

Corporate Assessment Report

March 2007



Corporate Assessment

London Borough of Harrow

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

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

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

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

- sustainable communities and transport;
- safer and stronger communities;
- healthier communities;
- older people; and
- children and young people.

- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

- 4 The JAR covers all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report.

Executive summary

- 5 Harrow Council is performing adequately overall, meeting minimum standards.
- 6 Its ambition is for the borough to be 'loved by its residents offering the best of capital and country'. It has a good understanding of its communities and local need and shares this intelligence with partners. It has developed a shared medium term vision for the future but a longer term strategic vision reflecting the distinctive nature of the borough is not clearly articulated. The Council is tackling the immediate financial pressures it faces and developing more sustainable spending plans over the medium term led purposefully by senior councillors. This involves some difficult choices which impacts on plans with partners, some of whom have similar resource problems. The net result is a focus on short term and medium term improvements which are not always challenging or clear.
- 7 The Council is adopting a stronger user focus through the redesign of service delivery such as Access Harrow, its one-stop shop and call centre. It uses a wide range of user surveys to gauge satisfaction at a high level and consults on policy change, though how the Council uses this information in service planning is not always clear. The Council has structures in place to involve users at a strategic level, including for older people, sustainable development and enterprise work; but not all of these are sufficiently representative of the local population. There are fewer examples of users being involved in service monitoring and in reviewing the performance of services.
- 8 Harrow understands the diversity within its communities and has responded with effective changes in some but not all services. The Council has good systems to keep it updated on the profile and diversity of its communities, and regularly monitors local opinion on priorities and levels of satisfaction, including by different ethnic groups. It understands the changing nature of its communities such as the increase in the Somali and Eastern European population. The borough enjoys positive community cohesion and recent projects seek to strengthen this, such as third-party reporting of racial incidents. The Council's service responses to diversity are strongest in its work with schools and children's services. Council staffing figures show a reasonable reflection of the local community though the Council wants to do more. Good work with the voluntary sector and in projects such as Rayners Lane regeneration are also providing for diverse needs. But the Council does not routinely use its data to develop services, and some areas such as leisure do not yet offer mainstream services which respond to new needs.

- 9 The political leadership team provides clear direction but gaps in senior managerial leadership have meant they are more occupied with short term issues than long term strategic direction. It has a clear view of the need to achieve a stable financial position and has taken swift action on plans to achieve this. Portfolio leads bring some useful professional backgrounds but they do not yet provide sound strategic direction in some areas, such as children and young people (CYP) and housing. Managerial leadership is not consistent throughout the Council. The executive management team has suffered significant gaps over the last year, creating additional workloads and delays in organisational change. Leadership is clearest in Children's Services and these provide some of the best examples of using systems such as performance management to drive improvement. Organisational change has not always been effectively led in Harrow, though the Council has learned from previous experience and recent changes have been more successful. Capacity of staff is stretched due to small establishments, rising sickness levels and reduction of posts in some services.
- 10 Current financial capacity is weak. For two years the Council has not met the minimum level of reserves defined by its own policy, and there is little prospect of it doing so in 2007/08. Improving value for money is a top priority for the Council, but the auditor's latest assessment shows that current work to improve the cost and performance relationship has not yet produced an overall improvement. Harrow's recent business partnering exercises have resulted in improved systems and expertise and it is using these to address previous areas of weakness such as procurement. For example, a partnership with Accord MP for highways services is bringing additional expertise for town centre scheme design and planning.
- 11 Overall achievement and outcomes for local people in Harrow are adequate. The contribution of the Council to outcomes for children and young people is adequate overall, with some areas of high achievement such as education attainment. It has shown an ability to target resources on meeting the needs of different areas, for example responding to neighbourhood issues in South Harrow and co-ordinated work to regenerate Rayners Lane. Service improvement is, however, often related to one aspect of service and it can be difficult to see the overall impact the Council wants. For example, performance on the environment is mixed and stretching targets for improvement are not always in place. There remain key challenges in transport congestion and housing in Harrow and in the Council's ability to balance the economic, social and environmental needs of the area. Harrow enjoys low crime rates and has worked with partners to reduce the fear of crime and provide more assurance and support to those most at risk of disadvantage. In other areas of the national shared priorities, older people and health, the Council's work to broaden its approach and refocus its services to contribute to these shared aims is at an early stage.

