

Corporate Assessment Report

August 2006



Corporate Assessment

London Borough of Hounslow

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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 The London Borough of Hounslow is performing well. There are clear strengths in many of its services which it delivers effectively with partners. It has worked successfully with local partners, and consulted well with local people, to set its future ambitions and priorities to develop: a safer, healthier, accessible, thriving, greener, and creative community. Many of its ambitions are stretching and challenging, and the Council's top priorities address local needs, and the most pressing concerns of its communities, namely, crime, grime, children and youth. They also reflect national priorities. The Council prioritises well and maintains its focus on its most important agendas. Action in keeping with many of its aims is making a measurable difference for local people. Progress is particularly apparent in its regeneration developments in three of its town centres.
- 6 Hounslow's Community Plan 2004-2007 is entitled 'Celebrating Diversity - Building Cohesion'. The Council's focus on, and commitment to promoting community cohesion and good race relations overall is a significant strength. It is successfully threading this important theme through its ambitions, priorities, culture and working practices. The Council is leading the way locally on this issue and its senior managers, councillors, and staff are fully engaged with this agenda.
- 7 Hounslow Council is a good community leader. Its ability to work effectively with partners across all sectors is one of its key strengths. It is well regarded by local partners. It works collaboratively and especially well with the police on anti-social behaviour and community safety initiatives, and the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) on health. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) will require the Council to develop and strengthen its community leadership role further, the Council is aware of this and is taking positive and appropriate action to put in place more robust performance management arrangements for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).
- 8 Political leadership at the Council is strong. Councillors are representative of their diverse local communities. Executive members are able, share common ambitions and work together effectively. Scrutiny members are able and keen, and they receive high quality support from officers. They have contributed a great deal to improving services and many of their recommendations are implemented by the Executive, for example, regarding recruitment and retention, parking and health. However, their contribution has to some extent lost some momentum over the last year, partly due to many scrutiny members believing that their role is not sufficiently valued by the Council's leadership.
- 9 The Council's managerial leadership culture is characterised by a people-focused, prudent, pragmatic and responsive approach. Senior leaders and managers at the Council are thorough, and their eye for detail, yet enabling approach, has served the Council well. However, for Hounslow to raise its profile and performance to a higher level and to further accelerate the pace of change, the Council will need to shift its management culture to become more pro-active and bolder in its approach to managing risk.

- 10 The Council takes account of diversity issues in decision-making, capacity-building, service design and delivery and staff development. This is an important backdrop to its efforts to strengthen its user focus and embed throughout the organisation a customer-centred approach. The Council is learning from good practice in user focus in some of its higher performing services (for example Hounslow Homes, Supporting People, services for Older People) and is working hard to transfer to other services its more successful approaches. For example, the Council, intends to set up a Council-wide call centre.
- 11 However, the Council's capacity to deliver its ambitions is currently adequate. In spite of it having proven capacity to deliver improvement and a stable and competent workforce committed to improving services, some of its managers are over stretched, for example in Customer Services and Modernisation departments. In recognition of the need to modernise its services for users and address relatively low levels of resident and customer satisfaction, it has recently appointed an Assistant Chief Executive to lead a new department for customer services, and developed a Customer Services Strategy. The Council has also recently advertised senior management posts as part of the integration of children's services.
- 12 Currently, some of the Council's functions and facilities which are critical to supporting a strong user focus to meet the needs of all Hounslow's communities meet only minimum requirements. As a result the Council is taking steps to modernise them through implementation of action plans attached to Customer Services, E-Government and ICT strategies. For example, the Council is transforming its customer access point at its civic centre and it has well developed plans to update its ICT to meet e-government requirements to improve access to services. It is currently researching how to improve its use of ICT to support better corporate management of its performance.
- 13 In terms of achievements, the Council is performing well and improving well overall. Sixty-two per cent of its key local government performance indicators have improved since 2002/03. It has a track record of improvement across many services, including services which are high priorities for local people. The Council has achieved successes in building sustainable communities, most notably in achieving excellent (three-star) performance judgements for the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) - which manages its housing stock - and for its Supporting People services - which deliver services to some of Hounslow's vulnerable people. The Council is effective too in promoting a sustainable local economy and in securing job opportunities for local people. Through strong partnership working the Council and its partners have reduced local crime levels, are successfully tackling anti-social behaviour and are making effective progress to improve health outcomes for local people. The Council is making good progress in providing services for older people. It is performing well in meeting the needs of children and young people, outcomes are good; overall children and young people are healthy and safe and those most at risk are well protected.

- 14 The Council provides adequate environmental services overall. It has achieved improvements in arrangements for household waste and recycling collection, and, based on audited data for 2004/05, it has increased levels of recycling and reduced the time taken to remove graffiti and abandoned cars. Satisfaction with household waste collection shows improvement between 2003/04 and unaudited part-year figures for 2005/06. But street and environmental cleanliness remains relatively poor. Waste minimisation levels remain relatively low performing, although there have been improvements in composting according to unaudited 2005/06 part year data. Resident satisfaction levels with parks and open spaces are also relatively very low.
- 15 The Council is performing well overall in how it uses its resources and delivers value for money. It manages its finances adequately and prudently, and has delivered high efficiency savings. It was top of the league this year for Gershon efficiency savings. Its financial planning is effective. The Council is having to make up for past under-investment in some key service areas, such as ICT, and work within resource constraints. This makes for a very challenging future ahead.

Areas for improvement

- 16 The Council should develop a culture that is more pro-active and forward-looking.
- 17 The Council should develop a more strategic approach to procurement.
- 18 The Council should review and clarify its long-term vision for the area.
- 19 The Council should import good practice from its robust high level strategies to consistently apply to all its business plans an outcome-focus and SMART approach to target setting.
- 20 The Council should build on the work it has done to improve the capacity of its staff and continue to invest in staff development.
- 21 The Council should facilitate frank and open discussions with relevant managers, councillors and staff to address the differences in opinion that exist about how well the scrutiny function is valued and supported.

