

Corporate Assessment Report

October 2006



Corporate Assessment

London Borough of Barnet

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Contents

Introduction	4
Executive summary	6
Areas for improvement	8
Summary of assessment scores	9
Context	10
The locality	10
The Council	11
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	13
Ambition	13
Prioritisation	15
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	18
Capacity	18
Performance management	22
What has been achieved?	24
Sustainable communities and transport	24
Safer and stronger communities	26
Healthier communities	28
Older people	29
Children and young people	30
Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment	32

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 Barnet Council is performing well. It has strong and clear ambitions which are founded in the borough's strengths, the needs of its communities and the views of local residents. The ambitions strive for much more than sustaining the good quality of life in the borough and include radical improvements for more deprived communities. The Council and its key local partners are clear about what they are aiming to achieve and how they are going to achieve it, with an emphasis on working together to realise the Local Strategic Partnership's vision for the borough in 2016 of 'a first class suburb'.
- 6 The Council's ambitions and priorities for the borough are set out in its Corporate Plan, which was updated in June 2006. They provide a robust framework for strategies, plans and service delivery. A visionary plan for the future is manifested in 'Protect, Enhance and Grow' (PEG), the Council's economic development and regeneration strategy, which clearly expresses the Council's ambition and its strong community leadership and balances well the sometimes conflicting needs and aspirations of very diverse communities. This strategy goes well beyond the preservation of the current prosperity and good quality of life enjoyed by the majority of the borough's residents.
- 7 The Council has very good knowledge of local communities and its ambition and priorities are founded in community views and needs and in detailed geographical mapping. This is evident in Protect, Enhance and Grow. Other examples include reducing crime and the fear of crime, which is a key priority for local people and features in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan and the recent addition of health to the Council's corporate priorities after consultation with local people.
- 8 The Council takes diversity and human rights into account when it plans services and takes decisions; its services have a good focus on their users in a very diverse borough. However, the development of an integrated approach to customer access across the Council's services is at an early stage.
- 9 The Corporate Plan contains a good range of outcome-based targets. These are driving improvement in the Council's services through a comprehensive performance management framework, but some targets are being missed and the framework is weakened by a lack of public monitoring and of regular scrutiny and challenge by councillors. A formal medium term financial strategy to support the longer term resourcing of the priorities is not yet in place, but is being developed for autumn 2006 to support the Corporate Plan.
- 10 Good political and managerial leadership is giving the Council clarity of purpose and a focus on improvement. The Cabinet provides clear leadership and decision-making. However, scrutiny committees are not always clear about their role and the Council is not making best use of the scrutiny function.

- 11 The Council is doing much to improve the way it works, although all of its actions to address earlier weaknesses are not complete. It is building the capacity and flexibility it needs to deliver its priorities and improve services by modernising systems, restructuring the organisation, tackling weaknesses and changing the culture of the organisation to enable it to meet new challenges. Services are expected to comply with a framework of corporate policies and systems but are empowered and enabled to manage at the front line. The Council has had a strong drive to achieve savings and efficiencies during the last few years. This has produced good results: financial reserves have been built up to a satisfactory level from a very low base three years ago and the Council has achieved its 'Gershon' efficiency savings one year early. Value for money was assessed as 'adequate' by the Council's external auditors in 2005.
- 12 Overall the Council is performing well in the delivery of its own ambition and priorities and contributing to the achievement of the shared priorities. It has a strong and integrated approach to economic development, regeneration, housing and the local environment. The PEG regeneration strategy has a focus on delivery of a sustainable economy in the borough with the creation of over 35,000 jobs (including those arising from natural growth) over the next ten years, building on the fast economic growth of recent years. Plans for the renewal and improvement of the borough's social housing stock are integrated with the PEG strategy, with the redevelopment of four major housing estates through renewal and replacement to create mixed tenure estates. The Council has had significant success in increasing levels of recycling through its compulsory recycling scheme, which was introduced in 2005 with considerable support from local communities and partners. Four of its Premier Parks have recently achieved Green Flag status.
- 13 The Council has a good partnership approach to reducing crime and building stronger communities with some tangible successes. Overall, current performance is mixed with reductions in total offences and violent crime but increases in burglary and motor vehicle crime. A number of initiatives to improve health are focused on areas of greatest deprivation with some positive results, but joint work with the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) to develop a joint health strategy and outcome targets and measures is at an early stage. The Council's strategy for services for older people focuses on health and social care, in line with its inclusion of older people as a significant element in its 'supporting the vulnerable' priority. In practice the Council provides a range of services to support the quality of life of older people.
- 14 The Council and its partners achieve good outcomes for children and young people in Barnet. Strong political commitment, clear and determined leadership by senior officers and strong partnership working, especially with the voluntary sector, have contributed strongly to a rapid improvement in services over the last three years, many of them from a low base.

Areas for improvement

- 15 There are some areas for improvement in the way the Council works.
- 16 The role and operation of the scrutiny function needs to be clarified and strengthened to enable all councillors to be engaged in the performance of services, to provide effective challenge to and scrutiny of Cabinet, and to ensure that the Council makes best use of the role of councillors as community representatives and advocates.
 - The Council should ensure that councillors, including members of scrutiny committees, regularly engage in open public scrutiny of performance and that they consider financial performance alongside service performance in the delivery of the Council's priorities.
 - The training and development of councillors should be strengthened, and councillor attendance at training events improved, to equip all councillors to carry out their roles.
- 17 The Council should consider what it can do, in addition to existing activity, to ensure that all local people and local groups understand its plans and their implementation. In doing this, it should learn from good practice in its services for children and young people.
- 18 To improve the consistency of the day to day responsiveness of the Council's services to service users, the Council to ensure that it develops and implements the action plan for its new Customer Access Strategy without delay.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	4
	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

