

Corporate Assessment Report

September 2008



Corporate Assessment

London Borough of Waltham Forest

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Contents

Introduction	4
Executive summary	6
Areas for improvement	9
Summary of assessment scores	10
Context	11
The locality	11
The Council	12
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	14
Ambition for the community	14
Prioritisation	16
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	20
Capacity	20
Performance management	23
What has been achieved?	26
Sustainable communities and transport	27
Safer and stronger communities	30
Healthier communities	32
Older people	35
Children and young people	37
Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment	40

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 Waltham Forest Council is performing well. With its partners the Council has developed a clear and challenging vision for the borough based on a robust analysis of local needs and concerns. The ambitions for the community set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) reflect the major challenges facing the borough, the diversity of the community and national priorities. The overall ambition to create sustainable communities is supported by clear plans for the principal regeneration areas in Walthamstow town centre and Blackhorse Lane. Partnership working is well established in crime reduction and community safety, but less so in housing. Awareness of ambitions among all stakeholders is good and the Council has developed strong and visible leadership for the community which is supporting the achievement of priorities.
- 6 Prioritisation has been used effectively to transform service performance across the Council and to build capacity for future improvement. Clear and robust priorities are articulated in the SCS, the new LAA and the Corporate Plan and are reflected in comprehensive service plans, providing a firm foundation for delivery. Following the approval of a new SCS in May 2008 the Council is now developing its policy framework to support the refocused ambitions and priorities. Consequently not all priorities are supported by specific outcomes.
- 7 The Council has developed its capacity and is now well placed to deliver the broader ambitions for the community. Political and managerial leadership is strong and leads to effective strategic decision making. The Council has reshaped services to meet its priorities and is enhancing its capacity through the Efficiency Review. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is well led and focused in its approach to meeting community priorities. The Council has a robust financial strategy, delivers good value for money and actively seeks opportunities to deliver better and more efficient ways of working. Staff capacity has been enhanced with high calibre senior appointments. However, the Council's strategic approach to Human Resources has only recently been strengthened. The Council uses strategic partnership working well, but opportunities exist for greater engagement with some voluntary sector groups.
- 8 Performance management is effective in driving improvement across Council services. The performance management framework is clear, well communicated and reviewed annually. Clear accountability for performance management from the top of the organisation is reflected in the approach of councillors and staff. The Council is self-aware and evaluative. Effective internal and external mechanisms support a culture of openness with partners, with rigorous challenge of under performance. Good use is made of complaints and comments to inform learning and scrutiny supports performance improvement.

- 9 The Council has effective mechanisms in place for focusing on the needs of users and its diverse communities. It has comprehensive and robust directorate equality plans and equality schemes for gender and disability, and established programmes for equality impact assessments (EIAs). The Race Equality Scheme is being refined to reflect the learning from the other schemes, but training in equality and diversity has not been systematic. Effective engagement with the local community helps to ensure that needs are met in a sensitive way, for example work with school communities sharing faiths. A range of accessible services are provided using new technology and e-government to increase choice and meet needs, mainly through Waltham Forest Direct (WFD) and one stop shops. However, inconsistent monitoring of the profile of service users may mean barriers to access for particular groups are not being identified.
- 10 Effective performance management, prioritisation and capacity building has supported significant improvement across Council services and some improvement in the quality of life of local residents. Improved levels of satisfaction with most key services have been achieved, although overall satisfaction with the Council remains low.
- 11 A clear strategic approach to creating sustainable communities has been developed with partners, but outcomes achieved to date are limited in the context of the significant challenges facing the borough. Targeted intervention in priority neighbourhoods has improved the employment rate, new jobs have been created, and capital programmes for schools and children's centres are delivering community benefits. Environmental sustainability is central to key decisions and a comprehensive approach to climate change has been developed following a Carbon foot-printing exercise. Significant challenges remain, however, in delivering sustainable communities, including housing demand far outstripping supply, in common with other similar boroughs, and a fragile economy with low adult skills and high levels of worklessness.
- 12 Considerable progress has been made in addressing fear of crime, and tackling actual crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) through partnership working. The Council has a well established and effective approach to community cohesion and tackling violent extremism. It works well with partners to improve health and reduce health inequalities and most health targets in the 2006 to 2009 Local Area Agreement (LAA) are on track. However, the health gap between the borough and London and England is not closing. Outcomes achieved include reduction in smoking in pregnancy and improved access to general practices in deprived wards. However, there is no coherent strategy in place to ensure all Council partners are clear about their role in improving health.

- 13 A range of initiatives promote and support the independence, health and wellbeing of older people, but a strategic approach with partners to ensure effective coordinated working is lacking. Health, safeguarding and educational outcomes for children and young people in Waltham Forest have improved well overall and are mostly in line with or above comparators. Young people contribute to society and their economic wellbeing is developed. Participation in education, employment or training, including for vulnerable groups, has increased substantially and is above national averages. Extended services are also improving outcomes for vulnerable families.

Areas for improvement

- 14 The Council has delivered significant improvement in its services through effective performance management and prioritisation and its focus now needs to be on delivering the broader ambitions in the new Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 15 The Council now needs to consistently set out the specific outcomes it is trying to achieve across all its plans and strategies, including those with its partners. This will enable it to clearly monitor the impact of its work on the quality of life of local people.
- 16 The Council needs to ensure that, working with local strategic partners and sub-regional and regional partners, it maximises opportunities to close the skills gap, tackle worklessness and improve access to both employment and housing. To achieve this it needs to strengthen its arrangements to deliver regeneration across the borough through partnership working. This includes, for example, working with housing providers and the private sector to build confidence and deliver tangible outcomes.
- 17 The Council needs to develop a joint strategic approach to meeting the needs of all people aged 50 and over with key local partners. This needs to address longer term needs arising from changes in the population, such as increasing numbers of older people from black and minority ethnic groups.
- 18 The Council's strategic workforce planning approach with partners needs to be developed to ensure that local public services have appropriately skilled and experienced staff in place to meet their ambitions for the local community.

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	2
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 Waltham Forest is a north east London borough located on the edge of London. It is surrounded by Redbridge to the east; Newham and Hackney to the south; Haringey and Enfield to the west and Essex to the north. It is one of the five Olympic and Paralympic host boroughs although only a small part of the Olympic Park is in the borough. The Hockey stadium is the only Olympic facility that will be within the borough. Waltham Forest has four main town centres: Walthamstow, Chingford, Leyton and Leytonstone. A fifth of the borough is made up of forest land, reservoirs, open space, parks and playing fields.
- 20 Waltham Forest's age profile is very similar to the London average. According to Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2006 mid-year population estimates, there are 221,700 people living in Waltham Forest. Over the last ten years, the population has grown slowly and steadily. The most significant growth being in the 20 to 44 age group. Population projections for 2020 are an issue of contention, with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) predicting an increase to 292,000, 23.1 per cent higher than the Greater London Authority's figure. The proportion of economically active households is set to fall, the number of young people increase, and more older people will have increasing care and support needs.
- 21 Waltham Forest is the tenth most ethnically diverse of the London boroughs and is home to a wide range of faith communities, including London's third largest Muslim population. Based on 2005 experimental data from the ONS, the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population is 47 per cent (although it is far higher among the school population); this percentage is higher than the London average of 42 per cent. The largest ethnic groups are: Black Caribbean (7.7 per cent), Pakistani (7.7 per cent) and White Other (7.6 per cent). There are also increasing numbers of working age people from South Africa, Poland and Lithuania in the borough.
- 22 The government's Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007 ranked the borough 15th out of the 354 local authorities in England in terms of average deprivation (where 1 is most deprived). There are areas of relative affluence in the north of the borough, with high priced housing and well-distributed open spaces. The North Circular (A406) divides the borough and the centre and south are more deprived. The statistics in the indices of deprivation are broken down into geographic areas smaller than wards known as Super Output Areas (SOAs). Of Waltham Forest's 145 SOAs, 18 are in the 10 per cent most deprived in England and just under half are in the 20 per cent most deprived.

