

Corporate Assessment Report

February 2008



Corporate Assessment

Wandsworth Borough Council

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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 specific services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as relevant health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes especially concerning safeguarding; services for looked after children; and services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The separate JAR report also 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 and the most recently published Annual Performance Assessment from Ofsted which covers all of the Council's children services.

Executive summary

- 5 Wandsworth is performing strongly. It is a business-like and consistently high-performing council. Its long-term focus, which is well-recognised by all stakeholders, is on delivering high quality, top quartile services across the board at low cost. It is very successful at this. It does not give priority to the development of overarching strategies and visions since it does not believe they add value. This restricts the understanding and full engagement of some partners and stakeholders in developing a shared long-term vision for Wandsworth as a place.
- 6 The Council with its partners has clear and challenging ambitions to build on its current achievements to make the area an even better place to live while keeping expenditure under tight control. These ambitions include continuing improvements in education, health, social care and housing alongside making the area safer, improving the environment and building a prosperous and vibrant community. Key medium-term outcomes include reducing health and employment inequalities, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour and reducing carbon use by the Council.
- 7 Political leadership is very strong. The leader is a key member of the long-standing Conservative administration and chairs the Local Strategic Partnership. He has made a major contribution to developing an effective administration with a strong culture of challenge. Lead councillors are high calibre and very well-informed and take an active part in engaging with the community. The Council's approach to Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC) allows non-executive councillors to be fully involved in challenging the performance of the Council and to develop their understanding and expertise.
- 8 Managerial leadership is very effective and professional. Alongside its stable administration, the Council has key senior staff who have been in Wandsworth for many years. It has evolved a delivery-focused work culture, the 'Wandsworth Way', which is pragmatic and can-do and well understood by staff. As a result, staff are very clear about their responsibility to deliver effective and continuously-improving services.
- 9 The Council has a clear set of corporate priorities but they do not always drive delivery by directorates. The Council's corporate business plan brings together its service and financial planning and links well to directorate plans. Most spending decisions are taken corporately but directorates have considerable responsibility for deciding how they deliver services within this funding envelope. The Council monitors performance across a wide range of Key Issues which are updated every year. Among these it identifies a small number of short-term improvement priorities which are a particular focus. Within directorates, decisions on operational priorities are revised frequently based on service needs. This arrangement allows a flexible response to new demands or concerns but partners are not all clear about what is most important to the Council.

- 10 Community leadership by the Council is strong. It has a long history of working with local partners, including the business and voluntary and community sector and this has now been formalised through the Wandsworth Local Strategic Partnership. The Council has good one to one relationships with partners and has created an excellent formal framework for partnership working. The stakeholders surveyed were positive about the way the Council works with them to deliver services but some felt the Council was not taking full advantage of their potential contribution to wider partnership working. The Council also campaigns effectively about issues of importance to residents which are beyond its direct control, such as aircraft noise and publicises these issues through newsletters and leaflets.
- 11 The Council has a very strong focus on meeting the needs and preferences of its residents. Consulting users is an integral part of the Council's planning, with good use of regularly-gathered intelligence. It also undertakes specific research to inform development of key strategies or where it is about to re-tender services. The Council and its partners have invested strongly in resident participation and offer a range of opportunities for consultation and involvement in decision-making: at local ward level, through special interest groups, via the Council website My Wandsworth and through petitioning. The recent Best Value (BV) satisfaction survey showed that 70 per cent of residents agree that Wandsworth Council promotes the interests of local people - the highest in the country.
- 12 The Council is performing well in delivering its core Community Strategy aim to promote a cohesive, prosperous and vibrant community. Eighty-three per cent of residents agree that Wandsworth is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together - above the London average of 78 per cent. Support for equalities in service delivery is strong. The Council has reached level 3 in the local government equalities standard with the ambitious target of achieving level 5 within two years. However, despite good representation among middle managers and across the workforce overall, Wandsworth has lagged behind other London boroughs in the percentage of ethnic minority staff and women who reach the top 5 per cent of the workforce.
- 13 The Council makes effective use of its contracts with the private sector and partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to enhance its capacity to deliver responsive services. However, oversight of its own support infrastructure is less strong. The lack of a corporate strategic framework to direct the development of information and communication technology (ICT) services has limited effective planning for change. Joint workforce planning is not yet fully in place in adult services.
- 14 The Council delivers excellent value for money in line with its long-standing corporate objective. It has well developed systems to deliver tight financial control including a well established approach to risk management and has delivered efficiency savings which are considerably above target. Wandsworth has a strong track record of using procurement to deliver high quality services at low cost. Its Council tax remains the lowest in the country and most services are high-performing. It has consistently been rated excellent in the annual value for money assessment by the external auditor.

- 15 Performance management is strong and well-embedded and its effectiveness is reflected in the year-on-year improvement in service performance. Performance management of partners is also effective with Overview and Scrutiny Committees leading reviews on cross-cutting areas such as crime and health.
- 16 With its partners, the Council delivers strongly across services and against the shared priorities. Resident satisfaction levels are high and increasing. Particular strengths are cross-service work to promote community safety and keep crime levels low, its engagement in the green agenda, its housing services, and its services for children and young people. It is achieving real reductions in inequalities in health. Its focus on developing the five town centres addresses a range of wellbeing issues such as increasing local employment, improving community cohesion and reducing travel. It is reducing its own carbon footprint as well as car use by local residents. It is also effective in addressing disadvantage, for example, all ethnic groups, including Black and minority ethnic (BME) boys, achieve better results at school than their peers in other London boroughs.

Areas for improvement

- 17 Wandsworth Council's stable councillor and officer leadership has allowed it to evolve a strongly pragmatic and delivery-focused culture. This does not put high value on overarching vision statements, unnecessary strategies or rigid corporately-determined priorities. Its approach is highly effective in allowing it to deliver responsive, high quality services at the lowest possible cost. However, a consequence is that partners and stakeholders are not all fully involved in strategic planning or clear enough about how operational priorities are determined by the Council's high level priorities. This limits their ability to understand the overall vision and therefore to align their longer-term plans with those of the Council. It is a missed opportunity to add extra value to what the Council and its partners do at present.
- 18 The Council should use the review of the community strategy as an opportunity to facilitate the development of a shared, overarching, longer-term vision with its partners. This should help them shape Wandsworth as a place in order to ensure that the high levels of development planned in the area contribute to the community as a whole. A set of objectives and related priorities should be derived from this vision and incorporated explicitly into service plans.
- 19 Wandsworth's decentralised approach to ICT has slowed the development of new ICT solutions. The Council has produced a draft ICT strategy. It now needs to agree this strategy and the associated implementation plans to ensure it maximises the benefits of its existing systems and prioritises future investment. It also needs to take action to extend joint workforce planning to relevant services.