The locality

- 19** The borough of Barnet is in north London. It is an area of mainly suburban development reflecting the expansion of London since the late 19th century. Densely populated areas give way in the north of the borough to the open spaces of the green belt and farmland on the border of Greater London with Hertfordshire. The borough includes Golders Green, Hendon, Finchley, Edgware, Hampstead Garden Suburb, Mill Hill, Cricklewood and Barnet.
- 20** The borough is the second largest in London by population (326,700) and the fourth largest by size (86.7 square kilometres). The population, which is younger than the national profile, is growing in all age groups and is predicted to rise by 33,000 during the next ten years; in particular, the school age population and the number of elderly people are increasing. The borough is very diverse. Its ethnic minority population of 26 per cent includes new Somali and Afghan communities and the largest number of Chinese residents in an English district. It is the second most religiously diverse borough in the country. There is a well established Jewish population (almost 15 per cent of the total).
- 21** The borough is generally prosperous but there are pockets of deprivation particularly in the west. The local economy is mainly service-based; the Brent Cross shopping centre is within the borough. The borough contains many small businesses (90 per cent of local firms employ less than ten people) and it has the third highest number of VAT registrations in London; it also contains the headquarters of 20 global companies; unemployment is at the same level as the average for England but lower than the average for London. The borough is ranked 193 of 354 districts in the national index of deprivation; 12 areas are within the 20 per cent most deprived nationally and include some significant deprivation.
- 22** Owner occupation of housing is among the highest in London. The borough is home to a large number of commuters, with about twice the number of people travelling out of the borough as travel into the borough for work. Barnet residents have a higher average level of educational qualifications than the average for London and educational attainment is generally above the national average. People in Barnet are relatively healthy, on average: life expectancy is higher and deaths from cancer and circulatory diseases are lower than the national averages, but in the more deprived areas people have poorer health and lower life expectancy on average. The number of serious road accidents is high but is reducing (the number of people killed or seriously injured reduced by 15 per cent in 2005 compared to 2004). Crime levels are lower than London averages but fear of crime is relatively high.

- 23 Car ownership is high compared to the rest of London. Transport links southwards into central London via rail and bus and northwards to the motorway network outside London, principally via the M1, M25 and A1, are good. However, transport links east and west are less clear and the only orbital major road, the North Circular, is subject to congestion.

The Council

- 24 Barnet Council is the tenth largest single tier council in England. It has 63 councillors. The Conservative party currently has a majority of 11, with 37 seats; Labour holds 20 seats and the Liberal Democrats hold 6 seats. A Conservative majority in 2002 reduced to no overall majority immediately before the May 2006 local elections, with control maintained through the Mayor's casting vote. A new Leader was elected in May 2006.
- 25 The Cabinet has ten members, all of the majority party, with portfolios in Environment and Transport, Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Learning, Policy and Performance, Regeneration and Development, Social Care and Housing, Planning, Property and Licensing, Community Safety and Community Engagement, and Public Health. The Leader takes responsibility for communications, financial planning, risk and asset management and resources.
- 26 There are six overview and scrutiny committees, all chaired by members of the majority party. Five of these relate directly to the Council's priorities. The sixth overview and scrutiny is Cabinet Overview and Scrutiny, which reviews Cabinet papers and acts as the call-in function. There are four regulatory committees, for audit, planning and environment, licensing and standards.
- 27 There are six Area Committees (three Area Planning Committees and three Area Environment Committees) with delegated decision-making powers. Six Area Forums provide local opportunities for communication and discussion with local residents; the Forums do not have decision-making powers or delegated budgets.
- 28 The Council introduced a restructure in 2004/05 to group services in three themes: Community Services (including housing, regeneration and adult social services); Environment (including highways and planning); and Children's Services. An Executive Director is responsible for each of the themes. Heads of Service manage the services within the themes. The Resources Department contains all the Council's support services, grouped as Organisational Development and Customer Care, Shared Services and Strategic Services. The Corporate Support Unit (which includes the Corporate Performance Office, Internal Audit and Communications) and the Law and Probity service report directly to the Chief Executive.

- 29 The Council has about 9,000 employees including teachers. Its net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £390 million, with a capital budget (including housing) of £75.5 million. The Council receives proportionately less Government funding than most London boroughs but from April 2006 it is receiving Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for the first time (£1 million per year for two years). Council Tax in 2004/05 was slightly above the median level for London councils.
- 30 Services are provided both by the Council itself and by a range of voluntary and commercial partners, including a PFI contract for street lighting (procured in a joint exercise with the London Borough of Enfield) and three major ICT contracts for the Council's infrastructure with private sector partners. The Council's housing service is managed by an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), Barnet Homes. Leisure management and recycling services are provided by social enterprise partners. Almost all of the Council's adult social care is provided by the private and voluntary sectors; most residential care for children is provided by the Council.
- 31 The Local Strategic Partnership has recently restructured to divide its functions between an Executive, the decision-making body which is chaired by the Leader of the Council and represents all major service providers in Barnet, and a Community Steering Group, which represents local voluntary and community groups and businesses and is chaired by the Commercial Manager of Brent Cross Shopping Centre; the role of the Community Steering Group is to challenge performance and link to the wider community. The Steering Group is to meet the Executive four times a year. Barnet is developing a third wave Local Area Agreement, due to be launched in early 2007.

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

Ambition

- 32 Barnet Council is performing strongly in this area. With its major partners within the borough, it has strong, clear and challenging ambitions which are founded in the borough's strengths, a detailed knowledge of the needs of its communities and the views of local residents. The ambitions form a far-sighted agenda which is informed by a strong sense of place and of what is important to local people in Barnet. Good leadership by the Council and its key local partners ensures that shared ambitions directly influence strategies and plans.
- 33 The ambitions are clearly set out at highest level in the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP's) new Sustainable Community Strategy, which is a development of the earlier Community Plan. A ten-year vision for Barnet 2016 describes life in 'a first class suburb' which is inclusive and thriving. Four themes (Investing in Children and Young People; Safer, Stronger and Cleaner Barnet; Growing Successfully; and Healthier Barnet) provide the umbrella for 13 ambitions to realise the vision. The vision, themes and ambitions provide a challenging goal which clearly depends on effective partnership working. The ambitions are supported by a detailed action plan, which has measurable outcome targets and clear responsibilities and timescales; performance and progress are monitored and managed on a quarterly basis by thematic partnerships and twice a year by the LSP Executive and the Community Steering Group.
- 34 The Sustainable Community Strategy (and the Community Plan before it) was developed from detailed consultation with local communities to determine local issues and priorities. Residents, businesses and voluntary organisations were involved in the articulation of the vision, and influenced its wording. For example, 'affordable and decent homes' was explicitly included in the vision for 2016 after consultation with local people.
- 35 The Council's own ambition clearly derives from its understanding of its role in delivering the ambitions of the Sustainable Community Strategy. Its four-year Corporate Plan, which is updated every year, interprets the LSP's vision as 'a successful suburb in a successful London', locating the Council's activities within the London context. There is a strong focus on partnership working to achieve the vision and ambitions at both LSP and Council levels and to add value by joint working. The annual update of the Corporate Plan draws on regular consultation with local people on priorities and services. A comprehensive range of outcome-based targets in the Plan provides challenge and evidence of the Council's focus on action to achieve its ambitions. The Council and its partners are therefore clear about what they are going to achieve and how they are going to achieve it.