- 23** Waltham Forest has a relatively small economy with fewer businesses and jobs than most other outer London boroughs, the lowest commercial tax base in London and the lowest rate of new business formation. Manufacturing, which was traditionally the borough's economic base, has declined. There are low rates of employment and self employment, high levels of benefit dependency and lower than average levels of skills. One quarter of the working age population is economically inactive. Worklessness is a major cause of poverty and an estimated 40 per cent of children in the borough live in households below the official poverty level. The proportion of women from the South Asian, Caribbean and West African migrant communities in work is particularly low. The borough neighbours the Thames Gateway and the Stratford City development which will see £30,000 new jobs created in the next decade.
- 24** Within Waltham Forest there is significant unmet demand for housing. While house prices in the borough are still relatively low compared to other parts of London, approximately 80 per cent of existing households cannot afford to buy a one bedroom flat in the borough on their current income. According to the 2001 census, 58 per cent of the housing stock in the borough is owner occupied; 16 per cent is privately rented and 23.8 per cent is social housing, around half of which is Council housing managed by Ascham Homes, an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). A key challenge acknowledged by the Council is using the limited land available to promote house building to provide a more socially and economically balanced community.
- 25** Waltham Forest has good external transport links, with easy access to the M11, M25, A406 and A11. There are rail connections to the city and two underground lines to central London. Walthamstow bus station is the third busiest in the capital and provides a transport hub for the borough. Public transport links between the north and the south of the borough, however, are less well developed.

The Council

- 26** The Council has a leader and a cabinet system of governance and has 60 councillors. The Labour party has 25 councillors, the Liberal Democrats 20 and the Conservative party 15. No party has overall control and a joint administration formed between Labour and the Liberal Democrats has been in place since 2002. The cabinet comprises 6 Labour councillors and 4 Liberal Democrats. There are 4 junior Cabinet Members appointed to assist portfolio leads in proposing, formulating and advising on policy. Scrutiny arrangements include an overall management committee, 6 standing sub-committees and issue-based time limited scrutiny panels. The Council also has 6 area committees known as Community Councils jointly chaired by a councillor and a local resident. A standards committee oversees the conduct of councillors.

- 27 The Leadership Team comprises the Interim Chief Executive; the Interim Director of People, Policy and Performance; three Executive Directors (for Adult and Community Services; Environmental Services; and Children and Young People Services); the Director of Finance; the Director of Public Health (a joint appointment with the PCT); the Director of Governance and Law; the Head of Corporate Communications; the Head of Children and Families; and the Assistant Director for Safe and Strong Communities.
- 28 The Council employs over 6,600 staff (including staff in schools). The Council's net revenue budget requirement for 2007/08 is £363 million, incorporating revenue growth of £9.5 million and a similar figure for projected efficiency savings. Band D Council Tax for 2008/09 is £1,440.55 (this includes the Greater London Agency precept of £309.82).
- 29 In 2002 when Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced, Waltham Forest was subject to government intervention and was classified as one of the worst performing councils in the country. The Council is in a very different place today achieving a three-star rating in 2007 under the CPA framework.
- 30 Established in 2001, Waltham Forest Together is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The LSP brings together all the main local organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors in Waltham Forest. Its purpose is to work together to improve the quality of life for the people of the Borough through the provision of better services. The LSP has a goal of ensuring that people should not be disadvantaged by where they live and so there is a focus on narrowing the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest through the Better Neighbourhoods Initiative.

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

Ambition for the community

- 31 The Council is performing well in this area. A clear and challenging vision for the borough has been developed with partners based on a robust analysis of local needs and concerns. The ambitions for the community set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) reflect the major challenges facing the borough, national priorities and the diversity of the community. Partnership working is well established in some areas and stakeholders have a good level of awareness of the ambition. The Council has developed strong and visible leadership for the community which is supporting achievement of ambitions. The Council and its partners are now agreeing the specific outcomes that flow from the ambitions set out in the new SCS.
- 32 The Council, with its partners, has defined ambitions which clearly address the long term needs of the borough and its communities. The SCS, 'Our Place in London', was approved in May 2008 and replaced the previous community strategy from 2005. The new plan is based on three key principles for achieving the long term vision for the borough: 'managing population growth and change'; 'creating more wealth and opportunity for residents'; and 'retaining more wealth within the borough'. These are supported by a set of 11 priorities and 41 commitments for the short, medium and long term. For example, the managing population growth and change principle has a priority to 'Improve housing quality and choice with the right kind of homes in the right places'. This is supported by a commitment to develop high quality, affordable three and four-bedroom family homes. Ambitions clearly reflect local needs.
- 33 The Council has a clear ambition to use the London 2012 Olympics, and the development of Stratford City in neighbouring Newham, as a catalyst to develop sustainable communities. It recognises that the latter in particular represents both a threat to Waltham Forest's economy and particularly its town centres, but also opportunities in the form of employment for its residents. Senior officers and councillors are effectively engaged with the other Olympic host boroughs, the Olympic Delivery Agency and London wide bodies in the key Olympic Park and legacy steering groups. This is enabling the Council to share its ambitions for its communities from such major developments happening close by, including improved access to employment areas.

- 34** The new SCS sets out a clear and challenging vision for the future which describes what the borough will be like in ten to 20 years time. The vision in the previous community strategy which has driven the Council's ambition up to May 2008 was for 'Waltham Forest to be a safer, cleaner and healthier borough benefiting from its wealth of diversity where everyone is able to reach their potential'. The new vision places a greater emphasis on increasing the prosperity of all residents through improving access to jobs and raising skill levels. The vision is broken down into a number of areas, including for example; 'All our children are happy, resilient and successful'; and 'None of our residents live in poverty'. It is supported by broadly defined outcomes such as: strong Council leadership on planning has made the borough an attractive residential location for people moving from flats into family accommodation, and by high-level indicators. However, currently, unlike the previous community strategy, supporting action plans with explicit targets for the outcomes and indicators are still being developed. A clear vision provides a solid basis for the Council to articulate its overall ambitions for local people.
- 35** Development of the SCS by the Council and the LSP, involved a rigorous and comprehensive review of the social, economic and environmental challenges facing the area. This was supported by discussions with partners and engagement with residents through town centre road shows and workshops with newly-arrived communities, young parents, people on low incomes and school children. A detailed analysis of the borough's spatial position within London and identification of the drivers of change was followed by development of the vision, the priorities and the commitments. An equalities impact assessment (EIA) was undertaken to ensure the action planning for the SCS takes account of diverse needs. The SCS is also informing the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) to ensure the ambitions are reflected in future physical developments in the borough. Comprehensive data analysis and consultation helps to ensure the ambitions clearly reflect the needs of the borough's diverse community.
- 36** The main employment and housing regeneration areas in the borough are now supported by comprehensive and ambitious plans. The master plan for Walthamstow was subject to an innovative consultation process and an Interim Planning Policy Framework (IPPF) is in place to deliver this. Planning and Design Briefs for Blackhorse Road provide detailed guidance on the types of development the Council wants with plans including new shops, cafes and restaurants around a public square and up to 2,000 new homes, half of which will be affordable. These plans aim to combine sustainable growth in housing, business development and employment and improve community services, infrastructure and access to green space in line with the SCS.
- 37** There is strong support and ownership for the ambitions. Councillors, managers, staff, statutory partners and voluntary and private sector organisations understand the ambitions as a result of their extensive engagement in their development. As a result there is strong commitment to what the Council and its partners are trying to achieve for the area.