Summary of assessment scores

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

- 22** Hounslow is a unitary authority and outer London borough situated to the west of central London. It is bordered by the London boroughs of Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon, Richmond upon Thames and Surrey County Council. 212,344 people live in the borough, in 83,000 households. Just under 20 per cent of the population is 15 years or younger; 69 per cent is of working age (16-64 years), and just over 11 per cent is 65 years and over. Thirty-five per cent of the borough's residents are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. Hounslow describes itself as a community of communities. It is one of the most culturally diverse areas in the UK. In all age groups BME residents are projected to make up a steadily increasing proportion of the population. The number of BME older people (aged 65 or more) is expected to increase from 3,877 in 2001 to 4,991 in 2006, an increase of 29 per cent. The number of children aged 5 to 14 years from BME communities is projected to increase from 11,414 in 2001 to 12,794 in 2006, an increase of 12 per cent. Over 120 languages are spoken in the borough.
- 23** Hounslow borough has areas of relative deprivation, such as Feltham, and areas of affluence in the east of the borough, such as Chiswick. Overall Hounslow ranks 102nd most deprived of 354 councils (source ODPM indices of deprivation 2004). There is low unemployment at 2.9 per cent, but there are many low skilled workers and average household incomes and wages are low relative to most other London boroughs.
- 24** West London is a choice location for many businesses and Hounslow has some major multi-national businesses in its area. However, local businesses report widespread skills shortages and many of Hounslow's residents lack the qualifications and skills required by the more prosperous employers.
- 25** Heathrow Airport is situated directly on Hounslow's west boundaries. It is a significant employer - 11,400 residents work there - but it also puts enormous pressures on the local environment in terms of air pollution, noise and traffic congestion. These pressures may increase with the imminent expansion via the opening of Terminal 5 in 2008.
- 26** Significant regeneration is underway in three main town centres in Hounslow central, Feltham and Brentford.
- 27** There are at least 800 active voluntary organisations in Hounslow.

The Council

- 28 The political composition of the Council when the corporate assessment took place was 36 Labour, 14 Conservative, 4 Liberal Democrat and 6 independent and other councillors. The Council was Labour led - through a leader and executive model. The ten Executive Members each had Executive portfolios covering the Council's ten corporate priorities, for example, Better Performance, Resources for Future Improvement, and Positive Regeneration. The Council also had five Area Committees which discuss and make decisions on matters affecting many local issues, including on planning matters. The Council had four standing scrutiny panels and also some service and topic based panels. These were overseen by an overview and scrutiny committee. The Leader was elected in May 2004 and was Deputy Leader for the two years prior to this (2002-2004).
- 29 Following the elections in May 2006 there has been a change in the political composition and political control of the Council.
- 30 The Council's estimated revenue expenditure for 2005/06 is £290 million (source: CIPFA). The 2005/06 council tax band D is £1320.62, including a GLA tax of £254.52. This represents an overall 4.6 per cent increase on 2004/05, including a 4.4 per cent Hounslow Tax increase.
- 31 The Council employs approximately 7,000 staff across all services. The officer structure has undergone recent changes and more changes are taking place, partly in response to the demands of the Children Act 2004 and partly to improve the Council's capacity to deliver its priorities, in particular its Modernisation agenda. As at March 2005 the Corporate Management Team comprised: the Chief Executive (CE), an Assistant CE for Corporate Policy and Regeneration, an Assistant CE for Customer Services and Modernisation, and eight directors covering: children and lifelong learning, housing and community services, finance, legal services, street management and public protection, human resources, project co-ordination and corporate property, and planning. The current Chief Executive joined Hounslow borough Council in February 2001.
- 32 The Council has many local and regional partnership arrangements. Hounslow is an active member of the West London Alliance that comprises also the boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, and Hillingdon.
- 33 The Council set up a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in 2003. It is chaired by the Council Leader. Members include senior council officers including the Chief Executive, local representatives of the PCT, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, the Metropolitan Police, West London Business, London West Learning and Skills Council, Hounslow Voluntary Sector Forum, Hounslow Race Equality Council. At the time of our on-site inspection, the LSP was working on its Local Area Agreement submission.

- 34** The Council's key service providers include Hounslow Homes, an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) which manages its housing services; and Community Initiatives Partnerships (CIP), which is a charitable trust set up by the Council to deliver its leisure services. The Council has also recently signed a ten-year contract with a private sector revenues and benefits service provider.

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

Ambition

- 35 The Council is performing well in this area. It has worked very effectively with local partners to develop an ambitious agenda for Hounslow. Together they aim to make a real and measurable difference for local people. Hounslow's Community Plan 2004-2007 'Celebrating Diversity - Building Cohesion' sets out an over-arching strategic vision for improving the quality of life of local people and promoting the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area. The Council and its partners have clear aims to develop: a safer, healthier, accessible, thriving, greener, and creative community. The aims set out in the Community Plan are supported by strategies, plans and three year targets and action plans which are developed jointly.
- 36 The Council's ten priorities are clearly articulated in its Executive Business Plan (EBP). They are well publicised and promoted, and they are understood by residents, partners and all levels of staff. For example, in response to the Council's staff survey in 2004, seventy per cent of staff said they could see how their work contributes to the Council's overall objectives. The ten priorities have provided the framework for the Council's overall ambitions, strategic planning and business planning and performance monitoring since May 2002. They clearly link with, and articulate the Council's contribution to, the Community Plan themes. They are:
- 'One Hounslow';
 - promoting community development, cohesion and safety;
 - children and lifelong learning;
 - supporting vulnerable people;
 - enhancing our environment;
 - sustainable mixed housing;
 - positive regeneration;
 - improving customer care;
 - better performance; and
 - resources for future improvement.

- 37 Many of Hounslow's ambitions are stretching and challenging. For example, in relation to regeneration. Over the next ten years the Council and its partners aim to transform the borough into a thriving location, to enable it to 'take its rightful place as the international gateway to the capital'. Major developments are set to regenerate three of Hounslow's key town centres - Hounslow, Feltham and Brentford. The Council aims to provide thousands of jobs to give residents good access to local employment, including in higher skilled and higher paid jobs. It aims to provide new good quality housing for sale and rent, to improve the quality of social housing, and to give all residents good access to improved shopping, education, and community and leisure facilities.
- 38 These ambitions are appropriate for the area and address the needs of Hounslow's diverse local communities. Councillors, officers and partners are enthusiastic about achieving the ambitions. Residents, staff and local partners understand and support the objectives. The Council has consulted extensively to develop its ambitions and they reflect the aspirations and concerns of local people, including black and minority ethnic groups and other groups at risk of disadvantage. Its ambitions are also realistic, taking account of the Council's capacity and its need to prioritise its limited resources.
- 39 The Council has a very strong commitment to promoting community cohesion and good race relations. It is successfully threading the theme of community cohesion through its ambitions, priorities, culture and working practices. The Council is effective in taking account of diversity issues in decision-making, capacity-building, service design and delivery, and staff development. For example, the Council is not content simply to maintain a solid record in education overall. It is successfully targeting initiatives to ensure the attainment of pupils from newly arrived and refugee communities who currently are performing less well, such as Somali boys, are brought in line with attainment of other pupils.
- 40 The Council has a thorough understanding of the scale of the social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities in the area, including those relating to diversity, race equality and deprivation. The Council's ambitions are informed by good intelligence which it systematically gathers from reliable sources and shares openly with its partners. The Council and its partners work well together to assess changes in the local context and they share an understanding of local needs. Ninety-three per cent of stakeholders who replied to a recent Audit Commission survey agreed that the Council has a good understanding of all its local communities, the locality, and the challenges facing it. The Area Profiles section of the local community plan clearly sets out data and information about the main geographical areas of the borough. The Council and its partners use such local intelligence to effectively target resources and engage effectively with their communities.

