

Corporate Assessment Report

August 2006



Corporate Assessment

London Borough of Hackney

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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 Hackney Council has put in place many of the foundations for achieving excellence, but recognises that it is on a long-term journey of improvement. It has established effective leadership at the senior level but this has not yet translated into consistent performance lower down the organisation. It has a good understanding of where it needs to improve but many of the resulting changes are recent and have yet to have an impact on outcomes. Service performance is improving in many areas but remains low in comparison to other local authorities.
- 6 The Council is increasingly confident in defining its long-term vision and outcomes for the area. It is determined to make Hackney a better place where people want to live and is doing this with its partners by focusing on six key priorities. These are a good place to grow up; a dynamic and creative economy; thriving, healthy communities; better homes; a safer, cleaner place to live; and a sustainable borough.
- 7 The Council's vision is shared by its partners through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), now re-launched as Team Hackney. The Council and its partners recognised that improvement was needed to the structures, membership and accountability of the LSP and its thematic partnerships. They took the decision to re-launch the partnership in 2005 and devise a Fresh Start programme and this has significantly strengthened partnership working, though there is more work to do. There are some good examples of partnership work such as the multi-agency Safer Communities Partnership, work with the Learning Trust to develop Children's Trust arrangements and joint work with the local health trusts.
- 8 Community leadership by the Mayor is strong and his commitment is an important driver of the continuing improvement in Hackney. He now has a high profile in the community and his three priorities are familiar to staff and stakeholders. With the cabinet, he has taken a lead in developing links with the local community and businesses as well as in widening Hackney's involvement in regional and national initiatives such as the Olympics, regional housing and transport initiatives. Councillor training is now effective. Scrutiny has improved but does not sufficiently challenge service performance.
- 9 Managerial leadership is also strong and effective. In just over a year the Chief Executive has succeeded in bringing about a cultural shift from a strongly centrally managed and controlled organisation to one increasingly characterised by collaboration and partnership. This was achieved partly through her personal style and approach and partly through a range of programmes from internal improvement initiatives to the re-launching of the LSP. There is still work to do to implement this cultural change at all levels of the organisation. The newly-appointed corporate directors have a good balance of the skills required to deliver change across the organisation. However their effectiveness as a team has yet to be demonstrated.

- 10 There is a clear commitment to user focus and evidence of good consultation for the Community Strategy, with children and young people and with hard-to-reach groups. A 2005 Mori survey showed that residents are significantly more satisfied with Council services than in 2002, though they are still more negative than those in other London boroughs. The Council recognises that it still needs to embed customer focus across all services and this is the aim of the three year Service First project. It is also prioritising community engagement and communication with residents and staff in 2006/07.
- 11 The Council shows a strong understanding of diversity which it celebrates as a strength of the local community. The strategic plans describe the diversity of the local population. The variety of faith communities is recognised and the Council is developing links with a range of these. There are examples of targeted work with specific communities, such as engagement with young people with regard to crime reduction and work with the Turkish community to increase service take-up. Internally the Council has focused on race equality and eradicating discrimination, following the Crawford Report and concerns expressed by the Commission for Racial Equality. The independently-chaired Race Scrutiny Group reports good progress in terms of the Council's role as an employer of black and minority ethnic individuals. Despite this there is evidence that some black and minority ethnic staff and community groups still feel they are not given equality of opportunity by the Council. The Council has been too slow to move beyond level 1 of the equality standard for local government.
- 12 Financial planning and control is now very strong in contrast to the situation five years ago. This provides a robust basis for resourcing the Council's priorities over the medium term and delivering continuing improvement. Improvements in income collection and more efficient procurement have helped the Council to deliver efficiency savings while maintaining service quality. Overall, value for money is adequate. A culture of delivering value for money has yet to be embedded throughout the organisation. In particular, the capacity of service managers to assess the cost-effectiveness of the services they provide is limited.
- 13 Although the Council has made considerable progress in enhancing its capacity to deliver its ambitions, some of the key supporting systems are not yet fully in place. These include workforce planning, risk management, project management and ICT. The Council is aware of these weaknesses and has credible plans to tackle them.
- 14 The Council is now much more outward-looking and has made good use of external advice and support to improve performance. Performance management has improved at the corporate level with the implementation of a new framework. There are some good examples of improvements in performance but the arrangements are not yet used consistently by services to manage performance actively. The lack of outcome-focused and measurable short-term targets in some plans is a barrier to progress in this area. The performance management arrangements for Team Hackney are not yet robust.
- 15 The Council is clear what it needs to do to become high performing. It knows what it needs to improve, has developed strategies to do this in a sustainable way over the medium term and has already begun to deliver some improvements.

Staff are enthusiastic about the progress made and keen to make a contribution. During the past year there has been demonstrable progress on the internal improvement programmes as well as improved outcomes in areas such as benefits administration, planning, recycling and crime reduction. However, some key overarching strategies, such as a regeneration strategy, are not yet in place and performance in many important areas is still low compared with national averages. High levels of deprivation in Hackney make it more of a challenge to improve performance in these areas.

Areas for improvement

- 16 Hackney Council now needs to complete the move away from being an inward-looking organisation to one which is more focused on the outcomes for people in Hackney. It should aim over the medium-term to capitalise on the commitment of staff to the improvement process and devolve more responsibility from the corporate centre. Middle managers should be given the training and support they need to take on more responsibility for managing resources, setting targets and monitoring their performance against these.
- 17 To provide a robust basis for performance management, the Council should clarify the link between its priorities and a limited number of performance indicators and ensure they are more outcome-focused. Action plans, both internally and within partnerships, should be focused on measurable outcomes for, and feedback from, the people of Hackney, rather than on process and completion of projects.
- 18 Monitoring of the value for money of services should be enhanced by linking resources to specific actions in service plans, and by developing and benchmarking unit cost information. Performance monitoring should be more closely linked with the monitoring of costs.
- 19 The Council has recognised the need to improve engagement with the community as one of its priorities. There is more work to do to improve links to the voluntary and community sector, particularly with smaller groups from black and ethnic minority communities. The implementation of the compact is an opportunity to provide more clarity about access to funding and participation in partnership working along with support to develop the sector's capacity to take advantage of these opportunities.
- 20 Hackney Council should draw up a comprehensive regeneration strategy to bring together the various regeneration initiatives with which it is involved and to ensure there is a clear vision of what they will deliver and when.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	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	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	2
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

