

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2008



Corporate Assessment

Croydon London Borough Council

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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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 The Council is performing well. There are clear and challenging ambitions for the borough and its communities based on a good engagement with and understanding of local communities and their needs. The seven priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) encompass these ambitions and these are reflected in the Council's own five corporate priorities. The Council and its partners share the ambitions for the area and are working together to deliver them. However, it does not communicate well to all residents about all its ambitions, such as raising educational aspiration and achievement and improving health.
- 6 Clear and robust priorities, well understood by councillors, staff and partners, if not the public, underpin the vision. Comprehensive and linked plans and strategies underpin delivery of priorities. The Council takes difficult decisions to align its resources to deliver its priorities. The Council, with its partners, focus on delivery and have a track record of success.
- 7 The Council is increasing the effectiveness of its community leadership. It has long-established key strategic partnerships with the police and health sectors and is using these to develop and deliver good-practice working based on clear understanding of ambitions and priorities. Partners also report the Council has improved the focus on its leadership role across the community. The Council and partners have displayed leadership by working to act on the views of the community. Neighbourhood Partnership meetings are an opportunity for residents to feed in to the Council policies and feedback on the quality of services. The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is being consulted upon and a new strategy is due to be published by the end of 2008. The Council is also working on the Local Development Framework (LDF), a series of important district community strategies (DCSs) and district regeneration strategies (DRSs) across the borough. The Council intends to integrate these strategies with the SCS. This is a challenging agenda.
- 8 User focus in services is good and developing well but resident satisfaction with the Council overall is low. A 'Think Customer' campaign and local access and channel management strategies are driving user focused improvement. Ten neighbourhood partnerships are in place, independently chaired by local people, who set their own agenda. An innovative web-based tool -'Talk2Croydon', shares outcomes from community engagement activities and encourages dialogue on issues of local concern. However, the Council has work to do to improve resident satisfaction, which is well below average at 42 per cent. Communication of performance to some residents is unreliable. For example, many residents do not receive 'Your Croydon', the Council magazine. The Council acknowledges it needs to communicate more effectively to increase resident satisfaction and enable all communities to understand how well the Council is performing and what it is doing about under-performance.

- 9 Overall, the approach to diversity is good and continuing to develop. The Leader has appointed his deputy to lead on community cohesion, which shows senior councillor ownership of the issue. The Council recognises that it needs to improve further and is developing a corporate approach, learning from best practice. Internally, there is a good approach to diversity. The representation of staff with disabilities and from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities at a senior level in the Council is above average. This is not the case for women in senior positions. The Council's staffing reflects the working age population of the borough. The percentage of staff from BME communities is above the average for local authorities. The Council intends to achieve Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard by March 2008 and is aiming to achieve Level 5 by 2009.
- 10 The Council effectively promotes good community relations in a very diverse borough and it is developing its strategic approach to community cohesion. The Council and its partners have a growing understanding of community cohesion issues across the borough. The Council's Corporate Equalities and Cohesion Sub-Board (CECB) chaired by the Director of Adult Social Services is coordinating the development of a community cohesion strategy. The local strategic partnership (LSP) is also providing a renewed focus on promoting community cohesion and partnership working is delivering a broad range of initiatives targeted to improving community relations.
- 11 The overall capacity to sustain improvement is in place but is at an early stage in some areas. Good leadership provides clear direction to staff and partners. Relationships between councillors and officers are effective with clarity about roles and responsibilities. Decision-making is transparent. Financial capacity is strong. The Council delivers good value for money (VfM). Risk management arrangements are sound. Good use of information technology and procurement is adding to capacity. Successful partnership working is increasing capacity and service delivery. However, management capacity is not consistent across all services. Some structures and management teams, such as in the Department of Children, Young People and Learners, have yet to bed in. Workforce planning with partners and councillor development are at an early stage. The scrutiny function lacks the capacity to challenge effectively.
- 12 Robust performance management enables most services to improve. Thorough, timely and systematic monitoring of targets helps keep performance on track. This has resulted in an above average percentage of key performance indicators improving between 2005/06 and 2006/07. Effective action corrects most under-performing areas. For example, Council staff (excluding school staff) sickness absence has almost halved and the payment of benefits has been turned round, from the slowest to among the quickest in London.
- 13 The Council provides good value for money, a priority in its corporate plan and a shared priority with LSP partners. It is on track to deliver £12 million of efficiencies this year through the RELEASE programme while continuing to provide good and largely improving services. It directs efficiencies and savings to priority areas such as school improvement and recycling.

- 14 The Council displays, in many areas, a good record of achievement. Priority areas such as value for money, community safety and the environment are performing well. Success in other areas such as absence management, revenues and benefits and building affordable homes is clear. However, while pupils make satisfactory progress overall there is wide variation in the progress made by children in different schools. Services for older people are improving but the Council recognises there is still scope to broaden the strategic approach to cover those who are not users of social care services. While health is generally improving, sexual infections and health inequalities across the borough are not. The Council and its partners also recognise they have work to do to improve a weak skills base, increase wages, secure employment, and support business formation and survival.

Areas for improvement

- 15 The Council needs to ensure it aligns and integrates all its key strategies. This includes integrating the developing district community strategies and the district regeneration strategies into the revision of the Sustainable Community Strategy in 2008; and ensuring the Council's spatial planning strategy fully links to other policies and strategies.
- 16 The Council needs to clarify how it shares, measures and communicates its ambitions to its various communities, and how it uses all sources of feedback to help shape both its ambitions and the design and delivery of its service provision.
- 17 The Council needs to use partnership working to strategically identify and systematically deliver improved health outcomes for local people, such as reducing health inequalities across the borough and reducing sexual infections.
- 18 The Council needs to ensure it keeps the capacity in place to sustain improvement. This includes continuing to strengthen management and scrutiny capacity, developing workforce plans with partners, improving councillor training and using complaints to inform corporate learning.

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	3
Overall corporate assessment score**		3
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on 5 themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

Context

The locality

- 19** Croydon is an outer London borough bordering Surrey to the south and the boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark to the north. Croydon is London's southern-most borough and covers an area of 87 square kilometres. The borough has London's largest population and it is the ninth largest unitary authority in the country. It is one of London's biggest local retail and commercial centres, with good rail, tram and road links, more than 120 parks and open spaces and some of London's most expensive housing. This could give the impression that Croydon is a leafy suburb that is universally prosperous. This is not the case as large parts of Croydon have inner-city characteristics. The borough has been eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) for the past seven years due to severe pockets of deprivation – mostly in the north of the borough and in two wards in the east, New Addington and Fieldway.
- 20** The borough has a population of 340,000 the largest population of all the London boroughs of whom 82,000, almost 25 per cent are under the age of 18. Thirty-six per cent of its residents are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities but in some northern wards that percentage is higher. Over 100 languages are spoken and there are a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers. Around 40 per cent of children and young people are from BME groups, although this varies by age group from 35 per cent of those aged 16 to 17, to 45 per cent of children aged under-five. Croydon has a lower than average population of people over the age of 65 (13 per cent compared with the national average of 16 per cent). However, the number of older people is expected to rise from 41,800 to 43,400 over the next five years.
- 21** Croydon is a socio-economically diverse borough. Although ranked 21 out of 33 London boroughs in terms of overall deprivation, it has some wards with low levels of disadvantage and others which are amongst the most deprived in England. The employment rate, at 74.6 per cent is among the highest in London, but the borough has a relatively weak skills base in London terms and wages are relatively low. Croydon is one of the country's largest commercial centres and is home to more than 20 'blue-chip' companies. Over the next five years significant developments are either planned or in the pipeline. Nevertheless the economy remains fragile. Employment in Croydon has declined by 6.8 per cent since 2001 and reliance on public sector employment has risen. Although Croydon is ranked eighth in terms of the share of London jobs, that only equates to 3.2 per cent of London employment. The rate of business formation and survival of businesses is below the London average.