16 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 41 Overall, the Council is a strong Community leader. Productive partnership working is one of the Council's key strengths. Councillors and officers are strongly committed to working in partnership and are well regarded by local partners. The Council works constructively with its LSP partners in an atmosphere of openness and trust, and it collaborates particularly well with the police and PCT to undertake needs assessments, develop joint strategies and ensure its joint plans are properly resourced. Partners are clear overall about their respective roles. The Council also works effectively across authority boundaries, for example, as an active member of the West London Alliance. The Council can also be ground-breaking, following dialogue with Central Government, the Council has recently instigated that Hounslow's high performing ALMO should undertake a pilot scheme whereby it will build 15 new housing units in the borough. No other ALMO currently has the authority to undertake the building of new properties.
- 42 Partnership working with the voluntary and community sectors is positive. The Community Development and Regeneration Unit (CDRU) makes a very significant and highly valued contribution to building good relations and facilitating consultation with the voluntary and community sectors. The voluntary sector is also represented on many local partnerships. But some voluntary organisations do not always feel properly engaged by all sections of the Council and joint strategic planning of services and joint capacity building for the future is underdeveloped.
- 43 Councillors and managers are willing to take tough decisions to balance competing demands in the light of available resources. For example, the Council closed a local residential care home - John Aird house - in spite of significant opposition. It drove this change because of its firm belief that more effective and efficient services could be provided to residents elsewhere.
- 44 The Council's managerial leadership is effective and senior leaders and managers at the Council work well together. Staff morale is good as a result of good team working within departments and improving staff management practice overall. Senior managers put into practice Hounslow's values, such as, 'Taking pride in our Borough', 'Bringing success to our communities', and 'Ensuring we are inclusive and fair'. Their attention to detail, yet enabling approach, has served the Council well and there are examples of the Council taking challenging steps, such as establishing the ALMO. However, for Hounslow to raise its profile and performance to a higher level and to further accelerate the pace of change, the Council will need to shift its management culture to become more pro-active and bolder. Its staff are keen for the Council to take a more ambitious approach to taking and managing risks.
- 45 The Council is successfully keeping local people informed about decisions it has taken and what it is doing to improve services, having improved its internal and external communications. Its fortnightly magazine hm delivered to every home in the borough, in particular, is widely read and highly valued. The web-casting of public meetings over the internet is a means by which the Council is improving accessibility and accountability. The Council also has a good website which is easy to use.

- 46 However, there is scope for the Council to more effectively articulate and promote its positive long term vision. While the Council's 2005 employee survey showed that 58 per cent of respondents had a good understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve, this still means that many of the Council's staff do not have that same understanding. Only one in three staff report that senior managers provide a clear sense of direction. The Council's political and managerial leaders are able to articulate their long term vision verbally, but the Council has not set out in writing in a concise and clear way what success in achieving all of its ambitions will 'look' like and 'feel' like. And the Council's criteria for success and outcome-focused targets are scattered among several documents. It is not easy for local partners, residents and staff to gain an understanding what will be different in terms of their experience as a result of the considerable efforts and many initiatives planned and underway - or when changes will happen.

Prioritisation

- 47 Overall the Council prioritises well.
- 48 The Council has clear, appropriate and robust priorities for the area. which reflect the findings of thorough local needs assessments and extensive local consultation. In a recent Audit Commission survey seventy-eight per cent of stakeholders agreed that the Council has clear priorities which focus on the things that matter to local communities.
- 49 The Council takes explicit account of diversity issues in decision-making about its priorities, reflecting its effective mainstreaming of its theme of community cohesion. Its priorities effectively address the needs of black and minority ethnic groups and other groups at risk of disadvantage. For example, there are specific priorities within the Community Safety Strategy which focus on tackling race crime, homophobic crime, crimes against young people and working with disaffected white youth to promote good race relations.
- 50 The Council has clearly drawn from its overall priority framework, its medium-term focus and it is successful in making the relevant links across all its priorities to establish a cross-cutting programme. For the three-year period 2005-08 the Executive is focusing on five cross-cutting policy initiatives. These reflect local people's most important priorities of 'crime', 'grime', 'children' and 'youth'. The five medium term priorities, which are each supported by a clear rationale, are:
- children's services;
 - improving services and outcomes for young people;
 - tackling crime and community safety;
 - tackling grime and improving street-scene; and
 - improving processes, efficiency and management of the Council through the 'Modernisation Agenda'.

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- 51 The Council is effective at targeting its resources on these key priorities. For example, in 2005/06 it has appointed a number of new youth workers to improve services for young people and it has invested, along with the Police, in Neighbourhood policing. The Council has set up a Modernisation Fund which it has operated since 2003/04 to support corporate developments to deliver EBP priorities. Until recently there has been under-investment in ICT. The benefits from ICT are now recognised and this has led to this area being given priority under the Modernisation agenda. Clear prioritisation is helping the Council to work corporately to effectively focus its resources on the issues that matter most to local people.
- 52 The Council has identified non-priorities and consciously shifted resources away from them as part of a systematic process. For example, between 2002/03 and 2004/05, £6.1 million of efficiency savings were made. £2 million of these savings (around one third) were made from central services. In line with the Council's priorities, back room services were targeted for reductions in order to invest in front line services.
- 53 The Leader and Executive, Chief Executive and senior managers are taking a particularly strong role in steering and driving change in services that have suffered from lack of attention and investment in the past, for example, in regeneration and in improving support functions. Overall the pace of change has accelerated in the last couple of years for key areas for development. Councillors and senior officers maintain their focus and are not distracted by minor operational matters. New initiatives are clearly linked to the Council's stated priorities.
- 54 Priorities are informed by local consultation and reflect an appropriate balance between local and national priorities. The Council consults widely and effectively using an appropriate range of methods, including a residents' panel. It is successful in making special efforts to engage with its diverse communities and people at risk of exclusion, for example, older people. The Council's five area committees have also been successful in ensuring that the concerns of local people are reflected in strategic and service planning that will impact on their locality, for example, to secure better street lighting and installation of CCTV. The Council readily shares its intelligence with partners to inform joint strategies and initiatives. The Council recognises that it needs to better co-ordinate consultation and it is taking positive steps to address this, having recently completed an internal consultation audit.
- 55 The Council's high level strategies which support delivery of its ten corporate priorities are, in the main, robust and outcome focused. They contain clear objectives, usually covering the next three or five years, which are based on a thorough understanding of the needs and priorities of local people. They also contain clear targets for improvement which are challenging and realistic. For example, the Council's Community Safety Strategy 2005-08 is based on a detailed analysis of local crime patterns and extensive consultation. It outlines clear objectives and action plans to deliver a twenty per cent reduction in recorded crime, including by focusing joint initiatives and targeting resources on five key crime hotspots.