- 21** Hackney is a borough in the East End of London lying just north of the City of London. It has a population of over 210,000, which is one of the most ethnically diverse and socially deprived in the United Kingdom. Every ward in Hackney is among the 10 per cent most deprived in the country and 47 per cent of children live in low income households. Fifty-seven per cent of the population is from black and minority ethnic communities, mainly Black African, Black Caribbean and Turkish and the borough receives a high proportion of refugees and asylum-seekers. The overall population continues to increase by around one per cent a year and population turnover is estimated at more than 20 per cent every year – making it a particularly challenging environment in which to plan and deliver public services.
- 22** Over 50 per cent of Hackney residents live in social housing but the condition of two-thirds of these homes is below national Decent Homes standards. Homelessness and the number of households in temporary accommodation is relatively high. Crime rates are reducing but remain well above average and there are high levels of community concern about crime. The proportion of the population in work is low (58 per cent compared with 70 per cent for London) and the community's health is relatively poor. Hackney is one of the five boroughs which will host the 2012 Olympics, with 28 per cent of the site, and this offers a key regeneration opportunity.

The Council

- 23** Between 1999 and 2001 a series of inspections and audits signalled serious concerns about Hackney Council's leadership, financial management and service performance. In December 2002 a formal Government Monitoring Board, led by the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, was set up to monitor delivery against a recovery plan for Hackney. The 2004 corporate assessment recognised improvements in leadership, financial management and some services and judged there to be promising prospects for further improvement. Following the 2005 CPA where Hackney was assessed as one star and improving adequately, the ODPM has notified the Council that this formal monitoring arrangement is no longer necessary.
- 24** The Council's financial position is strong and budgets are now well managed, with spending contained within budget for the last four years. The gross revenue expenditure budgeted for 2005/06 was £947 million with planned capital expenditure of £123 million. Council Tax is higher than the median for other London authorities but the increase in 2005/06 was below the average.

- 25 The political make-up of the Council at the time of the assessment is similar to that in 2004 with 44 Labour councillors, 10 Conservatives and 3 Liberal Democrats. The directly elected Mayor has been in post for nearly four years and is up for re-election, along with the rest of the Council, in May 2006. There are nine Cabinet members with portfolios which reflect the national shared priorities and key areas of Council focus such as regeneration and partnerships and there are two Cabinet advisors: one for older people and one for Building Schools for the Future.
- 26 The senior officer structure of the Council has been reorganised with effect from April 2006 reducing from seven to five directorates which more closely reflect the Council's priorities. These are: neighbourhoods and regeneration, community services, customer and corporate services, finance and resources, children and young people. There is also a new post of director of partnerships and a chief executive of the new Arms Length Management Organisation. Although the Learning Trust continues to deliver the Council's education services, the secondment of the chief executive of the Learning Trust as interim director of children's services reflects the Council's commitment to the integration of these services.
- 27 The Hackney Strategic Partnership was given a 'fresh start' in 2005 with a new Board, greater Councillor involvement and a focus on improving areas of weak performance. The Community Strategy 'Mind the Gap' was re-launched. It identifies six priority themes:
- a good place to grow up;
 - a dynamic and creative economy;
 - thriving, healthy communities;
 - better homes;
 - a safer, cleaner place to live; and
 - a sustainable borough.

These are, in turn, addressed under the Mayor's three priorities in the corporate plan.

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

Ambition

- 28 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. The Council, with its partners, has developed an overarching strategic vision for Hackney which is clearly set out in its 2005 Community Strategy – ‘Mind the Gap’ and which is reflected in the Council’s corporate plans. Its ambitions are clear and challenging and promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the borough. Equally importantly, partners are fully supportive of this vision and involved in its delivery.
- 29 The overall ambition is to make Hackney a better place by increasing opportunity and reducing inequality and poverty. This vision is articulated through the six themes of the Community Strategy, to be delivered in partnership, and the Mayor’s three priorities, to be delivered by the Council. These high level priorities are linked to the national shared priorities and address the key long-term needs of the borough, focusing on narrowing the gap between those who are better off and those who are excluded from this prosperity. They are based on a robust needs analysis and an extensive and thorough consultation process. They clearly reflect the community’s own main concerns as revealed in a recent Mori survey: crime, cleaner streets, education and quality of housing. The community, staff and partners are aware of and support these priorities.
- 30 The ambitions for the Council are based on a commitment to, and an understanding of diversity. The Community Strategy identifies the diversity of the borough across key dimensions of ethnicity, age, religion and neighbourhoods. This enables the strategy to focus on key improvement priorities which will address the variable levels of experience and outcomes for different communities.
- 31 The Council engages effectively with residents and partners. There was extensive consultation over the Community Strategy that influenced its direction – for example, the inclusion of the ‘sustainable borough’ theme. Consultation is focused and targeted at particular hard-to-reach groups and most report that they feel the Council listens to them. Examples are earlier consultation on controlled parking and work to promote recycling with the Orthodox Jewish community. Community sector partners recognise a definite improvement in the Council’s communication and consultation mechanisms and see a genuine commitment to this. However some communities, particularly some Muslim groups, still feel that their views are not sufficiently taken account of in consultation. Those involved in consultation are not always given feedback on how their views have influenced the outcome.

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- 32** Leadership remains a strength in Hackney and the Council's credibility as a community leader has improved since the last assessment. The Mayor has established himself as a visible and accessible leader of the Hackney community. He holds 'meet your Mayor' events in the community, chairs the Local Strategic Partnership's main board, is establishing strong links with businesses to develop the local economy and led a high profile and successful campaign for Hackney to be linked to the underground network. The Chief Executive has made a key contribution to developing more effective partnership working which has led to much greater enthusiasm and involvement on the part of partners. She has also initiated a range of programmes designed to deliver cultural change within the Council to establish the basis for improved performance. She has personally led the first phase of this programme which has met all its targets. Links with the Learning Trust have been strengthened with the appointment of its chief executive as interim director of children's services.
- 33** Partnership working has been significantly improved through the recent 'Fresh Start' of the Local Strategic Partnership and its re-branding as Team Hackney. The Council has taken a lead in providing additional resources to drive the improvement plan and there is now clarity of purpose and a shared vision among partners. The new approach demonstrates good commitment from councillors – as members or chairs of each of the partnership boards - and from partners as champions of the improvement areas. The improvement plan is based on a detailed analysis of performance against floor targets to select the performance priorities. Three priority action groups have been created to address the main areas of persistently low performance: worklessness, violent crime and infant mortality.
- 34** The Council recognises in its self-assessment that some elements of the Team Hackney Fresh Start have still to be delivered. There is a need to give greater focus to the thematic partnership boards, implement a common performance management framework, further empower some partners such as the voluntary sector to participate and develop a strategic commissioning strategy. Some of the six themed partnership boards set up to deliver the Community Strategy priorities are working very well and partners are addressing the priorities in their own plans. These include the 'thriving, healthy communities', 'a safer, cleaner place to live' and 'a good place to grow up' boards. However, there is still some way to go to ensure all the partnership boards are working effectively and have clear agreed action plans and targets.
- 35** The Council has some strong and effective links with the voluntary sector, especially in some parts of social care where many services are commissioned from these groups. However the sector has a range of groups with different expectations and capacities and some of the smaller local groups are not positive about work with the Council. There is no single point of contact in the council to inform them how grants are allocated or about the route to involvement in Team Hackney and the compact with the voluntary sector which would clarify these arrangements has not yet been implemented. A number of voluntary and community groups feel they get little feedback from the Council on the way their views have been taken into account after consultation.