- 22 The housing market in Croydon has, until recently, been very buoyant, although in many parts of the borough, prices remain below the London average. The Council wants to see housing growth focused mainly on town and district centres rather than suburban areas. The Council is a significant social landlord managing more than 14,700 properties. The Mayor's London Plan set Croydon a target of 850 new homes of all tenures each year up to 2016, of which the Council expects 670 to be new build.
- 23 Croydon has the highest number of children and young people in London. The borough has one of the largest local education authority (LEA) provisions in London, with 89 primary and 20 secondary schools. There are 15 children's centres and plans in place for another 4 to be opened by April 2008. Foundation stage child development is of a high standard (11th in London in 2007 – Government Office for London Indicator Profile) but subsequent attainment in schools places Croydon in the middle of the performance range for London. The overall secondary performance also conceals the fact that a third of secondary-age pupils attend schools where the percentage achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* - C including English and Maths is below 30 per cent.
- 24 The Border and Immigration Agency is located in the borough and Gatwick Airport is within easy reach. This combination has resulted in a high number of unaccompanied asylum seekers. Seven hundred of the 1,050 children and young people looked after by the local authority are unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- 25 Primary health care is provided by the Croydon Primary Care Trust (PCT), which is coterminous with the Council. Acute hospital services are provided by Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust and mental health services are provided by South London and Maudsley NHS Trust.

The Council

- 26 Croydon is divided into 24 wards with 70 elected councillors. In the May 2006 election the Conservative Party took control of the administration. There are 44 Conservative councillors and 26 Labour councillors.
- 27 The Council has adopted the Leader and Cabinet (the Executive) model. The Cabinet has ten members, all belonging to the majority party. The Cabinet consists of the Leader, two Deputy Leaders and seven other Cabinet Members in all covering nine portfolios. The Deputy Leaders are responsible for Performance Management and Finance in addition to a portfolio. The Cabinet portfolios are Safety and Cohesion; Housing; Resources and Customer Services; Children's Services and Adult Learning; Culture and Sport; Health and Adult Social Care; Regeneration and Economic Development; Environment and Highways; and Planning.

- 28 Unusually shadow cabinet members attend cabinet meetings and challenge and debate with cabinet members on their proposals. These meetings are also web-cast to make them more accessible to the public. The Council has an overarching Scrutiny and Overview Committee with three sub-committees - Children, Learning and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee; Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee; and Community Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee which covers safety, the environment and planning. The Council also has ten ward based Neighbourhood Partnerships which meet up to three times a year. Local people can use these to debate local issues and inform the development of policies, services and plans of statutory agencies and other community groups.
- 29 At the time of the inspection the council's corporate management team (CMT) was made up of the Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Directors of Adult Social Services; Children, Young People and Learners; Environment, Culture and Public Protection; Housing; Finance and Resources; and Planning and Transportation. The Chief Executive took up his post in July 2007. In March 2008 the Council announced that it was creating a new departmental structure.
- 30 Excluding teachers, the Council employs 4,070 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. In 2007/08 the gross cost of services is £912 million with a net operating expenditure of £258 million. The net revenue budget is £168.7 million and there is a budget of £63.3 million for capital expenditure. Band D Council Tax is set at £1,357.64 for 2007/08.
- 31 The LSP Board is chaired by the Leader of the Council and is supported by a Chief Executives' Group which is chaired on a rotational basis. It is currently chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and the previous chair was the Director of the Black and Minority Ethnic Forum Croydon. The 15 Board Members comprise five representatives from each of the public, private and third sectors. Supporting the LSP are nine separate thematic partnerships which provide a focus for the more detailed review of topics. The LSP also encompasses a wider range of partnership groups and Community Network representatives drawn from more than 340 voluntary and community groups and individuals.

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

Ambition

- 32 The Council is performing well in this area. There are clear and challenging ambitions for the borough and its communities. The seven priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) encompass these ambitions and are reflected in the Council's own five corporate priorities. The Council and its partners share the ambitions for the area and are working together to deliver them. These ambitions are to retain the character of Croydon, improve school performance, strengthen the area as a retail centre to increase prosperity and focus on the physical environment to make Croydon a more attractive, forward-looking place. The Council's commitment to city status, as an element of the emerging regeneration ambition for the borough, is less clear. Recently the Council created a 'Third City' branding to package the Council's ambitious proposals to bring significant regeneration and renewal to Croydon. However, this ambition has yet to be fully articulated and shared with residents and other stakeholders through the SCS.
- 33 Overall, the Council and its partners have set a clear and challenging ambition to make Croydon the leading metropolitan centre for the south of England. These aims were set out in the Croydon Vision 2020 regeneration initiative. The main themes and priorities of Vision 2020 were taken account of in the SCS and in planning guidance adopted in 2002. This strategy is currently being refreshed following visioning work in 2007, led by the international architect, Will Alsop. The vision includes the Croydon Gateway and Park Place schemes in a proposed £3.5 billion development of the town centre. These developments should ensure businesses are attracted to Croydon in the future. They should also help to achieve the borough's ambitions to increase wages and provide employment for its more deprived residents and secure Croydon's position as an economic centre in London and regionally.
- 34 Ambitions are based on a shared understanding of local needs. The Council and key partners, the police and PCT, have a good understanding of the local context. For instance the police have a long-standing and shared understanding about local needs of communities and this understanding has been used in the deployment of Neighbourhood Enforcement Officers (NEOs). The Council funds a NEO programme which is targeted to wards identified as having high recorded anti-social behaviour crime rates and where they have safer neighbourhood teams with nine or fewer officers. The NEOs work in partnership with the police and police community support officers (PCSOs). The Council and police have also used their resources to make the town centre safe at night.

- 35** Croydon Council consults effectively with engaged residents and stakeholders. It is using data and consultation well to identify clear and challenging ambitions for the community. The Council is using regular consultation to inform ambitions and achieve consensus and commitment to them. Good use is made of the website to encourage participation. The Council makes good use of a wide range of strategies to act on the outcomes of its various consultations. For instance a borough-wide consultation exercise was launched in January 2008 to enable local people to feed into the update of the LSP's vision for the borough. This will also include discussion at every neighbourhood partnership meeting. The Council is co-ordinating the sustainable community strategy consultation on behalf of the LSP and the outcome of the exercise will also influence the drafting of the borough's Local Development Framework and the physical appearance of the area. The Council communicates effectively with business through dialogue with representatives on the LSP, Croydon Business, and other partnerships.
- 36** In contrast, the Council is less effective at communicating its ambitions to residents who are not active in community groups or clients of the Council. Some residents do not feel informed about the Council's ambitions for the borough. The distribution of 'Your Croydon', the Council magazine, is recognised as patchy and the Council has taken the decision to move the distribution to a new contractor. It has communicated its campaign to keep the council tax low and improve its grant position, its desire for clean streets but not other ambitions. For example, the Council still has work to do to communicate its ambitions to raise educational aspiration and achievement and to improve health. Good communications encourage residents to engage with the political process and help improve resident satisfaction with services.
- 37** The Council has clear objectives with challenging targets that underpin its ambitions. For instance 'Achieving better outcomes for children and young people' is a priority in the SCS. This ambition is underpinned by SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound) targets. Persons responsible for each outcome area are identified and these include the Borough Commander and Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) as well as the Director of the Children, Young People and Learners and the Council's Chief Executive. The Council's ambitions for the environment include doubling its recycling and composting rates to 40 per cent by 2010. This target is to be delivered through a partnership with three other South London boroughs.
- 38** The Council's internal communications are good. The Council communicates openly with staff and they have a positive view of Croydon Council. The Council's bi-monthly staff newsletter, 'the loop' contains information relating to budgets, services, and other public service activities. Nearly two thirds of staff state that they understand Croydon Council's vision and mission and three quarters are clear about how their work can help the Council succeed.