- 38 The Council uses effective community engagement mechanisms to understand the views, needs, desires and preferences of its citizens, as well as partners. Community Councils, the Council's area committees, in place since 2003, have recently had their budgets increased to help meet the priorities of local residents and community groups. The Council has a range of other mechanisms for engaging the community, including the residents' panel, forums for service users, businesses and faith communities, and use of DVDs to consult on strategies. There is particularly strong engagement with young people. Initiatives include the young people's e-panel, the Forest Flava press gang and website, the young advisers' scheme and youth ambassadors (promoting the 2012 Olympics in schools). Effective community engagement enables communities to play an effective role in decision making.
- 39 The Council is seen as a strong strategic partner. It is ensuring that partnerships are productive and sustainable and accountability is clear. Following a review in 2007, the LSP has been strengthened by the creation of an executive board with refocused partnership groups beneath this. The LSP now has decisive leadership at board level with strong and effective relationships among partners. Partnership groups beneath the board are at various stages of maturity, with the safer and stronger communities' partnership theme ('SafetyNet') the most advanced due to long standing effective relationships with the police. The partnership group for housing, however, has only just been created and the Council is in the process of selecting a small group of Registered Social Landlords as development partners. The Council has also devised a comprehensive framework to guide the development, governance and sustainability of partnerships. The new partnership arrangements in place provide a sustainable framework for delivering the ambitions.
- 40 The Council has developed its effectiveness as a community leader and partners recognise its role. It has a good understanding of community cohesion and has received national recognition for its work in this area, in particular in tackling violent extremism. This included effective action to deal with the multiple terrorist suspect arrests in August 2006, through multi-agency communications and work with community leaders. This is supported by innovative projects with children and young people on cohesion, such as the Swapping Cultures initiative in schools and the Young Muslim Leaders' programme.

Prioritisation

- 41 The Council is performing well in this area. Its sustained focus on priorities has been used effectively to transform service performance across the Council and to build capacity for future improvement. The Council has recently refreshed its policy framework and ensured that the SCS, the new LAA (2008 to 2011) and the Corporate Plan (2008 to 2011) set out its current priorities clearly. It is now in the process of ensuring that all its key strategies are fully aligned with the new SCS priorities. Priorities are supported by comprehensive service plans, linking together community, corporate and operational priorities and providing a firm foundation for delivery.

- 42 The Council has used prioritisation effectively to turn around the performance of its services since 2002. At that time Waltham Forest was one of the worst performing councils in the country. It was subject to Government intervention, including a direction for education services to be outsourced. Through strong political and managerial leadership, good planning and robust performance management, it has effectively turned around the performance of council services. All service blocks are now rated as at least good under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework. However, this meant that the Council did not have sufficient capacity, at that time, to deal with some of the broader challenges facing the area such as health inequalities and regeneration. Overall, prioritisation has delivered real improvements in council services.
- 43 The Council sustained a clear focus on its corporate priorities for the period 2005 to 2008. These were 'enhancing community understanding and participation'; 'improvement to the local economy and infrastructure', 'improved health and wellbeing'; 'decreasing crime and improving safety and the quality of the environment'; 'improving learning opportunities to help individuals achieve their potential' and 'working for Waltham Forest'. Each of these priorities was reflected in the previous community strategy and corporate plan and visibly delivered through service plans. There has been a particularly strong focus on improving learning opportunities through implementation of the children and young people's plan, leading to marked improvement in attainment levels and support for vulnerable children. The revised priorities in the new SCS broadly cover each of these former priorities but with a different emphasis given the new ambitions. This shows good continuity of priorities over time, adjusted to address an updated assessment of needs.
- 44 A clear framework is now in place for delivering the SCS priorities. The three SCS principles and the 11 SCS priorities are fully reflected in the Corporate Plan for 2008-2011. The Corporate Plan also has a fourth principle to 'Achieve excellence', with four additional priorities which reflect its new organisational values including, for example, 'Continuous service improvement'. A series of commitments identifies how each priority is to be achieved and the plan highlights the link to relevant LAA performance indicators and to local indicators. Staff, councillors and stakeholders are clear what the priorities are and their role in delivering them through effective internal communications. However, explicit targets or measurable outcomes have yet to be developed for all commitments.
- 45 The Council is taking effective action to deliver its priorities. Service plans follow a corporate template which makes explicit links with the SCS and the corporate plan. Service plans include measurable outcome targets; performance indicators; risk analysis and financial information including projections. They also incorporate the outcome of consultations. The Council's service plans provide a sound basis for delivering priorities.

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

- 46** Following the approval of the new SCS, the Council is now developing Strategy Action Plans for delivering the priorities through the LSP. The Council is also developing a number of new strategies to align with the SCS. These include a new cultural services strategy (to sit above individual service strategies), a new health improvement strategy, and the LDF. These are being informed by a new corporate approach to the development of strategies.
- 47** The Council's priorities are aligned closely with national and regional priorities. For example, the new SCS has a priority to 'Ensure residents are fit and healthy for work' and this is supported by a commitment to tackle childhood obesity by focusing on diet and exercise and an LAA target for obesity among children in Year 6. Overall the priorities fully reflect national and regional policy agendas.
- 48** Local priorities are informed by the needs and aspirations of the borough's diverse communities. Residents' concerns highlighted in consultation, which include improving safety, the local environment and schools, are reflected in priorities. The Council also has robust equality plans at a corporate and directorate level which link well to other key plans and have clear and challenging outcomes and targets. Research into new communities (including Lithuanians, South Africans and Poles) also fed into the development of a commitment to provide them with better information about services. However, the Council does not systematically monitor the profile of service users so it may not know if there are barriers to access for some groups. Overall, effective engagement with the local community helps to ensure that priorities reflect the areas of particular importance to local people.
- 49** The Council matches its resource allocation to its priorities. There is a comprehensive strategic framework for allocation of resources to priorities. This includes the 'star chamber' process for service and financial planning, the annual budget book, the capital plan and the three-year medium term financial strategy. This results in effective targeting of both revenue and capital resources to priority areas. For example, between 2004 and 2007, £190 million was allocated to priorities, including £48 million for delivery of improvements to Council housing and £55 million for the improvements to school and library buildings. External funding, such as planning delivery grant, has also been ring-fenced to support regeneration activity. Efficiencies of £23.7 million over the next three years have been identified through the Efficiency Review, facilitating re-investment in social care and environmental services and helping to keep Council tax increases below 2.5 per cent. Integrated service planning and resource allocation helps to ensure delivery of priorities.
- 50** Existing and developing strategies and action plans are informed by comprehensive consultation and analysis of needs. For example, the new strategic housing plan is being informed by detailed analysis and research into the local housing market, needs and land availability. In the absence of an adopted LDF, the priority of retaining family housing is being supported through a new interim policy on dwelling conversions.

- 51** Robust performance and financial monitoring ensures focus is maintained and priorities are delivered. Partners, councillors and senior managers play an appropriate role in monitoring achievement of priorities. Scrutiny is actively involved in developing priorities and influenced the selection of the LAA targets, including the target for achievement of a level 3 qualification by the age of 19, as a proxy indicator for accessing higher education.
- 52** Councillors and senior managers take and stick to difficult decisions. For example, in modernising its traditional services, the Council is closing its seven residential homes for older people and building two new resource centres by 2011. The Efficiency Review, involves the deletion of a significant number of posts (with frontline services protected) and this is designed to reconfigure services and staff to equip them to better meet future needs, as well as delivering efficiencies.