Prioritisation

- 36 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Hackney has identified clear high level priorities within the ambitions for the area, however, the large number of priorities in lower level plans are not all clearly linked to these key priorities. Nor are the actions to deliver the priorities sufficiently focused on outcomes.
- 37 At the corporate and directorate level, the Council's ambitions are translated effectively into clear priorities which are included in plans. The Mayor's three priorities are linked to the overall vision and to the six Community Strategy priorities in a diagram 'Making Hackney a better place'. This appears in the main corporate and directorate plans and is displayed in Council offices. The Council and its partners are familiar with and understand these high level strategic objectives. The Mayor's priorities include three service priorities: a safer, cleaner, greener Hackney; children and young people and affordable, decent homes, as well as making sure the Council is high-performing and efficient, and improving community engagement.
- 38 The priorities are clearly based on a detailed knowledge of the needs of Hackney's complex and diverse community. The key strategy documents of the Council and its partners demonstrate an informed understanding of the needs of local people and particularly of black and minority ethnic groups and other disadvantaged groups. For example, actions in the corporate plan address the needs of specific hard-to-reach groups such as Turkish children and people with mental health needs.
- 39 In 2005/06 there were also six shorter-term priorities making up the programme for internal improvement. Good progress has been made on all these and some, such as the 'Fresh Start' for the local strategic partnership, the new approach to service and financial planning, and the first phase of the Service First programme are well on the way to completion.
- 40 Lower level plans for 2005/06, such as divisional and team plans, do not all reflect the Council's key priorities as clearly as the corporate plans. Links between actions and the Mayor's priorities are made clear and cross-service actions are clearly identified in plans but other actions derived from the many improvement initiatives or from local or national priorities appear to be equally important. The term 'priority' is used too frequently by the Council and its partners to describe a range of short, medium and long-term actions such as the improvement 'priorities' and the 'priorities' identified for additional funding during the 2006/7 budget process. Although these are linked to the key Council priorities, the links are not always made explicit. The resulting high number of priorities means that less senior staff are not clear where their efforts would be best spent, nor how they contribute to the key outcomes for Hackney. The Council recognises in its self-assessment that it needs to do further work to develop understanding of the links to key priorities.

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- 41** The Council is in the process of restructuring with new directorates in place from April 2006. It is developing new, more focused plans for 2006/07, based on storyboards which identify the key ambitions, priorities and outcomes for each directorate and division. A number of strategic plans will be re-written as the restructuring proceeds. This process is helping to reduce the number of priorities and to focus the work of the new directorates but it is not yet complete so the impact on the lower-level plans is not clear.
- 42** Although the Council has a track record of successfully driving change and improvement at a senior level, many of its current plans and strategies do not help less senior staff to get involved in the process by making the 'golden thread' linking priorities and targets clear. These plans and strategies do not have action plans with consistently clear milestones and outcome-focused targets. While action plans in children's services are good, many of the actions in other areas involve implementing a strategy or carrying out a project without attempting to translate these into shorter-term outcomes or targets. Existing measures and targets such as Best Value performance indicators or the success measures in the corporate plan are not well enough linked to specific projects or actions. The resource requirements of actions are not always identified in plans. As a result staff and stakeholders cannot be clear whether some priorities are being delivered in the short term.
- 43** The Community Strategy priorities and actions are well focused on areas where partnership working is necessary and there are six cross-cutting objectives. The strategy interacts with the corporate plans of the appropriate partners such as the Police, Primary Care Trust and the Learning Trust where the actions and targets are addressed. Team Hackney is allocating neighbourhood renewal funding to the three priority action areas where performance is lowest. However The Team Hackney themed partnerships have been slow to agree clear action plans and targets. They have produced a range of draft action plans, however not all the groups have developed these so that responsibilities, targets and timelines are clearly indicated.
- 44** There is now a more transparent link between financial planning and the business planning process which ensures that resources are allocated to priorities. The business planning process, together with the medium term budget forecast, is the basis for ensuring there is a sustainable budget over the medium term to deliver the Council's ambitions. The forecast includes good forward provision as earmarked reserves for areas such as pension funds, asset maintenance and ongoing projects. The cycle of service and financial planning has been interlinked and a more transparent process of allocating additional resources to priorities was adopted for the 2006/07 budget round. This involved replacing the bidding system previously in place with an options-based process where councillors and officers considered key areas for additional funding linked to the Council's priorities and desired outcomes. In 2005/06 over £13 million was allocated to priority areas such as improving street lighting, re-laying pavements, reducing homelessness and expanding warden services.

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

Capacity

- 45 The Council is performing adequately in this area and at the senior level of leadership and decision-making it is performing well. Its strong financial capacity provides a good basis for further improvement. However, Hackney does not yet have all the systems in place to maximise its capacity to address areas of under performance. It has recognised the need to improve key building blocks, such as workforce planning, risk management, project management and ICT but some of this remains at a relatively early stage and is not fully developed. This is limiting the capacity of the Council to deliver its ambitions.
- 46 The Council has effective and strong political leadership. The Mayor is visible, supportive and focused on strategic development. He works well with local MPs and regularly attends events in the community. Councillor roles and responsibilities are clear, relationships, including those between officers and councillors, are good and councillors have ample opportunities to participate in the democratic process. The cabinet is strategically focused and its decisions and actions are recorded in papers and minutes which are clear and concise. Cabinet considers financial and performance management information on a monthly basis and there is strong ownership by the relevant lead member. Representatives of opposition parties attend as observers.
- 47 Scrutiny is not yet fully effective at supporting decision-making. There have been a number of detailed reviews which have had a positive impact on policy, for example the markets strategy. However, the scrutiny function does not challenge performance of services sufficiently. During our inspection, scrutiny panel members identified several areas where better scrutiny could lead to improved performance. These included recycling, management of council assets and housing.
- 48 External assessments of councillor training demonstrate high standards of training supporting a strong culture of decision making. It is now effective for those receiving it but the training is not always well attended. Scrutiny training does not sufficiently support councillors to challenge and manage performance.
- 49 The Council's ethical governance arrangements are good and at the forefront of best practice. Codes of conduct for councillors and staff are in line with requirements and declarations of interest for councillors are clearly recorded.