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	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement	4
Overall corporate assessment score**		4
*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

- 20** Wandsworth is a relatively affluent borough for inner London which nevertheless has areas where deprivation remains relatively high. The largest of the inner London boroughs, it stretches along the south bank of the Thames in West London and includes some very expensive private housing as well as some pockets of high-rise social housing. The average household income in Wandsworth is above the London average and it is ranked 128 out of 354 local authorities in England in terms of average deprivation (where 1 is most deprived). No wards fall in the most deprived 10 per cent nationally but there is considerable variation across the borough and within wards. Battersea, Roehampton and Tooting are the most deprived areas and the focus for targeted work by the Council and its partners.
- 21** Of the 279,000 people living in Wandsworth in 2006, 48 per cent were aged 20 to 39 compared to a London average of 36 per cent, with correspondingly lower proportions of children and older people. The relatively young population and the high proportion of privately-rented accommodation are reflected in high levels of mobility. The borough's population has been growing since 1997 and is projected to grow a further 6 to 9 per cent by 2021. There is a pattern of single adults moving into the borough while, against the national trend, the population aged over 64 is falling.
- 22** Wandsworth has a lower proportion of non-white residents (22 per cent) than the average for London (29 per cent) though this is well above the national average of nine per cent. However the proportion is growing. It has longstanding Afro-Caribbean (5 per cent), Black African (4 per cent) and South Asian (7 per cent) populations which are now being joined by newer populations from Europe, Africa and Australasia.
- 23** Wandsworth is a mainly residential area with much of the population travelling to work outside the borough although an increasing number of jobs are provided by small businesses locally. Unemployment levels are, at 8 per cent, close to the London average, however young men of Black and minority ethnic background have a particularly high level of unemployment: 14 per cent, versus an overall male 16 to 24 unemployment rate of 6.4 per cent. Overall crime levels per head of population are the lowest in inner London and close to the national average though street crime is relatively high. Crime remains a concern for residents though its importance has reduced since 2004. Health outcomes are mixed with some significant inequalities between wards.

- 24 The Council continues to own and manage its social housing stock after strong endorsement from tenants. Nearly all its properties (97 per cent) meet the Decent Homes standard. The take up of right to buy means a high proportion of leaseholders live in Council-owned buildings. The borough has large amounts of green open space and good access to the river. Public transport links to central London through the underground and the rail network are good but there are high levels of road congestion and traffic pollution. Rather than one central area, there are five town centres across the borough where shops, bars and restaurants are concentrated. These are located in Balham, Clapham Junction, Putney, Tooting and Wandsworth.
- 25 Resident satisfaction levels are high according to the 2006 BV satisfaction survey. Seventy-three per cent of Wandsworth's residents are satisfied with the Council, compared to a London average of 54 per cent.

The Council

- 26 The Council has been led by the Conservatives since 1978 and they currently hold 51 of 60 seats. This means it has had a very stable administration which is reflected in a consistent focus on providing high quality services while charging the lowest council tax in the country.
- 27 It adopted a version of the Leader and Executive model in September 2001. The full Council of 60 councillors meeting together is responsible for determining the budget and policy framework for the Council. The Executive of eight lead councillors implements these policies, takes decisions about them and spends the budget. There are eight Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) which carry out prior scrutiny of all reports going to the Executive and also scrutinise services provided through partner organisations such as the Police and the health service. The OSCs are aligned to departments and to councillors' portfolios. As a deliberate choice they operate in a very similar way to the old committees.
- 28 The Council has maintained an 'excellent' CPA score since the introduction of CPA in 2002. Its average equivalent band D council tax at £681.13 remains the lowest nationally in 2007/08.
- 29 The Wandsworth Local Strategic Partnership is the focus for partnership working supported by a range of thematic partnerships. It is chaired by the leader of the Council and manages the community strategy and the Local Area Agreement. A new framework for partnership working, based on best practice, is currently being piloted by a number of the key partnerships. The Council has good links with local business through the five town centre partnerships and with the voluntary and community sector which provides a significant range of services.
- 30 The Council has a gross revenue budget of £496 million, net £178 million, in 2007/08, excluding the housing revenue account of £113 million and the Dedicated Schools Grant of £191 million. Current capital spending is budgeted at £77 million in 2007/08 including housing.

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

Ambition

- 31 The Council is performing well in this area. Wandsworth has a well-established set of challenging ambitions for the community which are based firmly on the needs of the area and the concerns of its residents. Led strongly by the Council, partners share these ambitions and have a clear idea of their own responsibilities. However, the vision is not consistently translated into clear longer-term outcomes for the borough and its communities. Instead the Council sets targets over the short to medium-term. This shorter-term approach makes it more difficult for partners and residents to understand the distinctive local impact expected from the Council's ambitions for the area. The review of the community strategy is an opportunity to develop and articulate a longer-term, sustainable, shared vision with partners.
- 32 The community strategy envisages Wandsworth in the future as 'a place which is safer, healthier, more prosperous and sustainable – a good place to live and work now and a better place in the future'. This vision is translated into six challenging strategic priorities:
- making Wandsworth safer;
 - improving the local environment;
 - building a prosperous and vibrant community;
 - improving education for all;
 - improving health and social care; and
 - meeting housing needs.
- 33 There are clear links between national priorities, local priorities, the six community strategy priorities, the local area agreement and the five strategic objectives of the Council. The five strategic objectives set out in the 2007 corporate business plan are:
- delivering high quality, value for money services;
 - improving opportunities for young people;
 - making Wandsworth an attractive, safe and healthy place;
 - providing care and support for those in need; and
 - building a prosperous and vibrant community.
- 34 These strategic priorities and Council objectives are based clearly on the needs and concerns of residents. Partners, through the various partnership groups, know how they contribute to delivery of these objectives.

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- 35** Based on these objectives, the Council and its partners have agreed a range of ambitious outcomes which they aim to deliver within a strictly-controlled funding envelope. These include reducing health inequalities, especially a 43 per cent reduction in teenage pregnancies by 2010, and reducing the gap in the proportion of low birthweight babies across the borough. There are some very challenging environmental targets such as major reductions in the use of landfill for waste disposal, a 25 per cent drop in carbon dioxide emissions by the Council and an 80 per cent increase in cycling trips by 2010. There are targets to stimulate a thriving community through funding and building capacity in the community and voluntary sector and developing local employment opportunities especially for groups such as black and minority ethnic young men. Although most of the Council's objectives are long-term, its plans include few explicit targets beyond 2010 to illustrate its ambitions for Wandsworth and its people.
- 36** The Council has not been sufficiently proactive in updating its shared, long-term vision with partners. The community strategy is no longer a live document articulating such a vision. It was produced in 2003 and does not reflect some current objectives, for example, for children's services. Targets are included only up to 2005/06. There have been regular thematic updates but these have not been brought together into one document. A range of more recent strategic plans such as the Children and Young People's Plan and the Local Development Framework core strategy show that the Council and its partners have some shared ambitions which are less directly reflected in the high level priorities in the community strategy. These include the sustainable development of the five town centres and secondary/local neighbourhoods, improving transport, and improving opportunities for all children and young people. A review of the community strategy is under way with a revised strategy to be produced for April 2008. Until this is complete, partners and stakeholders do not all have a consistent understanding of how their objectives fit into the overarching ambitions for the community.
- 37** The Council provides clear community leadership. It has a long history of working with partners and it provides strong leadership of, and support for the Wandsworth Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Council officers do a considerable amount of work to support the LSP, for example in investigating black and minority ethnic (BME) unemployment. The partnership is effective and well-structured and voluntary and community sector representation has recently been enhanced. The responsibilities of partners are made clear in the partnership's terms of reference and through newly developed guidance on partnership governance. However, some partners reported being able to contribute effectively to joint operational working but not to broader strategy development. As a result, opportunities to further enhance the effectiveness of partnerships are being missed.