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

Capacity

- 53 The Council is performing well in this area. The political and managerial leadership leads to effective strategic decision making. The Council has reshaped services to meet its priorities and is enhancing its capacity further through the Efficiency Review. It has a robust financial strategy and delivers good value for money. Risk management informs key corporate planning processes. Staff are committed and motivated but the strategic approach to Human Resources has only just been strengthened. The Council uses strategic partnership working well, although some voluntary sector groups feel less engaged. Procurement practice is used to support priorities. The Council provides a range of accessible services and its plans for equality and diversity are well developed.
- 54 Good political and managerial leadership leads to effective strategic decision making. There is clarity of roles and responsibilities and councillors work effectively within the ethical framework. Executive members take an active lead on their portfolios and governance arrangements are sound. The Leadership Team has worked well with departments in driving service improvement from a low baseline. Monthly Top Team Briefing meetings give Cabinet Members and the Leadership Team the opportunity to discuss and plan strategic issues, with good engagement of managers through the Top 40 and Top 130 managers' conferences. Good leadership and constructive relationships result in open and transparent decision making.
- 55 The Council has improved decision making processes and scrutiny is having an impact. The Council works to a forward plan based on its priorities and external reviews of scrutiny have resulted in improvements, including opposition members appointed as Chairs of committees. Scrutiny has led to engagement of young people in Council communications. Political party considerations are not paramount. However, there are some concerns regarding a proposed reduction in the level of officer support for scrutiny. Local decision making arrangements help to build capacity.
- 56 Risk management informs key corporate and strategic planning, including the main partnership plans. Risk management review forms an integral part of the service planning process, and project and programme management arrangements, and is used as part of quarterly performance reporting at partnership and Council level. All councillors are receiving training in risk management. Highly effective arrangements are in place for the detection of fraud and the vetting of new recruits. The Council is taking effective action to minimise and manage risk.

- 57 Councillors and managers have a strong commitment and focus on delivering and improving value for money. The 2007 Use of Resources assessment assessed the Council as performing well and delivering good value for money. Efficiency targets have been exceeded and the Council's financial strategy is robust. The Council is now developing its financial capacity to deliver its broader ambitions through partnership working. It is seeking extensive leverage of funds from the private sector and other sources to meet its plans for regeneration and it has been successful in securing external funding, including £15 million for transport improvements in the last three years. The Council is also developing its strategic approach to asset management and disposal of assets in line with the new SCS to achieve greater benefits from the land it owns. It has a good approach to project management, for example in delivering the extensive capital improvement programme in schools. A clear focus on value for money helps to build capacity.
- 58 The Council has reshaped services and continues to build capacity through its Efficiency Review. The Council has restructured the corporate centre and established a Sustainable Communities Delivery Unit bringing together regeneration, community safety, planning for the Olympics, development control and community engagement. High-calibre senior appointments have significantly improved strategic capacity. The Efficiency Review has identified £23.7 million of efficiency savings over three years from 2008/09 and reconfigured services. Capacity building is enabling redeployment of resources to priority areas.
- 59 The Council's strategic approach to human resources has only recently been developed. Effective action has been taken to address recruitment and retention hotspots, notably in social care. However, an absence of joint strategies with partners to overcome skills shortages could mean some opportunities to build capacity are being missed. As part of the Efficiency Review the HR function is being centralised and merged with the OD function. Staff are self-motivated and benefit from a range of development activities. The Council achieved Investors in People accreditation in 2005, 450 managers have completed the Management Development Programme and management competencies are in development. Councillors are supported by a comprehensive training and development programme including mentoring. An accredited learning scheme has also been developed which gives points towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Governance and Community Leadership. Evaluation of training and development is comprehensive in relation to the larger programmes and induction is effective although agency staff are not currently included. Development initiatives are encouraging new ways of working.

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

- 60 Overall the Council uses strategic partnership working well, but some sections of the voluntary sector do not feel fully engaged. Through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme the Council has secured capital expenditure in excess of £210 million to radically improve the fabric of all secondary schools, with very good progress to date. The Council has a pragmatic approach to procurement and has created a mixed economy of service provision. Major services such as refuse collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance have been outsourced, and decisions about which education services should be brought back in house were based on an accurate assessment of capacity. Waltham Forest has a joint venture profit-sharing agreement for provision of building consultancy services and it is leading work on integrated regulatory services with the other Olympic host boroughs. A strong commissioning framework is in place, but some voluntary sector partners do not feel well engaged and the 2003 Compact is not a live document. The Council has developed a new Partnership Framework which covers procedures for conflict resolution between partners.
- 61 Procurement practice has been strengthened to support priorities, but the Council's contract procedure rules have not always been complied with. A new Strategic Procurement Board has recently been established to evaluate tender submissions against a cost and quality framework. The London Centre of Excellence best practice guide on contract management has been adopted and a centralised electronic procurement process is in place, with 95 per cent of all purchasing through chosen suppliers. However, the Council has identified and reported weaknesses in the commissioning and procurement of contracts for central government grant funded programmes between 2004 and 2006. Procurement practice supports priorities but lack of compliance with the Council's procedures could expose the Council to risk of legal action. This is being remedied through procedural and managerial changes.
- 62 The Council is delivering on its responsibilities for equality and diversity and provides a range of accessible services. Access to local services is enabled through the Waltham Forest Direct (WFD) call centres, local one stop shops and good use of customer relationship management. An Access to Services Strategy was agreed in May 2007 and the housing benefits service has been re-designed within WFD shops. Comprehensive Disability and Gender Equality Schemes are in place but the Race Equality Scheme is less well developed. The implementation of the programme of EIAs for services and strategies is progressing well, but EIAs are not always outcome focused. The Council's staffing is largely representative of the communities it serves, and it is ranked 67th in the Stonewall 100 index of top employers. Established staff networks are also well engaged. A comprehensive equality and diversity training programme is developing, but current delivery and take-up is patchy. Services are being made more accessible in a variety of different ways to meet diverse needs.

Performance management

- 63** The Council is performing well in this area. There is clear accountability for performance management from the Chief Executive and Leadership Team across all council services. The Council is self-aware and evaluative; performance is regularly challenged, monitored and reviewed through effective internal and external mechanisms. Resource management and performance management are integrated. Planning is of good quality and there are clear linkages between community, council and service plans, but outcome measures are not sufficiently clear in all areas and not all staff have performance appraisals. Prompt action is taken to remedy shortfalls in performance and good use is made of internal and external evaluation and benchmarking to drive improvement. Outsourced services are subject to comprehensive monitoring. Complaints and comments are used to inform learning and service improvement.
- 64** A clear and comprehensive framework supports the good management of council performance. The performance management framework is clear, well communicated and reviewed annually, and incorporates details of performance managements of partners. It makes strong links between corporate and service performance and provides staff with a coherent and consistent set of standards, templates and tools to manage service and staff performance. These are widely available on the council's intranet. The framework is reinforced by a performance coordination group, with representatives from key partners, which effectively monitors and reports performance and shares knowledge and good practice. Data collection, monitoring and reporting arrangements are all good and a single electronic performance system is used to manage performance. Performance monitoring of national and local indicators including council priorities and outsourced services is good.
- 65** Political and managerial accountability for performance management is clear and effective. Roles and responsibilities are well defined and the leadership sets a clear performance management culture. The Leadership Team reviews performance quarterly, directorate teams review it weekly and cabinet and scrutiny quarterly. The scrutiny function is effective in challenging Council performance, for example, a scrutiny review led to improvements in educational attainment. Senior managers are held to account for performance through an independent and objective assessment from the corporate performance team. Councillors receive regular good quality performance reports and portfolio holders are regularly briefed. This enables them to effectively challenge performance and has contributed to service improvements. A performance culture supports performance improvement.
- 66** Community, council and service plans provide an integrated framework for delivery. The ambitions and priorities are clearly reflected through all plans; they are of a consistently good quality and they are integrated with financial plans. Plans follow a corporate framework, and are easy to read with clear linkages to individual objectives. Integration of service and financial plans is supporting delivery of priorities.