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

- 36 The ambitions of the LSP and the Council balance the needs of the very diverse communities within the borough; they are clear about ensuring that all local communities benefit from the present and future prosperity of the borough. To help to achieve this, the two plans set out commitments and values to support the ambitions. The Sustainable Community Strategy contains commitments to the shared 'protect, enhance and grow' approach and to diversity, partnership, community engagement and customer focus. The Corporate Plan commits the Council to customer care, local choice, supporting an active community, value for money and facilitating success. Both plans clearly recognise the needs of the most vulnerable members of the community and target action to support them; the Corporate Plan is explicit about offering choice to all local people.
- 37 The Council's ambition informs and links its strategies, which together provide a challenging and stretching framework. This is very clearly expressed in the Council's innovative strategy for economic development and regeneration, 'Protect, Enhance and Grow' (PEG). This takes a holistic approach to the future of the borough and goes beyond the preservation of the suburban characteristics which provide the current good quality of life for the majority of the borough's residents. The PEG strategy balances the needs of and opportunities for different parts of the borough, combining the maintenance of the present good quality of life (including the green belt) with economic growth (generated by the growth of London and by investment opportunities within the borough, such as the redevelopment of the Brent Cross and Cricklewood) and with the need to tackle deprivation within some areas of the borough. The integration of housing, economic and transport ambitions provides a challenging agenda: the strategy aims to deliver over 35,000 jobs, including those from natural growth, and 16,500 homes by 2016. There are links to other local priorities through education and health provision in regeneration areas.
- 38 The PEG strategy communicates clearly to local people what the Council and its partners are seeking to achieve. It is soundly based on engagement with local communities and partners and on analysis of community needs and prospects for growth. It grasps current and future opportunities and aims to maximise benefits to the borough, particularly for more disadvantaged communities, without undermining the characteristics which local people have said that they want to preserve. While preserving this quality of life, the strategy is radical in its approach to the renewal and development of housing provision, combining the replacement of poor quality housing with new development to provide mixed tenure properties. Local communities within the Council's four major housing estates have been involved in the development of the proposals and support them. The strategy involves a number of partners in improving local people's access to the new jobs which will be generated. PEG has the strong support of major private and public sector partners, who have confidence in it and believe it to be deliverable.

- 39 The Council's commitments to partnership working and to responding to local communities are clear in other strategies. The Barnet Crime and Disorder and Drugs Strategy provides a clear vision for the area, to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The strategy is based on significant consultation. Similarly, the Children and Young People Plan is clear and the ambitions in it are visibly shared with partners; the voluntary sector and children and young people have been actively involved in its development. The Council's strategy for older people is focused on health and social care in response to the Council's 'supporting the vulnerable' priority but a wider approach is emerging. The foundations have been laid for a shared strategic approach with health partners.
- 40 The Council has worked well with the Greater London Authority in the development of regeneration projects and its ambitions for the development of the borough support the Mayor's agenda. The planned housing growth supports the delivery of regional plans. It is currently working with Transport for London to align plans for transport in the local transport strategy.
- 41 The Council is able to focus on its ambitions, to identify what activities are not key to its ambitions and to refocus when enough has been achieved. For example, repairing roads and pavements remained an important priority for residents in the consultation for the 2006/07 budget but the Council decided not to include it in the new key priorities, making way for the inclusion of health. The Council has a good focus in its operational management on the achievement of its ambitions and priorities, demonstrated by the restructuring and modernisation of the organisation and in the performance management framework. The majority of staff are clear about the Council's ambitions.

Prioritisation

- 42 The Council is performing well in this area. It has clear priorities which are founded in community views and needs and are supported by planning and review frameworks. It does not have a formal medium term financial strategy to support the longer term resourcing of its priorities, but there are links between financial and service planning; a medium term financial strategy is being developed to support the new Corporate Plan, for final agreement in autumn 2006.
- 43 The Council has five key priorities to support the vision of the Sustainable Community Strategy and its own vision for the future of the borough. The priorities are:
- A Bright Future for Children and Young People;
 - Supporting the Vulnerable;
 - Clean, Green and Safe;
 - A Successful Suburb; and
 - Strong and Healthy.

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

There is also a sixth priority of 'A Better Council for a Better Barnet', which focuses on improving the way the Council works.

- 44 There are good links between the themes and ambitions of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan. The Council has developed its own priorities on the basis of what it needs to do to contribute to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The links are made in the Key Priority Plans (KPPs) which set out the actions the Council's services will take to achieve the priorities, with clear references to the Sustainable Community Strategy. Good partnership working supports the delivery of the ambitions and priorities; this is evident, for example, in the PEG strategy: regeneration projects are being delivered by consortia of partners including housing associations and developers.
- 45 The Council's priorities are supported effectively by arrangements for their achievement. Targets for a total of 40 objectives for the five 'outward facing' priorities and a further four objectives for the sixth priority are set out in the Corporate Plan and in the KPPs. The KPPs are structured around the corporate priorities; they are a development of the Performance Management Plans (PMPs) which formed the basis for performance management against the Council's priorities until 2005/06. The PMPs were service-based but had clear links to Council priorities. The KPPs cover four years (they are updated annually) and include milestones, measurable targets and objectives, resources by which they will be delivered, consultation evidence, equalities and diversity, key risks, and asset and technology requirements. Although they are a new development, the KPPs are well understood by staff; together with the service plans they provide the action plans for services.
- 46 Local intelligence and residents' views are used well by the Council to inform its priorities. A range of well-planned consultation and involvement techniques enables the Council to have a good understanding of the needs of different groups of residents. Consultation is well co-ordinated and supported. There is a very clear and comprehensive Communications Business Strategy, linked to the communication of the Council's ambitions and activities and to consultation to inform these; this strategy is new but builds on and draws together existing activity; it supported by a clear action plan. There are arrangements to ensure that consultation activity includes the wide range of different groups in the community, including those most at risk of disadvantage. The Citizens' Panel, which was established in 1999 and reflects the composition of the borough's population for ethnicity and disability, is consulted regularly by the Council and receives feedback in the form of a newsletter. The Consultation, Communication, Complaints and User Focus Network, an officer group, has been set up within the last year to co-ordinate activity and to ensure that the needs of diverse groups are recognised by the Council's services.
- 47 The Council works well with partners on sharing information and on communications. In 2005 the Council and key partners established the Barnet Observatory, formalising existing arrangements for the provision and sharing of research and other data. Communications on community safety and crime are co-ordinated through an officer working group which includes voluntary sector partners.