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- 50** Managerial leadership is strong. The Chief Executive, who joined the Council in 2005, is accessible, well-respected and has a friendly, open and enabling style of working. She encourages a can-do attitude amongst staff and partners. This effectively fosters team-working and the development of ideas at the top management level which supports the internal changes under way. External communications have improved greatly under her leadership as have internal communications through her regular roadshows to meet staff at all levels. However, the intranet is not used effectively enough to get messages to and from front-line staff.
- 51** Strategic management capacity has increased with the appointment of a new team of corporate directors. The new Hackney Management Team is driving improvement internally and in partnerships. Further reshaping of the directorates will take place in 2006/07 and a programme of internal cultural change continues. This is already leading to a more collaborative style of cross-council working. Staff satisfaction with the Council as an employer is high. Middle managers are enthusiastic and committed and have a genuine desire to see the Council do well. Although there is robust challenge from some trade unions, employee relations are good overall.
- 52** Financial management is strong. The Council has a strong medium term financial strategy, which links into the service planning process, but this does not link into workforce planning which is under developed. Budget setting and monitoring are robust and spending has been contained within budget for the last four years. The level of financial reserves is adequate and properly risk-managed. Capital projects are generally completed within budget and spending takes account of the revenue implications of their longer term impact.
- 53** Value for money is adequate. It is the focus of one of the Council's internal change programmes in 2006/07. The auditor's use of resources assessment concluded that the Council is making progress in securing value for money though the arrangements are not yet embedded. A good level of efficiency savings has been delivered but weaknesses remain in the availability and use of comparative cost data and the absence of financial information in the quarterly performance reports. These would support budget monitoring of operational activity.
- 54** The Council is starting to use its partnerships to increase its capacity. The re-launch of the LSP has led to more effective joint work and a director of partnerships has recently been appointed to take this further. Its shared objectives to reduce crime and improve community safety have had an impact on local people - operation Crackdown and the drug intervention work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership are important successes in the community. However, the Council is not utilising the capacity of the voluntary sector well enough, particularly through its commissioning arrangements.
- 55** Risk management is at an early stage of development with a new risk management policy and risk register in place from November 2005. The Council has already introduced a risk based scheme in procurement and there is a planned roll out for improving the management of risk across Council services.

- 56 The Council's approach to managing procurement has improved greatly. Councillors are active in getting involved in the early approval process on the basis of risk and in monitoring progress. The corporate lead and directorate links have been strengthened and a new procurement strategy is in place. Though there are still perceptions that procurement is too slow, the new risk-based approach is speeding up the process. Recent contracts for example for internal audit, the new finance system, offer much better value for money, freeing money for the Council's priorities. However the opportunities for delivering efficiencies through E-procurement are still under-developed.
- 57 Asset management is generally sound. The council rightly plans to update the asset management plan and link this more closely to the capital strategy. There are clear plans to address backlog and planned maintenance supported by resources in the medium-term financial strategy. Arrangements for the management of the service are under review. Investment and disposal decisions are not consistently based on robust option appraisals and whole life costings. Although disabled access to buildings has improved it is still in the bottom 25 per cent in England.
- 58 The Council is investing well in its ICT services, but recognises it has more to do to improve because many of its plans are still work in progress. It is in the process of reorganising its ICT service to improve its strategic and operational capacity. It recruited a new head of ICT five months ago, who has recently introduced a new ICT strategy for the organisation to consolidate the different IT initiatives across the organisation. Internally some staff see IT as inaccessible and unresponsive to their needs. The Council has relaunched its website and a good range of e-government services is available on line.
- 59 The Council has invested in the training and development of staff and was awarded corporate Investor in People status in 2004. Corporate training is targeted well on priority areas such as improving customer focus, performance management and project management and is valued by staff. There is a good focus on developing internal talent to meet future needs, through its Breakthrough and Phoenix programmes. The appraisal process is effective in identifying development needs and ensuring staff are clear what is expected of them. Sickness absence has been reduced and current performance is in the best 25 per cent nationally.
- 60 However, improvement in some HR areas has been slow. More needs to be done to ensure that staff have opportunities to put into practice lessons learnt from development. Strategic workforce planning is not undertaken corporately and is not linked to the corporate strategy or the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council's HR plans are not yet SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed) and delivery of some objectives has slipped. For example, the council is only at level 1 of the Local Government Equality Standard despite a commitment in its HR strategy to progress this and effective equalities work by services. Recruitment and retention have improved but they are not linked with workforce planning and use of agency staff remains high.

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- 61 The Council has responded positively to the findings of the 2004 corporate assessment in relation to project management. A corporate manager with an overview of the many projects which Hackney is involved in has recently been recruited to better co-ordinate project activity. The Council is also addressing the corporate weaknesses in project management. It has introduced a new framework and trained over 150 members of staff, but training is not mandatory for managers. With the level of internal change currently underway this is an important investment to support project delivery across the Council

