

Corporate Assessment

Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames

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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 Kingston Council is performing well. It has a clear vision underpinned by a set of challenging long term ambitions linked to the medium term Community Plan. Taken together, these aim to make a measurable difference to Kingston, the place and for its local communities over the next 20 years. Supported by effective prioritisation and based on a shared understanding of need and what matters the most to local people, there is realism for its delivery. Key service and partnership strategies, including the recently agreed Local Area Agreement (LAA) set out short, medium and longer term improvements. These will deliver significant redevelopment of Kingston Town Centre, key to the overall economic well being of the borough, as well as an appropriate range of anti-poverty and social inclusion initiatives targeted at the borough's vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. However, not all supporting actions and targets are outcome focused and some strategies are not in place.
- 6 Capacity to deliver the ambitions is good overall. The Council benefits from a highly motivated and empowered workforce, a strong track record in securing additional funding to increase capacity in priority areas and effective risk management arrangements. The devolved approach to performance management and evident performance culture has been successful in delivering some high quality, value for money services. Some areas are still developing though, such as the corporate approach to asset management, utilising the full capacity of ICT, and consistent performance management arrangements within key partnerships.
- 7 The Council provides good value for money across the services it delivers. There is a clear culture of delivering efficiency savings whilst maintaining the quality of services. The Council has secured £1 million of cashable savings per year since 2002, which are targeted to priority areas. The recently modernised approach to procurement is acting as a driver for efficiency, service improvement and innovation. The use of ICT is also playing its role through reducing and streamlining processing and handling costs. However joint monitoring and management of value for money across partnerships is underdeveloped.

- 8 User focus and diversity is clearly embedded in service planning, with numerous examples of users influencing the design of services, including BME and vulnerable groups. Access to services is monitored for BME and vulnerable groups and steps are taken to address issues where these arise. Personalisation and choice are actively promoted through for example the Council's longstanding commitment to direct payments and more recently choice based letting in housing. There is a good record of decision making informed by widespread engagement and consultation with residents and stakeholders, but feedback is inconsistent, and there is limited involvement in setting specific standards and targets and in performance review. The needs of vulnerable communities are at the heart of the LAA. An appropriate range of targeted social inclusion and anti-poverty initiatives complement the high quality universal services such as education, which are seen by the Council as key to improving the quality of life for all communities. The Council works closely with the race equality council in delivering its responsibilities under race equality legislation.
- 9 Political and Managerial leadership is strong and respected both internally and externally. The Leader and the Chief Executive provide effective leadership on difficult issues, for example in relation to Kingston Town Centre and the new Rose Theatre. There is a clear commitment to delivering consistently high quality services and the importance of partnership working to deliver wider community outcomes is established and understood. Member officer relations are good, with a healthy mutual respect for their different roles. There is an effective mix of skills and experience amongst the Executive and within the established four neighbourhood committees. New overview and scrutiny arrangements are very recent, but early signs indicate a positive foundation for holding the Executive to account. However, progress on developing a comprehensive member development programme which meets their needs and those of the authority in delivering the ambitions is slow.
- 10 The Council is a respected, strong and creative community leader, and works extensively in partnership with key stakeholders, the private and voluntary sectors and with communities. It is an effective lobbyist over issues such as public transport provision. The Council takes a collaborative leadership approach to the LSP, fostering for example strong working relationships with the active voluntary sector, who co-chaired each of the theme groups developing the LAA. In partnership with local businesses, Kingston Town Centre became the first Business Improvement District in the Country, securing substantial additional investment that would otherwise have been unachievable. The four established neighbourhood committees enable the Council to champion local needs to good effect. With delegated budgets and Executive functions for a range of operational services, decision making is taken close to those most likely to be affected. Sixty four per cent of residents believe they can influence decisions that affect their neighbourhood.

- 11 Achievements are strong overall and outstanding in some areas. These are recognised in areas which matter the most to local people, such as in crime and the quality of the environment, and are in line with national priorities. Outcomes for those most at risk of disadvantage are good. Overall crime has reduced from an already low level, and is decreasing further. National targets for the numbers in drug related treatment programmes have been exceeded. Streets are cleaner and recycling has increased from an already higher than the national average position. The Council is achieving a shift towards more environmentally friendly forms of transport through a host of ongoing infrastructure and innovative behavioural change initiatives such as personalised travel planning. The overall effectiveness of the Council's children's services is outstanding. All services for children and young people are at least good and have had a very substantial impact on improving outcomes for almost all children and young people. A broader approach to older people, building on the already excellent social care services is being implemented. Delayed discharges from hospital are kept at a low level and a high proportion of people are able to live at home. Multi-agency projects are increasing the uptake of benefits to older people. Teenage pregnancy has exceeded national targets with a continuing downward trend. Fuel poverty is reducing. Access to jobs for the disabled and those on incapacity benefits is improving. Health inequalities are being tackled through targeted activities in deprived areas of the borough such as through the Community Action Partnership, but measuring the impact on health outcomes is more difficult. Meeting the area's housing needs remains a challenging agenda particularly for affordable and sheltered housing.

Areas for improvement

- 12 Consistent SMART, outcome focused action planning requires attention both within service planning and in partnership projects. The Council needs to move towards describing the outcomes of its and its partnership activities on a more consistent basis, rather than describing the activity or output. This will make it clearer internally and externally what difference is expected and ultimately what impact was delivered.
- 13 The Council needs to ensure it is able to deliver consistently high quality services in line with its ambitions. The implementation of the performance management framework in practice is leading to some inconsistencies internally and with partners. As the Council with its partners moves towards more integration and seamless delivery for users, the degree of corporate or strategic overview may require review to ensure consistency of provision. Building capacity in project management skills will also be key to delivering the Council's ambitious agenda.
- 14 The Council should consider a strategic approach to knowledge management to facilitate easy access to data, intelligence and learning across the Council and its partnerships. This should enable a greater sophistication in identifying and acting on issues and trends that may require a corporate or partnership response.
- 15 The Council would benefit from ensuring that its developing approach to member development is strategic. As proposals are considered it needs to ensure that they are fit for purpose in supporting individual members and the authority's needs in delivering the Council's ambitions in the short, medium and longer term, for example, in effectively fulfilling community leadership roles.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	3
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement	4
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

- 16 The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames is situated in the south west of London. The borough is important as a destination in its own right. As a place to shop, Kingston Town Centre is one of the largest and most successful shopping centres in London. It is significant not only for the continued prosperity of the borough overall, but is regionally important as a Metropolitan Centre. However, it faces increasing pressure from other centres, such as Croydon, and has been slipping down the UK Town Centre League. Kingston First, the first Business Improvement District (BID) in the country aims to reverse this decline and restore visitor numbers. K+20, the area action plan, with the proposed major re-development of a large part of the town will have a significant impact on Kingston economically and socially.
- 17 As a place to learn, Kingston is a centre of excellence for education with many fine schools and an excellent Further Education College and University. As a place for leisure activities, over 30 per cent of the borough is Metropolitan Open Land or green belt. It is a centre for nightlife in London with three major clubs and is home to Chessington World of Adventures. As a place to do business it enjoys a buoyant local economy and is a centre for many knowledge based small companies. The independent district town centres of New Malden, Surbiton and Tolworth survive in their own right.
- 18 The population is relatively affluent overall. In 2005, Kingston was ranked as the second least deprived of the London boroughs, and ranked 266 out of 354 nationally. However this masks pockets of relative deprivation, largely concentrated in small areas associated with social housing estates.
- 19 The population stands at 151,800, of which 15.5 per cent are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. This rises to 20.6 per cent for those under 18. Kingston notably has the largest Korean population in Western Europe with recent estimates as high as 15,000. The population is growing, with forecasts predicting around a 5 per cent increase by 2016.
- 20 The borough itself is relatively compact at 37 km². It is characterised by attractive suburban residential areas, with large areas of Metropolitan Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land. This inevitably places pressure on the availability of land for housing and importantly for the borough, affordable housing.
- 21 Unemployment is low at 2.2 per cent compared with the outer London average of 3.7 per cent in March 2005. Over 50 per cent of Kingston's residents work in the borough. Whilst the borough has a highly qualified population, with over a third of residents having a degree, the economy itself is largely low wage.