- 38** The Council has excellent local intelligence which is shared with partners to help them understand the social, economic and environmental challenges they face. The community strategy and council policies are based on an understanding of local needs derived from a wide range of ongoing consultation with the community and other stakeholders. This includes biennial surveys of residents, specific research to inform particular service reviews or contract re-tendering, use of consultation forums, for example for older people or black and ethnic minorities and harnessing of feedback from complaints. The voluntary and community sector is used effectively in consultation to access harder to reach groups such as BME communities and older people. The Council also has good informal information-gathering processes for example through neighbourhood watch events, ward surgeries. Local people are very clear about the Council's aim to deliver high quality services at low cost.
- 39** The Council has a strong and shared culture and values which partners recognise. The stable administration has stimulated the development of a pragmatic and business-like approach strongly focused on effective service delivery for residents at low cost. This has produced innovative and responsive ways of working and continuously improving performance across most services. It is proudly known as 'the Wandsworth way'.
- 40** The Council's rigorous approach to delivering services while keeping its council tax low means that it has often needed to make difficult decisions. Examples are the recent increases in parking charges and increases in the thresholds for home care for older people. These decisions are widely consulted on and the Council is willing to support innovative solutions. An example is the recent proposal to close the Wandsworth Museum. This led to a public outcry. A benefactor offered a funding package and the Council has helped to set up a trust which will take over the running of the museum.

Prioritisation

- 41 The Council is performing well in this area. Its objective to deliver high quality services at low cost is highly visible and permeates its work. In addition to this it has a clear policy to monitor a large number of priorities and objectives in line with its aim to deliver good performance across all services. Councillors, officers and partners understand the priorities in their service area. However, the large number of priorities across the Council means that stakeholders are less clear than they should be about which are most important for delivering the Council's ambitions. This restricts their ability to align their plans to contribute to the broader vision for Wandsworth.
- 42 Decisions on the Council's key priorities are led strongly by councillors in the Conservative group. The most important of the Council's corporate objectives is delivery of high quality, value for money services. This priority is long-standing and crystal-clear to stakeholders. The corporate business plan (CBP) links these strategic objectives to the medium-term financial strategy and to directorate service plans and performance indicators. Partnership plans such as the children and young peoples' plan or the crime, disorder and drug strategy demonstrate good links to the joint priorities of partners.
- 43 The Council's ambitions are effectively translated into short and medium-term priorities. A list of 122 Key Issues is identified linked broadly to the strategic objectives which is updated annually and monitored regularly across the Council. This corporate process includes the identification of areas which are not priorities such as the provision of services which people can afford to pay for. The Key Issues include both broad, longer-term development processes and specific outcomes and many are cross-cutting. Between eight and ten of these issues are identified corporately as short-term CPA improvement priorities each year with some remaining in this category for several years until performance improves. The Key Issues and CPA priorities are integrated into business plans and the performance targets of services and individuals and may be allocated additional resources as part of the annual service and financial planning process. In addition to the regular council-wide monitoring, the CPA priorities are also the subject of specific monitoring reports. The Council's plans and those of its partnerships clearly identify the actions to be taken, responsibility, resources dedicated, timescales and the targets to be achieved.

- 44 Delivery by directorates is not always driven by the Council's high level priorities. Apart from the CPA priorities, the operational priorities within the Key Issues are not decided corporately nor explicitly linked to the high level priorities in the corporate plan. The Council aims to deliver good performance across all its services and, except for the CPA priorities, does not rank its Key Issues in order of importance. Most decisions about which issues are operational priorities at any one time are taken within directorates with lead councillors, rather than at corporate level. In the current stable context this devolved approach is flexible and highly effective in delivering responsive services. However, although partners understand the priorities which they are involved in delivering, there is variation in their understanding of the links to the Council's high level priorities. This means that partners are less able to see how their own contribution fits into the broader vision for Wandsworth and to plan accordingly.
- 45 The high level priorities of the Council and its partners accurately reflect the findings of needs assessment and local consultation. They address the needs of disadvantaged groups such as young black men, vulnerable older people and the areas of the borough where disadvantage is higher and outcomes are worse. Resident and service user views have been harnessed effectively to shape policy, such as providing a stronger focus on reducing carbon use and improved safety arrangements on estates. The Council uses information on residents' concerns effectively to lead campaigns on issues such as the closing of post offices, reducing aircraft noise and improving public transport. The stakeholder survey shows that partners agree that the Council acts on the concerns of local people.
- 46 The Council and its partners effectively share data and intelligence and use this to shape and change policy and ensure it is well-focused on the needs of residents. An interagency working group was recently set up to examine data and service information in response to public concern about gangs which led to targeted work with the three main local gangs. The Council includes public health issues in its own survey to help understand the needs of local people. Specialist jointly-funded post holders analyse health data and crime data to help understand how best to improve services for the community.
- 47 There are robust arrangements to deliver priorities through directorate, partnership and service plans. Financial and service planning is carried out as part of a well-established annual process. The financial framework sets the realistic budgets within which services must work and there is a strong annual efficiency review process which takes account of the Key Issues. Departmental priorities are reviewed effectively on an ongoing basis during the year and through the robust annual quality and performance review (AQPR) carried out by each service. The CBP is comprehensively updated annually to provide an accurate record of progress and plans for improvement against each Key Issue.

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- 48** The Council has strong and extensive systems for monitoring progress which are tailored effectively to their audience. These include quarterly reporting to overview and scrutiny committees and partnership groups such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership or the LSP, publishing ward level reports on the quality of the local street scene and reporting outcomes once a year in Brightside, the council newsletter. Key priorities are not always clearly identified within these reports. In practice lead councillors and staff understand the corporate priorities which are relevant to their areas of responsibility and focus their monitoring accordingly. The stakeholders surveyed rated the transparency of the Council's reports about performance highly. However some partners who are less familiar with the operation of the Council find the detailed monitoring information difficult to follow.

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

Capacity

- 49 The Council is performing well in this area. There is strong councillor leadership and good work with partners to build capacity and thereby improve outcomes. The Council has an established track record of delivering value for money services through strong competitive process and systems of internal review. The Council's corporate ICT strategy is under-developed and joint workforce planning in adult services is at an early stage.
- 50 The Council has well-established decision-making processes which are well understood by officers and councillors. These involve early discussion of draft policy and financial issues at the leader's meeting, then by OSC, followed by approval by the Executive and finally by the full council. The Council acknowledges that, following the 2000 Local Government Act, the system used may be unique. It sought to replicate key aspects of the committee system which predated it in order to involve backbenchers more effectively. This leads to strong engagement by councillors in decision-making but other aspects of the 2000 Act, in particular the ability to call-in key decisions, are little used.
- 51 Councillor leadership and challenge is strong and evident not just through Cabinet but across the Council. Lead councillors and backbenchers are highly capable and motivated and are actively engaged in ward issues. Their detailed local knowledge is used effectively to inform their work within Council committees. Scrutiny committees very effectively challenge delivery of Council services and those provided jointly with partners and there is particularly good and longstanding engagement on health matters. There is a councillor training programme which is well established and offers good induction and more detailed training in areas such as planning. As with other aspects of councillor activity, engagement in this training is good with high attendance levels at training events.
- 52 There are effective officer-councillor relationships and these support the well established value for money culture within Wandsworth. Senior officers take clear responsibility for delivery of the low council tax agenda and there is routine briefing and joint performance-monitoring with lead councillors to support this. The Chief Executive takes a clear lead in key development areas such as creation of a children's services directorate. There is strong officer leadership on service delivery and a culture of robust financial management and accountability. Staff are offered an extensive range of training courses and develop good levels of expertise.