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

- 67** Action plans set out specific, measurable and achievable actions with timescales, but are less consistent in describing actual outcomes. Some action plans, such as the environment directorate equality plan set out clear outcomes, but others, such as those for older people and sports and physical activity, only have outcomes for specific actions. More recent plans show a sharper focus on outcomes and there is an increasing emphasis on use of proxy indicators for quality of life, such as resident satisfaction. Inconsistent definition of outcomes in action plans makes it difficult for the Council and its partners to clearly monitor the impact of their work on the quality of life of local people.
- 68** Targets for individual members of staff are based on priorities in corporate and service plans. Awareness of community and corporate priorities is good, through effective communication, but the Council does not adequately monitor staff appraisals. The 2006/07 staff survey showed that of those staff who responded, 20 per cent said they had not had an appraisal in the last 12 months. An absence of monitoring of staff appraisals means that the Council does not know if all staff have individual targets reflecting council priorities.
- 69** The performance management of partnerships is good. Partners openly discuss performance in a constructive way. This is based on an effective performance management framework put in place to monitor the LAA and the LSP. The framework links well with other partnership frameworks, such as that of the Local Safeguarding Board. The LSP is accountable and shares performance monitoring arrangements for the SCS and the LAA. The Council has recently implemented a new performance management IT system which has the potential for further development, for example in terms of better coordination, reporting and management of performance with partners. The good focus on partnership performance has led to the LAA targets for smoking cessation, healthy schools, thermal comfort and increasing physical education all being exceeded.
- 70** The Council has effective arrangements in place to learn from customer complaints and comments. Complaints are logged centrally, taken seriously and addressed without delay. The Council uses a mediation service to help resolve complex cases. Learning from complaints is used to drive improvement within and across services. For example, in children's services a system of complaint briefings are produced for managers which set out the complaint, council response and learning. Complaints and comments are used effectively to support learning and performance improvement.
- 71** The Council communicates its performance well. Local people are kept abreast of the Council's performance through effective communication, including the Council's magazine, WFM, delivered to every household fortnightly. Staff are well briefed on performance and use an easily accessible intranet where clear performance data and reports are available through a dedicated area on performance management. Effective communication supports the understanding of performance.

- 72** Internal and external challenge and evaluation are used effectively to drive improvement. Well established performance challenge sessions and performance clinics, involving councillors and senior managers have led to improvements in several areas, such as adoption and fostering services, housing benefit processing times, and smoking cessation. The Council invests in external evaluation, including a peer review in 2007, to challenge council performance, assess needs and learn from approaches used elsewhere. Representatives from the private, voluntary and independent sector and young people are involved in challenging performance. Scrutiny meetings have been held in local venues to stimulate interest and this has increased public access and participation, particularly amongst young people.

What has been achieved?

- 73 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Effective performance management, prioritisation and capacity building has supported significant improvement across council services from a low base with some improvement in the quality of life of local residents. However, performance against national shared priorities has been more variable. There have been notable successes in delivering safer and more cohesive communities and provision for children and young people is meeting diverse needs, particularly those who are more vulnerable. Less progress has been made in developing sustainable communities and delivering healthier communities and joint provision for older people aged 50 and over.
- 74 Overall the Council is ranked ninth out of 388 councils for the percentage of best value performance indicators (BVPIs) that have improved in the last three years (75 per cent of BVPIs have improved which is above the average range for all single tier authorities). In terms of best 25 per cent performance, the Council's services perform slightly below average when compared to other councils. Despite improved satisfaction with key services, overall residents' satisfaction with the Council was 45 per cent in 2006/07, the fifth lowest in London and in the lowest 25 per cent nationally.
- 75 The Council, with its partners, has begun to deliver more sustainable communities. However, its main focus has been on securing significant investment for future improvements. Among the outcomes delivered are creation of new jobs and training opportunities for local people; local transport improvements; and development of affordable housing in line with targets. The main outstanding challenges include housing demand far outstripping supply in common with similar boroughs; a fragile economy with low adult skills and continuing high levels of worklessness.
- 76 The Council in partnership has delivered well against its priority of decreasing crime and improving safety and the quality of the environment. Both crime and fear of crime have been reduced and anti-social behaviour has been tackled effectively. Drugs and substance misuse have been controlled effectively and incidences of domestic violence have been reduced. Cleanliness of the streets and the quality of green spaces have been prioritised and the Council is ranked seventh nationally for the percentage of environment related PIs that have improved over the past three years.
- 77 Good progress has been made in delivering the Council priority of enhancing community understanding and participation. The Council has a well established approach to community engagement and applies this well, for example in its 'Our Area Matters' initiative to address the concerns of residents in individual wards. Applying a good understanding of community cohesion issues the Council provides strong community leadership to one of London's most diverse communities. This fosters an environment where people generally get on well together.

- 78 Achievements have been delivered in terms of health and wellbeing and meeting the needs of older people, but the lack of a strategic approach to these areas has resulted in limited progress in outcomes. Working in partnership the Council has promoted healthier lifestyles and contributed to improved health in more deprived wards through the Better Neighbourhoods Initiative. However, life expectancy remains below average and the gap in health from London and nationally has not closed. A range of initiatives promote and support the independence, health and wellbeing of older people, but the older people's strategy is mainly focused on the needs of the vulnerable rather than the over 50s population.
- 79 Achievements in the priority of improving learning opportunities to help individuals achieve their potential have been delivered, mainly in respect of children's services. The capital improvement programmes for both primary and secondary schools are being implemented on time and with good engagement of children and young people in their planning and design. Similarly the network of children's centres has been implemented effectively with good engagement of the voluntary and community sector. Outcomes for children and young people in Waltham Forest are good with health, safeguarding and educational attainment all improved with a clear focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 80 The Council has recently set out a clear strategic approach to creating sustainable communities with its partners, but outcomes in this area to date have been on a relatively small scale given the overall context of the area. New jobs have been created through targeted intervention and affordable housing targets have been met. Capital programmes for schools and children's centres, improvements to Walthamstow town centre and local transport improvements have been delivered. However, significant challenges remain, including tackling entrenched worklessness and low adult skill levels and meeting housing needs.
- 81 The Council is contributing to the local economy and infrastructure and supporting local businesses as set out in the new joint Strategy for Enterprise, Employment and Skills. Through the Business Board (a sub group of the LSP) and a network of business forums the Council supports business, including the establishment of Business Improvement Districts at Leytonstone and Argall Avenue. Growth of small businesses, particularly those led by women and BME communities is promoted through the Council's procurement procedures. The Council is also part of a ten-borough supply chain assisting businesses to take advantage of Olympic contract opportunities. From 1999 to 2006, there were 119 new business start ups. However, the rate of creation of VAT registered businesses has worsened - to meet the London average Waltham Forest needs 396 more firms registering per year.

- 82 Progress has been made with tackling worklessness but this has not been sufficient to match London and national averages. Targeted intervention in the five priority neighbourhoods in conjunction with Job Centre Plus, has improved the employment rate by 4.5 per cent since 2004. The employment rate gap for disadvantaged groups, including lone parents, people from BME groups, the over 50s and disabled people, has improved. However, no change has been made in the employment rate for the lowest skilled and the employment rate for the non-white population (58 per cent) is 11 percentage points below the borough average. Targets for job creation and providing business advice have been exceeded for the last three years. Between 2005/06 and 2007/08, over 1,000 jobs have been created and the 'WorkNet' programme has assisted at least 45 lone parents from deprived areas into full time work in the last year. A new construction skills training centre is also being built in Leyton, the most deprived ward. Numbers of child care providers and places has increased and development of children's centres is on target with strengthened support for parents to enhance their economic potential.
- 83 The Council supports partners to deliver wider benefits for the community through sports. The SCORE complex in Leyton which opened in 2006 is owned and managed by a Third Sector organisation and is used by an average of 1,800 people each week. It incorporates indoor and outdoor sports facilities and a community centre with a nursery, a health centre, training facilities and community halls. It has seen a decrease in fear of crime, increased community participation and an increase in numbers of local residents accessing employment. The Council has secured a number of pre-2012 Olympics benefits for residents, including: Waltham Forest featuring in the pre-games camp directory; approval for a 'Light up': live screen in Walthamstow town centre and a multi-use games area for Langthorne Park. The Council is revisiting its strategy for securing lasting benefits from the 2012 games in light of the developing national legacy proposals.
- 84 Addressing the skills gap remains a clear priority but with limited success to date. Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) is helping to support asylum seekers, promote extended schools and create new work-based learning programmes. Community and adult learning provision has been effective in attracting BME groups and women in deprived areas. However, the number of people with only a Level 1 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) has increased and there has also been no change in those lacking a Level 2 NVQ. Numbers claiming job seekers allowance have dropped sharply (from 14,000 to 6,000) but this is offset by increases in lone parents on income support and people on incapacity benefit. The population of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in employment, education or training has remained broadly unchanged at 6.3 per cent. Almost a third of 20-24 year olds are also either unemployed or economically inactive. Reducing the skills gap clearly remains a key priority for the Council and its partners to address.