Clear prioritisation within the Strategy is enabling the Council and its partners to deliver significant reductions in crime in targeted areas.

- 56** The Council develops its high level strategies into service and departmental strategies. Many of these also contain outcome based SMART objectives and clear action plans to support delivery of objectives. For example, the Education Development Plan 2002-07 has sharp targets and outcome measures.
- 57** Many of the Council's strategies and action plans clearly exemplify long term and medium term funding arrangements and financial implications. Also the Council has robust processes to ensure that councillors are fully engaged in ensuring that resources are drawn to its priorities as part of the annual process to agree its budget. There are examples too of the Council co-ordinating its service and financial planning with local Partners, such as the PCT. The Council also effectively links financial and service planning within directorates.
- 58** The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in its EBP sets the level of resources needed to meet local priorities over the next three years. It projects the likely level of council tax for this period and is based on effective three year financial modelling.
- 59** The Council works effectively with its partners to review priorities and work programmes, for example, at Annual Stakeholder Conferences and through the LSP.
- 60** The Council has taken decisive action to deliver its priorities. Examples of decisive action are driven by financial imperatives and a desire to achieve the best potential outcomes for residents and service users and include setting up the ALMO Hounslow Homes. As a result, the Council has been able to attain high performance levels, realise achievements recognised by local people and also deliver efficiency savings.

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

Capacity

- 61 The Council's capacity to deliver its ambitions is adequate.
- 62 There is clear accountability and decision-making to support delivery of services and improvement. Officers and councillors work effectively together, are committed to delivering improvement and are clear about their respective roles for taking decisions. Although the Council recognises the roles of group leaders and the Chief Executive in ensuring observance of national Codes of Conduct relating to the ethical framework they are yet to be formally defined and communicated.
- 63 Decision-making processes are transparent and result in relevant actions. Executive members are able, enthusiastic, share common ambitions and are working together effectively to make a real difference to Hounslow and its people. They have a good understanding of their portfolio services and agendas, and focus well on strategy and policy.
- 64 Scrutiny members are able and keen, and they receive high quality support from dedicated officers and some senior managers. Scrutiny members have had significant successes in contributing to service improvement - for example, on parking, health, and recruitment and retention - and engaging effectively with local partners, particularly in relation to health and children and young people. A very high proportion of their recommendations are implemented. However, many scrutiny members believe that their role is no longer sufficiently valued by the Council's leadership and as a result scrutiny is not currently as rigorous or challenging as it once was. However, there is a wide gap in perception as to whether the concerns of scrutiny members, about being valued and also about having access to timely and comprehensive information, are founded in fact. This gap in perception is currently a barrier to scrutiny members working to full capacity.
- 65 Risk management is currently adequate and improving. The Council is continuing to build a solid framework of risk management processes and address the areas for development identified in the Annual Audit letter arising for the Use of Resources judgement.

- 66 The Council overall is performing well in delivering value for money and efficiency savings. The Council's officers and members have a clear and sustained focus on improving value for money. The Council has adequate financial management arrangements which, in spite of financial constraints, have delivered a balanced budget over many years. The Council maintains reserves at broadly the lowest acceptable level, although it increased its reserves in 2004/05. There is a financial risk to the authority of receiving what it perceives to be poor financial grant settlements from central government. The Council's response to managing such a risk is to maintain even tighter financial control. Overall, capacity is a constraint and the Council is not meeting some community aspirations for improving the local area, for example, to fully maintain all its parks, roads and paving to a high standard.
- 67 In many respects the Council manages its staff effectively to deliver its ambitions and priorities. Staff are positive about the Council as an employer. Days lost to sickness absence is comparatively very low, and improving, at only 6.9 days in 2004/05. The Council achieved corporate Investors In People status in July 2005. The 2005 staff survey tells a strong 'story' of improvement in how the Council communicates with, and manages, its staff. It shows strong improvement since 2001, when the last survey was undertaken, especially in terms of staff being more aware of what is going on in the organisation and having the information they need to do their jobs. Team briefings have been introduced and are very effective - they are the source of information about what is going on in the Council for 70 per cent of staff. There is good team working and staff feel treated equally regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation. The Council monitors the extent to which its staff are representative of local communities. Overall its staff are generally representative of Hounslow's communities, except among the more senior management levels, where BME communities are underrepresented.
- 68 The Council is not yet fully effective in facilitating two-way communication with staff. Less than half of staff reported in the 2005 staff survey that they can express their views freely and feel confident their views will be respected. And a minority of staff think the Council is in touch with staff and the community. Most staff say that Hounslow is not an easy place to get things done. This is in spite of most staff experiencing high levels of autonomy in their day to day work, having a good understanding about how their work contributes to the Council's objectives, feeling their line managers listen to their suggestions and ideas, and having access to a well publicised staff suggestion scheme. In response to an I&DeA peer review recommendation, trade union capacity is being developed to enable staff representatives to engage more effectively on strategic issues. The trade unions are very positive about this because it will help the Council better integrate staff concerns into its planning. But overall, currently, the Council is not learning as much as it could from staff feedback and engagement.