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- 53** The Council works effectively with public partners, the voluntary sector and private contractors to build capacity and deliver outcomes, for example the 25 per cent increase in use of the contracted-out leisure centres. A culture of proactive contract management and contractor engagement around a set of clearly defined outcomes is evident across the Council. Partners and contractors were able to point to specific outcomes which have resulted from these clear approaches to partnership working such as the creation of over 700 jobs or training positions through the Job Shop at Battersea Power station in partnership with Jobcentre plus, the developers and the London Development Agency. Some partners expressed concern that the Council's approach can be directive but many found the clarity of approach helpful and constructive.
- 54** Financial planning and management are robust. The Council uses a Medium Term Financial Plan to ensure it will retain sufficient resources to forward fund its activities. Financial control is strong and based on corporate decisions. The Council has consistently delivered very good financial performance which is reflected in its low council tax levels, consistently excellent use of resources ratings and its history of delivering substantial efficiencies across services. These excellent financial management arrangements are supported by robust councillor and officer monitoring which takes place on a routine basis. There are clearly documented triggers and processes for exception based reporting and these are widely understood, but given the strong financial culture, rarely used.
- 55** Risk management is strong in Wandsworth. The Council does not use a risk register based methodology but it does routinely document and review risks. These risks are actively reviewed at service level and effective action is taken to mitigate or eliminate risks. Risk management is conducted well across the Council with directors collectively reviewing and agreeing corporate risk to be presented to councillors. The internal audit team carries out a well-established process of central monitoring and assurance of risk management arrangements.
- 56** The Council supports partners well to develop their capacity. It jointly funds data analysis and joint commissioning posts and provides training, for example on safeguarding vulnerable people. It has introduced an excellent partnership framework setting out the governance arrangements and expectations for its partnerships. The framework draws on best practice and is notable in its identification of critical governance issues including standards of conduct for partnership decision-makers. The framework has not been applied to all partnerships but following the initial pilot phase it is being rolled out to the major partnerships. The protocols and procedures in the framework provide a robust basis for improving the management of the Council's partnerships.

- 57 The Council is proactive in ensuring high standards of conduct amongst councillors and officers. The monitoring officer regularly offers councillors useful advice on ethical matters. A Standards Committee with appropriate independent membership meets routinely to review standards of conduct across the Council. The committee has been proactive in reviewing the codes of conduct for councillors, officers and partners as well as its own role and remit. The Council's code of conduct is well publicised and there has been training for councillors to support its implementation. There have been no major ethical issues in the Council for the committee to deal with.
- 58 Procurement has been very effectively used to help meet the overriding priority of low council tax. The Council's approach to procurement has been traditional, based upon a well founded process of clear specification, with a strong focus on quality, often leading to acceptance of the lowest priced tender. Lowest price is not always the deciding factor and the Council used user evaluation to inform the selection of the meals on wheels contractor based on price and quality whilst the waste contract has been designed to allow for flexibility to manage costs as the balance between recycling and refuse collection shifts. The recently revised draft procurement strategy incorporates necessary legislative updates, including those relating to equalities duties. The Council is beginning to consider alternative approaches, such as sharing services or joint procurement exercises to pursue better value for money.
- 59 Wandsworth's devolved arrangements for human resource management and its approach to joint workforce planning have led to variable practice in different services. Some services have achieved and retained IIP awards with the 2006 technical services assessment being notable for the absence of any negative findings. There is a good range of training and development opportunities offered across the Council with positive feedback from staff. There are examples of corporate policies which have been innovative and effective such as successful action taken to reduce sickness absence and some good work to improve recruitment and retention for example in children's services. While joint workforce planning is well-developed in children's services, in adult services the Council and its partners have yet to formally commence the survey work necessary to develop joint strategies and plans. Within corporate guidance on flexible working, individual services are adopting a range of different mobile and flexible working solutions. Performance-related pay is not applied consistently across the Council - for example there are variations within the newly integrated children's services. While this variability allows for different needs and capacities in departments, there is not always a service justification for the differences. As a result there is inconsistency between the human resources arrangements for staff in different services.

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- 60** There has been little progress on some longstanding human resource issues. There have been a number of initiatives over several years to increase diversity at a senior level in the organisation but there has been little improvement. Despite good levels of diversity lower down the organisation, the percentage of the top 5 per cent of earners that are women has remained close to 22 per cent and in the worst quartile nationally since 2004/05 while the percentage from BME communities has improved from 4.3 per cent in 2004/05 to 5.2 per cent in 2006/07 but remains worse than comparable councils. The Council has yet to conclude its single status negotiations with local trade unions. These corporate issues have a negative effect on the motivation of some staff and could represent a risk to the Council's strong record of service delivery.
- 61** The Council does not consistently maximise its capacity to deliver its priorities through ICT. The Council's highly decentralised approach has resulted in effective outcomes in some areas but unnecessary variability in others. There are examples of service innovation using ICT such as the development of the PARSOL e-planning system which has now been rolled out to other environmental services. There is good access to information and services through the web-site. Wandsworth is also a key contributor to a number of e-government ICT projects such as the London Grid for Learning and the e-CAF (Common Assessment Framework). However, the decentralised approach means that the quality of ICT varies between directorates and locations. There have also been difficulties and additional costs incurred in supporting the wide range of equipment and systems in different directorates.
- 62** The Council has been too slow to respond to these limitations. It is now undertaking a major project of ICT infrastructure renewal and redrafting its ICT strategy. The Council's strong track record of good project management is an asset here. It is reconsidering issues from the purchase of basic equipment to the procurement of major solutions. The draft strategy recognises the need for significant transformation of ICT services and the need for a better balance between central and service control of ICT procurement but it is not yet agreed across the Council.