- 22 There is good coverage of bus services across the borough. Main line train services run from the South West to London via Surbiton, and radial road routes to the South and South West fan out from Kingston Bridge, while the A3 trunk road links the borough with inner London and the M25.

The Council

- 23 Following the May 2006 elections, a Liberal Democrat administration was returned. The Council has 48 members overall, one Parliamentary constituency and a shared constituency with the neighbouring borough of Richmond upon Thames. The Liberal Democrats hold 25 seats, the Conservatives 21 seats and Labour 2 seats. The Executive comprises members of the controlling group of Liberal Democrats and includes the Leader and six Executive members, each responsible for a cross cutting portfolio. Following a recent constitutional review, overview and scrutiny functions have now been split with a dedicated Scrutiny Panel, chaired by the opposition and an administration led Overview Commission. In addition a Shadow Executive, comprised of opposition members has recently been established.
- 24 The Council has a long established model of devolved decision making to four Neighbourhood Committees, made up of councillors representing the electoral wards within the Neighbourhood. They make decisions on a wide range of services from traffic management and planning applications, parks to libraries and grants to Voluntary Organisations.
- 25 The Council is relatively small, with a workforce of around 4,069. The Council's net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £103.3 million. Kingston receives a low level of government grant support for local services due to its relative affluence. Consequently 68 per cent of local expenditure is funded by the Council tax compared to the London average of only 42 per cent. This means there is little headroom for council tax increases. The Council tax for a Band D property in 2006/07 is £1,448.86, which represents an increase of 5.38 per cent compared to 2005/06.
- 26 The Leader chairs the Local Strategic Partnership which brings together a broad range of stakeholders that deliver services or represent local interest groups. The Partnership's Community Strategy runs from 2004 to 2009, and has recently been underpinned by a Local Area Agreement (LAA) which sets out greater specificity on the outcomes that will be delivered over the next three years in support of the Community Strategy. The partnership itself has recently been restructured. A Community Leadership Strategy Group provides the strategic direction and links formally with the Council's Executive. A Partnership Delivery Board (PDB), with links to the Council's corporate management team and chaired by the Chief Executive sits beneath this. Two members from each of the four rationalised delivery groups sit on the PDB including: Children and Young People's Trust Board; Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership; Adults/Health and Well Being; and Sustainable Communities and Transport.

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

Ambition

- 27 The Council is performing well in this area. It has a clear set of challenging long term ambitions consistent with the medium term Community Plan. Based on a shared understanding of need and established and strong partnership working, there is clear commitment to their delivery. Taken together, these aim to make a measurable difference to Kingston, the place, and for its local communities over the next 20 years. However, understanding of the ambitions amongst some smaller stakeholders is less clear, and not all of the key strategies supporting the delivery of the ambitions are in place.
- 28 Kingston's Community Plan sets out clear and challenging medium term ambitions for the borough. The shared vision, described in the five year plan is to be, 'the best place to live and work'. Eight themes, framed in the national shared priorities sit beneath the vision. These aim to balance economic, social and environmental well being to enhance the quality of life of Kingston's communities. The recently agreed Local Area Agreement (LAA) provides the measurable outcomes that aim to be delivered over the next three years to support its delivery. An appropriate range of anti-poverty and social inclusion initiatives run throughout the agreement and aim to make a measurable difference to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. For example, increasing civic participation by young people, better access to justice and referral pathways, and welfare to work programmes.
- 29 The Council's own ambitions are consistent with the Community Plan and set out a longer term challenging agenda for improvement. Six ambitions of equal importance, called strategic aims, provide the framework for the delivery of the Council's vision, to 'create the best opportunities, services and environment for the people of Kingston'. The strategic aims are supported by 12 key priorities and a range of linking long term strategies and effective partnerships, providing confidence for their delivery. They are as follows.
- Investing in children and young people - to sustain a prosperous and inclusive community.
 - Caring for the environment - putting the environment at the heart of everything we do.
 - Enhancing Quality of Life - improve the quality of life of our residents - whether or not the Council runs the services.
 - Putting people first - we are proud of our diverse borough and value every resident.
 - Working in partnership - a strategic and campaigning Council.

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- Delivering improvement - quality services that offer the best value for money.
- Communications and customer care, along with personalisation and choice are cross cutting themes within each of the six strategic aims. For example, customer contact centres in housing and environment, and building on the successes in direct payments through piloting the 'in-control' model of individualised social care budgets.

30 Long term strategies supporting the delivery of the six strategic aims are stretching and realistic, but some key strategies are not yet in place. The Local Implementation Plan has challenging targets, above the London Mayor's requirements, to deliver sustainable transport, including reducing car use to 45 per cent by 2011. The 16 year waste strategy sets out a longer term sustainable solution to managing the borough's waste in partnership with neighbouring authorities, aiming to achieve 47 per cent recycling and composting by 2020. However, the Housing strategy is not yet in place and there is less clarity in other areas such as the After Dark Strategy. The latter is key to providing specific clarity on how the night time economy in Kingston Town Centre will be shaped. Having key strategies in place provides confidence for the delivery of the ambitions.

31 Long term plans to re-invent the regionally significant Kingston Town Centre (KTC) are challenging. Despite not being eligible for significant external funding streams due the borough's relative affluence, K+20 sets out a raft of development opportunities that will shape the metropolitan town centre for the next 20 years. Plans include: the growth of the retail offer through new landmark shopping facilities; provision of new and refurbished offices and business space including space for creative industries; and up to 1,500 high quality new housing units, of which 50 per cent will be affordable. Around 2,500 new jobs are expected along with a broadened night time offer, including the opening of the new Rose Theatre in 2007. Plans to redevelop part of the town in partnership with a developer are advanced and based on widespread stakeholder consultation and market analysis. This increases realism for their delivery.

32 Ambitions are based upon a shared understanding of the scale of opportunities and challenges facing the borough and what matters most to local people. Extensive and wide ranging consultation, engagement and analysis occurs at many levels to inform the Council's and partners' understanding of need. Community planning events, engagement with numerous existing groups such as the Interfaith and Disabled and Older Peoples forums, and the use of MORI surveys all informed the development of the Community Plan and the recent LAA. Targeted surveys of minority communities are also used to understand needs, for example in accessing health and social services. The broad understanding of needs results in ambitions rooted in what matters to local people and the areas in most need of improvement.