- 48 The Council takes notice of consultation results and acts upon them. Health has been included in the corporate priorities for 2006-2010 as a result of local views. There are many examples of service improvement resulting from consultation, and the Council has a flexible approach to meeting community needs; for example, there is a high level of community satisfaction with Passover skips and the Council increased provision after requests from the Jewish community. It has very good knowledge of the location and needs of vulnerable groups within the community and has used this well to plan service provision. Examples include targeted work with communities in Colindale on recycling waste, and responding to the needs of a group of a frail white elderly recipients of meals-at-home.
- 49 The Council's approach to non-priorities has been closely linked to its drive for savings and efficiencies, prioritising within services rather than ceasing provision. This approach is evident in the Council's approach to libraries and leisure, which the Council decided were not priorities in response to the need to make significant savings to improve its financial health. For example, while maintaining a commitment to provide a park within one mile of every home in Barnet (linked to its health priority), it is actively investing in only half of its 32 parks.

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

Capacity

- 50 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Through its focus on 'a better Council for a better Barnet' during the last few years the Council has been putting in place structures, systems and ways of working to improve delivery of its priorities, to develop a modern and flexible organisation, and to secure efficiencies. Action has been taken to address earlier weaknesses; some of this is still in progress. Political and managerial leadership is good, but the scrutiny function is weaker.
- 51 Financial capacity has been improved but from a low base. The Council exhausted its financial reserves in December 2003, and received statutory requirements for improvements in its financial position from the external auditor. It embarked on a major programme of improvement to achieve significant savings through rationalisation and modernisation of its operations. Financial reserves have increased every year since 2004 in line with or exceeding its targets, reaching £10 million at the end of 2005/06. The Council has reached its government efficiency target (Gershon) one year early.
- 52 Political leadership is good. Cabinet members are clear about their roles and Cabinet meetings are efficient and well structured. Arrangements for delegation to officers are appropriate. However, the scrutiny committees are less clear about their role. They have done some good work (for example in setting up two Development Forums to discuss planning applications with key stakeholders) and they regularly make recommendations to Cabinet. However, there is no consistent approach to their role and the extent of their challenge to the executive varies. The Council is not making fullest use of its scrutiny function.
- 53 There is a programme of training for councillors but with relatively low take up; all councillors are not therefore fully enabled to carry out their roles. The Council complies with requirements for ethical governance; there have been few referrals to the Standards Committee, none of them substantiated. The Standards Committee has not been proactive in promoting high standards but it has carried out work on the Code of Conduct and planning guidance for councillors.

- 54 The Chief Executive and the Directors provide very good leadership. The management structure established during the last two years helps the Council to maintain focus and to communicate effectively with heads of service and through them to service teams. The Directors Group pursues strategic issues; Management Board (Directors and Heads of Service) deals with operational matters and Corporate Management Group (the top three tiers of management) takes a strategic and collaborative view of issues facing the organisation. Carefully managed sequences of meetings and events ensure that managers are kept informed about policy, priorities and performance.
- 55 Relationships with key local partners are strong and productive. Formal partnerships are well organised, around sound Partnership Agreements, and partners work well together with a focus on outcomes. The Chief Executive includes chief executives or equivalent of major partners in regular meetings with the Council's Directors; these meetings are very effective in providing opportunities for sharing information on developments and working together.
- 56 There are good examples of how the Council has worked with partners to fill identified gaps in provision, for example with the police to reduce bullying of adults with learning difficulties and to increase capacity and expertise, for example in work on estates consolidation with Middlesex University, which is located within the borough. The Council is using the Chamber of Commerce's survey of employers' training and skills needs. The Children and Young People key priority plan demonstrates that the Council is working with partners to develop capacity in workforce and information sharing, but these developments are at an early stage.
- 57 The Council and its major partners have good arrangements to involve smaller partners. The Civic Network, held bi-annually and attended by over 100 community groups and businesses, involves smaller partners directly in plans and activities. The creation of the LSP Community Steering Group in June 2006 gives smaller partners a major role in challenging and influencing the work of the LSP in and feeding to and from the wider community. The Council has good arrangements for the management of grant aid linked to its priorities and service strategies. However, some smaller voluntary organisations in receipt of grant are not clear about the Council's priorities. The Council is currently carrying out a best value review of working with the voluntary sector.
- 58 The Council has a strong focus on modernising its operations through restructuring the organisation, identifying inefficiencies, rationalising its accommodation and most significantly through the introduction of new ways of working. Its approach is based on clarity of purpose and expectation. Its goal, set out in the new Organisational Development Strategy, is 'a smaller entity with a smaller, but more efficient, corporate support function and a greater concentration of resources on outcomes'.