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- 69 The Council effectively reviews training and development for councillors and staff. Staff training and development is linked to the Council's objectives through its performance and development appraisals. The Council has a sound member development programme and there has been good take up of the I&DeA Leadership Academy, including by some non-executive members, which demonstrates self awareness that skills and capacity among leading members need developing.
- 70 The Council currently has the capacity it needs to continue to take forward incremental improvement in its services. Its recruitment and retention strategy has been effective in tackling capacity gaps, for example for teachers and social workers. But it does not have the capacity and skills it needs to deliver all of its more ambitious long term objectives, or respond flexibly to emerging challenges. It has therefore taken steps to recruit to new management positions. The Council has also recently agreed a Workforce Development Plan which sets out future skills requirements and skills gaps which the Council needs to address. But the planning is at an early stage. The plan sets a broad framework for addressing changes in staffing requirements, but it does not yet quantify future capacity needs, or set out SMART targets to assess whether needs are being met. Also, workforce planning has not yet been undertaken as a collaborative exercise with partner organisations including voluntary and community organisations or other boroughs.
- 71 The Council's procurement strategy is not being used effectively to drive the delivery of priorities. Despite some successes in negotiating contracts, the Council is not harnessing the potential benefits of pro-active, innovative and co-ordinated procurement. The Council has been aware of this for some time, but due to delays setting up a fully integrated corporate procurement function, this weakness still has not been fully addressed. A new procurement strategy is in development, but progress is slow.
- 72 The Council has been very effective in using partnerships to enhance its capacity in some services, for example, the Council has recently signed a ten-year contract with a private sector partner to deliver its revenues and benefits services. Its other main partners include the ALMO and CIP leisure trust. There are also examples of the Council undertaking joint commissioning and capacity-building with local partners. For example, the PCT and the Council jointly fund officers who are working to integrate service delivery and improve processes, such as those for delayed discharges. The Council has worked with the police to target capacity on burglary hot spots, aided by funding from the Council's Modernisation Fund. The joint initiative is impacting positively on Public Service Agreement (PSA) crime targets.

- 73** Relationships across corporate managers and between departments are good, but joint working across departments is still in development. To draw some extra capacity to cross-cutting agendas and promote joint working across departments, the Council has set up Corporate Improvement Teams, for example, to deliver projects for ICT and human resources. The teams have been successful in taking forward joint agendas, but delays in progress has been experienced in some areas due to project leaders and members finding it difficult to divert time away from their departmental responsibilities.
- 74** ICT systems are currently adequate. They inhibit easy access to many services and embedding of a user-focused approach to service delivery. Ambitious plans to update the ICT systems are now underway.

Performance management

- 75** The Council's performance management is adequate.
- 76** The Executive and Corporate Management Team have taken a strong and effective leadership role in seeking to improve the Council's approach to performance management over recent years. As a consequence, the Council is progressing well in implementing a consistent, rigorous and open approach to performance management. It has an effective system for managing its performance, staying focused on its priorities, and facilitating open debate and constructive challenge. The current framework is based on a Quarterly Performance Management (QPM) process whereby the Corporate Management Team (CMT), Executive and Chair of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance using performance indicator information. The QPM meeting incorporates updates on the revenue budget and this has resulted in additional resources being allocated to areas in need of improvement. The QPM process involves use of a 'traffic light' reporting system to ensure attention is focused on areas where action plan milestones may be missed, or where there is a higher risk of targets not being met. The QPM thus provides a sound basis for tracking performance within priority services and addressing identified problems. For example, additional resources were provided, and decisive action taken to tackle under-performance in meeting the Council's secondary school absence target. As a result of rigorous analysis and a tougher strategy to improve attendance, school absences declined and the 2004/05 target was exceeded. From early 2006 the quarterly review meetings are to be held in public thus providing the public with an opportunity to scrutinise the performance of the authority.

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- 77 The Council very often involves service users, residents and partners in monitoring services and keeps them up to date with what it is doing. The Council convenes Annual Stakeholder Conferences to review its progress against the LSP's Community Plan. Such engagement is helping the Council to track its performance against planned objectives and more effectively target its resources. For example, following a residents' survey in 2004 and budget consultation in 2005 which revealed the need to improve customer care, the Council reprioritised its three-year medium term financial strategy to reflect its priority of 'modernising' the Council.
- 78 Performance management arrangements have led to demonstrable outcomes in improving services for local people. For example, for planning applications, where there has been significant improvement in the speed of processing applications. Reorganising the street cleansing service to implement same day rubbish and recycling collection and next day street sweeping has been recognised by the public as a very positive initiative. And an increase in public satisfaction with waste collection from 69 per cent in 2003/04 to 75 per cent in 2005/06 has been evidenced by the Council's unaudited monitoring data. There have also been improvements in turnaround time for voids in Council/ALMO housing between 2003/04 and 2004/05 from 66 days to 42.33 days.
- 79 The Council uses project management effectively for some activities of the authority, for example, for large scale property related and ICT projects. But the Council relies on external providers for some major projects and recognises many of its managers need training in the use of its chosen project management framework, PRINCE2.
- 80 Staff are clear about their individual contribution to the achievement of overall priorities. Use of individual performance appraisal is widespread across the authority. This is helping the Council to ensure that effective performance management is embedded.
- 81 Performance management of the LSP's Community Plan objectives is not yet sufficiently robust. The Council recognises that it needs to develop more robust arrangements for how the LSP partners work together to track their performance. The Council is addressing this by integrating the successful aspects of its own performance management arrangements throughout all LSP ambitions. It will also apply the arrangements to the LAA targets, once they have been agreed.
- 82 The Council produces relevant management information about performance and managers and staff use performance management as an integral part of how they work within their departments. However, some internally focused departmental business plans are adequate. They clearly outline what the department will be doing over the coming year, and outline milestones and accountable officers, but they do not consistently make clear the relative prioritisation of objectives. And some contain limited financial information. The Council recognises that linking service and financial planning is a key area for development.

- 83** There are weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for learning from complaints from users. The Council is developing its approach to improve its use of learning from complaints, which it acknowledges needs development. The Council has recently revised its complaints process and the revisions have produced improvements in response times from 51 days to 30 days, which is just over the Ombudsman's target.

What has been achieved?

Summary

- 84 The Council is performing well in its achievement of many of the shared priorities. Its own ambitions and local priorities reflect national priorities and are tailored appropriately to local circumstances. The Council secured improvement in 62 per cent of its key performance indicators in 2004/05. Effective partnership working is having a positive impact on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. The Council is performing well in terms of community cohesion, regeneration, housing services, Supporting People services, education, and social care for adults and children. Overall it is effectively developing its responses to challenging agendas to reduce health inequalities, promote healthier communities, and address the needs of children and young people and older people in the area.
- 85 However, the Council's capacity is adequate and the Council faces significant challenges in terms of resource limitations, historical underinvestment in some services and outdated ICT systems.
- 86 In spite of delivering improvement in its environment services, including to improve recycling levels, take faster action on graffiti and abandoned vehicles, modernise its approaches to rubbish collection and street cleansing, and improve the condition of some roads, pavements and parks, performance overall is adequate. It is not clear how the Council intends to meet the very challenging recycling targets set by itself and central Government. Failing to meet these targets will have significant financial implications for the Council.
- 87 Resident satisfaction levels are in general adequate or poor, with many appearing in the bottom 25 per cent or bottom 50 per cent compared to the rest of England. These figures are based on the position at the 2003/04 survey and the Council has provided more up to date information, not yet audited, which shows many of the indicators improving. But it is not possible to say whether they are improving faster than other authorities to bring them out of the bottom two quartiles.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 88 The Council is effective in promoting a sustainable local economy. It successfully exercises its regulatory functions in supporting its ambitions and priorities. For example, substantial regeneration is underway in Hounslow's three major town centres and this has led to the creation of significant job opportunities in the area, including for local labour under terms of agreement. The developments are providing, and will continue to provide, improved housing, shopping and other services to enhance residents' use and enjoyment of these localities.