- 39 Good capacity, effective performance management and clear prioritisation increasingly underpin the Council's ambitions. Tough decisions on spending have put the Council in a stronger financial position and it now anticipates delivering its 2008/09 ambitions through the council tax increase. Improved performance management has improved delivery against targets and priorities, such as revenues and benefits. Good self awareness is used to strengthen acknowledged weaker areas such as the relatively new Children, Young People and Learners Department. In March 2008, the Council announced that it was creating a new departmental structure to ensure it has the capacity to deliver its regeneration and other ambitions.
- 40 The Council is promoting community cohesion well. As a result of good community leadership, engagement and management of sensitive cohesion issues, the Council has a strong relationship with the borough's diverse communities; 75 per cent of IPSOS MORI, a large social research company, respondents agree that Croydon residents get on well together regardless of background. For example, the lead taken by the Chief Executive on developing shared values, the Council's handling of the politicised 'shrines' to crime victims and work with the Sikh community on managing and reducing diabetes. The Council is also rethinking its Neighbourhood Partnerships aiming to increase the involvement of younger people and the business sector.
- 41 The Council works effectively with partners to provide leadership across the community. Partners report the Chief Executive has improved the focus on the Council's community leadership role. There are many examples of productive partnership working across the full range of areas covered by the LSP. All funding applications are assessed against the SCS ambitions. The local public sector agreement (LPSA) contains 12 indicators and 22 targets to deliver the partnership's objectives. The end of year report for 2006/07 shows that the partnership met 18 of the 22 LPSA targets. For example, there is improvement in homelessness provision, improvements in educational attainment, and a decrease in the number of thefts from motor vehicles. Other examples include training the voluntary sector on adult protection and diversity; the Family Justice Centre (a partnership that includes both statutory and voluntary sector partners); and the voluntary sector had a strong input in to the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. These achievements are contributing to better outcomes for local people.

Prioritisation

- 42 The Council is performing well in this area. It has a clear and rigorous approach to prioritisation. Overall, the Council has established priorities that reflect local needs. Consideration of national priorities and their affect on the borough's priorities is embedded in the culture of the organisation and senior partners. The needs of residents and BME, hard-to-reach and minority groups are taken into account through a range of consultation methods and resident surveys. Challenging targets, shared with partners, drive the improvement process. Resources follow priorities. However, further work is required to ensure its spatial planning strategy fully links to other policies and strategies.

43 There are clear linkages between the LSP's 'Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2010' (SCS) and the Council's corporate priorities identified in their corporate plan. The seven SCS priorities are reflected in the Council's own corporate priorities. The corporate priorities are:

- Safer streets;
- Providing a better environment;
- Retaining Croydon's character
- Providing a sense of community; and
- Value for money.

These priorities are broken down into specific outcomes and actions in corporate and service plans. For example, local area agreement (LAA) and local public service agreement (LPSA) targets are also included in both the SCS and the Corporate Plan.

44 Councillors and senior officers maintain a focus on priorities which ensures resources are directed to priorities. The leadership are committed to keeping council tax levels down as an election pledge and this has focused attention on resource allocation. Councillors are strongly involved in departmental and service financial planning. Councillor involvement extends beyond the budgeting process to the RELEASE programme which is used to ensure the Council and its services are delivered with a focus on value for money (VfM). As part of the programme the Council's political leadership, Chief Executive and Finance Director formally review and challenge Directors' and Heads of Services' budget proposals. Council staff know the priorities and they are embedded in departmental and service plans. The Council uses RELEASE to ensure resources are effectively targeted at priorities such as a £3 million investment in recycling in 2007/08 and a budgeted 2008/09 investment of £500,000 in school improvement. Clear allocation of resources within the Council has also identified those areas that are not priorities and this has stimulated innovative responses in terms of how affected services have responded. Examples include bidding for lottery funding for library provision and continued investment in arts and culture; and using Britain in Bloom to attract business investment.

45 The political leadership plays an important role within a range of partnerships. The Leader of the Council chairs the LSP. This helps to ensure that priorities are understood outside the Council. However, there is political and senior officer recognition that work needs to be done to cascade the understanding of priorities through to partners and the community. The Council is addressing this through an in depth consideration of its communications strategy and this has been presented to Cabinet and actions agreed.

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

- 46** Partners and other stakeholders are actively engaged in setting realistic but challenging targets. Targets set and delivered in partnership include a reduction in mortality due to circulatory disease; a 20 per cent reduction in vehicle crime between 2006/07 and the previous year; and a halving of the number of domestic burglaries. The work around the previous LPSA and the current LAA targets has fully involved partners as well as a range of community groups. The borough's ten Neighbourhood Partnerships have been engaged in the setting of LAA priorities through participation sessions. The LSP also undertakes annual reviews of its priorities.
- 47** The Council takes difficult decisions to channel resources to support its priorities. An example is the reappraisal of all social care clients' needs with the outcome of more efficient targeting of resources without a decrease in care provided. An adult social care transformation paper went to cabinet last year and it was agreed to reduce the budget by £7 million and shift resources to care prevention. The Council has also implemented many improvements including: a Careline system with a backup support team; the AZTEC centre for aids and equipment with an interactive DVD for ordering; and an improved employment service to support people into work.
- 48** The Council's review of progress is continual and systematic. It identifies local indicators that reflect national and local requirements through the 'Croydon Counts' performance management reports. The Cabinet uses these regular reports to ensure performance against priorities. Members monitor issues around delivery of priorities through weekly briefings with relevant CMT members. Councillors are also focused on where priorities need to be revised or re-assessed and use this information in discussions with partners and community groups.
- 49** Diversity issues are well understood and acted upon. The LSP partners have agreed a common approach to equalities. The Deputy Leader with responsibility for Safety and Cohesion will lead a LSP group. The needs of different groups are also recognised and addressed in strategic plans such as the SCS, culture and health. The Council is also working up more formal diversity strategies for implementation.
- 50** Action to ensure the Council's spatial planning strategy fully links to other policies and strategies is incomplete. The Council is preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF) to provide an up to date planning framework to encourage sustainable economic and housing investment in the Borough, particularly in Croydon centre. The Council accepts that work on this has slipped substantially and it has recently allocated new staff to speed up the process.

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

Capacity

- 51** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council is self-aware and is building good capacity. Overall, political and managerial leadership is strong and is providing clear direction to staff and partners. Work to strengthen management capacity to ensure consistency across all services continues. Relationships between councillors and officers are effective with clarity about roles and responsibilities. Decision-making is transparent. Financial capacity is strong and the Council delivers good VfM. Risk management arrangements are sound. Good use of partnership working is enhancing capacity and service delivery. The Council won a government Beacon Award for the LSP in March 2008 and with its partners continues to strengthen its partnerships' governance arrangements. Human resources improvements are being successfully put in place although councillor development is at an early stage. A corporately-directed approach to equalities and diversity is being developed. However, the scrutiny function is not effective as it lacks the capacity to challenge sufficiently.
- 52** Political and chief officer leadership is widely respected and is now providing clear direction and management. Cabinet members have good understanding, are committed and engaging well in their areas of responsibility. They are held to account through regular reviews and an appraisal arrangement undertaken by the Leader and the Deputy Leader with responsibility for performance management. Councillors and the CMT work well together on cross-cutting issues such as VfM and community leadership. Staff are committed to delivering service improvements and are encouraged to innovate and generate service improvements. The Council's developing culture supports the continued improvement of services.
- 53** Management capacity has been inconsistent. The Council has recognised this and is now restructuring its senior management across the organisation. Management capacity is strong in finance, adult social care and housing and it is developing in human resources and culture and leisure services. However, areas of weakness remain in children's services. The Council is putting in place increased capacity to achieve rapid change and deliver its priorities across all departments and areas.