- 33** There is a good understanding and commitment to the vision and ambitions by members, officers and key partners. Communication to the wider public is improving - 56 per cent of residents feel they are kept well informed by the council in contrast to 47 per cent previously. However, there is less understanding amongst some smaller stakeholders, for example, smaller businesses outside of KTC, some smaller minority and voluntary sector groups.
- 34** The Council is a respected, strong and creative community leader. The established neighbourhood committees with executive functions and delegated budgets enable Chairs to actively champion local needs with positive results. Sixty four per cent of residents believe they can influence decisions that affect their neighbourhood. The Council has a collaborative community leadership style. In the recent development of the Local Area Agreement, the voluntary sector co-chaired each of the theme areas. Through a cross party and cross authority lobby, a key bus route serving the north of the borough was saved.
- 35** Partnership working is strong. As one of the Council's six ambitions, the Council has a long standing commitment to partnership working, which is consistently externally recognised and respected. For example, the Council has been successful, in partnership with local KTC businesses in becoming the Country's first Business Improvement District, securing £3.5 million of additional investment over five years in the local environment and town centre management that would otherwise have been unachievable. Recent strengthening of partnership governance arrangements within the LSP has been implemented, including a Partnership Delivery Board. The Council's approach to the private sector is moving towards longer term partnering, with all contractors now signed up to the Partners' Charter. Strong partnership working brings capacity to support the delivery of the ambitions.

Prioritisation

- 36** The Council is performing well in this area. It has a set of clear priorities based on what matters most to local people and in the areas most in need of improvement. Not all of these are supported by measurable outcome focussed actions and targets for improvement. Services actively take into account differing needs of its communities, including BME and vulnerable groups, although feedback to participants of consultation and engagement activities is inconsistent. Resources follow priorities and difficult decisions are taken when required. The Council's approach to non priorities or those of lesser importance is not clearly set out in its plans.

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37 Twelve priorities of equal importance support the delivery of the overall vision of the Community Plan and the Council's own ambitions. Eight of the priorities, called key objectives, set out in the Council's overarching Policy Programme focus on what will be delivered for residents. The remaining four support the ambitions for how the council itself will work to deliver the outcomes. These include: having a thriving voluntary sector; neighbourhoods and participation; financial responsibility and improving how the council works. The public facing priorities are:

- prosperous and thriving local economy;
- cleaner and safer neighbourhoods;
- the best place to live;
- reduce, re-use and recycle;
- options for travel;
- a fair deal for tenants;
- caring for the vulnerable; and
- better schools and services for young people and families.

38 Priorities reflect what matters most to local people and the areas in most need of improvement. The local quality of the environment, crime and fear of crime remain local people's consistent top concerns. Maintaining universal high quality education and social care services are recognised by the Council as being fundamental to promoting economic prosperity through tackling inequality and social inclusion.

39 Not all of the priorities are supported by measurable, outcome focused actions and targets for improvement. Short, medium and longer term targets are set out in some service plans, the LAA and some key service strategies. For example within the 'reduce, reuse, recycle' priority, the Waste strategy implementation plans contain clear short, medium and longer term outcomes to recycle and compost 35 and 47 per cent of waste by 2010 and 2020 respectively. Incremental improvements, from an above the national average base will be delivered until the new contract is let in 2008. Under 'cleaner and safer neighbourhoods' targets are set to reduce crime by 17.5 per cent between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2008. However some plans lack outcome focused actions and targets. For example the Homelessness Action Plan under the priority, 'a fair deal for tenants', and the Cultural Strategy under the, 'best place to live', priority.

- 40 Local intelligence and residents views and expectations are used effectively at a service level to inform priorities. Consultation and engagement activities are mainstreamed, through the service planning framework and supplemented by a range of established forums. In addition there is ongoing engagement through neighbourhood committees, Citizens' panel, and the use of surveys. These ensure an ongoing understanding of individuals', groups' and area needs. Combating anti-social behaviour (ASB) was identified as a high priority for residents and businesses following detailed consultation and review, including engagement with youth in reducing crime and promoting diversionary activity. As a result a number of targets were set to tackle the underlying determinants, for example a 5 per cent increase in public satisfaction with visible policing by 2007/08. However, feeding back to participants on what has changed as a result of their input is inconsistent. Co-ordination of consultation activities and outcomes is just beginning as part of the new consultation strategy. By engaging with local people the Council increases the effectiveness of its planning and actions.
- 41 Services actively take account of the needs of BME and vulnerable groups in their design and delivery. The target for all bus stops to be fully accessible by 2008/09 came out of consultation with older people's and mobility impaired groups. The MILAAP centre for Asian Elders, and the New Malden helpdesk and translation of the A-Z of services into a ten page directory for the Korean Community came out of consultation exercises. Surveys of children and young people led to a recording studio in Hook. In addition the Council is working to meet level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard.
- 42 The Council has been successful in influencing partners to line up behind priorities, including integrating approaches to setting priorities and allocating resources. Under, 'caring for the vulnerable' the Council has influenced the PCT to deliver an integrated service for disabled children by 2008, alongside established integrated health and social care teams for older people. Within 'cleaner and safer neighbourhoods', the council with the police deliver mixed neighbourhood policing teams. Within 'better schools and services for young people and families' the CYPP identifies a total of £126 million of revenue funding between the local authority, the Connexions service and the Learning and Skills Council to provide services for children and young people in 2006/07.
- 43 There is a clear link between priorities and financial planning, and difficult decisions are taken when necessary. The Council's policy led budget approach ensures service and financial planning is integrated through the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Both revenue and capital follows priorities to support their delivery. Almost £3.5 million of cashable savings since 2002 has been recycled back into priority areas. For example £295,000 went to recycling, £250,000 for road/street improvements and £150,000 to street cleansing. Difficult decisions have been taken for example in charging for domiciliary care, and proceeding with the opening of the Rose Theatre. The cutting of decorations to older people's Council properties was another example of a difficult decision needed in order to re-direct resources into achieving the Decent Homes Standard. The new MTFP is currently being worked on for 2007 to 2011 which will set out the approach to priority and budget setting for that period.

- 44 The Council's approach to non priorities or those of lesser importance is not clearly set out in its plans. The current overarching corporate policy programme does not set out a clear hierarchy of priorities, arranged in order of importance. Currently, services have to prioritise individually in collaboration with the relevant Executive member, and between neighbourhood committee areas. The resulting hierarchy is not explicitly set out in their plans. In addition, the Council has reduced the number of priorities in the policy programme from 24 to 12 following the recent local elections, but this represents an amalgamation of the previous set rather than a material change to current commitments. Priorities for the next two to four years are being refined in tandem with the developing MTFP, but it is too early to assess if priorities will change as a result.
- 45 The Council effectively maintains its focus on delivering the priorities. Following the May 2006 local elections officers have worked quickly to translate the manifesto into the overarching policy programme which sets out the actions that will be delivered over the first year. Portfolio holders undertake ongoing monitoring of actions through regular meetings with service heads and informal communications. Progress reports on individual actions such as the library plan go to neighbourhood committees. Member and officer groups provide a more intensive focus on areas for improvement such as Housing and Waste services, with improvements successfully delivered in each. These formal and informal mechanisms ensure focus is maintained.