Performance management

- 62 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Despite recent investment in improving its corporate performance management processes, implementation is underdeveloped and is not consistent across all services. This is limiting its ability to improve underperforming services. Although 76 per cent of Performance Indicators (PIs) have improved since 2002/03, 45 per cent remain within the bottom 25 per cent nationally. Some partnerships, such as the Local Strategic Partnership – Team Hackney - do not yet have robust arrangements to manage performance.
- 63 Commitment to performance management is high and the picture is improving. The Council has invested time and resources over the last 14 months, with a new framework and guidance and has made sure that the majority of staff receive an appraisal. This investment has led to improvements in performance in some key service areas such as council tax collection, benefits, street cleaning, waste management, and planning. The increased satisfaction levels of residents suggest they are beginning to recognise these improvements.
- 64 The Council's recently launched reshaping programme aims to provide an even greater focus on performance management by redistributing resources to add capacity to corporate co-ordination and management. It commissioned an external assessment of its performance management arrangements, published in January 2006, which concluded performance monitoring and reporting arrangements were adequate. Progress has been made in establishing corporate performance monitoring as a routine activity: performance monitoring reports are detailed and reviewed three monthly by councillors and monthly by departments. There is guidance and training for councillors and the Council is aware of how it performs on PIs. However the scrutiny process is not sufficiently focused on challenging service performance.
- 65 The Council's data collection is comprehensive, and its analysis and monitoring is good, but this has not translated into a performance-driven culture. The Council has had to set stretching targets in order to make a step change in performance. While several of the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) targets set for 2004/05 were too stretching and were not achieved, some significant improvements were made, and particularly ambitious targets for improving rent collection and benefits handling were achieved. Many plans lack SMART targets and within these plans, BVPIs are not clearly linked to Council priorities.

The Council's systems for using complaints and user feedback to deliver improvement are weak and a culture of learning, valuing and using complaints in business and service planning is not yet evident.

- 66 Managers vary in their ability to manage performance and issues of under performance need to be addressed faster. The council has been slow to address its poor performance in handling members' enquiries and complaints. Decisive action to deal with poor performance in the youth service and the youth offending services was only taken in the light of external inspections. This inconsistency is a symptom of inadequate use of performance information by some middle managers to target improvement.
- 67 Performance management of the LSP, Team Hackney, is not sufficiently robust. It has recognised this and prioritised improved performance management as part of its Fresh Start. The development of targets is not consistent across the themed partnership boards and key task groups, and the monitoring of quarterly performance reports is underdeveloped. As a result the LSP is currently unable to assess the effectiveness or value for money of much partnership activity.
- 68 The Council is keen to learn and improve and relies on both internal and external challenge. The Council does not make enough use of comparative information, internally or with partners, to understand where it could do better and what the barriers are. There is no strategic and systematic approach to sharing and using learning within the Council or between partners, although work is underway to develop a template for reporting in some areas.
- 69 The Council has prioritised diversity and is working to tackle racial discrimination. Its performance in this area is strong. The Race Equality Scheme review places the work of the Borough in context reflecting the diversity of the locality. There is a strong commitment to mainstreaming race equality in terms of the Council's role as a service provider, employer and a purchaser. There is a detailed analysis of service areas and a programme for equality impact assessments. This means the Council is well placed to effectively tackle discrimination and deliver its vision and values.
- 70 Connections between community planning, corporate planning, service planning, finance and individual plans are improving but are still not fully integrated with strategic workforce plans and risk management. Service planning guidelines are in place and evolving so that business plans for 2006/10 and departmental 'story boards' for 2006/07 are more consistent. Corporate service standards are in place but some departmental service standards are not fully developed - for example in housing. Standards are not easily accessible for users.

What has been achieved?

- 71 Hackney is performing adequately in this area. Although it has recently made significant investment against most of its high level priorities and has delivered some impressive improvements in performance, it has begun from a very low base and its performance remains low compared to other authorities. The high levels of deprivation in Hackney make it more challenging to achieve at national levels in relation to many of these outcomes.
- 72 The local priorities of Hackney Council and its partners - to provide a safer, cleaner place to live; thriving, healthy communities; better homes; a dynamic and creative economy; a good place to grow up and a sustainable borough - reflect the national shared priorities as well as the needs and concerns of local residents. In these areas the shared ambitions and strengthened partnership working referred to earlier in this report are an essential element of success. The Council's strong financial position means it is able to invest additional resources in priority areas such as a director and team of staff to lead on the borough's Olympic action plans, additional staffing for the youth service or extending recycling.
- 73 Four of the priority areas relate to the sustainable communities and transport area and this is the area where the Council recognises it faces some of the greatest challenges to its aim of making Hackney a place where people want to live. Local unemployment is high, skill levels and earnings are low, much social housing is in a poor state and the infrastructure of streets, transport and buildings is run down. There are many areas where performance has improved such as recycling, street cleaning and planning applications but in 2004/05 these remained in the lowest quartile, as did many employment and housing indicators. There are some good examples of regeneration initiatives in specific areas but these have had relatively little impact on the overall picture and there is no overarching regeneration strategy to address this. The Council and its partners are ensuring they make maximum use of new development opportunities such as the 2012 Olympics, the City Fringe and the Thames Gateway to regenerate the area. However the results of these will not be seen for some time.
- 74 Reducing crime and the fear of crime is of major importance in Hackney and is the main focus of the 'safer, cleaner place to live' priority. Here the Council and its partners have delivered some significant achievements based on strong joint working through Team Hackney with the Safer Communities Partnership. This includes the biggest drop in street crime in London in 2004/05, closing crack houses, using CCTV to secure convictions and the early roll-out of safer neighbourhood teams. However the overall levels of crime remain high and levels of violent crime are increasing - reducing violent crime is now one of the priority action areas for Team Hackney.

- 75 Thriving, healthy communities is another key priority in Hackney since the high deprivation levels mean health outcomes are generally poor. Health partnerships are strong and there are good examples of joint work with the health services which are leading to improvements such as a drop in teenage pregnancy and reductions in smoking. Cross-service working is more variable - services such as leisure and the Learning Trust are contributing well to the health agenda but the housing service is less effective.
- 76 Children and young people are at the heart of the priorities of both the Community Strategy and the Council, reflecting their relatively high representation in the population and their importance for future prosperity. Outcomes for children and young people in Hackney are adequate and improving.
- 77 Although older people are not currently one of the key priorities in Hackney there is a clear plan, led by councillors and officers. There is some good cross-departmental work in the Council and with the local health trusts. There is meaningful engagement with older people and some examples of effective joint work to increase their independence.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 78 The Council has given the development of a sustainable borough, a dynamic and creative economy, a safer, cleaner place to live and the provision of better homes high prominence among the six priorities of the Community Strategy. However, the lack of a specific regeneration strategy for the borough and the weakness in current performance show that many challenges remain in delivering outcomes in this area.
- 79 The successful bid by London for the Olympic Games in 2012 has given fresh impetus to Hackney's regeneration. The Mayor played a leading role in brokering the effective five-borough partnership team to prepare for hosting the 2012 Olympics and the borough is determined to achieve a long-term positive legacy for Hackney people. There are action plans to deliver benefits such as better transport; jobs for local people; work for local businesses; and more participation in sport, in culture and the arts. Despite these efforts, the LSP did not meet its targets for reducing worklessness in 2004/05. Team Hackney has rightly made this the focus of a newly-established priority action group.
- 80 The Council is involved in other regeneration initiatives across the borough, the Woodberry Down and Dalston initiatives are examples which will provide much needed additional affordable housing capacity. The lack of a regeneration strategy to integrate these initiatives and make clear how they will contribute to meeting Hackney's needs is a weakness. This makes it difficult for partners to identify how they might take advantage of the opportunities and contribute to delivery of the benefits envisaged. The Council has further work to do to develop mechanisms to ensure that local people and businesses are able to benefit from opportunities such as the Olympics (to the east of the borough) and expansion of the city (to the south).