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

- 54** Financial capacity is strong. The Council has robust financial planning processes (the Audit Commission recently gave it a top score of four stars for its use of resources), and these have a significant impact on the way it manages its resources. Financial and risk management frameworks are aligned. In three years, the Council has moved from a position where it had £280,000 in reserves to holding reserves at target levels. The Council now has approximately £9 million in balances. Budgetary control arrangements are thorough. Many services have undergone zero-based budgeting. The Leader and cabinet, senior officers, and scrutiny challenge cost and performance during the annual budget round. Departments are required to show their resource needs for the next three years. The Council is taking a longer-term view of financial capacity. It has identified and set out its financial pressures for the next ten years. The Council's key priorities are appropriately financed within a strong planning and delivery framework.
- 55** The Council delivers good VfM overall. The Council's 'RELEASE' efficiency and improvement programme is integrated with service and financial planning processes. The programme has secured £24 million efficiency savings in the four years to 2007/08 and it has budgeted to achieve £12 million of efficiencies this year. The 'Chief Executive's Challenge', is the process used to ensure services demonstrate VfM within a budget round. Service VfM examples include the revenues and benefits service and the payroll service, which have secured increased productivity within existing resources. Better quality services are being delivered within customer services for instance the Council has extended 24-hour call-out for the neighbourhood response team through the contact centre.
- 56** Good use is made of partnerships to build capacity. One notable example is the Family Justice Centre (FJC), which uses an innovative approach to delivering a multi-agency service and this has increased capacity across the partner agencies. The centre facilitates immediate intervention by a number of agencies when a problem is reported and eliminates the need for time consuming referrals. Partners within the centre share accommodation; there is 'hot-desking' among agencies, and shared information and communications technology (ICT) facilities. This work is having a positive impact in improving protection for children and their families who are affected by domestic violence.
- 57** Staff training and development is well targeted, accessible and of good quality. Courses include a broad range of diversity courses targeted at all employees. Front-line staff are benefiting from training so that they can provide a wide-ranging delivery service for customers. Councillor training is less well-developed but it is improving. There is induction training for councillors and other courses are available. The Council signed up to the London Member Development Charter in 2007 and anticipates achieving Charter status by 2009.

- 58** Stronger user focus is being developed. Overall resident satisfaction with the Council and satisfaction with services is relatively low. Nevertheless, some services are improving. Satisfaction with cleanliness has increased by 14 per cent from 47 per cent to 61 per cent. User satisfaction with face-to-face service and over the telephone has increased to 71 per cent and 60 per cent respectively, from 67 per cent and 49 per cent in 2002/03. The Council has initiated a 'Think Customer' campaign, to improve its customer service culture. This is being monitored through the Council's new performance management and competency framework. The Council's contact centre receives 1.6 million calls a year, 75 per cent of which are answered within 20 seconds and 63 per cent are completely dealt with on the first call. It has drawn up a local access strategy which has been informed by demographic data, customer knowledge, relevant service statistics and organisational priorities. The strategy is designed to improve customer service using ICT and telephony. However, these are developing initiatives and there is some way to go. Neighbourhood Partnerships are chaired by local people and set their own agenda. The Council supported the development of an innovative web-based tool 'Talk2Croydon', to share outcomes from community engagement activities and encourage dialogue on issues of local concern.
- 59** The approach to diversity is good and continuing to develop. The Council is promoting community cohesion and developing its strategic approach. For example, it successfully looks after 700 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (the highest number in the country) and provides them with good social and educational support. Internally, there is a good approach to diversity though it recognises that it needs to continue to improve its corporate approach and, learn from best practice. The representation of staff with disabilities and from BME communities at a senior level in the Council is above average and improving. The Council's staffing reflects the working age population of the borough. However, women are under represented in senior positions. The Council is at Level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard. It plans to achieve Level 3 by March 2008 and is aiming to achieve Level 5 by 2009.
- 60** Good use of procurement is adding to capacity. Good partnership procurement arrangements are delivering improved levels of service delivery. For example, the Council's partnership with the PCT has seen it deliver improved services at lower cost; savings of £1.2 million have been achieved under the leisure contract; and savings of £1.7 million realised under the renewed ICT contract. E-procurement initiatives are contributing to achieving efficiencies. A partnership with the SeaLEGs (South East London e-Government Services) group has enabled the Council to develop a multifunction smart card integrated with the Transport for London Oyster chip. Procurement arrangements are delivering efficiency savings, supporting strategic aims and delivering Council priorities.

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- 61 Risk management arrangements are good. Councillors and senior officers monitor a comprehensive risk management register. Cabinet members have online access to the corporate risk register and their portfolio areas. The Audit Advisory Committee is concerned with governance issues and ensuring that the risk management framework is robust. It has good capacity and the function is continuing to develop. All heads of service have been trained on the Council's risk management strategy. Risk management arrangements have been extended over the past year to cover partnership working. The Council can identify key risks it faces and takes action to reduce any potential negative impact.
- 62 The Council's relationships with partners are long standing and good. The priority is now to build on these solid foundations. The Council and its LSP partners are now working on more accountable governance arrangements with a greater focus on outcomes. Despite the commitment within partnerships to delivering improved outcomes for communities, there has been a lack of focus on measuring the impact of the work effort. The Council and its partners envisage a renewed focus on outcomes will be delivered following this programme of review.
- 63 Good use of information technology is supporting the delivery of priorities. The Council has recently renewed its contract with its ICT provider. The contract includes a series of services and changes which more fully address the Council's needs. Remote technology is being introduced. Revenues and benefits staff can work from home with access to the service and savings on office accommodation. Councillors have web access so they can access council papers remotely. The draft local access strategy incorporates increased use of ICT within the proposed one stop shops, which will include self-serve points for customers.
- 64 The human resources function is improving rapidly and has seen significant improvement over the last few years. The Council has in place a modernisation programme to increase the responsiveness of human resources to current and future needs. Noteworthy recent improvements include revision of the pay and rewards system (including the introduction of single status); a reduction in sickness absence to below seven days for each employee (this figure excludes school based staff); and a review of the payroll contract which has been brought back in-house. Succession planning remains an area for improvement, most notably in children's services where there are shortages of key staff in some service areas. Managers are trying to address this by working with Human Resources to have a rolling recruitment campaign. Workforce planning with partners is also at an early stage.
- 65 Scrutiny and overview is not fully effective. Decisions, policies and performance are not being robustly and routinely challenged. The Council has made changes to address recognised weaknesses in the scrutiny function. It has decreased the number of overview and scrutiny committee meetings for a more purposeful approach, has aligned the scrutiny function to corporate priorities, and has opened the committees to public question time allowing for a better understanding of local needs. Despite these changes, the overall impact on services delivered to the community has been limited. Scrutiny has yet to demonstrate impact on improving outcomes for local people.