Capacity

- 46 The Council is performing well in this area. Capacity is enhanced through strong political and managerial leadership and a committed and motivated workforce. Partnership working is effectively utilised to deliver the ambitions for the borough. Financial management is sound and there is a track record of successfully securing external funding to support delivery in priority areas. The Council has been investing in building longer term sustainable capacity through procurement practices, strengthened overview and scrutiny arrangements and revised LSP governance structures. Progress on member development is slow, and the corporate approach to asset management is underdeveloped. The Council's ICT capacity is not fully utilised, for example in knowledge management.
- 47 Political and managerial leadership is strong. The Leader and the Chief Executive provide effective leadership, for example in relation to Kingston Town Centre and the new Rose Theatre. They are well respected both internally and amongst partners. There is an effective mix of skills and experience amongst the single party Executive and within the established four neighbourhood committees which take delegated decisions on a range of operational services. However slower progress is being made to understand and meet the skills and competency requirements of members to deliver the future priorities. This is acknowledged and proposals to address this are underway. There has been a lack of evaluation on the effectiveness of the previous years' programme limiting progress.

- 48** The Council benefits from a committed and highly motivated workforce, supported by effective and successful human resource (HR) management. HR practices, including training and development for staff, are regularly reviewed and linked to corporate strategies and priorities ensuring competencies and skills are in place to deliver the Council's ambitions. The workforce is largely reflective of the local community, with action being taken to improve the representation of women and BME at senior management level. Sickness levels are low, with figures in the best quartile for the past three years. Staff are empowered to innovate in service delivery, such as the direct payment initiative. Project management skills however, need to be harnessed and developed, given the ambitious agenda to deliver projects such as K+20.
- 49** There is a strong approach to workforce planning both within the Council and with partners to support the delivery of its future plans. Consequently performance on recruitment and retention is good. For example the Council, in partnership with the local PCT, voluntary and community sector partners has developed a five year strategic Workforce Development Framework aimed at enhancing the quality of social care staff.
- 50** Member and officer relations are strong, open and mutually respectful. There is clarity and a healthy working respect for their different roles. The Council's Standards Committee is working well and has an appropriate profile. The Corporate Development Team (CDT) and Executive members work jointly to provide an effective focus at strategic level on driving improvement and achieving long term objectives.
- 51** The Council is improving its Overview and Scrutiny functions, building on some satisfactory performance, for example in the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Previous arrangements were adequate overall. Overview and Scrutiny are now separate with a single opposition led Scrutiny Panel and an administration led Overview Commission contributing to policy development. These arrangements, established after the recent elections, are new and in the process of being embedded. Early indications from the first Scrutiny Committee are that the new arrangements provide a sound foundation to build on in holding the Executive to account.
- 52** The openness and transparency of key officer decisions is not effective. There are no arrangements to record key decisions taken by officers under delegated authority. This creates the risk that these are not available for call-in or are easily accessible.
- 53** The role of the established neighbourhood structures is being enhanced to deliver the key 'neighbourhoods and participation' priority. The four neighbourhood committees, with their dedicated budgets, already effectively bring decision making close to residents and local communities. However, following the constitutional review and independent expert input, their remit is being developed to enhance their community leadership role across a wider range of issues and to extend the opportunities to engage more widely with their local communities. Neighbourhood charters, linked to the aims of the Community Plan, are in the process of being developed. As a result the Council is strengthening further its responsiveness and ability to provide tailored responses to local needs.

- 54 Partnership working is particularly strong, well established and effectively utilised to deliver the ambitions for the borough. In line with the priority of, 'having a thriving voluntary sector' the Council is enhancing its capacity to address inequalities and social inclusion by supporting the already active sector to play its key role in delivering the vision and the LAA. Grants to the voluntary and community sector range from small and neighbourhood grants to strategic three year funding. For example the Council provides strategic funding to the MILAAP centre for Asian elders, who work with the Kingston Chinese Association to offer recreational and community support to the local Chinese community at the centre. A Voluntary Sector Board has recently been set up to further improve partnership arrangements by increasing communication and access to elected members, and providing an opportunity to discuss wider partnership issues.
- 55 The Council's strategic approach to partnering and procurement is enhancing its long term capacity to deliver more cost effective services in innovative ways. Recently awarded long term contracts such as, Leisure Services, and Parks Management and Grounds Maintenance are intended to lever in investment and secure improvement through stable but flexible long term partnerships. The recently revised Procurement Strategy, in partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce is also being used to support local supply chains through sourcing minor and routine procurement locally and encouraging its main contractors to use local sub-contractors. Twenty eight per cent (£28 million) of procurement spend in the last year has been to local businesses. This has increased to 31 per cent since April 2006.
- 56 Partnership governance arrangements of the wider LSP have recently been rationalised and strengthened. The Community Leadership Strategy Group (CLSG) maintains the strategic overview. The Partnership Delivery Board (PDB) focuses on driving improvements and delivery of the outcomes of the LAA. The new arrangements better align with the Council's own governance arrangements, formally linking the Executive with the CLSG and the CDT with the PDB. This helps to develop a greater strategic understanding and focus as well as increased local capacity to deliver the vision and LAA outcomes. Whilst arrangements are new, there is clear commitment from both the partners and the council to make it work successfully.
- 57 The Council has secured financial capacity to deliver on its 2006/07 priorities. The approved capital programme funding takes account of all external funding, which has delivered additional capacity of £20.9 million for the next two years. The Council has agreed a medium term financial plan (MTFP) for 2005/06 to 2008/09, based on the previously approved Policy Programme. The Council has maintained a focus on reducing service costs, investing the efficiency savings and building up its reserves. This has enabled it to contain council tax increases and to improve value for money.

- 58 Kingston has a strong track record in securing external funding to increase its capacity to deliver in priority areas. Examples include, successfully bidding for £3.9 million for highways related schemes in 2006/07 from Transport for London (TfL), and securing £9.9 million from the Department for Education and Skills in capital grants for maintaining and modernising its schools. The Council is utilising prudential borrowing to fund its capital works, amounting to just over 50 per cent of its capital funding programme. As a result, the Council has been able to invest £2.4 million in undertaking a programme of major repairs to Council buildings and meeting its obligation under the DDA, as well as investing £1.75 million in highways investments and lighting.
- 59 The Council's corporate approach to asset management is underdeveloped. Until recently, property was seen as a fixed asset within individual departments. An asset and project management group is currently being formed to facilitate a corporate landlord approach to managing and securing best value from its assets. This is being linked to the review of the MTFP and remaining two to four years of the Policy Programme.
- 60 The Council has sound arrangements in place for risk management. Corporate risks have been reviewed and reassessed, and explicitly form part of strategic and service planning. There is a strong track record of the successful and effective risk management in service developments. For example an inspection and maintenance system based on the volume of pedestrian traffic was developed in the highways department. As a result, the risk of accidents is reduced.
- 61 The Council's use of its ICT capacity is not fully effective. ICT is used to improve access to services, through the website; the use of electronic kiosks throughout the borough, and users' ability to make payments and book facilities on line. The Council has recently implemented the Children's integrated assessment and information system. However, whilst data and intelligence is shared effectively within partnerships, the Council does not maximise its ICT capacity to hold and manage knowledge across services and between partnerships as a strategic resource. In addition some internal administrative IT systems such as the HR system are nearing the end of its useful life. Whilst action is being taken to replace the system, its current capacity impacts on payroll administration issues with contractual partners.