- 85 Significant investment has been secured to deliver future improvements through economic development. For example, Growth Area Funding has increased from £1.8 million, two years ago to £8.1 million in 2008/09 and the City strategy pilot includes £3.4 million from the London Development Agency, to address worklessness across the borough in 2009. A Local Employment and Training framework attracting £800,000 per year from 2008/09 is supporting the delivery of training and business engagement as part of the North Olympics Fringe with the other Olympic host boroughs. The Council is also at the forefront of discussions with these boroughs, regional bodies and the Department of Communities and Local Government about a Multi-Area Agreement (MAA) for worklessness.
- 86 The Council is at an early stage in ensuring that the borough's housing market meets the needs of existing and future residents. There are some positive aspects: the Council met the London Plan annual target for new homes for the first time in 2006/07, completing 671 units, with all new homes built on previously developed land. Additional units have been created for vulnerable groups including those with mental health problems and learning disabilities, and young people with severe physical disabilities. Progress in meeting the Decent Homes Standard for the Council's stock has been slow with over 50 per cent of homes below the standard, although the ALMO now has resourced plans (£93 million in total) in place to meet the standard by 2010. Homelessness acceptances are falling steadily, but there are still 700 homeless households and 10,000 households in total on the waiting list, most needing family-sized housing. Some neighbourhoods are in decline due to high numbers of multiple occupancy properties or flat conversions. The new LAA recognises the need to deliver more affordable housing and increase housing density while making better use of the existing housing stock, and facilitating development with partners.
- 87 The Council has made improvements to the quality of the environment in line with its priority. The recycling rate has improved from 10 per cent in 2003 to just under 30 per cent in 2007/08 (narrowly missing the statutory target), following the introduction of compulsory recycling in 2007. Street cleaning has improved with 23.2 per cent of streets now below acceptable standards. A successful Parks for People Lottery Bid is funding £4 million of improvements to Lloyd and Aveling Park and Green Flags have been awarded for Coronation Gardens and Langthorne Park.
- 88 The Council shows clear commitment to the sustainability agenda and reducing the impact of its activities. It has a good strategic approach to tackling climate change, but with limited outcomes to date. The Council, working with the Carbon Trust has undertaken a Carbon foot-printing assessment for its services and the borough as a whole. This shows Waltham Forest to have a comparatively low level of emissions currently due to the level of deprivation. An action plan to meet the challenging Carbon reduction target set is now in development. Environmental issues are considered in all key decisions and major developments are subject to sustainability appraisals. All new large commercial, industrial and residential developments are required to have 10 per cent of their energy from on-site renewable energy sources.

- 89 The Council has had some success in its priority of encouraging sustainable transport and improving access to employment areas. Less progress has been made with securing major transport infrastructure improvements. Good use has been made of funding from Transport for London and section 106 Agreements for improvements. Achievements have included bus and rail station improvements; extension of bus priority and new routes to more inaccessible localities. Rates of cycling have almost doubled since 1998 through expansion of the cycle network and school travel plans have helped reduce school journeys by car. However, the Council has yet to publish its own travel plan and congestion remains a key concern of local people. The Council is seeking further major transport investments, such as re-instatement of the Hall Farm Curve line to link the Chingford rail line to Stratford. It is exploring a range of funding options for this line. However, transport links to East London and north - south connections within the borough make it difficult for some residents to access employment.

Safer and stronger communities

- 90 The Council works effectively in partnership to create safer and stronger communities with good progress made in addressing fear of crime, actual crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). It gathers robust local intelligence and research and this is reflected in its key plans and priorities and is used in resource allocation. It has made good progress in reducing accidental death and injury, although less progress has been made with regard to children. The Council's emergency plans have been tested and are effective. The approach to community cohesion is strong supporting a culture where local people get on well together.
- 91 The Council has a clear understanding of local community safety issues and concerns using wide ranging consultation. A new partnership plan, developed in March 2008, is clearly aligned to the SCS. The Council made a capital investment in the region of £11 million in this priority between 2004 and 2007. The Tactical Joint Action Group (TJAG), a sub group of 'SafetyNet', the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, is chaired by the Council and is a forum for joint problem solving and tasking. Its remit includes an 'Our Area Matters' programme which addresses local enviro-crime issues in every ward in the borough, working in partnership with local agencies and residents. Independently commissioned research into local gang culture has resulted in additional Children's Fund monies being secured. Domestic violence comprises about a quarter of violent crime in the borough and joint working has seen an 11 per cent drop in incidents in 2007/08. The impact of environmental and social factors on crime are clearly being identified and addressed.

- 92 The perception and fear of crime has seen a significant improvement through partnership working. In the BVPI survey carried out in 2006/07, 57 per cent of respondents reported that they felt safe outside at night in their neighbourhood. This shows a significant positive shift in perceptions from 2003/04 when only 26 per cent felt safe. This has been achieved through a range of initiatives including: police-led safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) in every ward operating alongside Council Street Wardens in targeted wards, and through the Women's Design Service the Council has worked with groups of local women to identify crime-related issues. However, there are opportunities to secure improved value for money from Street Wardens and SNTs through amalgamating police and Council resources. Overall effective partnership working is making people feel safer.
- 93 As well as addressing fear of crime, the Council and its partners have made good progress in reducing actual crime. British Crime Survey comparator crime has fallen by 12 per cent in 2007/08 and overall crime has reduced by 16 per cent since the 2003/04 baseline with the rate of improvement increasing, although the Public Service Agreement crime reduction target (PSA1) for 2007/08 was just missed. Crime in priority neighbourhoods has reduced at a greater rate, for example, in Leyton crime has reduced by 27 per cent over the past three years. Crime reductions are better than the London average and British Crime Survey comparator crime is fractionally above the family average.
- 94 The Council has an effective approach to tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB). The Crime and Drugs Strategy, 2005/08 provides a clear framework for addressing ASB. In 2003/04, 53 per cent of British Crime Survey respondents perceived a high level of ASB in their local area and this fell to 29 per cent in 2006/07. The Council undertakes effective enforcement action - the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts has increased and the introduction of the Alcohol Restriction Zone in Leytonstone has led to a reduction in common assault in the area. Early intervention is effective with successful sport based projects such as the Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme. The number of young people involved in crime for the first time has reduced by 23 per cent. A recent joint inspection of the Youth Offending Team found the Council's management and leadership of the YOT to be adequate with a similar rating for outcomes for young people.
- 95 The Council is successful in managing and controlling drugs and substance misuse. Since 2003/04 the Council has achieved the largest increase in numbers of problem drug users entering treatment of any London borough and target waiting times for treatment have continued to improve. The proportion of drug users retained in treatment has improved from 68 per cent in 2006/07 to 79 per cent in 2007/08. The Council worked with the University of Central Lancashire to identify drug-related needs and concerns among the local Pakistani Muslim, Black Caribbean, and LGBT communities. This has resulted in the establishment of a Muslim Drug Education Forum. The Council is actively using its intelligence to reduce drugs and substance misuse in the local community.