Performance management

- 66** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council has a clear and rigorous approach to performance management. A robust system to monitor performance is used systematically to ensure the Council and its partners stay on track. This is delivering better services and VfM, if not improved overall resident satisfaction with the Council. Targets and objectives are stretching. The Council is helping to develop performance management for its key strategic partnerships. Councillors and officers have a focused involvement in performance management. Complaints are used to inform service development in some areas but could be used more effectively at a corporate level.
- 67** Good performance management has enabled the Council to improve services from a low base. Seventy one per cent of key performance indicators (PIs) improved between 2005/06 and 2006/07 (above the national average) in key priority areas including finance and community safety. In 2007/06, Croydon had 28 per cent of PIs in the top 25 per cent (on average, all single tier authorities have 29 per cent of PI results in the top quartile). Performance has also improved in other areas such as absence and financial management.
- 68** Councillors are successfully keeping performance on track. One of the Deputy Leaders has responsibility for the Council's performance and he provides clear leadership for performance management. Each Cabinet member has a portfolio of services and takes ownership for performance in those areas. Cabinet members are briefed at regular intervals by lead officers about key issues of performance relating to their portfolios. The frequency is informed by an analysis of risk. Cabinet receive detailed reports on finance and performance every two months. This monitoring ensures that Councillors are able to manage continuous improvement.
- 69** The Council has developed a structure to ensure strong and effective performance management. The Director of Finance and Resources chairs the Performance Board which has the remit of improving performance management. The board ensures the Cabinet, the council management team and the Council have a rounded and balanced understanding of corporate performance against all key targets indicators, including trend and comparative data. The Chief Executive chairs the Improvement Board with the remit of improving the quality of services based on priorities identified by the Strategy and Performance Groups and Cabinet. A separate Schools Improvement Board has also been established to drive up educational attainment and achievement.

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- 70** Robust and systematic use of targets and performance monitoring ensures the Council and its partners stay on track and deliver their priorities. The Croydon Counts Index comprises targets selected annually by the Cabinet from among the national PIs, other national indicators (including floor targets incorporated in Croydon's LAA) and local targets. Targets selected for the index cover the Council's key priorities and are regularly reviewed and revised by Cabinet. Detailed performance information on the index is reported every two months to Cabinet and enables under-performance to be challenged. Performance on targets outside the index is monitored by department management teams and through regular performance meetings with Cabinet Members. Cabinet also receives a six monthly report to Cabinet that covers areas that are not in the index.
- 71** With a few exceptions the Council has made good use of knowledge on performance to drive improvement in outcomes. Systematic monitoring and management of performance ensures the Council stays on track. Because of this performance is improving in most areas. Examples include:
- the reduction in crime;
 - the reduction in sickness absence to 6.9 days in 2006/07 (this figure excludes school based staff);
 - 69 per cent of major planning applications decided in 13 weeks (2006/07) where the target to achieve top quartile performance in London, is now being exceeded; and
 - revenues and benefits where the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation declared Croydon to be one of the four most improved teams in 2007 - three years ago, the service was in the bottom five for London with a 12-week wait for payment. Now payments are received within five weeks among the quickest in London; 97 per cent of claimants receive payment within seven days of their claim being completed and 99 per cent of claims are assessed accurately.

However, this use of performance knowledge has not been timely in school improvement.

- 72** The Council is developing performance management in key strategic partnerships. For instance the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB) is a strong effective partnership. The Council and LSP have performance management arrangements in place for the LAA. The LSP has recently reviewed its partnership arrangements and recognises that it needs to further strengthen accountability and performance management to deliver the new LAA.

- 73** The Council is making good use of ICT to support performance improvement. The recent introduction of an electronic performance management system (known as PIMS) ensures regular, timely and accessible performance information with the production of bi-monthly reports for Cabinet since July 2007. The system holds performance information against the targets in the Community Strategy, LAA and LPSA, as well as Croydon Counts. The system is web based and it is planned that the system will be extended to include partners in the LSP to improve their performance management.
- 74** A robust budget process effectively links performance and financial management. Performance information is used to inform the efficiency and improvement programmes to support the requirements for the three year budget setting process, and the Council's efficiency targets.
- 75** The Council has a proactive approach to publicising information on its performance but this information is not communicated consistently to all residents. A number of mechanisms are used to report on performance to residents including: articles in the local community magazine 'Your Croydon'; wrap-rounds on the local newspapers, and the 'Open House' newsletter for 24,000 households in council housing. However, distribution of 'Your Croydon' and local newspapers has not covered all the borough's residents. Views of the community, staff and partners are important to the Council and are considered as key indicators of its performance. However, resident satisfaction with the Council is low. The Council acknowledges that more effective communication is needed to increase resident satisfaction and enable all communities to understand how well the Council is performing and what it is doing about under-performance.
- 76** The complaints process is clear and accessible but corporately the Council does not systematically use complaints to inform or shape service delivery. The Council has been working to reduce the time taken to respond to complaints although this has improved it has not met the Local Government Ombudsman target for the period ending March 2007. Complaints are used to inform service development in some areas but could be used more effectively at a corporate level. The Council is implementing a corporate complaints handling and monitoring system to ensure it learns more from the complaints and uses customer insight to inform service planning.

What has been achieved?

- 77 The Council is performing well in this area. Its local priorities reflect national priorities. For example, the SCS reflects national objectives such as improving the environment, creating inclusive communities, improving health and social care, community safety, implementing the Every Child Matters agenda for children and young people and greater efficiency in the way the Council is run. The Council has put in place financial and managerial systems to deliver these objectives and performance is improving. Seventy one per cent of key performance indicators improved between 2005/06 and 2006/07 (above the national average) in key priority areas including finance and community safety. The number of indicators in the top 25 per cent was just below the national average. However, Croydon residents' satisfaction is low at 42 per cent based on the 2006 best value performance indicator (BVPI) and the Council has a target to improve this figure.
- 78 Ambitions and priorities also take good account of the wishes of local people. The clear emphasis on a quality environment, making Croydon a safe place, and regenerating the town and district centres reflects these wishes. The Council is delivering improvements in terms of physical and economic regeneration, community safety, improving health and helping people of all ages to live a better quality of life independently. Nevertheless, the Council and its partners recognise they have work to do to improve a weak skills base, increase wages, secure employment, and support business formation and survival. Outcomes for children and young people are adequate but the educational attainment of some 11-16 year olds is an issue. The first end of year LPSA report for 2006/07 shows that the partnership met 18 of the 22 targets. For example, there is improvement in homelessness provision, improvements in educational attainment, and a decrease in the number of thefts from motor vehicles. These achievements are contributing to better outcomes for local people.
- 79 Good progress is being made in economic development and jobs. Major regeneration schemes are underway in Waddon and the New Addington scheme has been formally agreed with a development partner. Environmental performance is improving and this improvement is supported by additional resources. Effective VfM is being used to support the achievement of ambitions in adult social care, revenue and benefits and waste management including recycling. Partnership activity is delivering positive outcomes for peoples' quality of life such as a reduction in crime, although the fear of crime remains high.
- 80 The Council has a broad programme of initiatives to promote improve health. The borough has some positive health trends. For example reducing the number of deaths from heart disease and the number of teenage pregnancies is starting to reduce.

- 81 Pupils make satisfactory progress overall but there is wide variation in the progress made by children in different schools. The Council and partners are improving their services for older people but recognise there is scope to broaden the strategic approach to explicitly cover those who are not users of social care services.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 82 The Council is addressing low wages, a weak skills base, threats to employment and a below average rate of business formation and survival. It is doing this through effective partnership work and regeneration initiatives directed at the town centre and the districts that make up the borough. It is intervening positively to improve the local economy and use its resources to provide new jobs, homes and community facilities. Projects are ambitious well-planned and involve partners and local people. More than £3.5 billion worth of development is now underway, or in the pipeline over the next five years, in the town centre and there are regeneration plans for district centres as well. Investment in the built environment is being used to better the life chances of residents. The Council is improving its environmental performance and in 2006/07 nine PIs improved, one stayed the same and three deteriorated. Of those that improved, six are in the top 25 per cent nationally.
- 83 The Waddon Regeneration Scheme, a development of mixed tenure housing, new schools and community facilities on six derelict sites, is underway. The Wandle Regeneration Scheme will produce new housing and improvement to a major park and the river Wandle. The Council has selected Tesco as its preferred developer to jointly take forward the regeneration of New Addington. This project will bring new community facilities including a leisure centre, one stop shop, library and café, a retail store, medical centre, residential units and a business enterprise centre. These developments are aimed at improving the lives of some of the most deprived residents in the borough.
- 84 The Council is using its assets creatively to deliver its economic ambitions and to renew its facilities to support service delivery. Using a Joint Venture model (an Urban Regeneration Vehicle) the Council intends to use its property as equity to share in any profit derived from building development and lever in new investment to secure new Council facilities and other community (offices, theatre and an arena) and economic infrastructure. The Council is also working on a series of important district community strategies (DCSs) and district regeneration strategies (DRSs) across the borough. The Council also intends to integrate these strategies with the SCS.
- 85 The Council is using its planning powers and assets to actively promote the best schemes for the development of Croydon. Key examples are the Croydon Gateway, a mixed residential, office and entertainment development, adjacent to East Croydon station and Park Place, a major town centre retail development.