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

- 59** New systems are designed to achieve this goal. Services are expected to comply with a framework of corporate policies and systems but are empowered and enabled to manage at the front line. This 'tight-loose' arrangement is evident in organisational structures and in strategies and systems; examples are the Modernising Core Systems (MCS) programme, strategies for human resources and procurement, the deployment of accountancy staff into services and the development of the Shared Services Centre for HR, finance, procurement, facilities and IT support functions. These arrangements are new and are not yet fully in place; for example the Shared Services Centre is not complete although good progress has been made, with financial and ICT services now working to this model. Service managers are clear about the new arrangements. The introduction of new systems has helped to drive a culture change which has been well managed.
- 60** The Council does not currently have an explicit, formal medium term financial strategy but in practice there are discernable links between financial and priority planning. The Council's budget process is linked to its priorities; it has incorporated the setting and approval of the KPPs within the budget process and has identified efficiency savings as part of this process. There are examples of the Council moving resources to its priorities, for example the Modernising Core Systems project, key to the 'a better Council for a better Barnet' priority and to efficiency gains, was funded from the rationalisation of the Council's office accommodation and sale of surplus offices.
- 61** The Council has a detailed work plan in place to address issues from the external auditor's Use of Resources assessment in 2005, when value for money was assessed as 'adequate'. It is developing a methodology for making value for money judgements about its services and there are some examples of the inclusion of value for money considerations, for example in the accommodation strategy, use of temporary housing accommodation and ICT developments.
- 62** Risk management arrangements are in place for Council decision-making and in service planning and management, but are less clear in partnership arrangements although there is a clear approach to risk management in the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. The Council has demonstrated very good project management in major projects such as MCS and has learnt from this to develop a corporate project management methodology.
- 63** There has been significant and transformational change in the extent, quality and usage of the Council's ICT resources during the past four years. The Council has used the MCS process as a key element in transforming the way it works; business process re-engineering is linked to the modernisation of systems through business process mapping, which is now being used voluntarily by services including highways, environment and social care. MCS has delivered £1.48 million savings in back office functions to the front line. ICT is supporting pilots in new ways of working, such as the use of hand-held units in social services (which have already led to increased efficiency and a reduction in administrative support) and flexible working, such as home working in the Benefits Service.

- 64 The Council performs better than London borough averages for resident satisfaction on ease of contact and communication of information. It does not currently have a consistent approach to customer access across its services but has recently agreed a new Customer Access Strategy, which also has LSP support. The Strategy provides a framework of broad principles based on user needs and a choice of integrated access channels into the Council and its partners. The action plan for its implementation is in development and the Council is considering whether a Customer Relationship Management system would be the best technological approach, after a two-year pilot. Some residents and local groups experience a variable quality of response to complaints and requests for service but the Council has invested in a number of small scale projects to improve access; there are some good examples of successful work including with refugees, children in care and people in housing need.
- 65 There are good arrangements for the management of procurement processes, both strategic and day to day. The Council works well with providers to increase its capacity and to learn, for example in the Management of Information (Moi) project. The street lighting PFI contract is delivering enhanced capacity and efficiency. The Council recognises that contract management is inconsistent across the organisation and that it is not maximising the potential financial, service delivery and efficiency gains from its contracts. It is taking action to address this, including restructuring the procurement team to dedicate resources to contract management.
- 66 The HR service is in transition. New policies and the inclusion of HR in the Shared Services approach are designed to address historical weaknesses in the Council's human resource management. The HR element of the Shared Services Centre is not yet established, but a number of new policies have been agreed and more are in development. New recruitment and retention strategies have ensured that there are very few vacancies, including in children's social care, and the use of agency staff has been much reduced. Staff are committed and motivated and the most recent staff survey (2006) shows some improvements in job satisfaction and in staff views of the Council and of management. Staff appraisal is in place but has not been applied consistently nor always linked to Council objectives; a new model based on competencies is being piloted in Resources Department.
- 67 With the exception of senior management, the composition of the Council's workforce is a good representation of the borough's communities and the Council takes account of diversity, user focus and human rights when it makes decisions. For example, when reviewing its parking zones, it has taken account of the needs of visitors to places of worship such as synagogues and mosques. Plans for CCTV surveillance strike a good balance between tackling racism and taking human rights into account. However, there is no overall strategic plan for promoting human rights across the Council.

Performance management

- 68 The Council is performing adequately in this area. There is a sound performance management framework with a well-structured and inclusive approach to dealing with performance issues which is delivering service improvements. The framework is based on a hierarchy of plans linked to the Council's corporate priorities. Performance management is shared with key partners. However, performance is not consistently reported to or scrutinised by all councillors, financial and performance management are not fully integrated and the quality of some of the Council's performance data has been poor.
- 69 The Council's performance management framework is weakened by a lack of public monitoring, scrutiny and challenge by councillors. A culture of openness about performance within the Council's services and in its work with key local partners does not extend to performance management by councillors. Cabinet receives regular reports on performance, but in private. Performance management by councillors outside Cabinet is inconsistent and sometimes weak. Scrutiny committees are not scrutinising the Council's performance rigorously as a matter of course; they receive performance reports only if their chairmen request them. This means that there is no consistent, comprehensive system of public reporting of performance or of challenge to service performance.
- 70 Performance management operates well in established major partnerships and is developing in newer partnerships. Partners share performance data and performance reports relating to the Sustainable Community Strategy are taken quarterly to the LSP thematic partnerships and twice a year to the LSP itself. The partners jointly plan action for improvement. The new LSP Community Steering Group has been set up to scrutinise the performance of the LSP on behalf of the community. There is good performance management in the Safer Communities Partnership. Elsewhere, performance management in partnerships is still developing: there is a good approach to performance management in the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Board and the Adults Strategy Partnership Board has adopted a performance management framework. The Council has performance management arrangements with voluntary organisations which it grant aids under contract, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- 71 The Council itself has over several years developed a systematic framework for the planning, monitoring and review of its performance by officers. The methodology was developed and piloted in 2005/06, building on arrangements which were already in place, and is now fully operational. It includes a number of tools and mechanisms for performance management, structured around the priorities of the LSP and the Council. Key Priority Plans (KPPs) comprehensively draw together cross-Council plans, targets, resources and action plans against the Council's corporate priorities; the KPPs are supported by service and management plans for individual services; the KPPs and service plans are part of a whole-Council policy framework which links statutory plans, strategies and partnership plans.