Performance management

- 62 The Council is performing well in this area. The clear member and officer commitment to devolved performance management has been successful in delivering some high quality value for money services. Financial monitoring and performance review are linked and effective in ensuring focus is maintained on delivering priorities and securing improvements. But there are some inconsistencies in practice, and in the frequency of performance reporting. Performance management arrangements across the Children's partnership are good, but are developing across other partnerships.

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- 63** The Council has a good record of being a performance driven organisation delivering effective and efficient services. There is a strong member and officer commitment to a devolved approach to owning, managing and monitoring performance, which delivers ongoing improvements in services for local people. Underpinned by its policy programme, key service strategies and service delivery plans, staff are consistently clear what is expected of them and what training and development support is available in delivering their targets. As a result the evident performance culture is helping to deliver tangible improvements in service priorities, both within already high performing services, as well as previously underperforming ones. For example, the Council is one of only eight in England to have the highest rating, three-star education and social care services. Un-audited 2005/06 figures for the CPA basket of performance indicators demonstrate positive absolute performance and direction of travel. Sixty eight per cent of selected PIs improved between 2004/05 and 2005/06, with 31 per cent in the best quartile and 55 per cent overall in the best and second quartile.
- 64** User involvement in shaping services is good, For example, the Kingston Panel is routinely engaged to seek views in a range of issues including parking, recycling and on local spending priorities. As a result the opening hours in two Town Centre multi-storey car parks were extended and provision made for parking spaces for bicycles.
- 65** The Council provides good value for money across the services it delivers. Well established principles for reviewing and improving efficiencies are consistently applied across all services. There is a clear culture of delivering efficiency savings whilst maintaining the quality of services. Over the past six years, the Council has achieved £20 million in real terms budget savings, with £1 million of cashable savings per year since 2002. As a result, in the 2006/07 budget, identified efficiency savings from back office functions, day care for the elderly and sports, arts and adult education are targeted to priority areas. As a result of grant funding from the Council, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, is able to extend advisory services to twice as many clients than the Council could have done.
- 66** Financial monitoring is sound, well embedded and linked to performance monitoring. The CDT has a prominent and active role in reviewing budgets, especially in dealing with spends and potential overspends. Variances in budgets are addressed effectively. For example, in November 2005 the Council was predicting an overspend. Through effective and strong financial controls, led by the CDT, the Council was able to turn around the position, achieving an under-spend by the end of the financial year, part of which helped build reserves and contain increases in council tax levels. Budgets and performance are monitored by CDT and Executive and by individual Portfolio members with service heads.

- 67** The performance framework is clear, understood and owned by staff and members, but there are some inconsistencies in approach. Comprehensive guidance on service planning is issued to managers but this is not consistently followed across the organisation. Some examples include Trading Standards, Income and Cashiers Department and Life Long Learning and Leisure. Ensuring a consistent approach is important to delivering the ambition of consistently high quality services.
- 68** SMART, outcome focused action planning and robust target setting is varied. Whilst there are examples where this is done effectively, this is not replicated consistently across services. For example, the Homelessness Action Plan contains targets that are not consistently outcome focused or challenging and can demonstrate attributes of being SMART. Actions included in some service plans focus on processes rather than impact. User engagement in setting specific standards and targets is limited.
- 69** Performance comparisons are used effectively to promote self awareness and drive improvements within services and across some partnerships. Top level PIs are compared with top performing authorities, and service benchmarking has delivered improvements in services such as highways. The CDRP receives crime figures on a regular basis showing comparisons with national and London performance. However there is a lack of comparison undertaken on financial and value for money aspects. Mechanisms do not currently exist to compare and evaluate process, costs and outcomes with partners and other providers.
- 70** There are effective performance review mechanisms in place to ensure focus is maintained on delivering priorities, but the frequency of formal reporting is inconsistent. At service level, reviews are undertaken as part of regular meetings between service heads and portfolio members, or through more intensive dedicated member officer groups, with positive effect. For example, Housing is now rated as a three out of four service block in the CPA. Corporately, top level PIs linked to the priorities are reviewed quarterly by the Everyone Counts group (ECG), chaired by the Chief Executive before reporting formally to the Executive. However, over the last 12 months reporting has occurred only twice. User involvement is also limited in reviewing performance. For example tenants are involved in engaging new repairs and maintenance contractors but are not involved in reviewing their performance. As a result, performance reporting is not as open and transparent and readily accessible to all members, stakeholders and to the wider community. This has the potential to impact on their ability to be able to challenge performance effectively.
- 71** Overall, performance management arrangements with key delivery partners are developing. Refined LSP governance arrangements have recently been put in place to strengthen accountability and a focus on delivery. The Council with its partners is in the process of developing a performance management framework for the delivery of the recently agreed LAA, but this is not yet in place. Performance management across the Children and Young People's Trust Board is more advanced and is good. With a clear focus on underperformance, improvement has already been delivered. For example improved standards in lower performing sixth forms.

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- 72 The Council is open to sharing data with individual partnerships to good effect. Several partnerships, for example the crime and disorder partnership and the Health partnership, routinely share data to redesign and flex services. As a result, it targets additional support to areas in need of improvement; for example, it commissioned a voluntary community sector (VCS) partner to survey BME service users to identify reasons. Cultural and transport issues were identified as barriers and these have influenced the partnership's childcare strategy to improve access to services. However, the Council does not have a systematic approach to sharing data and intelligence across partnerships and as a result a corporate or more strategic partnership response is more difficult to identify and achieve.
- 73 The Council is an open and learning organisation, making good use of external evaluations and responding effectively to user views. There is constructive use of consultation and user satisfaction information to review and improve service performance. Complaints of alcohol misuse and discovery of discarded needles at a local park, triggered an alcohol free zone at Fairfield park and the Council's Alcohol and Harm Reduction Strategy. The Council has recently invited peer review and commissioned a review on constitutional arrangements. The role of scrutiny in reviewing performance management was limited under previous arrangements. Following the external review, revised arrangements are in place, with scrutiny now chaired by the opposition. This demonstrates a constructive use of external evaluation in order to learn and reflects a high degree of self awareness.

What has been achieved?

- 74 The Council is performing strongly in this area. The ambitions of the Community plan are framed in the national shared priorities. The Council's own priorities flow from these and reflect national, regional and local agendas. Cross cutting agendas such as social inclusion and anti-poverty are mainstreamed throughout the Council's and partnership activities and embodied in the LAA.
- 75 Capacity to deliver its ambition and priorities is effectively enhanced through extensive partnership working and importantly co-ordinating activities across its own services to maximise impact. For example with the Police and Kingston First to deliver the, 'cleaner safer neighbourhoods' and, 'a prosperous and thriving local economy' priorities. In partnership with local businesses, Kingston Town Centre became the first Business Improvement District in the Country, securing substantial additional investment to improve the physical environment and management that would otherwise have been unachievable. Planning, transport, youth and housing services work effectively to contribute to the delivery of the safer and stronger agenda. The Council has been particularly successful in securing external funding and lobbying in line with priorities, such as highways improvements and increased frequencies and extensions to bus services to improve access. Longer term sustainable capacity is being enhanced through new procurement approaches. Performance management is used effectively to deliver improvements in underperforming services, such as environment services and housing and in already high performing service such as education.