- 86 The Council is working effectively at promoting the prosperity of residents. A new economic strategy will set out key strategic interventions for economic improvement and maximising resident's potential to secure reliable better paid employment. The Council is using the local economic growth initiative (LEGI) to contribute positively to the local prosperity and the economy. The Council and its partners have used their knowledge of the borough to develop the LEGI initiative and competitively win £77 million of funding support from Government to tackle national priorities. The responsible partnership is chaired by Croydon Business and 550 businesses have participated so far.
- 87 The Council is successfully increasing the supply of housing. The Council had consistently exceeded its London Development Agency (LDA) target for new homes built achieving 1,080 last year against a target of 903. This figure included 547 affordable homes suitable for key workers and others also exceeded the London Mayor's target. The Council is piloting the building of 100 new larger family houses using £3.2 million funding awarded by the Mayor.
- 88 The Council's housing service is effective. It is working hard to achieve the Decent Homes Standard for its own stock, 85 per cent of which currently meets the standard and by March 2008, 88 per cent of homes will meet the standard. Seventy-four per cent of tenants are satisfied with the Council's performance. The Housing Service has seven of its BVPIs in the top quartile nationally.
- 89 The Council has developed effective approaches to meet the needs of homeless people. Significant reductions have been achieved in the number of people in temporary accommodation. Homelessness acceptances have been reduced by targeted interventions by partnership projects such as HAP 25, a signposting initiative which helps young homeless people.
- 90 Council leadership and successful partnership working is helping to address climate change issues. The Council is reducing air pollution, improving air quality and engaging the community in climate change issues. Croydon was awarded Beacon status for Delivering Cleaner Air scoring maximum points in all six evaluation categories in 2007. The Council's planning policies require renewable energy sources to be built into new buildings. The Council is also using its planning system well to deliver more, greener affordable houses. The Council's has a LPSA target to increase energy efficiency in private houses. To meet this target it has worked with a large utility company to increase the take-up of loft and cavity insulation. This work has benefited over 1,000 households and saved 300 tonnes of carbon. The Council is also working with the Energy Savings Trust on its CO2 reduction strategy achieving savings of over 1,000 tonnes of carbon between 2002 and 2006, saving over £100,000 by energy efficiency increases in Council buildings, reducing business mileage and 'Switch Off Campaign'.
- 91 The Council is working well with the business community to reduce its impact on the environment. The Council's Envibe project has so far signed up over 30 businesses to action plans to improve their environmental performance using projects such as the freight consolidation centre to reduce business emissions. The Council is reducing its own environmental impact by saving £250,000 on energy costs and 2,600 tonnes of carbon across the Council. Six schools now have solar panels.

- 92 The Council's approach to sustainable waste management is adequate and improving. The Council is working with three other London boroughs, Sutton, Merton and Kingston, on an ambitious, strategic project to tackle waste disposal and improve its waste management. This project is intended to be a major benefit to residents in supporting a reduction in global climate change by helping promote waste reduction and recycling. Recycling performance is improving year on year from a low base. In 2006/07, 20.11 per cent of waste was recycled or composted and the Council anticipates achieving 23 per cent in 2007/08. New financial resources have also been allocated to improving recycling - £3 million in 2007/08 and it is proposed to increase this substantially in the next two years. Over £400,000 has been spent in the 2007/08 roll out of recycling sites to over 400 social housing locations. A series of new initiatives are planned to improve collection facilities and contractor performance, encourage the public and raise awareness.
- 93 The Council is improving biodiversity and working hard to improve public parks and amenity spaces. The Council works with a wide range of community groups, the environmental partnership and schools on its own parks and woodlands. £550,000 has been secured for walking and cycling. The Wandle Trail initiative is improving links between central Croydon, Wandle Park, Ashburton and Addiscombe Parks and the South Norwood Country Park.
- 94 The Council is enabling more people to use public transport, cycle or walk in place of the car. It has had a long term focus on developing transport for the benefit of the local economy. It lobbied for and secured Tramlink in 2000 and is continuing to lobby for extensions of the tram to Crystal Palace and elsewhere. The tram has promoted social inclusion by meeting the access needs of disadvantaged residents in New Addington and Fieldway. More recently with the business group 'Access to Croydon' it secured funds for the Coulsdon by-pass which was opened in December 2006. The Council achieves a high level of financial support for its Local Implementation Plan (LIP) from Transport for London (TfL). It is now implementing environmental and traffic calming works assisting effective movement and balancing this by providing an improved local environment for residents. It is using its land use policies to concentrate new jobs houses and amenities in Central Croydon. It is promoting the Arena project at East Croydon Station (including the rebuilding of the station) and it is improving access to West Croydon station to make it more attractive and safe. It has a staff travel plan that has reduced the number of staff travelling by car by over 20 per cent. Support initiatives include car pooling, better public transport (tram) and the use of new technology/mobile working. The Council has signed up 60 schools to travel plans encouraging walking to schools and increased awareness of road safety.

Safer and stronger communities

- 95 The Council is working proactively with its partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The Safer Croydon Partnership has achieved a sustained reduction in crime but the fear of crime remains a concern for residents. The 2006/07 performance indicators show there have been reductions in burglaries, robberies, violent crimes against the person, and thefts from and of motor vehicles. Five of the seven nationally comparable PIs have improved and two have deteriorated. The numbers of crimes are also reducing in 2003/04, 22,088 crimes were committed and in 2006/07, 19,271 crimes were committed an improvement of 13 per cent. In the first half of 2007/08, 9,107 crimes were reported. The Council anticipates an 18 per cent reduction in recorded crime since 2003/04. Although the fear of crime is reducing locally, it remains high overall. The Council and its partners have identified that the fear of crime remains an area for improvement and are taking targeted action to reduce it.
- 96 Community partnership working is good. The Council has committed additional resources to its local communities in support of the safer neighbourhood teams. It has introduced neighbourhood enforcement officers (NEOs) who work as part of the ward police and community support officer teams. High visibility policing takes place in targeted areas in response to criminal damage activity. A 24-hour witness support scheme provides an immediate response. Trading standards have an intelligence led programme to check on the sale of knives, alcohol and cigarettes. As a result, two licences have been withdrawn, and fewer instances of unlawful sales are being reported.
- 97 Partnership working to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) is good. Reducing ASB is a council priority and it has engaged local communities in establishing its strategy. The Council has an active ASB team and a joint action group with the police and partners from the voluntary sector. They use a range of enforcement, prevention and education initiatives to reduce ASB and are achieving some successes. There are drinking control areas in the town centre, and a safer passages project which has visible patrols in high risk areas of the town. Crime and ASB have decreased. Voluntary agencies are working closely with community groups to help young people find alternative activities and avoid becoming involved in ASB. The ninety-one signed acceptable behaviour agreements have had a 90 per cent success rate in delivering sustained better behaviour. Proactive engagement with registered social landlords and their tenants is also achieving a reduction in ASB.