- 81 Housing is a high priority in Hackney. The borough is the third most densely populated Council in London and with a high proportion of social housing, the Council still has much to do to reduce overcrowding, provide new affordable accommodation and achieve the government's decent homes standard by 2010. While improvement has been made on the performance indicator relating to progress towards achieving the decent homes standard, the current number of properties actually made decent shows there is a long way to go. Despite these challenges and its relatively low starting position, the Council has set about strengthening its regional role and is set to exceed London targets on affordable housing provision up to 2012. The establishment of the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) in April 2006 has provided increased optimism among key partners that this progress can be maintained. However despite the high proportion of households in temporary accommodation, the homelessness improvement plan is not on track. The Council is aware that while improvements have been made in communication with key stakeholder groups such as tenants and leaseholders, more remains to be done to reach diverse groups in order to fully understand the needs of householders.
- 82 The Council has invested additional resources in Hackney's local environment and has made the development of a sustainable community a high priority. Increased expenditure on street cleaning, graffiti removal, local parks and recreation areas is tempered by the fact that key performance indicators in these areas such as public satisfaction do not yet fully reflect the investment made. An area of particular achievement has been recycling, where the Council has made rapid progress from a very low base of just 1.2 per cent in 2002. The Council has taken an innovative approach to dealing with potential challenges such as the high proportion of households that are flats, by using sacks for mixed recyclables rather than boxes and implementing a compulsory recycling pilot in parts of the borough. This has contributed to the recent improved performance.
- 83 Transport is another area where the Council, principally through the lobbying strategy led by the Mayor, has been able to articulate a very clear vision for investment and service improvement. The extension of the East London line will connect Hackney to the underground system and will bring three new tube stations to the borough by 2009. The Council has developed an informative Transport Strategy and has successfully integrated it with other documents such as the clean air strategy to underpin its commitment to developing alternative forms of transport such as cycling and walking in the future. This is underlined by improving performance on reducing the number of residents killed or injured on Hackney's roads and improvements in both pedestrian and cycle infrastructure across the borough.

Safer and stronger communities

- 84** Reducing crime and the fear of crime is a key priority in Hackney. There is a strong link from the Mayor's priority, 'A safer cleaner greener Hackney', through to the Community Strategy (Mind the Gap) theme of 'A Safer Cleaner Place to Live' which is then taken forward by the Safer, Cleaner Partnership. The Safer, Cleaner Partnership has produced a good overarching community safety and substance misuse strategy and reducing crime and improving community safety is a clear priority. The local strategic partnership, Team Hackney, have recently prioritised violent crime as an area where partners are reviewing how they can improve outcomes.
- 85** For 2004/05 a number of performance indicators show improvements although when compared to other authorities Hackney is performing less well. There have been reductions in domestic burglaries, robberies and theft from and of a motor vehicle. The indicators relating to young people show an improvement and there is best quartile performance with regard to the number of problem drug users in treatment. The data for 2004/05 does however show an increase in violence against the person and sexual offences and the percentage of local residents who think that people using or dealing drugs are a problem is in the worst quartile. The Council's latest performance information shows that there has been a 6.1 per cent fall in overall crime up to December 2005. However, violent crimes are up 3.9 per cent when compared to the same period in 2004/05.
- 86** The Council works well with partners to reduce and prevent crime. The Safer, Cleaner Partnership is effective, well supported and reflects the commitment of a range of agencies. It is a multi agency group supported by a range of sub groups reflecting key priority groups or crime types for example the Drug Action Team, Youth Offending Team Management Board, Youth Crime Reduction Group, Property Crime Reduction Group. A key response to the increase in violent crime and its impact on young people has been the establishment of the Safer Schools Partnership through which a police officer is present at each secondary school in the Borough. Team Hackney has also established a priority action team to review 'Guns and Gangs' related crime.
- 87** The Safer, Cleaner Partnership board has prioritised Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) investment to tackle priority areas of crime and community safety. Some examples of this investment for 2006/07 include £560,000 for anti-social behaviour, £148,000 for domestic violence and hate crime, £95,000 for burglary reduction, £115,000 for Closed Circuit TV (CCTV), and £95,000 for the Safer Schools Partnership. This investment will deliver a range of specific initiatives including action to reduce anti-social behaviour; domestic violence and hate crime; burglary reduction and strengthening CCTV effectiveness. In addition Team Hackney has already agreed investment of £3.6 million of NRF to roll out Safer Neighbourhood Teams to all 19 wards earlier than the pan London programme.

- 88 The community safety and substance misuse strategy was preceded by a thorough crime audit which not only engaged partners but also local people. There were specific initiatives to engage with different communities, for example the Turkish/Kurdish/Cypriot community, and to elicit the views of children and young people. The delivery of the current strategy is positively assisted by specific initiatives to focus resources on particular geographic areas or on working with identified groups. These initiatives include work on the Holly Street estate to deal with drugs and anti-social behaviour, education and awareness programmes with young people such as 'Prison Me No Way' which has involved 720 young people and Trading Places. In addition Operation Crackdown has significantly contributed to the sustainable closure of 267 crack houses since 2003.
- 89 The Council is aware of its responsibilities to integrate community safety into the work of services across the organisation. The service planning process encourages services to address community safety initiatives and activity is monitored on a quarterly basis by the head of community safety.
- 90 The partnership has a clear Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. This is supported by internal Council cross service groups backed up with multi agency working. There are targeted initiatives to respond to anti-social behaviour such as the multi agency Enforcement Days. There is a programme of improving street lighting and reductions in reports of criminal damage. The Council and its partners have used the full range of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour ranging from prevention through to more serious sanctions. There are 29 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders currently in place and over the last two years 152 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts have been established. There is close working with the Youth Service and the Police to deal with anti-social behaviour and one key indicator, the level of criminal damage, has reduced. The use of CCTV has helped the Police make 1,800 arrests in 2005.
- 91 The Council has an emergency plan which is recognised as being inadequate and the preparation of internal business continuity plans is at an early stage. There is a programme to deliver a revised and updated emergency plan. A Business Continuity Plan Steering Group has been established and the aim is to produce the first drafts of plans by the end of September 2006. The new duty to promote continuity planning with local businesses will be in part discharged through the London wide guidance that will be launched on 17 March. Whilst the Council believes that it responded well to the bombings in July 2005, without up to date plans they cannot be assured that the organisation will be able to respond effectively and maintain the delivery of key services in case of a disruptive incident.
- 92 Although there is no overarching strategy for community cohesion the Council and its partners understand the diversity of the borough and seek to respond through partnership plans and internal service plans. The Community Strategy focuses on promoting community cohesion through tackling disadvantage and social exclusion and makes an explicit commitment to narrowing the gap between the more and less well-off in the borough.