- 72 Thorough monitoring of performance against all indicators and targets by the Corporate Performance Office (CPO) and individual services highlights underperformance or potential problems. There are robust approaches tackling underperformance and emerging performance issues; these incorporate learning from good practice and are well regarded by service managers.
- FirstStat meetings (introduced in 2003) are held periodically to challenge and discuss performance issues against corporate priorities; these meetings, which involve a range of Council staff and partners, are designed to identify solutions.
 - Finance and Performance Review (F&PR) meetings, called by the Chief Executive, examine service and financial performance and issues; these meetings are held every October as part of the budget process and as necessary during the year when problems are highlighted by monitoring systems.
- 73 The FirstStat process is an innovative element of the Council's financial and performance management cycle. Drawn from practice in the United States, it provides for performance review within a culture of open debate and constructive challenge, enabling the Council to tackle performance issues proactively and swiftly. FirstStat is seen by managers as an effective way to tackle areas needing improvement and to make cross service links, for example graffiti reduction through the school curriculum. The process has been instrumental in a number of areas, including improvement in the youth offending service and reducing sickness levels to top quartile national and London performance.
- 74 There have been some significant improvements in Council services as a result of focused performance management and support to improvement, notably in education and social care. The majority of Corporate Plan and Best Value Performance Indicator targets were met in 2005/06 (unaudited data) and were often exceeded; where they were missed this was often by small margins. Overall, 57 per cent of national key performance indicators improved between 2002/03 and 2004/05.
- 75 The Council has effective mechanisms to monitor performance and to highlight and deal with emerging performance problems. Monitoring is linked to scrutiny of budgets. Information about user experiences, gathered through surveys, is used to assess the impact of performance on the borough's diverse communities and service users. However, the quality of some of the Council's performance information has been poor: in 2004/05 some performance data, particularly in HR and in adult social care, was unreliable, leading to qualifications on a number of best value performance indicators by the external auditor. The Council has been working to improve the quality of its data in these services.
- 76 In practice financial and performance management are linked, but they are not formally integrated in the Council's performance and financial management cycle at member level except at Cabinet approval of the budget and KPPs in March. The KPPs link resources and planning for delivery of the Council's priorities. The CPO and the F&PR meetings link financial and performance monitoring and management.

What has been achieved?

- 77 The Council is performing well in this area. Its own priorities reflect the national shared priorities. Its priority of Children and Young People contains the five outcomes for children and young people and is an exact match to the national priority. The remaining four national priorities are covered by the Council's priorities but not directly. Together with the themes and ambitions of the Sustainable Community Strategy, they enable the Council and its partners to work towards the delivery of national priorities while maintaining a focus on local priorities.
- 78 The Council has very good knowledge of its local context and the aspirations of local communities. With its partners, it has used these to form the basis of ambitions and priorities which are particular to the borough and embody the political will of the Council to 'protect, enhance and grow' a successful borough while supporting the vulnerable, improving health, tackling crime and protecting and improving the local environment.
- 79 Overall the Council is performing well in the delivery of its ambition and priorities and contributing to the achievement of the shared priorities. Strong ambition informs the priorities; service improvement against these priorities is supported by performance management systems; and capacity for the delivery of the priorities is being built by partnership working, tackling historical weaknesses and modernising the way the Council works.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 80 The Council has a strong and integrated approach to economic development, regeneration, housing and the local environment. It is working well with partners to realise ambitious plans for the borough. Significant elements of these plans are long term and their realisation depends on the foundations and infrastructure which the Council, with its partners, is currently putting in place.
- 81 The Council's Protect Enhance and Grow (PEG) regeneration strategy is a strong example of community leadership dealing with competing demands in a borough where different communities have different needs and aspirations. The green belt is to be protected, successful suburban areas are to be enhanced, or where they need some support (for example, town centres), targeted for action, and the economy in areas of economic growth pressure or deprivation will be 'grown'. The number of jobs in the borough has grown by 15 per cent since 1995 and is projected to grow more rapidly in the next 10-15 years. Greater London Authority predictions indicate that economy of the borough will grow faster than the North London average (an 11 per cent expansion in jobs is forecast for Barnet, compared with 3 per cent for North London). The Sustainable Community Strategy and the PEG strategy both have a focus on sustainability in plans for new jobs, homes and communities over the next ten years.

- 82 The Council sees its role as building the infrastructure to enable growth and development to achieve sustainable suburbs and new communities. It has the support and involvement of major partners in public and private sectors and of local communities for its approach. The formal PEG strategy itself is relatively new (September 2004) but is already delivering results in terms of actual developments. Three major developments are sufficiently advanced for them to be formally agreed by Cabinet. A major private sector partner is involved in the Cricklewood scheme, attracted by the Council's vision and leadership. These developments are the result of planning and sustained effort by the Council over several years.
- 83 As part of the PEG approach, the Council is working with partners on the factors needed to produce a sustainable labour market for all Barnet residents; for example, there are requirements in development agreements for partners to deliver job opportunities and employment training for local people, and there is good partnership working with Barnet College and Middlesex University on skills development. A number of partnership initiatives, for example a Skills Development Framework, also support the aim of the Sustainable Community Strategy to equip people with the right skills to take advantage of employment opportunities.
- 84 The Council has a well planned long term approach to the provision of housing in the borough. The PEG strategy is integrated with plans for the renewal and improvement of the borough's social housing stock, with the redevelopment of four major housing estates to provide a mix of private and social housing; there are plans for approximately 16,500 new homes to accommodate the increase in population and to replace some of the Council's housing. The Council anticipates that the regeneration schemes will enable it to meet its London Plan targets for affordable housing by 2016. Barnet Homes (the Council's ALMO) has funding in place to achieve the Decent Homes Standard (DHS); the Council has agreed an enhanced DHS with tenants, but funding for the achievement of this is not yet fully secured because of recent changes to the funding regime. Barnet Homes provides good housing services and there is rising tenant satisfaction, including among black and ethnic minority tenants. The Council is making progress in tackling homelessness, using its housing advice team: in 2004/05 the number of homeless was 751 (against a target of 758); in 2005/06 (unaudited) the figure was 668 against a target of 750.
- 85 There are good links between the planning framework and LSP and corporate plans for the sustainable future of the economy, housing, and the environment; The Unitary Development Plan is now almost in place and provides a solid base for the next three years during the development of the Local Development Framework, supported by specific plans for the growth and regeneration areas. PEG will become the spatial statutory planning vision for the LDF and core strategies by 2009/10 when the UDP is replaced. The Council's performance on handling major and minor planning applications is now top quartile. Housing-led regeneration schemes are delivering improvements to the public realm and to local parks.