- 96 The Council uses well established partnerships with police, highways and fire authorities, to reduce accidental death and injury. The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic incidents has reduced by half since 2,000 and the 2010 target has already been met. The percentage reduction in the number of people slightly injured has also improved; however the number of children killed or seriously injured has seen less improvement. The Council regularly exchanges information and identifies joint priorities with a number of local agencies, for example, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority which is represented on the TJAG and provides fire safety advice through the 'Our Area Matters programme'. Overall effective partnership working is reducing accidents.
- 97 The Council has up to date emergency and business continuity plans in place for vital services which reflect legal requirements. Plans for all other services are scheduled to be in place from 2009. Waltham Forest is a member of the multi-agency Local Resilience Forum for North East London, and has a Joint Emergency Planning Group to facilitate partnership working. Arrangements are in place at a strategic level to protect vulnerable members of the community and communication arrangements include a sub-regional website for local businesses. A training and exercise schedule is in place for the Emergency Plan and it has recently been tested and found to be robust.
- 98 Through strong political and community leadership the Council fosters good community cohesion. The borough's approach was tested by the multiple terror suspect arrests in August 2006. It took swift action through local agencies and community leaders involved in the Community Cohesion Task Group. It communicated a clear message about Waltham Forest being one community in which everyone has a role to play (using the strap-line 'Waltham Forest 225,000 People 1 Community'). The Council has developed a national reputation in this area, and is a pathfinder in relation to tackling violent extremism. It has developed a Young Muslim Leaders programme, reaching 500 young people in the borough which has helped to counter negative perceptions. Over 100 frontline staff have also been trained on community cohesion. A well attended community based event took place in April 2008 to develop a new cohesion strategy, to be adopted in July 2008. This new strategy recognises that a priority for the Council is to better engage with its 'new' communities. The Council has managed to sustain cohesive communities despite having to deal with significant incidents.

Healthier communities

- 99 The Council is working well with partners to improve health and reduce health inequalities but significant challenges remain. The partnership with the PCT is developing well and has been strengthened through joint appointments and a new partnership structure. There are examples of joint initiatives across local agencies, with particularly good provision for children and young people, but health inequalities in Waltham Forest remain worse than London and national averages and the gap is not narrowing. There is also currently no coherent strategy in place to ensure all Council partners are clear about their role in improving health.

- 100** The Council and the PCT have clear and joint commitment to tackling the healthier communities' agenda. The agenda is driven by the jointly funded Director of Public Health (and Medical Director for the PCT) who sits on both the Leadership Team for the Council and the PCT. The refreshed LSP has also seen the establishment of a new Healthier Communities Action Partnership, chaired by the chief executive of the PCT, to set priorities for health improvement and determine the associated targets to be included in the LAA. There is monitoring through the LAA, the Council's Leadership Team and the service planning framework and annual health assessment led by the PCT, which informs the annual public health report.
- 101** Effective governance arrangements are in place with an established Joint Partnership Board which also considers allocation of resources, performance and policy. This is chaired alternately by the lead member for Health, Adults and Older People and the chair of the PCT and its remit has been extended to cover children and young people, safeguarding vulnerable adults and supporting people provision. This has overseen improvements in services, such as, initiatives for people with mental health problems to enable them to live independently and access employment and leisure facilities. The Health Scrutiny Panel has also contributed to the debate about future health provision, but there are opportunities for its involvement in looking at progress with the wider public health agenda.
- 102** The LSP is strengthening its focus on addressing the wider determinants of health. As part of the SCS, work streams have been established for employment, attaining skills, housing, and access to open spaces and leisure facilities. There is a particular emphasis on helping residents to get fit and healthy for work through encouraging healthier lifestyles. To date this has included free swims for children in school holidays, leading to increased participation; healthy eating programmes in schools and a weight baseline for 90 per cent of school children to address childhood obesity and successful sports taster sessions for young people. Cancer awareness sessions in libraries have provided guidance on when to seek medical advice. Warm Front grants are used to address fuel poverty with 1,333 households receiving energy efficiency measures in 2007/08.
- 103** The Council with its partners has collected comprehensive information about the health of the population but a health improvement strategy is not yet in place. The Council and the PCT have collected data which is used to inform work in this area. The latest annual public health report, 'Gateways to Health', published in March 2008, includes a thorough analysis of the current state of health of the borough and the inequalities between different groups, as well as regional and national comparisons. The major challenges are outlined and these reflect the national policy objectives and local priorities in the SCS. However, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Waltham Forest is not due to be completed until the autumn of 2008 and so current commissioning plans for the PCT and the Council may not fully reflect health needs.

- 104** Promotion of healthier communities has remained a consistent priority in both the first and the new LAA and most health targets in the former are on track. However, the gap between Waltham Forest and London and England is not closing. The rates of death from major causes including heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cancer are higher than average. Infant mortality, at 6.4 per 1,000 live births, is the fifth worst in London and the rates of premature deaths are higher than expected for both men and women. Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen by 14.8 per cent since 1998, a better rate than that of similar authorities or nationally, but remain high at 48.7 per 1,000 of 15 to 17-year olds. HIV infections and tuberculosis are also increasing. Positive outcomes have been achieved in cutting the incidence of smoking to reduce lung cancer, with over 1,000 people quitting in 2007/08. This has been achieved through joint working in children's centres reducing smoking in pregnancy and smoking cessation sessions for PCT and Council staff. LAA targets have been met for improved access to general practices in more deprived wards; breast feeding initiation and PE in sport supporting healthier communities.
- 105** Although there are a wide range of joint initiatives and services for improving health, there is an absence of integrated strategies or pooled budgets. Jointly provided services are in place for learning disabilities, mental health, equipment and child care. The Council has also invested £12 million to support two capital schemes for health and social care facilities. However, there are no joint commissioning strategies or pooled budgets between the Council and the PCT. The Council has developed a commissioning strategy for adults and the PCT contributed to this but it is not a joint strategy. Consequently, there is currently a lack of strategic focus behind the actions to deliver healthier communities.
- 106** Effective action is being taken to promote the health of the most vulnerable members of the community. Improved health among vulnerable groups and deprived communities has been secured through successful joint working between health and social care through, for example, investment in priority areas like cardio vascular disease, diabetes, obesity and end of life care. The Council has placed a strong emphasis on a geographical approach to improving health through the Better Neighbourhood Initiative in an attempt to bridge the gap in health and life expectancy between the north and the south of the borough. Through use of over £1 million of NRF, Household Health Improvement Managers have promoted health in the five Better Neighbourhood areas. Health needs have been assessed, access to health services improved and development of healthier lifestyles supported.

- 107** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good and partnerships are strong and effective. There is mainly good access to high quality integrated services and health outcomes are good, despite long delays for occupational therapy services. There is very good progress with the rollout of the healthy schools programme. The health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met effectively and BME groups have a good range of targeted health provision and cultural, educational, recreation and leisure activities. The health needs of looked after children and young people are well catered for, with very high numbers having annual health assessments and dental checks and routine sexual health and substance misuse screening.

Older people

- 108** The Council lacks a coordinated strategic approach with partners to commission and deliver services to promote the independence and wellbeing of older people. The Council's current strategy for older people focuses on improving the quality and range of universal and specialist services for vulnerable older people. The Council provides a range of initiatives to promote and support the independence, health and wellbeing of older people but impacts are not always clear. An older people's member champion has also been appointed although the role and impact of this position has not been well communicated.
- 109** The older people's strategy, 'Age is Just a Number', launched in 2005, is focused on the key issues affecting the independence and well being of older people. However, the strategy focuses on older people who are retired or those reaching retirement, rather than the over 50s. The strategy considers issues like personal safety, housing, leisure, benefits, social inclusion, information and access to it, as well as addressing the needs of vulnerable older people living alone. However, the outcome measures are non-specific, such as improve access to leisure and learning and increase numbers of swimmers. It is therefore difficult to measure the impact of the strategy on improving the quality of life for older people. The strategy identifies that 11.3 per cent of the population are aged over 65 (2001 census) and includes future projections suggesting a decrease by 2.5 per cent by 2011, although older people from BME groups are expected to rise to 19.3 per cent. However, there is limited information about what the Council has done in response to this. The strategy is currently being reviewed to ensure a greater corporate approach to improving quality of life of all older people across all Council services and to enable more robust monitoring.