- 89 The Council takes effective action to nurture business growth and it acts on factors to produce a thriving economy. For example, the Council has shown strong community leadership in embracing the opportunities associated with the movement into the area of international communications businesses. It has been instrumental in retaining the global headquarters of a major employer in the area in Brentford. And it has also secured a development partnership to rebuild Western International Market, which draws trade to Hounslow from across Southern England. Its successes are reflected in higher numbers of VAT registered businesses and lower unemployment in the borough.
- 90 The Council is working effectively with local partners and businesses to target educational and employment opportunities to young people and adults from its most deprived areas. The Council is effective in brokering jobs. About 232 people have been helped into sustainable employment as a result of its interventions. It is also successful in promoting apprenticeships and vocational training for local people at local colleges, and within its own service providers, such as Hounslow Homes and CIP. This is in line with the Council's ambition to reduce the skills gap to meet the needs of employers in the area.
- 91 The Education Business Partnership is particularly effective in engaging large employers to plan training to support growth in the local economy. An example of very good employer engagement with schools includes science days set up with local major employers. A major airway company is working with the Council to develop new career paths for Hounslow residents at its well-equipped training centre, a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in retail. The West London Learning and Skills Council has set up effective provider networks that have enhanced the quality and breadth of programmes available to young Hounslow residents.
- 92 The Council is successfully delivering its area's housing requirements and ambitions. The Council delivers good outcomes for local people in the local housing market. It links its robust housing strategies to wider community ambitions and liaises effectively with residents. Between 2005 and 2014 the Council projects 6500 new homes in Hounslow, 73 per cent more than the Mayor's London Plan requires.
- 93 The Council is successfully delivering affordable homes and has a positive understanding of its role in the housing market. The percentage of affordable homes built in the borough has risen from 18 per cent to 33 per cent since 2001/02. Twenty-eight per cent of all units completed in the last five years are affordable. In the last three years 732 new homes have been approved for key workers.
- 94 Hounslow Homes, the Council's ALMO, continues to be successful in improving the condition and management of local housing stock. It has been assessed as an 'excellent' three star ALMO with excellent prospects for improvement, and predicts it will deliver the decent homes standard for all its homes by April 2006, four years ahead of the central Government target. It is also the first ALMO in the country to be given permission as part of a pilot study to build social housing.

It is currently constructing 15 larger family units in response to the changing needs of the community where larger family units are needed compared to five years ago when smaller single family units were required. As well as improving quality of service, with 76 per cent of tenants happy with the service overall, the ALMO is delivering efficiencies. Hounslow Homes achieved nearly £16 million efficiency gains in 2004/05 and £13 million are projected for 2005/06.

- 95 There is however further scope for reducing the use of bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. And the Council recognises there is a need to increase the supply of larger units.
- 96 The Council has made significant improvements in some areas of its liveability agenda, particularly in its arrangements for rubbish collection, and speed of removal of graffiti and abandoned cars. However, despite this agenda being a corporate priority for many years, the Council's overall CPA score for environmental services in December 2005 was adequate. This is because it is not yet fully delivering on its waste minimisation and disposal ambitions, and improvements in recycling have not brought performance sufficiently close to the very challenging targets that have been set. The consequences of failing to achieve the necessary reduction in biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) going to landfill will be significant and will impact detrimentally on future years budget pressures.
- 97 The Council's current waste management strategy written in 2003 sets out the Council's aims to achieve government targets to minimise waste, and divert waste (through composting and recycling) from final disposal. While it sets out links to other objectives and aims, it is not robust in setting out how these will be achieved. It contains national targets, but no local targets. It does not articulate a long term view or critical timed decision points. The Council is currently waiting for West London Waste Authority (WLWA) to produce its strategy in June 2006 which in turn, takes account of the Mayor's London waste strategy. While it makes sense for the Council to set its own strategy in the light of the wider regional context, this is delaying the production of a clear and detailed strategy setting out what actions Hounslow will take and the impact these actions will have - on service delivery and the local community.
- 98 The Council has been successful in improving some of its parks - it has Green Flag Awards for three of them. Public satisfaction is improving but is still comparatively low. The Council is using a 'friends of parks' scheme to increase its capacity to bring, and/or keep, some of its parks up to standard, and it is developing a Strategic Parks Framework to prioritise capacity. But the Council recognises that many of its parks are suffering from historical underinvestment and that it will not have the resources to improve them all.

- 99 The Council is successful in pursuing proactive transport initiatives, such as increasing the number of bus lanes to encourage use of public transport and increasing the number of cycle routes to improve safety. Satisfaction with public transport is higher as a result, and the number of road casualties has reduced. Also the condition of the roads has shown some improvement following a £4 million investment. But despite this investment the condition of the highways and footways remains a key focus of concern for local residents, and there is an estimated £60 million backlog of repairs.
- 100 The Council lobbies hard to promote Hounslow's interests and mitigate the damaging environmental and health impacts of congestion and Heathrow airport. It ensures local people's issues are raised in the relevant decision-making forums.

Safer and stronger communities

- 101 The Council is working effectively with its partners and is delivering significant achievements in relation to community safety and building stronger communities.
- 102 The Council is performing well in contributing to crime reduction and crime prevention. Overall crime figures are down seven per cent and police statistics for 2004/05 show that Hounslow is performing well with only 24.78 per cent of local people very/fairly worried about crime, the fifth lowest of the 32 London Boroughs. However, residents and the Council recognise that there is still much to be done to tackle the fear of crime and provide reassurance. The proportion of residents who feel safer in their local area compared to 12 months ago was only 7.04 per cent, putting Hounslow in the mid range, 17th of 32 London Boroughs. Latest police surveys indicate that local people feel safer during the day as a result of local initiatives, but they still do not feel sufficiently safe at night.
- 103 The local Crime and Disorder Strategy 2005/08 is comprehensive, accessible and shows a good analysis of local problems. The Council, police and other partners share information to maintain a comprehensive picture of local problems, and use this information effectively to target crime 'hotspots'. Their initiatives have been successful. Overall there has been a 35-45 per cent reduction in crime in targeted areas. Residents appreciate the conspicuous street patrols which are in evidence.
- 104 The Council is working successfully, with partners to identify, target and reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) within the borough. For example, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has set up Detached Outreach Teams (DOT) to tackle youth crime, drugs and anti-social behaviour and these teams are having a good impact. Following the arrival of DOT and implementation of other initiatives via CIP and other partners to address social exclusion of young people on the Westmacott Estate, there has been a 25 per cent reduction in crime. Police statistics for 2004/05 show 23.91 per cent of Hounslow's residents were very/fairly worried about anti-social behaviour, sixth lowest of the 32 London Boroughs.