Performance management

- 63** The Council is performing strongly in this area. Performance management is securely embedded and councillors provide effective challenge to performance through the OSCs. The Council's Annual Quality and Performance Review (AQPR) process is a robust basis for delivering continuous improvement and the corporate objective of securing two per cent improvement year-on-year. As a result, 80 per cent of the Council's best value performance indicators have improved over the last three years, which is well above the average for all single tier authorities.
- 64** The Council has a strong performance management framework in place. Clear targets for service performance are cascaded through the annual Corporate Business Plan (CBP). They are integrated into service business plans and individual staff targets are set as part of the annual performance appraisal process. This ensures that staff are clear about what is expected of them and are fully engaged in meeting targets for improved service delivery.
- 65** The Council and its key partners effectively track and manage performance. For example, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) receives quarterly reports based on a traffic light system with an additional narrative on performance. The jointly funded crime data analyst post-holder leads on data quality through effective engagement with partners. This enables the Council and its partners to take targeted action based on the detailed intelligence data for each crime activity, for example tackling burglaries in a specific ward. A jointly prepared report with the PCT on progress on improving health and social care clearly sets out achievements, future challenges and performance information with year-on-year comparisons. It includes examples of joint working and new initiatives undertaken to extend the range of provision to cater for a broader range of needs. As a result of these joint approaches, councillors, officers and partners remain fully informed and engaged in partnership activities undertaken to improve services for residents.
- 66** The Council has a strong and effective approach to managing its own service and financial performance. Monthly monitoring reports are discussed by directors and portfolio holders. Quarterly reports and the annual comparative 'Rank of Ranks' reports are submitted to the OSCs and to the Executive. These are an excellent combination of evidence about performance outcomes with appropriate analysis of the factors associated with underperformance. They include detailed information about each performance indicator, showing direction of travel and comparisons of targets and performance with all London boroughs. This enables councillors and staff to be fully aware of the Council's performance.

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

- 67** Performance management is effectively integrated with the management of resources. The medium term financial strategy and three-year service improvement plans are formally brought together in the CBP. Annual service reviews are based on comparative analysis of performance indicators and cost data. These effective processes ensure that corporate objectives are reviewed annually and informed by outcomes, consultation and feedback from stakeholders. For example, the CPA improvement priority to implement the Youth Matters agenda was removed following substantial progress and replaced by a priority to improve the Housing Benefits service as a direct result of disappointing performance. Performance indicators which show under-performance are the focus of improvement plans. This has resulted in ongoing service improvement and better value for money.
- 68** The Council's arrangements to performance manage outcomes for key partnerships are effective. These arrangements go beyond performance management and information sharing, to local joint tasking and problem solving. The OSC's play a key role here. For example, the Health OSC reviewed the PCT's performance in continuing and expanding its extended GP hours service. As a direct result, the PCT has recently agreed to resource the provision of these extended services.
- 69** The Council communicates its performance to its users and its partners effectively. Comprehensive data on council performance is published in the annual CBP and on the website. Performance in key areas is published in the monthly edition of the council magazine, Brightside. Service performance is shared through regular newsletters, such as Homelife and Parking news. Ward level performance including action taken locally, such as installation of CCTV to deal with anti-social behaviour (ASB) concerns, is presented at ward report meetings.
- 70** The Council has a strong commitment to customer focus and there are some good examples of user engagement in setting targets and monitoring performance. For example, Sure Start parents are involved as members of the management committee and assist in staff recruitment and on the selection panels for service providers. When defining its Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets, the Council canvassed the views of residents through focus group meetings, resulting in the inclusion of a target to reduce black and minority ethnic (BME) unemployment.
- 71** The Council learns from internal and external challenge. It regularly invites external challenge through Investors in People, Crystal Mark and by applying for specific industry awards, for example for energy management. This secures independent evaluation of council services. The Council learns well from internal processes too. The Council's approach to co-ordinating older people's services is based on its experience of integrating services to form the children and young people's directorate.

- 72** Learning from complaints is very good. The complaints procedure is well publicised and accessible. Satisfaction with complaints handling is, at 49 per cent, the highest in England. The recently reviewed complaints system has enhanced analysis of complaints and feedback to inform service improvement. For example, relatively low satisfaction and a high level of complaints for waste services triggered a councillor-led review. An action plan is now in place to improve call handling.

What has been achieved?

- 73 The Council is performing strongly in this area. Wandsworth's strategic priorities in the community strategy closely reflect the national shared priorities and it makes effective use of the LAA to drive further improvement. Its achievements are good overall and outstanding in some areas. They are strongest in those areas which matter the most to local people such as crime and the quality of the environment. Local people recognise the Council's effectiveness with improved levels of satisfaction in the 2006 BVPI survey. Seventy-three per cent of residents are satisfied with the Council overall, a five per cent improvement since 2003/04 and 16 per cent above the average for inner London. Furthermore, 87 per cent of local people believe that the work of the Council improves the local area as a place to live.
- 74 Outcomes, including for those most at risk of disadvantage, are good and improving. Targeted activities in more deprived areas of the borough such as Battersea are leading to improvement in the overall quality of life. Overall crime is reducing from a relatively low level. The Council is well ahead of the national target in achieving the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) in its housing stock. Streets are very clean and recycling has increased. The Council is achieving reductions in carbon use and a shift from private car to other modes of travel through a range of infrastructure and innovative behavioural change initiatives using its planning powers. Inequalities in health are reducing. Services for children and young people are good or outstanding and have had a very substantial impact on improving outcomes for almost all children and young people. A coordinated approach to older people, building on the already good social care services is being implemented.
- 75 Well-established work across services and with partners means that the Council can demonstrate an integrated approach to improving community wellbeing. For example, its focus on developing the five local town centres addresses a range of issues such as local employment, reduced travel and improved community cohesion.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 76 The Council has an effective approach to delivering sustainable communities. It includes improving the local environment and meeting housing need among its strategic priorities. Underpinning this is the wider objective of ensuring that Wandsworth is a green and pleasant place to live and that communities are integrated and cohesive. The Council makes good use of opportunities to deliver a wide range of sustainable outcomes from regeneration and development schemes such as its five Town Centres and through improvements to the housing stock. It is focusing on further action to tackle inequalities in employment, homelessness, traffic congestion and to improve recycling. Its approach has led to tangible improvements across the borough.

- 77 The Council has a clear strategic approach to sustainability for its community based on the five town centres of Wandsworth, Putney, Balham, Battersea and Tooting, and a number of local neighbourhoods including Roehampton. It works through the business-led Town Centre Partnerships to ensure provision of a wide range of services, including independent shops, close to the main centres of population in the Borough. This is reflected in low and declining vacancy rates and improved rental levels in the town centres. This approach improves the economic stability of Wandsworth by providing opportunities for the small business sector, provides a focus for the community and reduces the need to travel.
- 78 The Council effectively supports and works with businesses through its Business Charter and Concordat. It has a clear strategy to promote the small business sector as important local employers and has established good links with businesses through its Town Centre Partnerships and the local Chamber of Commerce. Its regeneration schemes provide both mixed tenure housing and premises for small businesses. Business formation rates are higher than national and London rates, with an increase of over 3,000 in a decade.
- 79 The Council is working very effectively to increase employment of people from disadvantaged areas and those groups with higher than average unemployment rates. Five wards in Roehampton and Battersea have been identified as priority areas, based on measures of disadvantage and the Council has a range of schemes to address unemployment in these areas. For example, since 2005 the Job Shop set up at Battersea Power Station has helped 233 residents find employment and placed 471 into training. The Council, with its partners, has responded to the findings of its BME scoping group by setting a LAA target to narrow the gap in unemployment between young BME people and the average. The Council commissions services to support disabled people into work and, in 2006/07, achieved 315 successful outcomes.
- 80 The Council has invested very effectively in its housing stock to improve the quality of its housing and of the surrounding environment. It is a major social landlord and has high satisfaction ratings from its residents. A notable aspect of its housing policy has been the 'Hidden Homes' initiative which turns empty or threatening space such as garage blocks or disused boiler rooms into homes. This has provided 136 properties to let, with the potential for an additional 70 properties over the next two years. All have a 'very good' eco rating. All of the Council's housing stock will meet the Decent Homes standard by the end of 2008, two years ahead of the deadline and it is working with private landlords to promote similar improvements. The Council's approach has met housing need, improved social cohesion and reduced the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