- 76 Achievements are good overall and outstanding in some areas. These are recognised in areas which matter the most to local people, such as in crime and the quality of the environment, and are in line with national priorities. Outcomes for those most at risk of disadvantage are good. Overall crime has reduced from an already low level, and is decreasing further. National targets for the numbers in drug related treatment programmes have been exceeded. Streets are cleaner and recycling has increased from an already higher than the national average position. The Council is achieving a shift towards more environmentally friendly forms of transport through a host of ongoing infrastructure and innovative behavioural change initiatives such as personalised travel planning. The overall effectiveness of the Council's children's services is outstanding. All services for children and young people are at least good and have had a very substantial impact on improving outcomes for almost all children and young people. A broader approach to older people, building on the already excellent social care services is being implemented. Delayed discharges from hospital are kept at a low level and a high proportion of people are able to live at home. Multi agency projects are increasing the uptake of benefits to older people. Rates of teenage pregnancy are lower than national targets with a continuing downward trend. Fuel poverty is reducing. Access to jobs for the disabled and those on incapacity benefits is improving. Health inequalities are being tackled through targeted activities in deprived areas of the borough such as through the Community Action Partnership, but measuring the impact on health outcomes is more difficult. Meeting the areas housing needs remains a challenging agenda particularly for affordable and sheltered housing.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 77 The Council has a holistic and integrated approach to delivering its vision for being the 'best place to live and work'. Achievements are evident against all of the key objectives which underpin this shared priority area, although progress in meeting the area's housing needs is slower.
- 78 A comprehensive programme of infrastructure improvements is well advanced, supporting the delivery of the, 'options for travel' priority. Investments in the highway infrastructure have seen principal and non principal roads achieving top quartile performance, in line with local people's wishes. Ongoing investments will make all bus stops fully accessible and bring all footway conditions up to standard by 2008/09. One hundred per cent of the bus fleet is now accessible with further increases in frequency and extensions to routes planned for implementation in 2007/08. Bus patronage has increased with 78 per cent of residents very satisfied with buses.

- 79** In line with the 'options for travel' priority, the Council is achieving modal shift through a range of proactive and innovative approaches. A 10 per cent reduction in car usage has been recorded to date. The successful Christmas Park and Ride Scheme for Kingston Town centre saved 40,000 car trips, with a 10 per cent growth in passenger numbers in 2005. However, key plans for a permanent park and ride scheme are more developmental. Forty per cent of schools now have an approved travel plan with the remaining 60 per cent on target to have them by 2009. The New Malden pilot for the innovative 20,000 household personalised travel planning initiative, in partnership with TfL has recently finished, and is undergoing evaluation.
- 80** Improving the quality of the environment has been achieved and recognised in line with the priority. In partnership with Kingston First, improvements to the quality of KTC's physical environment has been achieved through: enhanced street cleaning, environment rangers operating seven days a week, new and refurbished street furniture, regular gum removal; daily street washing in high traffic areas; and enhanced hanging baskets, tree and planting programmes. More responsive graffiti removal and the removal of abandoned cars borough wide are recognised by residents and stakeholders. Whilst improvements are recognised in street cleaning borough wide the latest Encams survey returned a slight drop in performance, largely due to issues with detritus.
- 81** Much has been delivered against the, 'reduce, re-use and recycle' priority. Twenty five per cent of waste was recycled/composted in 2005/06, as a result of increased participation in the kerbside recycling scheme, estate based recycling, and refurbishment of the boroughs bring banks. Growth in waste has reduced by 3 per cent, although it is too early to determine if this is a long term trend or largely the result of improvements in data quality. Plans to develop a longer term sustainable solution to managing the borough's waste in partnership with neighbouring authorities are advancing, with promising private sector interest.
- 82** Whilst unemployment is low at 2.2 per cent, the Council, with its partners has been proactive in supporting a 'prosperous and thriving local economy'. This recognises the importance of a sustainable and vibrant local economy for the well being of the borough overall. Policies and initiatives include safeguarding employment workspace through planning and improving access to jobs for targeted groups, such as the disabled and those on incapacity benefits through welfare to work programmes. Forty people have been helped into jobs over the last year. Local Business are supported through the buy local commitment within the new Procurement Framework and local retail skills gaps are being addressed in collaboration with Kingston College. Enhancing the physical appearance of centres outside of the main Kingston Town Centre in order to improve viability and economic growth and jobs is seen as key to the Council's approach. Improvements to the streetscape have been delivered in New Malden with investments secured for improvements to Tolworth, including the filling in of a subway and landscaping. Surbiton businesses are being supported through the development of a loyalty scheme.

- 83 Kingston town centre remains economically significant to the borough and in partnership with Kingston First, achievements are being realised. In the first 15 months of the BID a cleaner and safer town centre has been achieved. Dedicated marketing campaigns returned a rise on town centre footfall by approximately five per cent in the four weeks leading up to Christmas in 2005. Public transport access to the centre is improving. Successful lobbying to support the night time economy has secured increases in frequencies and extensions to bus services to and from the town centre including night services to Chessington in the south of the borough. Long term investment plans to re-develop part of the town centre through K+20 are progressing with a private developer.
- 84 The Council has been less successful in ensuring housing supply meets the needs of the area. Steps are being taken to ensure affordable housing is secured from major developments. For example, the Royal Court development in partnership with Richmond Churches Housing Association has delivered 110 affordable units, of which 30 plus intermediate homes are affordable to households earning less than £30,000 a year. Fifty per cent of the proposed residential units across three of the major sites in KTC will be affordable following agreement with the developer. However, current delivery of 179 affordable homes between 2004 and 2006, in contrast to the anticipated housing need for 1,365 affordable homes annually falls short of need. Demand still significantly outstrips supply, which also has the potential to impact on local recruitment and retention. The Council's sheltered housing needs modernising. Twenty per cent of the stock has shared facilities. A housing needs survey is currently in progress which will feed into the delayed overarching housing strategy. The Council is on track to achieve the decent homes standard by 2010 for its social housing stock and is improving choice through the recent successful launch of the choice based letting scheme.

Safer and stronger communities

- 85 The Council works effectively through a range of partnerships to achieve its priorities for safer and stronger communities. It has been identified as the safest borough in London in the independent Reform Group's recent report. The Kingston Community and Police Partnership includes the Kingston Domestic Violence Forum and the Drug and Alcohol Action Team. There is good understanding of their respective roles by the partners and close co-ordination of activities. The Council's community safety strategy, for 2005 to 2008, is comprehensive and accessible and contains clear priorities and targets, including some joint targets with the police.