- 105** The Council with its partners have implemented successful initiatives to deal with domestic violence, including joint funding by the police, the local PCT, Hounslow Homes and the voluntary sector of dedicated staff. Targeted action has contributed to a 48.9 per cent reduction in reported incidents of domestic violence, from 2,118 in 2003/04 to 1,083 in 2004/05.
- 106** Mainstreaming of community safety through Council services is good. Residents have confirmed their recognition of improvements such as better street lighting. And the Council's leisure trust is contributing to reducing fear of crime by improving paths and lighting and pruning shrubs in its parks.
- 107** The Council through a multi agency approach with the police, PCT, and voluntary sector, is working effectively to reduce the impact of substance misuse on communities, individuals and their families. The Council has in place a wide range of initiatives to help curb drug addiction. For example, arrest referrals, a new drugs co-ordinator, drug testing equipment and a 24 hour helpline. There is a clear adult treatment plan in place for 2005/06 which identifies and is addressing gaps and weaknesses in current provision when compared to the national drug strategy. The plan sets out clear funding sources, spending profiles and key objectives and milestones to address the identified gaps and weaknesses. Performance to date in 2005/06 shows significant improvement against national targets. For example the number of people in treatment has increased by 14.4 per cent, this being in addition to a 57.6 per cent increase the previous year. Waiting times have reduced from 11 weeks to the national target of three weeks. The Council has also secured an 'alcohol free zone' within Central Hounslow as a pilot study to try to reduce alcohol related crime.
- 108** The Council's transport initiatives and work with the police are significantly reducing the numbers of people killed and seriously injured on its roads. Figures over the last year have reduced by 23 per cent for children and 35 per cent overall. Despite this, Hounslow still has amongst the highest number of road traffic fatalities in London.
- 109** The Council's emergency arrangements are fit for purpose and allow the Council and partners to respond to emergencies, communicate effectively with the public, and continue to deliver critical public services. The Council's up to date local risk assessment effectively informs arrangements for mitigating and managing risks. The Council has effective continuity arrangements for all services and has produced an appropriate training program for relevant staff. Regular tests are carried out, and independently assessed, to inform future risk management and training and development. The Council has contributed positively to local resilience forums and multi agency arrangements. It has begun to promote business continuity, but recognises that it must make further progress, particularly with voluntary organisations.

- 110** The Council is making good progress towards achieving its ambitions for community cohesion. The Council is fully committed to, and has a solid understanding of, this agenda. Sixty-one per cent of residents agree that their local areas is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together - this is a relatively positive result. The Council is also making progress towards achieving active citizenship. The Council through its cultural services stages many multi cultural events among an overall package of some 40 annual events to help build stronger communities. For example, the Filipino barrio festival which attracts 30,000 attendees, borough wide firework displays, Bedfont country fairs, and Mayor Mela Fetes in Boston Manor.

Healthier communities

- 111** The Council is making effective progress with partners to improve health outcomes for local people with some positive initiatives targeted at disadvantaged groups. Achieving 'Healthier Communities' is a priority for the Council and its partners, and work is underway to determine health inequalities priorities through development of a Joint Health Inequalities Strategy, which is in draft form. It indicates that much work is already going on to reduce health inequalities but a strategic framework is needed to pull the initiatives together and link the work to all relevant corporate priorities. It identifies that further work is required to turn the priorities and initiatives into realistic and tangible outcome measures. Use is also being made of the Local Area Agreement to identify targets and outcome measures.
- 112** There is a good level of understanding within the Council and among partners about the health issues of the local community. There is growing awareness about the wider determinants of health inequality and the impact of environmental factors. Actions to improve health are integrated in relevant strategies, such as the Sports and Recreation Strategy, and there is some awareness in other Council departments about how addressing issues like fuel poverty, and introducing an 'Ability to Pay' criteria for the new Hounslow Leisure Card, can improve health.
- 113** The Council's priorities for health are soundly based on clear information about health inequalities. This results from a comprehensive health inequalities report commissioned by the Council and produced by Public Health. Tackling air pollution is a key priority along with tackling the higher than average incidence of Coronary Heart Disease, Diabetes and TB amongst the local population. The Council has also identified health issues pertinent to local areas, and actions are underway to address issues of access to health provision, with plans to improve health provision in two of the most deprived wards.
- 114** The Council is effectively using its leadership role to raise awareness of the health issues in the borough and is working effectively with the LSP and business partners to raise the profile of health provision and health inequality in the borough. The LSP met last summer to look at data regarding health inequalities in the borough and one of the hidden communities identified was white working class people in deprived wards, who are now a target group.

- 115 Partnership working with the health sector to deliver improved health outcomes to the local community is strong. Public Health is situated in the main Council building and the joint appointment of certain public health posts enables effective working, particularly in relation to health promotion activities, which are contributing to positive health outcomes. An example of this is reduced levels of teenage pregnancy. Health Impact Assessments have also recently been commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel over concerns about development of 4,000 new housing units in Brentford and the impacts this may have on health provision.
- 116 The Council has been responsive and effective in setting up appropriate initiatives to improve access to services for people who traditionally have not accessed these. For example, the Council has worked with partners to improve early vaccination for asylum seeking families deemed to be at high risk of TB. The Council is also beginning to explore the health needs of hard to reach groups through the post of an Asian support worker to work specifically with Asian communities.
- 117 The Council has a range of positive initiatives in place to promote healthier communities. But the absence of clear outcome-based measures means that it is difficult for the Council and its partners to identify how the health of the community is improving as a result of them. This also makes it difficult for the Council to promote its achievements in this area with the public. The Council does however make use of local media such as the *hm* magazine to provide health promotion information for the public. And uses media advertising in local cinemas to promote health information issues such as smoking cessation.