- 81** The Council is addressing the need for more affordable housing through an ambitious regeneration programme which ensures that all new build is mixed tenure. The Council has a good working relationship with the local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and with private developers and provides strong leadership. Where estates are being redeveloped to higher density and better design standards the number of social housing units is being maintained and the regeneration paid for by the development of private and affordable housing. When a gap in provision is identified the Council moves swiftly to solve the problem. The Council supported the creation of a new RSL, Pathway, specialising in housing for people of Caribbean origin with mental health issues.
- 82** The Council has made very good progress against its priority to keep the borough's streets clean in line with residents' wishes. It has set a challenging LAA target and allocated additional funding to support this. The new street cleaning contract with a private contractor started in April 2006 and, after a difficult start, has achieved higher standards of cleanliness and lower levels of graffiti in 2007. The 2006 BV survey showed satisfaction with standards of cleanliness was 74 per cent, up from 57 per cent in 2003/04 and well above the London average of 65 per cent.
- 83** The Council's waste management is improving steadily. It has developed an innovative contract with its partners to ensure maximum flexibility in its ability to increase recycling rates and reduce waste to landfill as new technologies are developed. This will enable the Council to increase the range of items that can be recycled without incurring extra cost or contract renegotiations. Its aim is to ensure that minimal waste is sent to landfill by 2012. The volume of household waste is low (in the best quartile), and recycling is increasing. Recycling levels, at 23 per cent, are in the lowest quartile nationally but above the London average of 18 per cent.
- 84** The Council shows clear community leadership on reducing climate change. The Executive Councillor is promoting this agenda within the community through schemes such as the 'Green Pledge' where residents can sign up to pledges to reduce their environmental impact. The Council has set ambitious carbon reduction goals for itself which are higher and for earlier delivery than the national targets. The first target of 25 per cent reduction was achieved early and has been revised to a 28 per cent reduction.
- 85** Strong and effective leadership on reducing the use of cars is being given by the Council. The Council has adopted a green travel plan which is reducing car usage and increasing cycling, walking and public transport usage. The Council is also achieving car reduction through the use of the planning system. New flats only have restricted parking within the development and are not eligible for parking permits. Car clubs are thriving and are mandatory in new developments. The Council's recent resident's survey shows that one in four residents has reduced their car use.

Safer and stronger communities

- 86** The Council and its partners work effectively to make Wandsworth safe. Community safety is a key priority for the Council and its partners and overall outcomes are good compared with London averages. The Council shows strong community leadership in this area.
- 87** The Council has a strong track record of working with partners to deal with crime. The Council's Crime, Disorder and Drugs Reduction Strategy is comprehensive and supported by a detailed and resourced action plan and there is effective joint work with the police. Overall crime levels are low with improvement trends over the past three years across all crime. Although robberies have recently increased, the offence rate in Wandsworth is similar to those recorded across London.
- 88** The Council works very effectively with its partners to reduce fear of crime. Over 1,000 personal alarms have been issued to young people at risk of street robbery. Wandsafe Burglary Aftercare service is a targeted initiative to reduce re-victimisation, resulting in a reduction in the rate of re-victimisation. Working with Age Concern, the Council has set up over 500 neighbourhood watch schemes including a Senior Citizens Watch scheme. These provide valuable reassurance and mutual support to the community, including the vulnerable. The 2007 resident's survey shows that 40 per cent cite the level of crime as a priority for improvement, which is lower than the London average.
- 89** The Council demonstrates a comprehensive approach in using its services, such as the parks service, planning and housing, to effectively contribute to its safer and stronger agenda. Examples include housing-related environmental improvement works, provision of additional lighting, and targeted CCTV provision to make estates safer. The Community Safety Division (CSD) provides security advice to design out crime. Targeted burglary prevention publicity campaigns are coordinated with Police operations to help reduce opportunist burglary. A recent survey shows, there has been a reduction in concern about vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles from 60 per cent in 2003 to 32 per cent in 2006/07.
- 90** The Council has an excellent track record of acting as a community leader in reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB) in Wandsworth with partners. The 24/7 Parks Police and Housing Patrol services work closely with Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs), on joint ASB operations, burglary, youth disorder and pet nuisance. This effective use of mixed policing, with increased visibility of a uniformed presence, is leading to a reduction in resident's concerns about crime and disorder. The recent borough-wide survey shows a reduction in concern about ASB from 31 per cent in 2003 to 16 per cent, which is well below the London average of 29 per cent.

- 91 The Council works effectively with its partners to reduce ASB and to assist victims. The Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy is detailed and addresses key concerns of its residents such as ASB on estates and youth issues. Joint initiatives target resources on areas of high crime, such as the use of Q cars tasked to be the first response to offences and provide immediate assistance to victims. The Integrated Youth Service leads on Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and works closely with the ASB Unit, housing services, the police and social landlords. Over the past three years, this has resulted in increased use of ASBOs and ABCs. Further, over 44 per cent of reports relating to ASB were referred on to other agencies for diversionary intervention at an early stage.
- 92 The Council and its partners have made a significant contribution to addressing drug and alcohol related crime issues, including use of CCTV. Targeted action based on intelligence at ward level is taken, for example, in Battersea. The Council adopted zero tolerance on use of cannabis, working in partnership with the Drug Action Team (DAT) and the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Late night disorder CCTV surveillance is undertaken in the main town centre areas on Fridays and Saturdays, as a direct response to incidents of alcohol-related disorder. Crime analysis reports show a reduction in local night-time violence in spite of later pub opening hours. These initiatives have resulted in a reduction in people being drunk and rowdy in public places and a significant reduction in concerns about people using or dealing drugs.
- 93 The Council's comprehensive and current Emergency Plan complies with the Civil Contingencies Act. Its arrangements for business continuity plans are fit for purpose. The Council has fully integrated arrangements for emergency planning and business continuity with clear officer level responsibility for the Council's response. The Council hosts and chairs the South West London Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and actively contributes to the South West London Risk Register. The Council's emergency arrangements are reviewed after every major incident. Following recent floods, the Council has now agreed to formally adopt a flood defence plan for the first time.
- 94 The Council has robust arrangements to communicate with the public about emergencies. It has developed a Home and Family Plan Booklet, which is available on the website. The Council has pioneered work with Neighbourhood Watch groups in identifying the vulnerable, which is now being used by other boroughs. It has two anti-terror branch officers based in the Borough and a dedicated 24/7 counter-terrorism vehicle on patrol around potential target sites. In addition, joint training is undertaken with the Parks Police to help deal with suspect packages. These arrangements help to make the borough safer for its residents.

