and young people is in short supply and many spend significant periods of time in temporary accommodation.

## 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 Brent London Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 10 -19 January 2006.
- 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.