The latest Mori survey shows that 83 per cent of local residents agree that their neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.

Healthier communities

- 93** Improving the health of its population is a priority in Hackney. Thriving Healthy Communities is one of the six priority themes in the Community Strategy. The Council and its partners' ambitions to address health inequalities are articulated through the Health Improvement and Modernisation Programme (HIMP) 2005-08. This is produced under the auspices of the City and Hackney Health and Social Care Partnership Board as a shared programme and forms an integral part of the Community Strategy. The HIMP demonstrates a commitment to identifying and addressing health inequalities across Hackney for the next three years based on an assessment of population health needs and evidence of effective interventions. This enables the Council and its partners to build a profile of Hackney residents at both ward and locality level and has been utilised to by the Local Strategic Partnership, known as Team Hackney, to set priorities. For example infant mortality rates remain high and a priority action group has been established to address this.
- 94** The population of Hackney is relatively young and whilst overall mortality rates are not significantly above the national average, mortality rates for age 15-64 are thirty one percent above the England average. The major causes of death in Hackney are heart disease, stroke and cancers, with respiratory disease and accidents making a significant contribution. The impact of conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, infectious and sexually transmitted diseases, and tuberculosis (TB) is much greater in Hackney than elsewhere in England. Some health outcomes have improved albeit from a low base. Mortality rates from cardio-vascular diseases and cancer have improved with progress towards achieving the floor targets faster for cancer. The incidence of teenage pregnancy has reduced by ten percent over four years but is still significantly high. However, rates of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV remain high with service demands exceeding capacity. TB rates in Hackney remain the highest in the country and have been rising significantly over recent years with a rising trend from 30 per 100,000 population in 1987 to 103 in 2003.
- 95** Partnership working is good and is being strengthened through the refresh of Team Hackney. The 'Thriving Healthy Communities Board' is one of the theme groups within the Local Strategic Partnership with sub boards organised around client groups and is chaired by the Lead Member. The Council and the City and Hackney Primary Care Trust (PCT) are establishing the posts of Joint Director of Public Health and Joint Head of Healthy Communities to increase capacity and lead the work on improving health and reducing inequalities. However, the opportunities from partnership working are not maximised through the use of cross cutting themes, such as smoking cessation, across the Team Hackney thematic partnerships.

- 96 There are examples of Council initiatives which have had a positive impact on health and well being. The Kids Swim Free scheme, jointly run with other boroughs and joint funded with the PCT, resulted in a larger take up in Hackney than the other boroughs. Hackney also has a GP exercise on prescription scheme which is rolled out across the Borough and is well used with positive feedback from GPs. Partnership work with The Learning Trust has resulted in the recruitment of ninety nine percent of schools to the Healthy Schools Programme. The Council has also worked with the PCT on smoking cessation, which is one of the area's priorities. The network of smoking cessation is now extensive with a variety of community groups and outreach and all GP practices participating in the enhanced scheme to identify and support quitters. The Council is now smoke free and, working with the PCT has provided smoking cessation groups and support to staff. However the Council acknowledges that further cross directorate work is needed, for example on the regulation of tobacco sales.
- 97 The Council and its partners have improved access to a range of services including Sure Start and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Targeted support is provided to some people from disadvantaged areas and groups to improve access, examples include the Halkevi and Turkish Stop Smoking Service which has worked proactively with the community and has achieved above its targets, and specific swimming sessions for the Orthodox Jewish Community. However, further work is needed to widen access to services and opportunities for participation. The Council have recognised this and has developed with partners a new sport and physical activity strategy for 2006-2009 to encourage greater opportunities for participation across the borough.
- 98 The Council is taking some initiatives in relation to decent homes and fuel poverty but cross service approaches to healthy communities are inconsistent and do not address the housing needs of pregnant teenagers and those with TB.

Older people

- 99 The Council has a strategic approach to services for older people that goes beyond social care and health and cuts across a range of mainstream services including housing, culture and leisure. This is set out in its plan: 'Well old, well valued' which was drawn up in consultation with older people. The clearly written plan focuses on improving the quality of life and independence of older people by taking action in eight areas: being safe and secure; getting involved; living independently; staying healthy; meeting housing needs; getting out and about; reducing age discrimination and consulting people. There are clear links across to other partner's plans such as the health improvement plan, the supporting people strategy, the adult education plan and the substance misuse strategy. Although older people are not one of the key priorities for Hackney Council, it provides leadership for the older people's agenda through a lead member, a cabinet advisor for older people and a corporate officer champion.