- 95 The Council works very well in partnership to reduce accidents. Road safety has substantially improved with the number killed or seriously injured in road accidents steadily falling. The Health Partnership Group co-ordinates Council and NHS safety initiatives such as the Council-funded handyperson project with Age Concern which is targeted at the elderly to prevent falls by reducing trip hazards in the home. The Council's own health and safety performance is good. It has won the British Safety Council's International Safety Award for the fifteenth successive year.
- 96 The Council is effective in building stronger communities. The Council has sound knowledge about community cohesion issues in the area and takes effective action to promote good community cohesion. The Multi-Faith Sub-group of WLSP held Faith Direct, a multi-faith seminar for borough's students of Religious Studies. It also organised a seminar for local public sector employees and members of the WLSP to raise awareness of the different faiths in Wandsworth. In 2006, 83 per cent of residents agreed with the statement this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. This is well above the London average.

Healthier communities

- 97 The Council is making a good contribution to promoting the health of local communities and reducing health inequalities. The gap in life expectancy between people in Wandsworth and the national average is narrowing, including in some of the most disadvantaged wards. The Council and its partners have provided a good range of initiatives to tackle poor health outcomes and to improve access to services, with a strong, sustained focus on targeting resources where they are most needed. Health indicators are among the suite of performance measures used to track progress in the most disadvantaged 'priority' areas and to evaluate the impact of actions to bring about improvement. These include challenging LAA targets for smoking cessation and low birthweight babies.
- 98 The Council has good links to the Primary Care Trust (PCT), though the health trusts have been weaker partners due to their financial difficulties and this has slowed progress. Partners, led by the Council, have maintained a strong and consistent focus on health inequalities through the community strategy and the LAA, focusing on what is important to local people. The health partnership subgroup of the LSP has been given the lead role in implementing national policy on public health: 'Choosing Health'. The Council has made a strong contribution to developing local knowledge about need and sharing this with partners. For example, the Council is working with the PCT in a mapping exercise to inform the PCT's Commissioning Strategic Plan.

- 99 The Council and its partners are meeting the health needs of local people. The Council resources its health scrutiny function well. For example, it employs two health analysts who work effectively to research and report on health matters to the Council and its partners, liaise with local health providers and help draw up an annual scrutiny plan. The Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is operating very effectively to ensure that local health providers are meeting the needs of residents. It works closely with the Patient and Public Involvement Forums and takes a strong role in monitoring health outcomes. Its activities are well publicised via the Council's website and the public is invited to attend meetings. The Health OSC has developed a performance reporting system for NHS agencies which has been positively received by the partners.
- 100 Some very good work has been completed recently on reviews of services, including CAMHS and access to primary care. OSC has also been effective in reviewing public health and health inequalities issues. It identified the need for a healthier communities strategy and this is now in preparation. It has also effectively reviewed joint work between the council and its partners, for example raising important concerns about the effectiveness of the Drug Action Team (DAT) in engaging young people in treatment. A reconfigured DAT is now better coordinated in its approach to young people's services and the proportion of young people receiving specialist treatment for substance misuse has increased from 1 per cent in 2005/06 to more than 3 per cent in 2006/07.
- 101 The Council works well with partners to promote healthier lifestyles. Working with the PCT, the Council used the recent change in legislation on smoking in public to focus a campaign of awareness-raising and education, which included targeting local businesses. Council improvements to leisure services have been strongly focused on health promotion, including development of facilities for people with disabilities. In the Battersea regeneration scheme, schools are all on course to meet the new Government target of five hours activity in advance of the target date. Staying Healthy events, run jointly by the Council and the PCT, offer health checks and lifestyle advice and the Young Person's Health Promotion Team is targeting work in Roehampton to reduce smoking and substance misuse.
- 102 The Council and the PCT jointly fund good access to services for vulnerable groups through CareLine. This extended hours helpline provides advice on all health and social care issues and an extensive website. It offers a single contact point for disability/mobility equipment, referral to the appropriate health or social care service, and details of suppliers for people making their own arrangements. The Council and the PCT have a jointly badged carers guide which provides a good range of useful information in key community languages. The diverse needs of carers are well-recognised, including through an Asian Carers' group supported by the Asian Development Project.

- 103** Good progress is being made towards implementing the Community Mental Health Action Plan. This includes improved partnership working and care co-ordination. A recent overview of surveys conducted in 2006/07 by South West London and St George's mental health NHS Trust indicate that there was a significant improvement in the experience of Black/Black British inpatients between 2005/06 and 2006/07 in a number of areas. Partners have increased investment in restructured mental health provision for young people and, in 2006/07, achieved an 'Excellent' rating for progress towards a comprehensive CAMHS service.
- 104** The Council and its partners have achieved a 31 per cent reduction in teenage pregnancy since 1998, which is much better than the London average of less than 13 per cent, although the rate in the borough remains relatively high. The joint Health Promotion Team – part of Wandsworth's effective Healthy Schools Initiative - is working successfully to prevent teenage pregnancy, support teenage mothers, support schools and colleges in their drugs education and prevention work and assist young people with drug-related mental health problems.
- 105** A good response to the need for preventative services includes TH@W, a confidential advice and counselling service for young people aged 13 to 19 who have concerns about drugs, alcohol, sexual health, pregnancy and emotional issues. TH@W was developed as part of the Young People Agents for Change (YPAC) programme - with local young people on the Board - to deliver advice and support to young people in priority areas.

Older people

- 106** The Council and its partners provides a range of effective services for older people which go beyond social care but these have not yet been brought together into a strategic approach which is reflected in the community strategy. Engagement with older people is strong and influential in shaping services. However, the main focus is on care services for the most vulnerable people, often commissioned jointly with the PCT, reflecting the corporate business plan objective.
- 107** The Council and its partners were early to recognise that the needs of older people go beyond social care. It responded by cross-service development of a range of leisure, education, library, health and other services with partners such as the PCT, the police and the voluntary and community sector. The corporate plan includes a range of targets in different services eg to increase the numbers of over 50s attending leisure centres by 34 per cent in 2006/07, increasing the number of over 60s learning in libraries. An accommodation review is under way leading to a draft older people's housing strategy. Refurbishment of the Council's sheltered housing is almost complete and extra-care housing schemes are under development. Age is mainstreamed into the corporate equality plan and the equality impact assessments. These developments are not part of an overall strategy but represent a good basis for strategy development.