- 98** Partnership working to support young people and adults with substance misuse is good. Partnerships are effective in evaluating the causes and effects of substance misuse. Between them, partners have a comprehensive range of information on the patterns of drugs use and treatment problems. Young people's involvement in substance misuse has been identified as a key factor in youth crime. There is good collaborative working between the drug and alcohol action team (DAAT) and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to reduce substance misuse. Their work includes supporting parents and carers who are users. More young people are taking part in drug treatment programmes as a result of improved diagnostic and referral work. There are also a number of support projects for adults with substance misuse. A community drug agency offers a drop-in facility, a range of advice, information and counselling; the substance misuse team offers assessments, testing and education services; and an outreach service provides specialist advice for women. A partnership between housing, employment services, and the DAAT is achieving success in helping former adult drug users to remain drug free.
- 99** Serious accidents are reducing with a 38 per cent reduction in the overall number of casualties from 1997 to 2006 but the numbers remain high when compared to other councils. The numbers of road traffic accidents resulting in injury or death have fallen steadily, although figures overall remain higher than average. Targeted intervention programmes involving the Council, police and schools are achieving reductions in the numbers of serious road injuries and fatalities to children, from 19 in 2005/06 to 13 in 2006/07. However, the number of slight injuries from road accidents overall, is increasing. The Council and its partners are not achieving the same level of success for adults. In 2006/07, 145 adults were killed or seriously injured, which is a slight increase from 2005/06. The total number of slight injuries for all road accidents was 1,254 in 2006/07, an increase from 1,238 in the previous year. Accident prevention programmes are also targeted to vulnerable people in the community. A trips and falls project for older people removes hazards from their homes; and the Council has installed security measures in the homes of 350 older people through the safe project.
- 100** The Council is well prepared to deal with emergency situations. It has an established and tested approach to business continuity and a broad range of incident management procedures across departments. The Council has long-term emergency incident arrangements with local and neighbouring emergency service providers. The needs of vulnerable people are integrated within emergency planning through a social care and PCT partnership. The Council uses safer neighbourhood partnerships as one way of advising local people about emergency procedures. The Council delivers training sessions with councillors and staff, to ensure emergency planning processes remain current. Wide-ranging incident management procedures ensure the Council is prepared for internal and external emergencies.

- 101** The Council and its partners have a growing understanding of community cohesion issues across the borough. The Council's Corporate Equalities and Cohesion Sub-Board (CECB) which reports to CMT is coordinating the development of a community cohesion strategy. The Deputy Leader and the Director of Adult Social Services are formally charged with leading on diversity and community cohesion. The LSP is also providing a renewed focus on promoting community cohesion. Partnerships across all sectors are delivering a broad range of initiatives targeted to improving community relations. The Council and its partners recognised there was an uncoordinated approach to community cohesion and are taking action to redress this gap. For example, the social inclusion partnership is being modified to incorporate cohesion and equalities responsibilities. The Safer Croydon Partnership is promoting community cohesion by working with young people and tackling hate crime including identifying hotspots for homophobic and racist crimes and these crimes are falling. In 2005/06 the police recorded 443 hate crimes compared with 507 the previous year. Racist crime fell by 8 per cent and homophobic crime by 20 per cent. The Council provides support to the inter-faith network 'Faith's Together in Croydon'. The Council also supports community and resident 'Fun Days' and festivals such as the Mela Festival and Black History Month. The track record of engagement with local people is good.
- 102** The Council supports the voluntary and community sectors and involves them effectively in service delivery. However, the Council's Compact with the PCT and the voluntary and community sector dates from 2002 and has not been reviewed. The Compact has an action plan which focuses the Compact on five issues: funding, consultation, BME groups, volunteering and community groups.

Healthier communities

- 103** The health of communities in Croydon is improving although the Council and its partners still have work to do to achieve consistent results and reduce health inequalities between affluent and deprived parts of the borough. Deaths from some diseases are decreasing and life expectancy gaps are beginning to narrow. People are living longer because deaths from coronary heart disease and related illnesses are falling. The Council has a long-standing and effective partnership across the range of issues affecting health. It has a good understanding of the health needs of the area, which it is updating by undertaking a joint needs analysis with the PCT. This will sharpen the priorities for intervention. The partnership has developed and approved a new Health Strategy and is using the LAA to drive improvement.
- 104** The Council and its partners have a plan in place to reduce teenage pregnancies but results are mixed. While there have been reductions in conception rates for under-16s the reduction in under-18s conceptions has been less than in the rest of London. More recent data is giving a more promising picture. The teenage pregnancy strategy is having a positive impact. Conception rates are falling although the national target for the reduction has not yet been met. There are substantial variations between the poorest and most affluent parts of the borough. Reducing teenage pregnancies remains an important priority.

- 105** The Council and its partners currently do not have a strategy for tackling sexual health infections, which are rising. Albeit a range of actions led by the Sexual Health Partnership Group have had a positive impact on access to sexual health services. Actions commissioned under the teenage pregnancy strategy and good work with the Terence Higgins Trust to combat HIV infections across London Borough boundaries are also making a good contribution to tackling this problem.
- 106** The Council, PCT and voluntary sector are delivering a range of integrated services focused on those in need. The partners have developed joint facilities such as the Peppermint Healthy Living Centre. This centre, on the Valley Park Estate, is operated in partnership with voluntary sector partner ToC H and includes a Healthy Living Centre, a Sure Start Children's Nursery, a Croydon PCT Doctors' Surgery, a UK Online Centre, a community hall, youth room and family room for activities for local residents. The centre also provides outside play and recreation areas. The centre is engaging with some deprived and hard to reach residents, and is actively improving health and reducing health inequality.
- 107** The Council and its partners have initiated a wide range of projects designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, good diet and exercise. There is engagement across the Council. In leisure services the healthy lifestyles team is working with the PCT on exercise for people referred by GPs. Smoking has declined year on year since 2002 but significant problems remain. Smoking cessation support is delivered in partnership with the PCT and businesses and remains a key priority. The Council uses initiatives to target health improvements recognising that people access support in different ways. It has developed the 'Boxercise' project working on physical health, confidence and self esteem targeted at people with a variety of health and psychological issues.
- 108** The Council is working effectively in partnership with others to reduce the number of homes below healthy standards. The housing service has provided new heating systems including condensing boilers and insulation and has reduced the average running cost per tenant from £690 per month to £480. Croydon has one of the highest energy efficiency (SAP) ratings in London for its Council homes and has reduced carbon emissions by 30 per cent over the last 11 years. The Council has a LPSA target to increase the take-up of loft and cavity insulation in private houses and it has worked with British Gas to benefit over 1000 households. Awareness raising projects include 'Coldbuster' environmental grants and the partnership with British Gas to encourage insulation installation is linked to a one-off reduction in Council Tax. As a result people at most risk of disadvantage have a better, healthier living environment and their income goes further.
- 109** The Council is using its resources wisely to reinvest in service improvements which promote healthy living. Examples include the Thornton Heath Leisure and South Norwood Leisure Centres. The projects provide activity and entertainment for all ages and are making positive contributions to the healthy lifestyles and the engagement of young people.

- 110 The Council is working well with voluntary, health and business partners to offer health information in its proposed Healthy Croydon Resource Centre, a community enterprise. This is a £2.2 million partnership between Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA), Croydon Council, the Metropolitan Housing Trust and other organisations including the PCT. The Council and its partners have developed an innovative delivery model designed to encourage some of the borough's most disadvantaged residents to access the facilities of the centre and combine engagement in health activities and awareness alongside developing enterprise and business skills and support.
- 111 The Council is working imaginatively to protect the health of its residents. It has developed an important approach to ensuring its vulnerable residents most at risk to health problems from polluted air receive early warning so they can take action to avoid risks. It has created an innovative service using text messages, voicemail or email to allow 239 targeted residents to receive local air pollution information allowing them to stay indoors or take other protective measure on days and in locations where pollution levels might be harmful. This approach has been adopted by the Mayor of London for roll-out across the capital.