- 86** The Council is working effectively to create and maintain attractive and welcoming parks, play areas and public spaces using its Premier Parks Strategy, which prioritises investment and improvement in 16 parks; each of these has its own action plan for cleanliness, maintenance and facilities. The remaining 16 parks are maintained at a lower level, in line with the Council's current maintenance specification. Four of the Premier Parks achieved Green Flag status in summer 2006.
- 87** The Council has had significant success in increasing levels of recycling through its innovative compulsory recycling scheme, which was introduced in March 2005 with considerable support from local communities and partners. Recycling performance was 27 per cent in 2005/06 (unaudited data) representing a 28 per cent increase on the previous year; the target for 2006/07 is 32 per cent. However, current levels of waste produced are relatively high. The Council produced its Waste Prevention Strategy late in 2005; however, this is not underpinned by a robust action plan. Sustainability is addressed in the new street lighting contract, which has requirements for energy efficiency and recycling.
- 88** The Council is working with Transport for London (TfL) and other major partners to improve public transport, manage traffic and ease congestion. It is negotiating with TfL to achieve a Local Implementation Plan which balances the transport demands arising from the growth in population and jobs with the Mayor's ambition of reducing car use. The Council's transport strategy is linked to its understanding that its regeneration schemes will require improved transport provision and is being influenced by its plans and intelligence about the development of the economy and labour market. The Council has secured £7 million from the Growth Area Fund for the widening of railway bridges as part of road improvements to ease congestion. It reduced queue lengths by an average 40 per cent at ten congestion 'hotspots' in 2004/05 compared with 2002/03.

Safer and stronger communities

- 89** The Council has a good partnership approach to reducing crime and building stronger communities; current performance is mixed with reductions in total offences and violent crime but increases in burglary and motor vehicle crime.
- 90** The reduction of crime and of the fear of crime are key priorities for local people and feature in the objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Plan. The Crime and Disorder Strategy has clear links to the Sustainable Community Strategy; it includes the Drug and Alcohol strategy and has clear, accessible targets.
- 91** Together, the partners are achieving some successes.
- In 2005/06, there was a 40 per cent reduction in abandoned vehicles, a nine per cent reduction in graffiti, and a seven per cent reduction in the British Crime Survey Basket of ten crimes.
 - The borough is on track to achieve its LPSA target to reduce re-offending by 10-17 year olds by 8 per cent.

- The co-ordinated and speedy removal of dumped cars ('Operation Scrap-it') has led to a reduction in car fires.
 - The number of young people reporting reduced or discontinued drug use increased by 56 per cent in 2005/06.
- 92** The Council has adopted some innovative and intelligence-led approaches to reducing the fear of crime, for example the PFI contract to upgrade and maintain the borough's street lighting includes weightings to give priority to crime hotspots. The location of CCTV schemes is also determined by intelligence; NRF has been used to fund new CCTV in two current crime hotspots. The Council is working with local media to counteract sensationalism in the reporting of crime, for example in management of the media response to the murder of a local teenager and in its work with a local newspaper after the Council's own research revealed that fear of crime is highest among its readers.
- 93** The Council is reducing and preventing environmental crime. There is strong enforcement: 99 per cent of graffiti is cleared within two days, and close working with the police and the probation service to promote the 'zero tolerance' approach. Fly-tipping enforcement has been successful, with commercial fly-tipping nearly eliminated.
- 94** There is a good working relationship between the Council and the police; the Safer Communities team, including the ASB, Hate Crime and Domestic Violence teams, is co-located at Colindale Police Station. The Council is working with partners to reduce antisocial behaviour (ASB); there is an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy (2005/08) and a joint ASB prosecution strategy with the Crown Prosecution Service. The Council is dealing proactively with communications on ASB through a multi-agency working group which it leads as part of a co-ordinated approach to communications on community safety. Efforts to reduce ASB are bringing results; for example, ASB Orders taken out on four individuals in East Barnet have resulted in an 80 per cent reduction in the number of police calls from that area.
- 95** The Barnet Drug and Alcohol Strategy implements the four strands of the National Drug Strategy. It has close links to the Children and Young People Plan. Roles and responsibilities of partners are clear. The partners have exceeded their targets for the number of 'problematic' drug users receiving treatment.
- 96** Accidents in the borough have reduced. The national target for 2010 for 40 per cent reduction in numbers killed and seriously injured has already been met and the borough is just short of the London target of 50 per cent reduction by 2010. There is joint work with Fire Service, for example on smoke alarms and fire safety work with primary pupils and in meeting the LPSA stretch target on fire-related injuries.
- 97** Business continuity and emergency planning frameworks are in place; they are currently being further developed. The Council has procedures in place to respond to emergencies; it is in the process of improving these plans, with the involvement of local community groups.

- 98 The Council has a clear vision for equalities and was awarded Beacon Status for community cohesion in 2003. It clearly recognises the benefits of a diverse workforce and community. Its approach has been reinforced by the PEG regeneration strategy, which promotes social cohesion, and by its enforcement activities: racist graffiti is removed immediately, and the borough's mobile CCTV camera units are moved to sites of racist activity. It has recently reviewed and updated its Race Equality Scheme, building on its performance against its first Scheme; the Council achieved 68 per cent of the national measures for the Scheme from 2003 to 2006, compared with 74 per cent top performance in London. It has drafted a new Disability Equalities Scheme. Both schemes link clearly to the Council's aims, priorities and values; senior councillors show leadership and accountability through the Cabinet Equalities and Social Inclusion Committee. However, the corporate and service equalities action plans are largely input- and process-based and the Council has few specific targets for the achievement of equalities.

Healthier communities

- 99 Health is now a clear priority in the Sustainable Communities Strategy and in the Corporate Plan. Joint work with the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) to develop a joint strategy and outcome targets and measures is developing but is at an early stage. However, a number of initiatives, including with partners, are in place to improve the health of local people.
- 100 The Council has used consultation effectively to confirm health as a key corporate priority. It has undertaken a wide range of specific consultations with children, older people and mental health service users. It is now working with the PCT and other health providers to develop and deliver a common vision and improved health. It has agreed three-year shared work priorities for health with the PCT. This agreement clarifies and confirms Council contributions to the themes but these are existing work streams and the agreement does not allow for the reprioritisation of resource allocation or activity towards outcomes until 2007/08.
- 101 There are examples of joint working and aligned budgets, particularly in mental health, and pooling of budgets for the shared equipment store. Links between health and regeneration schemes are developing; for example, the Council and the PCT are looking at co-location of clinics and schools as part of the primary schools replacement programme.