- 86 Overall crime has reduced. Between 2004/05 and 2005/06 overall crime reduced by 3.9 per cent from an already low base, meeting most of the targets for crime reduction and sanctioned detections (crimes solved) and exceeding many. The first four months of this performance year have seen an 11.9 per cent reduction, building on the successes already achieved in 2005/06. To support the night-time economy at Kingstown Town Centre, the Council in partnership with the police and the business sector has put in place a range of initiatives. For example, the installation of three licensed mini-cab booking kiosks in the vicinity of the main night club areas for a trial period over the summer to make it easier to book cabs at night. Cab marshals are provided by the night club and paid for by the mini cab companies. The project is supported by Kingston First, Kingston Police and the Council in association with TfL's Public Carriage Office. As a result, Kingston First achieved a 14 per cent reduction in assaults in Kingston town centre.
- 87 The Council demonstrates a comprehensive approach in using its services, such as the planning system, transport, and housing, to effectively contribute to its safer and stronger agenda. It recognises the need to address environmental and economic concerns as well as general crime if it is going to have a sustainable and long term impact on crime and anti-social behaviour. Examples include undertaking planting schemes on housing estates aimed at deterring youth from congregating, designing a purpose-built youth shelter to provide alternative places for young people and clearing a dumping hotspot in Surbiton with joint input from the probation service, the rangers and the Council's environment services.
- 88 Partners recognise the priority the Council places on safer and stronger communities and its contribution through a range of initiatives. Initiatives include jointly funded posts within the police borough intelligence unit enabling better information exchange, as well as reducing the potential for duplication, thus gaining maximum value for money. The Council is using mixed neighbourhood policing teams to tackle community concerns such as solving crime and dealing with anti-social behaviour. Partnership initiatives instituted over the last year have brought considerable payback in terms of reducing crime and disorder, and police and partners are increasingly visible in the Town Centre in the form of Town Centre Rangers, Cab Marshals and Street Pastors. The Council has recently signed a protocol with NCP, which has brought the Borough's parking attendants into the extended policing family. Such initiatives ensure that activities are co-ordinated between partners to make them more effective and provide for a higher visible uniformed presence.

- 89 The council is making investments to build strong and cohesive communities. Examples include the well attended annual, 'Kingston Carnival', organised by Kingston Racial Equality Council (KREC) in partnership with the Council and various organisations based in Kingston. The event promotes diversity and multiculturalism through celebration and dance with an underlying message of tolerance and respect. Recently, the council, the police and the KREC issued a joint press release following the recent London bombings. In addition, the council, with contributions from the Police, the Inter-Faith Forum, KREC and other voluntary groups has launched a London Peace forum, with open days in the Police Station, local churches, synagogue and mosque, as well as stalls for providing community safety advice to international students arriving at the local university. The Interfaith forum also acts as an effective channel of communication and consultation in events of developing crisis. It aids open discussion of welfare issues affecting members of faith and ethnic minority groups, including students at Kingston University.
- 90 The Council's approach to the resilience agenda is fit for purpose. Clearly set out in its Business Continuity and Emergency Plan, it is linked to business continuity plans and co-ordinated with other south London authorities for mutual aid. In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, the Council has developed a framework for the development of corporate and service business continuity plans, and there are up-to-date risk assessments. The Council is also actively promoting business continuity within the borough. The Council has undertaken emergency exercises, led by the police, and has actively secured involvement of the voluntary sector within the Incident Support Team to add value on the caring aspects of emergency planning, assisting in the setting up of family assistance and rest centres.
- 91 The Council has secured effective partnership working to reduce accidents. One thousand children are trained annually on cycling proficiency and as a result of a variety of education and traffic calming measures the Council is on track to meet the statutory casualty reduction targets by 2010. Other initiatives include providing a summer scheme at Tolworth Recreation Ground, aimed at children to provide guidance on the importance of crossing road safely. The Council's Road Safety and Travel Awareness Unit also provides play equipment free of charge to local nurseries and playgroups.
- 92 The Council has worked effectively with the local Fire Brigade in reducing accidental fires by 19 per cent. Over 1,000 Home Fire Safety checks for residents over the past two years, including the fitting of a free smoke alarm where needed has resulted in a 5 per cent reduction in accidental dwelling fires. Other measures to reduce accidents include undertaking testing of electric blankets for older people and undertaking fire safety campaigns aimed at children.

- 93 The Council has a good track record in acting as a community leader in reducing anti-social behaviour in Kingston with partners. This includes tackling domestic violence and seeking to get drug users into treatment and rehabilitation. The Council has an ASB strategy in place, structured around the key themes of prevention, education, community support and engagement, enforcement and rehabilitation. Resident representatives active in the Crime and Disorder Partnership and Safer Neighbourhood Panels reported that the Council has been successful in controlling and reducing anti-social behaviour. However, there is a lack of clear outcome focussed targets to evaluate achievement of the identified outcome measures.
- 94 The Council has a shared Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy with partners, delivering some positive outcomes. The Council has exceeded national targets for the numbers in drug related treatment programmes. As a result, last year 334 Kingston drug users entered treatment, beyond the target of 283 Kingston residents set for 2005/06. Fifty two per cent of drug users completed treatment or stayed in treatment in excess of 12 weeks, again beyond the 2005/06 target of 45 per cent. The Youth Interventions Partnership became operational in November 2005. To date 19 young people have been referred, 12 offered an intervention, with seven still being assessed at May 2006. None of the 12 receiving an intervention has entered the Youth Justice system to date. Another example of the Council taking active steps following consultation, is the needle exchange programme led by the Kaleidoscope project.

Healthier communities

- 95 The Council, with its partners undertakes a wide range of proactive activities to deliver national and local priorities with some positive results. Kingston's Choosing Health implementation plan sets out actions agreed by all partners to deliver national and local priorities. For example, joint activities to promote smoking cessation range from smoke free council offices to targeted smoking cessation activities at schools serving relatively disadvantaged areas. As a result the numbers of people quitting smoking has risen from 485 in 2003/04 to 647 in 2005/06. Youth club programmes include preventative work on the use of alcohol and a specialist worker linked to the street based team, targets young people who are mis-using alcohol. All centres have a range of leaflets and information on drug and alcohol misuse. Young people report being better informed on issues.

- 96 People in Kingston are healthier than average. Life expectancy is rising and among the highest in London. Infant mortality is in line with benchmarked groups and significantly below the national average. There are lower than average numbers of people with mental health problems and there is evidence of some good health choices being made as a result of partnership activities. Whilst benefiting from being a prosperous borough overall, geographical pockets of deprivation exist in some wards and sub-wards. There is a degree of understanding of health inequalities, but current mapping is currently not sophisticated enough to be able to identify health outcomes for discrete groups, such as BME. Developing a more robust partners' health information strategy is a key task of the recently appointed joint Director of Public Health, which will help to more accurately target provision and activities.
- 97 Obesity among eight to ten year olds is increasing. The multi-agency Obesity Strategy Partnership Group is developing a joint approach to diet, nutrition and exercise across the borough, targeting high-risk groups and including the promotion of exercise in schools and community settings. Participation in the Healthy Schools Programme is high at 55 per cent and all schools with infant children participate in the five fruit and vegetables a day project. The Youth Service positively promotes healthy lifestyles and offers opportunities for physical exercise. The Splash youth clubs for eight to twelve year olds includes physical activity as a significant element of each session with an emphasis on play and participation. A Youth Opportunity Card to increase access to the Council's leisure facilities for vulnerable children is in place, but its impact is not yet clear.
- 98 The Council is reducing fuel poverty through targeted investments and increasing grant uptake. Targeted work has resulted in an increased uptake of cold busters grants from £85,000 to £174,00 over four years. An ongoing three year programme in the Council's housing stock will result in the replacement of all boilers with the highest rated energy efficiency ones, along with a programme of insulation. There is a marked reduction in the percentage of people living without central heating.
- 99 Other good examples of joint working include the borough's neighbourhood based, integrated health and social care teams which offer holistic assessments of need and user contribution to service design for older people and other vulnerable groups.
- 100 The council commissioned a survey of minority views in 2005 and Health Equalities Assessments have been implemented to measure access to services. The 'Update of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities' Health and Social Care News' aims to promote access to services across minority communities. A good range of consultation has taken place with young people in the design of new services. For example in KU19, which offers sexual health and contraception advice; in the design and development of the borough's new adventure playgrounds and the Family Advice and Support Service (FASS), a multi-disciplinary early intervention for children's mental health. The target for reducing the number of conceptions among 15-17 year olds has bettered national expectations with a continuing downward trend.