- 100 The strategy promotes a co-ordinated approach to initiatives and projects for older people which is being implemented with partners and across Council departments. It is supported by a range of action plans with identified lead officers in each department. The cross-service focus is effectively maintained by the corporate older people's champion. She drives this work by liaising with the lead officers to monitor performance. There are regular reports back to the cabinet advisor for older people with whom she works closely. The Council has also mainstreamed age into the equalities agenda and the corporate officer reports on the progress of implementation of the Older People's strategy to the Equalities Group.
- 101 The Council recognises that, with its partners, it needs to plan to address the evolving needs of older people in the longer-term. In particular it plans to do a systematic needs analysis bringing together health and demographic data and to consider what resources are necessary to meet these needs.
- 102 In 2005 the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) assessed the social care services for adults as serving most people well with promising capacity for improvement having found that the Council continues to develop services which promote independence in line with the Government's priorities. CSCI highlighted strong partnership working and effective integrated arrangements such as well developed Intermediate Care at home services which have minimised delayed transfers from hospital and stabilised emergency admissions. There had also been sustained improvement in the timeliness with which assessments and care service are provided and good progress on the further implementation of the Single Assessment Processes.
- 103 There are strong links with the PCT and other partners through the Thriving Healthy Communities Board of the LSP with some clear outcomes as a result. The five strands of the Thriving Healthy Communities theme are each supported by a joint commissioning manager and there are good examples of joint support and preventative work. The older people's sub-board promotes good health and social care for older people by the partnership.
- 104 There is a history of lively engagement with older people in Hackney and the Council and its partners have built successfully on this. Older people are involved as partners in discussing provision for older people in Hackney through the Council for older people and the older people's reference group for the LSP which is supported by Age Concern. There is a willingness to go out and listen to what older people have to say and a menu of visits, interviews meetings and specific consultation exercises are carried out. For example, 'Reaching out' in February 2006, was organised in partnership with Age Concern, the Pensions Service, Hanover in Hackney and TLC specialist care services, to provide information to older people and to collect their views on services. Some events, such as a well-attended meeting on mental health, are organised by older people themselves.

- 105** The Council uses a range of methods to provide information on services to older people such as large print documents and the Council website. However it recognises that there is more to do in developing alternative ways of accessing such information. Older people are not always given enough feedback about how their views have influenced services.
- 106** Many of the concerns of older people are the same as others in the community: fear of crime, cleaner streets, quality of housing and they benefit from the Council's investment in these areas. However there are other areas which are more important to older people such as access to services, health services, transport, the availability of public toilets and seats in the streets which are addressed in the older people's strategy. These have led to action such as opening six new public toilets over the next six months, a bus stop accessibility programme, increased availability of home-based therapy, the training of nurses to deal with older people's needs and more flexible care services.
- 107** The Council is working well with partners to deliver a comprehensive range of services to increase the independence of older people. A range of outcomes commissioned and delivered in partnership include a major reduction in delayed discharges, a reduction in numbers going into residential care, as well as outreach work with particular hard-to-reach groups such as gay and lesbian older people, the Orthodox Jewish community, and the Turkish community. Delayed discharges are very low thanks to an integrated intermediate care team including a joint first response team from health and social care and a therapy at home team from the Homerton hospital. There are also wider outcomes such as work to target older people at leisure centres, an Older People's Health & Leisure Festival Day, a programme of re-laying pavements and replacement of street lamps and partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector to provide work placements for older workers. Intergenerational work is being developed in discussion with Hackney youth parliament to improve understanding between both groups.

Children and young people

- 108** Overall the council and its partners achieve adequate but improving outcomes for children and young people in Hackney against a background of significant deprivation. Children and young people are generally safe.
- 109** Leadership at the senior level is effective and firm foundations have been established for improving outcomes for children and young people. A coherent vision for improving outcomes for children and young people is set out in the community strategy for Hackney and is clearly reflected in the draft children and young people's plan. Partnership working is strong and there are challenging but realistic ambitions for children and young people. Needs have been carefully analysed and gaps and underperformance in services identified. Partners are working well towards establishing a children's trust arrangement. Many services are good and are improving outcomes for most children and young people. Almost all services in education are good and performance management arrangements are effective in identifying areas for improvement.

Although the Council has a performance management framework in place for other services it is not having consistent impact and is not sufficiently well embedded in some areas such as children's social care duty services, the youth service and youth offending services. Both the latter services have suffered from ineffective leadership and management. The council has recognised these weaknesses and is taking appropriate action but there is insufficient youth provision to meet the needs of the area and improvements in the management of the YOT have been too recent to impact fully on re-offending rates.

- 110** The Council and its partners have good arrangements for providing children and young people with safe environments. Accidents and unplanned hospital admissions have reduced significantly. Arrangements for establishing the whereabouts of children and young people are adequate. Agencies collaborate well to safeguard children and there are good joint protocols in place between social services, the drug action team and adult mental health services. There has been one recent serious case review. Early intervention and family support services have been successful in reducing the number of children on the child protection register. Through its extensive quality assurance procedures, the council has identified that children and young people referred to children's social services are not always dealt with in a manner that is consistent with its published criteria for access to social services and child protection services and continues to take action to minimise risk to vulnerable children and young people.
- 111** Improving educational achievement has a high priority and standards are improving from a low base. The Learning Trust supports schools well and improving educational achievement has a high priority. The quality of early years' education is good and children make good progress through the foundation stage. High pupil mobility and a much higher than average numbers of children with English as a second language have an impact on test results. Although the achievement of many children is below that found in similar areas at the age of seven, 11 and 14 it is in line by age 16. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups identified as underachieving receive targeted support and make good progress. Children looked after achieve higher standards by the age of 16 than found elsewhere in the country and children with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress against targets set for them. Attendance rates are improving and are above the national average in secondary schools. Exclusion rates are higher than elsewhere but the number of permanent exclusions from primary and secondary schools is reducing.
- 112** There is much involvement of children and young people in local planning and decision-making and they are consulted effectively about developments in their communities and schools. Effective action is taken in schools and youth settings, to develop children and young people's social skills and they are tolerant of others' cultures. The Learning Trust has played an important role in raising the aspirations of the young people of Hackney. Young people and their families are supported well when they are facing challenges. The strong commitment to partnership working between the police and other agencies to address anti-social behaviour and offending has resulted in some notable improvements. Crime levels are generally falling but rates of offending and re-offending are high.

Multi-agency working to support the transition of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities to adult services for is at an early stage of development. Services for looked-after children have been strengthened and are supporting an increase in the proportion attending reviews.

- 113** Opportunities to prepare young people for working life are adequate. There is a clear and ambitious 14-19 strategy and the range of provision is improving. In some employment sectors however, clear progression routes are lacking. More young people are continuing in education and training but the proportion of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who are not in education, training or employment is higher than average. There is insufficient co-operation between Connexions, the youth service and colleges to target support to this group. Overall success rates on vocational courses are improving and the attainment rates for GCE A-level qualifications are in line with similar areas but remain below national averages. Young people leaving the youth justice system and those leaving care are well supported and those leaving care are just as likely to continue in education, training or progress to employment as their peers. Provision for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities is adequate for those with low level needs, but there is insufficient local provision for those with complex or profound needs. Effective regeneration has taken place in some neighbourhoods but suitable housing continues to be in short supply for families and young people.

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 Hackney Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 6-17 March 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.