- 108** Services and providers are at an early stage of working together at a corporate level and in the LSP to develop an agreed strategic response to older people. This is now a priority both for the Council and the LSP and progress is being made. The Council has recently set up a group chaired by the chief executive to lead on the older people's strategy and the LSP is setting up a subgroup to lead on older people across the revised community strategy. As a first step in developing a broader older people's strategy, the Council has carried out a comprehensive review of services to older people. It set these against the seven dimensions of independence, the demographic patterns and the concerns of older people. The Council is currently planning consultation on the draft older people's strategy with the older people's network and expects to have the strategy in place by April 2008.
- 109** The older people's champion is providing political leadership of the strategy development process and consultation. The champion has been successful in making changes to services as a result of feeding older people's views into the council. Examples include work with leisure providers to reduce charges for over 60s, establishing an Afro Caribbean and Asian library service predominantly aimed at older people.
- 110** The Council has a good picture of the needs and interests of older people in the area and how services measure up against these. It is aware that, against the national trend, the proportion of the Wandsworth population aged 60 and over is relatively low and has decreased since 1991. The proportion of minority ethnic elders has increased. It has taken these into account in its draft older people's housing strategy and in developing its wider strategy for older people.
- 111** There are well-established processes to consult with older people. The Council uses a range of consultation methods including face to face and telephone interviews and group work to inform policy and services. Visits to services by the councillor champion, ward surgeries and 'Wellbeing' days at the Town Hall also allow further input. The voluntary sector is used effectively to access particular groups such as Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Hindu elders. Feedback is provided through targeted newsletters such as '60 plus'. The Council carried out a specific consultation with older people in 2004 on their social and leisure activities which has informed service delivery eg a move away from day care towards more exercise through the active days programme with Age Concern.
- 112** The Council engages strongly with older people through the older people's forum and through the voluntary sector. The older people's network has recently provided early input into the development of the older people's strategy based on discussion with groups of older people and it will be involved in the wider consultation. The 'community partners' scheme with the voluntary sector aims to train older people to assist in recruitment, evaluating tenders and service reviews. It has led to service changes - examples are staff seconded to a new service provider to promote continuity, creation of some women-only mental health services and involvement in shaping the development of the Direct Payments scheme. Although the thresholds for home care services have been raised over the last two years, there was wide consultation about the proposals and there have been very few complaints.

- 113** The Council provides a good range of opportunities for active older people across its services and with voluntary sector partners such as exercise schemes, wellbeing days, Active days, adult education, reading groups and intergenerational projects. Other services are more focused on increasing the independence of frailer older people such as the Re-ablement service to help older people leaving hospital recover their ability to cope, an integrated older people community mental health service, a joint visiting team with the Pension Service promoting benefits take-up, a 'Shopmobility' scheme, expanding Telecare services and access to assessment and services for Black elders.
- 114** The Active Days project developed in partnership with Age Concern is an excellent basis for helping older people to decide on activities to improve their physical and social wellbeing. It stimulates the development of locally-based groups involving local services which become self-financing. These include line-dancing, crafts, games, cooking, gardening, singing, films, walking, photography, computers, social outings and pub lunch groups. Around 600 people are currently involved and a newsletter provides information on the activities offered. The project works with different departments of the Council and is developing links with the health sector.
- 115** A range of housing support services is in place to promote the independence and well being of older people. Services such as the Home Improvement Agency help owner-occupiers make improvements to their homes, Age Concern's Practical Help at Home scheme provides minor DIY for a charge of £10 plus materials, FLaSH, a partnership with the Fire and police services provides free home safety checks, fire checks and smoke alarms.
- 116** Information on local provision is widely available through the council website (a high proportion of older people have internet access) and those of partners such as CareLine, through newsletters such as 'Brightside' and '60 plus' which are delivered to all homes in Wandsworth, and through a one stop telephone service.

Children and young people

- 117** Services for children and young people are a priority in Wandsworth. Outcomes for children in the London Borough of Wandsworth area are good with outstanding features for 'Enjoying and Achieving' and are outstanding in 'Being Healthy' 'Staying Safe', 'Making a Positive Contribution' and 'Achieving Economic Wellbeing'. Those most in need of protection benefit from prompt intervention and support. Looked after children are making good progress in health and education outcomes. The range of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provision is very good with prompt access available. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least good progress at all stages of their compulsory education and the council has the lowest level of young people aged 16 to 18 not in education, employment or training in London.

- 118** Service management in children's services is good. There are some outstanding features. The Council's capacity to improve is outstanding. Children and young people are an integral part of the vision and ambition for the Council. Strong and visible leadership is evident. The portfolio holder for children and young people is actively and effectively engaged. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and its review clearly set out the highly ambitious, needs-based programme to deliver excellent services and reduce inequality. There are clear strategic aims to target services effectively at need, including re-designing and re-configuring services to improve access and impact. The Council and its partners have a very strong track record of setting realistic budgets and of successfully obtaining additional resources to develop and deliver services. Further investment in improving capacity to meet local needs is taking place through the implementation of integrated locality working. The Council tackles underperformance effectively.
- 119** The council's contribution towards improving health outcomes is outstanding. There are some excellent features. Children and young people are generally healthy. Excellent multi-disciplinary work undertaken in children's centres is improving health outcomes. Healthy eating is promoted well in schools. Teenage conception rates remain above the national average, despite having fallen at a sharper rate. Effective action is taken to promote the mental health of children and young people with strong multi-agency planning for CAMHS.
- 120** Children and young people appear to be safe and the safeguarding arrangements are effective. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board is well established and provides strong strategic leadership with good multi-agency representation. Most children say they feel safe. Concerns amongst older children about bullying, the use of weapons and gang cultures are being effectively addressed by the Council. A wide range of locality based multi agency family support and prevention services is readily accessible to parents. Use of the Common Assessment Framework is developing well across all settings. Highly effective referral and assessment provision results in prompt, timely and high quality assessment and intervention to safeguard children. Multi-agency partnership working is highly effective particularly for the most vulnerable children including those on the child protection register.
- 121** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. There are some outstanding features. Parents and carers are very well supported in helping their children to enjoy learning. Pupils make good progress at all stages of their compulsory education. There is a strong commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable groups, in particular BME groups. The attainment and attendance of looked after children has improved significantly. The reorganisation and improvement of provision for children with disabilities is well underway and these pupils continue to achieve very well.

- 122** There is very good leadership of school improvement and tackling underachievement. Primary attendance has been an area for improvement. Tackling persistent absentees remains a challenge. Permanent exclusions have risen in both primary and secondary schools, particularly from BME groups. Development of extended schools has been highly effective with joint commissioning arrangements in place for clusters of schools. Good progress has also been made with the building schools for the future (BSF) programme. An excellent variety of recreational facilities is available to children and young people with expansion of high quality play provision.
- 123** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. An excellent range of services help young people to take responsibility and to develop the confidence and skills necessary in their diverse community. There are effective and inclusive consultation arrangements in place. Looked after children are well served by advocates and have opportunities to train as peer researchers and contribute to the recruitment of new staff. Their participation in reviews is high. Children with disabilities are able to contribute very well to decision-making both in school councils and individually regarding transition points in their lives. An ambitious target for children and young people to contribute to their annual reviews has been achieved.
- 124** The impact of services in helping children and young people achieve economic wellbeing is outstanding. Family learning provision is highly successful. The Council has the lowest level of young people aged 16 to 18 not in education, employment or training (NEET) in central London. Good quality information, advice, and tracking result in a good take-up of courses and jobs by 16 year-olds. Good progress has been made in developing a coherent approach to 14 to 19 education and training through the re-organisation of the 14 to 19 partnership. Numbers of students taking vocational courses have significantly increased. A high number of care leavers successfully settle into jobs, training or education and this compares very favourably with similar authorities. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to achieve well.

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 Wandsworth Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 16 to 26 October 2007.
- 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.