- 101** The Community Action Partnership aims to improve services for people in the most deprived area of the borough. A commissioning group of local people, the PCT, the voluntary sector and the police has set priorities and manages the budget. However, more than two years into the project, the impact on health outcomes is unclear and take-up of some services, such as the shopping bus for older people, is low.

Older people

- 102** The Council and its partners have a good strategic approach to meeting the needs of older people. High level commitment is articulated through the community plan and LAA. The Active Ageing Strategy comprehensively addresses the national active ageing agenda, including helping people to be healthy and live longer as well as to improve the quality of life and independence of adults who need assistance.
- 103** The Council consults extensively with older people to understand their future needs and aspirations. The number of older people in Kingston has declined over the last ten years, but increasing numbers are forecast for the future. The Older People's Partnership Board has considered the implications of future needs and aspirations. For example, priority has been given to the development of Amy Woodgate, an existing residential home for older people, to meet the needs of the growing client group needing specialist provision for dementia.
- 104** There is good co-ordination of cross cutting agendas for older people, including strong links between housing, community services, the police, fire service, PCT and the voluntary sector. As a result a high proportion of people are able to live at home. Cross-departmental and cross-sector information for the over 50s is easily accessed via the council's website with links to partner websites such as the PCT and Age Concern. The Council has actively sought ways of communicating effectively with older people, piloting novel approaches such as using cell phone texting to alert older people to self-help strategies during the heatwave. The Council has helped to set up the Iraqi elders group, a West African elders group and older people in Chessington were consulted about what preventative services they would like to have available from a new centre.
- 105** Multi-agency projects are increasing the uptake of benefits to older people and promoting intergenerational understanding. The Kingston Information Partnership, with advice through Age Concern and access to two full time welfare benefits staff located in the Department for Work and Pensions, has increased the uptake of benefits to older people. Age Concern Kingston has developed an innovative Age and Youth Programme involving older volunteers supporting children's learning in a number of primary schools. The Executive member for Housing and Adult Services is the older people's champion. This role has enabled practical problem solving, including the relocation of MILAAP day care services for Asian older people from poor premises to empty purpose built accommodation.

- 106** Kingston has the second highest proportion of older people helped to live at home in its comparison group. Services to support people at home include the Handy Person scheme and 'sloppy slipper' falls prevention events. The council was a lead partner in the national development of direct payments. The partnership is on track to meet all LPSA targets, including further increases in the use of direct payments.
- 107** The Council has been very successful at keeping delayed transfers of care at a low level, exceeding its 2004/05 target. Integrated health and social care teams - Patient Individual Care Kingston (PICK) - are jointly funded and managed by the council and the PCT and were runners up in the national 2004 Health and Social Care Awards. Community Matrons linked to the teams and to GP practices lead on risk assessments and the management of long-term conditions with targets to reduce in-patient hospital admissions, promote person centred care, independent living and quality of life. An integrated community equipment service funded by a pooled budget has been in place for over two years. A small grant of £72,000 has been received from government for assisted technology and is being used to pilot the national scheme with small numbers of high-dependency older people.

Children and young people

- 108** The overall effectiveness of the council's children's services is outstanding. All services for children and young people are good or excellent and have had a very substantial impact on improving outcomes for almost all children and young people. Education services are outstanding. Very good progress has been made in strengthening the quality of universal services and developing and implementing preventative services to reduce levels of vulnerability. The capacity to build on these achievements and improve services further is good.
- 109** The management of services for children and young people is good. Good ambitions for children and young people are comprehensively set out in the Children and Young People's Plan 'Making a difference together' which provides a challenging agenda for improvement based on a sound needs assessment. Strong leadership of the children's agenda supported by high calibre staff and elected members underpinned by good relationships contribute to effective problem solving and a very good rate of progress. A Children and Young People's Trust Board is in place, chaired by the council's Chief Executive, with a good level of representation of key partners. Highly effective strategies for recruitment and retention and integrated workforce planning and development are contributing strongly to organisational capacity. The council has a good track record of increasing financial capacity through successful bids for additional funding. Current management of resources and value for money at the council are good. Performance management across the partnership is good. The council has a strong track record of focus on, and resolution of underperformance, exemplified by rapid and significant improvement in the youth service, and improved standards in the lower performing sixth forms.

- 110** The general support given to parents and carers to keep their children healthy is good. Children have good access to age appropriate health services when they are ill. However, in-patient services are not provided in an appropriate setting for adolescents and unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) do not have the same ease of access to health services as other looked after children (LAC). A new tier 2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service is providing good support to front line staff in identifying mental health problems and making appropriate referrals. The integrated support for very young children and their families with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is very good but is less well co-ordinated for school aged children with LDD.
- 111** Children and young people who are most at risk are protected well through good inter-agency collaboration and well managed procedures. Professionals in key agencies generally work well together and share information. However, not all agencies are consistently working in accordance with national guidelines to refer children who are affected by domestic violence appropriately. In addition there are some aspects of social care practice in the area of domestic violence that requires improvement. Very good progress has been made in setting up preventative services which provide early support as well as more intensive work for children and their families. Support for LAC is good but more variable for UASC. Reviews for LAC are held in a timely way, however, the Independent Reviewing Officer service is having insufficient impact on improving the quality of this work. Good support is provided for children with LDD and their families.
- 112** Standards in schools overall are excellent, well above national averages and generally above those in similar authorities. Services for school improvement are a particular strength. The strengthening focus on identifying and supporting specific groups of vulnerable pupils has improved their progress and attainment. Attendance is very good and innovative activities are being implemented to further reduce the low rate of unauthorised absences and improve the broadly satisfactory attendance of LAC. Good quality practice in youth work settings contributes strongly to good standards of achievement.
- 113** Children and young people, including LAC, are supported well to contribute to society and in managing changes in their lives. The well-conceived participation strategy reflects the strong commitment across the partnership to involve children and young people in the decisions that affect them but is not yet consistently implemented. Good targeted collaborative partnership work is effectively reducing anti-social behaviour. The council has effectively managed the rising number of young people who offend for the first time through well targeted early intervention and re-offending rates are reducing significantly.

- 114 Opportunities for children and young people to achieve economic well-being and prepare for working life are outstanding. A very high proportion of young people, including those who are more vulnerable, remain in full time education at age 16. A high proportion of young people achieve level 2 and 3 qualifications by age 19. A clear and appropriate strategy to meet the needs of 14-19 year olds is being systematically implemented. Some new school sixth form partnerships are not yet well established and there is variation in standards of attainment between school sixth forms. Most young people live in appropriate accommodation, although there is a shortage of permanent accommodation for care leavers. Good transition arrangements are in place for LAC to support their progression at age 16.

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 Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 4 to 15 September 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.