Older people

- 118 The Council has made effective progress in this area and has developed a strategic approach to older people which promotes them as active citizens in the community. It has been pro-active in putting in place a comprehensive multi agency older people's strategy, which draws upon consultation carried out with older people. It has a strong emphasis on prevention and independence and covers issues that older people see as important. The Council recognise that further work is needed to refine the strategy and to develop measurable outcomes. This work is planned in conjunction with the development of targets for older people in the local area agreement (LAA). Nonetheless, this is a positive framework on which to develop preventative services for older people. A proactive older people's champion and the recent engagement of the LSP are ensuring that older people's issues are being effectively mainstreamed.
- 119 The NSF Standard 8 workshop group, which produced the Older People's strategy, is a good mechanism for developing a co-ordinated approach to service delivery. It has begun to map existing services and work is underway to develop an action plan to address gaps in service provision. Its work is already resulting in positive outcomes for older people. For example, in response to older people's concerns about accessibility of information, the Council produced an older people handbook in November 2005 which has been well received by older people.

- 120** The Council is making good progress in developing a range of services which cater for the diverse needs of older people and to increase the range of community based and preventative services. The Council is successfully working with the health sector, for example, the joint development of an Intermediate Access and Rehabilitation Discharge service has contributed to a marked decrease in the number of delayed discharges. Council performance in supporting people to live in the community is improving, exemplified in strong performance, when compared with the rest of London and nationally, in the take up of direct payments. Benefit take up has been promoted through joint assessments with the Welfare and Money Advice Unit and work with Hounslow Homes is addressing the housing needs of older people through the provision of more appropriate housing. Whilst the development of these services is positive, the pace of some development is not occurring as rapidly and consistently to ensure equitable access across the borough. For example, the development of community drop in facilities within sheltered housing schemes has been staggered across three identified localities at present due to uncertainty about the availability of additional financial resources.
- 121** The Council has appropriately identified provision to BME older people as a priority area. The Council's commitment to catering for the needs of BME older people has been demonstrated through the setting up of a project for Asian elders on healthy aging and developing an Asian intermediate centre.
- 122** Engagement with older people is strong, with inclusive and targeted approaches. Older people are seen as active partners who have played an important role in developing and improving services. For example, the Council has about 20 older people volunteers who contribute to a range of Council activities. An Older People's Panel is in place which provides a scrutiny function. They determine which services to scrutinise and in the past year have reviewed a number of Council or partner services. Effective partnership working has been demonstrated by the involvement of older people in the tendering process for domiciliary care providers. The production of a video 'Are we being heard' developed with older people is to be used as a training tool across health and social services. The fact that contributors to the video were public thanked and rewarded at the annual 'Finding a Voice' event in October 2004 demonstrates that the contribution of older people is valued.
- 123** The Council makes effective use of a comprehensive range of mechanisms to consult with and engage with a diverse range of older people, including hard to reach groups in the community. In addition to a quarterly newsletter, 'Senior Matters', various consultation and engagement activities such as 'Find a Voice', 'Mini Find a Voice' and 'Jan Pechaan' are successful, well supported and valued by older people. They are seen as a useful in providing relevant information about issues that matter to them.

Children and young people

- 124** Overall, the Council is performing well in the provision of services for children and young people. Outcomes are good; overall, children and young people are healthy and safe and those most at risk are well protected. The Council provides adequate value for money. Educational outcomes have improved significantly over the last three years and there has been good improvement in the quality of social care provision. The Council's youth service is good. Young people who are looked after or in greatest need receive good care.
- 125** Children and young people are identified as a priority for the Council in its Executive Business Plan and community strategy for Hounslow. Services for children and young people were restructured in December 2005 through the creation of the department for Children and Lifelong Learning. While the ambitions with respect to the new service are clearly articulated by the Council's senior officers and elected members, there is as yet no overarching shared view of priorities across services and partners. The existing plans for education and social care are detailed but the children and young people's plan, which will take forward the work of the new integrated department, is not yet published. The Council takes the lead role on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board which has recently agreed to move to Children's Trust arrangements. The Board is making steady progress in defining its role and functions as is the newly established Director of Children's Services.
- 126** Management of the Council's services for children is adequate. The capacity to improve is good. The Council has increased its allocation of financial resources to children's services in line with corporate priorities over the last three years. While education and social care have good systems for monitoring budget expenditure, strategic financial planning is currently less well developed. Plans for the ongoing funding of some projects are not transparent. Council workforce strategies have led to significant improvements in the recruitment and retention of staff. Performance management is adequate; children and young people are not involved formally and routinely in the performance management of council services, although there are individual examples of good practice, for example for looked after children.
- 127** The Council works well with its partners in promoting children's physical and mental health, including for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children looked after by the local authority. Parents and carers are supported in their parenting by a number of partnership initiatives including Surestart and the development of children's centres. Schools are actively involved in promoting healthy lifestyles through personal social and health education programmes, healthy eating initiatives and a range of physical activities. The youth counselling service, with close links to the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHs) is available in all secondary schools.

- 128** On the evidence gathered by the joint area review, children and young people in Hounslow appear safe. Those assessed as most at risk are protected through good interagency collaboration and through the management of good child protection services. There is however a need to improve further the understanding amongst all agencies of the threshold criteria for accessing social care services. All schools have anti-bullying strategies and mechanisms for recording racist incidents. Overall outcomes for looked after children are satisfactory; provision and support for this group are now good.
- 129** A high priority is placed by the Council on ensuring that children and young people enjoy their education and achieve well. Provision for early years' education is improving and increasing; there are enough free nursery and childcare places for all three and four year olds whose parents request one. Standards of achievement for children and young people have risen often at a greater rate than nationally. The progress of the majority of children looked after and children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities accessing provision in the borough is good. However, young people leaving the care of the Council at age 16 do not achieve five good GCSEs. Overall attendance and authorised absence rates are good, and where there are areas of concern, successful action takes place. Inclusive approaches are promoted by the local authority and inspections indicate that schools are becoming more inclusive; however, too many pupils are permanently excluded from secondary schools and too many pupils with special educational needs are educated out of the borough.
- 130** Council services are effective in helping children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. They are well supported to develop positive relationships and are actively encouraged to take responsibility. The majority contribute to decision-making locally and some do at council level, though there are fewer opportunities for them to contribute at strategic level. However not all groups are fully represented and consultation with those who have learning difficulties is not co-ordinated effectively. In areas where anti-social behaviour is a problem, preventative strategies in partnership with the Hounslow police force have been successful in leading to a decrease in youth crime figures.
- 131** Opportunities for young people to prepare for working life are good. Post 16 success rates continue to rise although A level success is still below average. The number of young people not in education, employment or training is low. Good skills training for young people responds well to local needs. Young people receive well co-ordinated advice, guidance and support and provision for housing is satisfactory and improving. However, the most severely disabled young people have limited choices after the age of 16. Particularly good family learning develops parents' skills and supports children's learning.

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 Hounslow London Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 9–20 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.