Older people

- 112 The Council and partners are improving their services for older people but there is still scope to broaden the Council's strategy to explicitly cover those who are not users of social care services. The Council and partners are engaging well with older people and supporting them to live independently. The Council and its partners co-ordinate the strategic approach to older people through the Partnership Group Older People which reports to the Healthy Croydon Partnership, one of the themed sub-groups of the Croydon Strategic Partnership. Croydon has improved on all eight of the comparable PIs for older people. However, two of these indicators PAF C29 (Adults with a physical disability helped to live at home per 1,000 population aged 18 to 64) and PAF C31 (Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home per 1,000 population aged 18 to 64) are in the worst 25 per cent nationally. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 2007 assessment was three stars for delivering outcomes with excellent capacity to improve services. There is a good understanding by the Council and partners of the future demographic profile with regard to age and ethnic mix which is being used to develop strategic plans and service delivery for the future. The Council's RELEASE programme in the Older Peoples Division has been used to improve services to older people.

- 113** A good range of initiatives for older people are available outside of the social care agenda such as free swimming for residents over the age of 60, wildlife walks, tennis, bowling, fishing, and health walks. Twenty friends groups engage in conservation activities. A wealth of arts and culture opportunities encompass the rich ethnic mix in the borough. However, the 'Strategy for better Health and Social Care for Older People in Croydon' is oriented to older people using social care services and this is the main strategy document relating to Older People. The impact of this is that older people, who are not users of Council social care services, are not targeted by the Council. The Council is currently updating this strategy and the revised version will encompass all older people including those who are not users of Council social care services.
- 114** The Council is providing political leadership for older people and there is effective partnership work. The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care has strategic responsibility and she is also the older peoples' 'champion'. Departments provide clear cross-cutting support for older people's services. Initiatives can be found within the Environment Culture and Public Protection Service Plan and various strategy documents such as the Sports and Physical Activity Strategy 2005-2008. The Council consults on the views of older people in a number of ways. It supports, through Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA), the Older Peoples Network (OPEN) which has a management board consisting of representatives of older people and from across the ethnic groups. Representatives of OPEN sit on the Partnership Group Older Committee board and are active at attending council meetings, tabling questions at Scrutiny and Overview Committees to raise issues of concern as well as being a voice on the 'Homes for the Future' stakeholder group.
- 115** The Council engages and consults effectively with older people. The Council hosted an Open Space event in 2005 at which a range of representation from older people and communities together with partners. This consultation resulted in outcomes to meet the needs of older people. This initiative is being repeated in spring 2008 alongside an event to engage with BME elders. The events are being used to help draft a new older peoples' strategy.
- 116** Services are delivered effectively in partnership. Community needs are met by commissioning services and managing contracts in a way that promotes a healthy mixed economy in service provision. Domiciliary and residential care and extra-care housing is provided in partnership with the private sector. Current housing projects reflect the needs of older people into the future with the needs of BME and minority groups, including those with mental health needs and disabilities taken into account. The Council has a strong partnership with NHS partners to commission and deliver a co-ordinated range of services that promote independent living and avoid unnecessary hospital admission.
- 117** The Council supports independent living by making full and innovative use of assistive technology. It does this by supporting the latest developments in telecare and a state of the art centre, the AZTEC centre, which hosts a range of facilities including a state of the art aids equipment centre which can be accessed 'virtually' online.

- 118 The Council has introduced practical changes to make a difference to older people's lives. An example is the 'Triage' system whereby needs can be assessed through a single point of contact and IT improvements to manage caseloads more effectively.
- 119 Close work with partners is also improving quality of life for older people by the Council funding Voluntary Sector Service Providers for Older People (VoSSPOP), an umbrella forum for all voluntary organisations working with older people in the borough. Cross-cutting initiatives support a co-ordinated approach to delivering shared priorities. Examples include working with younger people on intergenerational projects, helping older people claim benefits in conjunction with the Department of Work and Pensions and provision of IT services and distribution of information through libraries. These initiatives support older people in their homes and help to promote community cohesion.

Children and young people

- 120 Outcomes for children and young people in Croydon are generally adequate and improving. The physical health of children is good and rates of infant mortality are in line with those nationally. Most children get a good start to their education in the early years. Standards of attainment are improving each year and are similar to those nationally at all key stages. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall but there is wide variation in the progress made by children in different schools. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is satisfactory.
- 121 Service management is adequate. Strong political leadership is driving the children and young people's agenda and an ambitious Children and Young People's Plan. Partnership working generally is strong with good use of the voluntary sector to increase capacity. The quality of action plans to deliver priorities is variable. There is strong financial management and good value for money but there is limited leadership capacity. Performance management is inconsistent and has been insufficiently robust in some areas, such as the performance of schools.
- 122 The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good with improved outcomes in a number of areas for example increases in the levels of most immunisations. Participation in the healthy schools programme is progressing well with good participation by Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy is having a positive impact, and the rate of conceptions among teenagers is reducing. Provision of, and access to, child and adolescent mental health services and drug and alcohol services are mostly good. The health needs of looked after children and care leavers are met well. Early identification and intervention for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good, although multi-agency assessments and care planning are generally not well developed.

- 123** Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. Effective partnerships, good early intervention and prevention services and robust child protection systems ensure that many children and young people are safeguarded well. Innovative services provide good protection for most vulnerable children, particularly those at risk from domestic violence or sexual exploitation. Some young people in the youth justice system and children excluded from school are less well served. Families receive good support to prevent children and young people needing to become looked after. Most looked after children receive good care in local, high quality placements and they are well supported in preparation for independent living. Effective partnership work with the Border and Immigration Agency ensures a good response to the needs of newly arrived asylum seeking children. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are offered a good range of high quality short breaks, although there is insufficient capacity in these services to meet all families' needs.
- 124** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is adequate. Although standards of attainment are in line with those nationally the Council has been slow to take robust action to challenge and support those schools which are not providing a consistently good enough education; which affects the progress of many of their pupils, particularly those from some vulnerable groups. Targeted action by the council is impacting on improving outcomes for some vulnerable groups such as looked after children and some BME groups. Action to improve school attendance is now adequate and there has been some recent improvement in the high rate of permanent exclusions. The quality of youth work in Croydon is adequate and young people that participate in youth service activities enjoy themselves and gain a good range of skills from contact with capable adults.
- 125** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate and they provide good support for children and young people to achieve economic well-being. Partners have a good understanding of the factors influencing youth crime and ASB and targeted work has achieved some reduction in offending and re-offending. However, not enough is done to deter young people who have committed serious crime from re-offending. Children and young people are increasingly involved in the management of performance and/or assessing the quality of services but their participation lacks a systematic approach. The strategy for 14 to 19 education is developing well. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has fallen significantly, particularly among young people who are looked after, care leavers and teenage mothers. Connexions advisers provide good support to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but the preparation for transfer of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to adult services is not always timely.

- 126 The capacity of the area's services for children and young people to improve is adequate. The track record of improvement in most key areas and performance is broadly in line with similar areas. There are examples of effective change management resulting in improved outcomes for children for example in children's social care and health services. However, there are a number of areas, particularly in relation to education, where there has been insufficient improvement and action to address weaknesses, particular in relation to vulnerable groups, has not been timely or robust. The partnership has a good analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and has now prioritised key areas of weakness for improvement.

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 Croydon London Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 28 January 2008 to 8 February 2008.
- 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.