- 102** The joint strategic approach to health is developing on the basis of a positive approach to partnership working. The Council and its health partners can point to a wide range of initiatives designed to improve the health of local residents, particularly in areas of deprivation. A number of these initiatives respond to the particular needs of local communities including ethnic minority and religious groups. Some examples are as follows.
- Joint work with the PCT on local projects, for example on teenage pregnancy and the new children's centre (the first of 17 centres) on Grahame Park estate, an area of deprivation, with plans to develop this into a children and families hub.
 - Good initiatives to improve health across the community, for example the A5 Partnership with libraries and a new programme of 'wellness suites' in leisure centres; sports development targets deprived wards and overall uptake has increased more than eight times over three years.
 - Measures to allow exercise to be incorporated into daily routines, including enhancing green spaces through regeneration and maintaining a well-resourced park within one mile of every home.
 - The inclusion of health facilities in regeneration schemes (for example, the Cricklewood sub-strategy on health which includes addressing the health needs of deprived communities), major developments and section 106 negotiations.
 - Adapting the national health agenda for Barnet's local context, for example sexual health promotion in the West African community and work with the Barnet Multi-Cultural Centre.
 - Developing health action plans for 100 people with a learning disability, as part of the Supporting People programme.

Older people

- 103** The needs of older people as a group are recognised in the Sustainable Communities Strategy and older people are a significant element in the Council's 'vulnerable people' priority. However, the Council does not have an overarching strategic approach to services for older people.
- 104** The 'Living Longer Living Better in Barnet' strategy agreed by the Council, partners, older people and their carers builds on an earlier strategy agreed in 2001. In both, the focus is largely on health and social care. In practice there are some services which relate to quality of life opportunities for older people beyond social care, for example sessions in libraries and leisure facilities and benefit advice. With housing partners, including developers, the Council has been working to address the housing needs of older people since 2001, implementing a Housing Strategy for Older People which includes consideration of the type of housing available and the need to support independent living. Council services have identified lead officers for services to older people.

- 105** The Council is now actively supporting the development of the new 55+ Forum, which has been established as a means of wider engagement with the older community. Older people were specifically consulted on the new Sustainable Community Strategy, and there is effective consultation with older people on specific issues, for example there has been consultation with older people on housing needs and library opening hours. The preparation for the meals-at-home contract has included consultation with ethnic minority elders.
- 106** There is a clear focus by the Council and its partners on supporting the independence of older people. There is good provision of information to older people through a comprehensive inter-agency directory which is updated regularly. Services for older people have been mapped in a 'preventative services chart'. This maps partnerships across the sector, particularly focusing on those services which promote independence and support low level need. The Council and the NHS are working together to avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital and to tackle hospital discharge issues. There is now no waiting time for the provision of equipment at home. Although performance indicators for social care indicate good services overall, the Council is not achieving many of its targets and costs of some services, for example the cost of intensive social care, are high compared to other authorities.

Children and young people

- 107** Overall, the council and its partners achieve good outcomes for children and young people in Barnet. Strong political commitment, clear and determined leadership by senior officers and strong partnership working, especially with the voluntary sector, have contributed strongly to a rapid improvement in services over the last three years, many of them from a low base. There are a clear and challenging set of ambitions for children and young people, derived from very good, geographically based analyses of need. Prioritisation is good, and the partners have set realistic shared priorities. The needs analyses have been used especially well to make decisions about the relative needs of minority ethnic groups and to develop suitably differentiated services. Plans are in place to create more children's centres and extended schools. Clear priority is given to improving attainment and reducing inequalities for the most vulnerable children and young people, although resources and the range of preventative services are limited, particularly in parts of social care and in the youth service.
- 108** There are some key strengths in capacity to deliver priorities but the role of scrutiny in securing value for money from local services is still underdeveloped. The partners understand what needs to be done. Close and effective working with the voluntary sector has increased capacity significantly. Performance management is good and has delivered improvements in several areas, notably in the youth offending. Within the Council, lead members are active in performance management but those involved in scrutiny do not routinely receive performance information, and their role is constrained.

- 109** Most children and young people are healthy; enjoy their education and feel safe and happy; are well prepared for working life; and have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and to take responsibility. From the evidence gathered most children and young people appear safe, and there is good protection for those most at risk. Outcomes for vulnerable children and young people are largely good. In particular, looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress at school and achieve standards that are above the national averages. However, the proportions of young people aged 16 and over from vulnerable groups not in education, training or employment are relatively high compared with other groups.
- 110** There is strong partnership working and services are well planned and targeted to address key health priorities. Effective school-based health education programmes are delivered through the Healthy Schools Programme.
- 111** Children and young people who are most at risk are well protected through good inter-agency collaboration and well managed procedures. Effective measures to recruit and retain qualified social workers have resulted in improved deployment of staff and continuity of care for looked after children and those on the child protection register. Professionals in key agencies work well together and share information, but there is a lack of shared understanding across the partnership of the thresholds for intervention for children in need.
- 112** School improvement practice is very effective, contributing to the good standards achieved by children and young people overall. Vulnerable and other groups are well targeted for improvement. Initiatives to support improvements in attendance have led to mixed results so far, although there are signs that strategies are beginning to make a difference. Attendance in the secondary sector is good and continues to improve but while attendance in primary schools is satisfactory overall, levels of unauthorised absence have remained above average for too long. Provision in the Early Years is adequate, with some variation across the wide range of settings and Foundation Stages.
- 113** Children and young people are encouraged strongly to participate in decision-making on issues that affect their own lives, but strategies for feeding back on the outcomes of their involvement are undeveloped. Concerted action and initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour by children and young people are very good. Effective action is also taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending. Less well developed, but nevertheless adequate, is the work that enables young people who offend to recognise the consequences of their actions, and for victims generally.
- 114** The partnership provides a good range of vocational courses, is actively encouraging the development of work-related education and has developed a well-conceived strategy for 14-19 education and training. Currently there are too few work based training opportunities in the key occupational areas of construction, retailing, administration and care. Housing support for care leavers is good. However, for some other young people with housing needs the level of service required is not always of sufficiently high quality. This is recognised and front line staff have been re-organised to provide an improved advice and guidance service.

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 London Borough of Barnet was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 12 to 23 June 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.