- 110 The Council with its LSP partners has an established priority to increase the independence of older people and improve preventative services. This is supported in the LAA (for 2006-2009) by a number of targets, the majority of which are on track, although these are mainly related to social care. They include targets for older people helped to live at home, those receiving direct payments, and reductions in the numbers attending A&E as a result of a fall, and emergency hospital admissions. The only area where performance is not on track is items of equipment delivered and adaptations made within target time-periods. The Commission for Social Care Inspection annual assessment in 2007 rated social care services for older people as two-star, with particularly good focus on vulnerable adults. The recent Better Care Higher Standards satisfaction survey also demonstrated a good level of satisfaction with 'Excellent/Good' ratings on virtually all key questions.
- 111 The Council works with partners to improve the economic well being of older people, but outcomes are limited. Through a joint visiting team with the Department of Work and Pensions the Council is helping to maximise take up of benefits. This has increased income for older people by £7.5 million over the last four years. However, the employment rate for those over 50 has declined to 34 per cent which is the fifth lowest in London.
- 112 The Council has a coordinated approach to engagement with older people and uses a variety of communication methods. The primary mechanism for engagement is the Older People's forum which involves older people setting the agenda for development of services. Older people are also well represented at meetings of Community Councils and the Street Watcher scheme and in world café forums. Good use is made of user surveys and a wide range of publications and web-based information for older people, produced with partner agencies. A recent multi-agency seminar involving voluntary sector groups has led to more effective joint arrangements for monitoring and delivering improvements in areas such as out of hospital care and healthy living and ageing.
- 113 The Council is promoting the active ageing agenda through provision of a range of services and activities with partners. It has a programme of 50+ sporting activities, including badminton and short mat bowls and promotes the use of allotments for older people and walking schemes in parks. It also supports Age Concern's Healthy Ageing programme. The Waltham Forest Older People's collaborative website provides information, advice, support and signposting and internet access in libraries. The Council also provides a mobile library service for housebound readers, transport to Walthamstow library and Silver Surfers classes. Inter-generational initiatives are used to increase community cohesion and respect, including discussion groups on gang crime. Distraction burglary is being tackled through a recent crime prevention initiative which included approximately 190 homes with residents over 60 years of age.

- 114** With its partners the Council commissions and delivers a range of services for older people covering the seven dimensions of independence. The Council has increased the priority it gives to support independent living and targets for supporting older people to live independently in the community are being met. Further development of extra care housing, increased floating support provision and continued promotion of direct payments are in train. Resources for this are to come from externalisation of residential care. Increased use of assistive technology and an integrated equipment store are also improving access to support.

Children and young people

- 115** Outcomes for children and young people in Waltham Forest are good. A culture of safeguarding is embedded well across agencies and health priorities are addressed well. Health and safeguarding outcomes show good improvement overall and are mostly in line with or above comparators. Educational outcomes show good improvement and pupils make above average progress. Attainment overall is slightly better than in similar authorities although remaining generally below national figures. Other educational indicators are mostly above those of comparators and nationally. Outcomes enabling young people to contribute to society show significant improvement and are either good or very good overall in comparison to similar authorities and nationally. Outcomes for economic wellbeing are good. Participation in education, employment or training, including for vulnerable groups, has increased substantially and is above national averages. Some achievement rates have risen faster than in similar authorities. Extended services are improving outcomes for vulnerable families well.
- 116** This inspection concurs with the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) judgements that service management is good and that the authority delivers a good level of children's services overall that has good impact across all outcome areas. Strong political and managerial leadership and productive inter-agency partnerships drive improvement. Ambitions are high, needs are well known and good prioritisation, including for prevention, equality and diversity, underpin good strategic planning that takes full account of corporate priorities. Very good engagement with children and young people, very good project management, good financial and staff capability and good performance management strengthen the delivery of services. Value for money is prioritised and efficiency savings are clear and achieved. Corporate parenting is good. Good multi-agency work is setting firm foundations for integrated working. As yet, strategic workforce planning does not fully address the future needs of services, there are gaps in measurable outcomes in some strategic and service plans and some smaller partners are not involved sufficiently well in decision-making.

- 117 Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. Strong corporate commitment, an effective Local Safeguarding Children's Board and innovative work, safeguard children and young people well. A good focus on community safety includes good participation of young people and addresses their concerns about safety in the community. Child protection practice is subject to good quality assurance. Prompt and effective action protects children who are identified as being at risk from significant harm and multi-agency child protection case planning and reviewing is robust. Social care assessments are of variable quality and there are delays in the completion of Initial and Core Assessments. Early support and intervention is good. Strong emphasis on targeted prevention contributes to reducing numbers of young people having to be looked after and effective strategies secure stable placements.
- 118 The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Multi-agency partnerships are strong and effective and there is mainly good access to high quality integrated services. Very good multi-agency work, including with schools, promotes healthy lifestyles. Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS), are good and a number of innovative provisions deliver a fully comprehensive service. The partnership has a good grasp of mental health admissions but there are a few inappropriate admissions of young people under the age of 18 to adult mental health environments. Good and focused attention is given to the mental health needs of most vulnerable groups although access is less good for a few that are particularly hard to reach. Young people with complex needs access well coordinated clinical services and have good access to CAMHS, although there are long delays for some specialist health services.
- 119 The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Children get a good start to their education. Attainment overall is improving at a faster rate than similar authorities and nationally, although higher grade GCSE results remain below national figures. Attendance in secondary schools has improved above that of similar authorities and behaviour is good or better in almost all schools. Looked after children receive good additional support, attend well, make good progress and show satisfactory attainment. For children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, attainment, achievement and progress is good, due in part to a dramatic fall in exclusions of pupils with statements. Good action with partners has improved participation in learning for nearly all BME groups, raising their attainment and closing the gap with their peers. Vulnerable and disabled children and young people have good access to recreation and leisure activities.

- 120** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Consultation with young people, including those who are vulnerable, is very good at strategic level and with individuals. Some excellent initiatives involve children and young people from BME groups and children's rights and advocacy services are outstanding. Good preventative action reduces anti-social behaviour and prevents re-offending and much good and innovative work promotes community cohesion. For children and young people from minority ethnic groups, effective collaboration between voluntary and community organisations and the Council promotes broader wellbeing, notably around prejudicial bullying, faith and values.
- 121** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic wellbeing is good. Childcare provision is matched overall to the needs of families and strengthened support for parents from children's centres enhances their economic potential. Good partnerships within the 14 to 19 strategy have reduced inequalities and improved success rates for vulnerable groups in particular. High numbers remain in learning post 16, and action is underway to address a limited range of learning options for some groups. Effective partnerships with a range of specialist housing providers secure suitable, safe and affordable accommodation for vulnerable groups, including care leavers. Children and young people with learning difficulties and /or disabilities receive good support to achieve independence in adulthood and transitions are managed well.
- 122** The capacity of Council services to improve is good. Service performance has improved significantly from one of the most poorly rated councils in the country six years ago. Good progress has been made in addressing areas for development from the 2007 APA and good actions have addressed recommendations from the inspection of the youth service in 2005. There have been clear benefits to vulnerable groups in particular. Good multi-agency working is establishing firm foundations for fully integrated working and good monitoring of services is informing coherence in strategic evaluation. The people and skills are in place to maintain good provision, although strategic work force planning is not fully comprehensive.

Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for London Borough of Waltham Forest was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 27 May 2008 to 6 June 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.