Areas for improvement

- 12 There are some areas for improvement in the way the Council works.
- 13 The Council should clearly identify the key issues which are most important in delivering its longer-term ambitions and link these to a clear vision which sets out how the Council and partners will maintain and improve the special characteristics of Harrow as a place. To deliver this vision, the Council needs to create a clearer hierarchy of priorities to guide its service planning and define clear outcome goals which are realistic and measurable. The corporate plan needs to make these priorities clear including where financial pressures have led to the creation of lower priorities.
- 14 Councillors need to ensure long term outcomes are clearly defined and understood. Councillors need support in target-setting and the performance management of services and activities.
- 15 The Council should aim for continuous improvement in areas of highest priority and seek to improve its comparative position in these areas to deliver good quality services for local people.
- 16 The Council needs to use systematically its range of profile data and regular public polling to inform service changes necessary to respond to changing needs in the borough.
- 17 With partners, the Council should strengthen its focus on the wider well-being of older people, by drawing up a clear and agreed strategy to deliver well-being across services and by providing officer leadership to drive its delivery.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	2
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	1
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	2
Overall corporate assessment score**		2
*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

- 18 Harrow is the twelfth largest borough in London, with a population of 219,000 and an area of 5,047 hectares (50 square kms). It has an average density of 41 people per hectare which is below the London average of 46, but above the Outer London average of 35 people per hectare.
- 19 Harrow is ethnically and culturally diverse, with over 41 per cent of the population from ethnic minority groups. The Asian community (consisting of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other Asians) makes up 30 per cent of the borough's total population, of which Indians comprise 21 per cent. There is a sizeable Irish population, with a lower proportion of black Caribbean and black African people. The most recent arrivals are from Africa, such as Somalis, but also include smaller numbers from southern Asia such as Tamils and from Eastern Europe. The different groups have distinct settlement patterns. The white population is most highly concentrated in the north and west of the borough. Asians are well-established in the southern part, while black groups are more dispersed and spread through the south and middle of the borough. The borough is the most religiously diverse region in the United Kingdom, with a high density of Hindus across the borough and a significant Jewish population in the north.
- 20 The borough's population is forecast to grow to around 220,000 by 2021 and this growth is projected to be mostly in the BME population.
- 21 Another feature of the borough's population is the characteristics of its older people households. These comprise 22 per cent of all households, largely based to the west and north of the borough. Half of all single occupancy households (thus 13 per cent of households) are headed by older people. Predominantly in the north of the borough, this section of the population is often typified as 'asset rich, cash poor'. Although the overall proportion of people over 65 is not as high as nationally, it is slightly higher than the London average. In Harrow the proportion of over 60's is due to increase by approximately one third by 2023, so that this group will then comprise almost one quarter of the total population.
- 22 Overall there are low levels of deprivation in Harrow, with the borough ranking 232 out of 354 in the country (1 is most deprived). However, there are extremes - while the borough has some of the country's most affluent wards, for example Stanmore Park and Hatch End, some wards such as Marlborough and Wealdstone are among the country's most deprived. Overall Harrow is a prosperous borough with high levels of income and low levels of general unemployment and of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The Council

- 23 Harrow Council is led by a majority Conservative administration elected in May 2006. Since the election the Conservatives have 37 councillors, Labour have 24 councillors and there are two Liberal Democrats. Before May 2006, no party had overall control of the Council but it was led by the then-largest group which was Labour. The borough has 21 wards with three councillors in each.
- 24 The Council is managed through a Chief Executive and three Executive Directors responsible for People First (children and young people, adult social care and leisure and life long learning); Urban Living (environment including cleansing and waste, planning, transport and highways, community safety, housing and property); and Business Development (finance, human resources, performance and policy, revenues and benefits, and the Business Transformation Project (BTP)). Each directorate has a number of service leads at Director level, with decentralised strategic and financial support. The Council has been without a permanent Chief Executive since March 2006. The current structure is due to change. The Executive Director posts are to be removed and replaced by a Director tier under the Chief Executive.
- 25 Harrow's net revenue budget is £254 million and the average council tax level is £1,300 per annum. Due to its low levels of overall deprivation Harrow receives lower government grant compared to nearby councils and attracts lower than average specific and special grants. Its council tax is high compared to other London councils. The Council needs to reduce its spending by £19 million in 2006/07 to both break even and start to increase its reserves, which are low at £1.8 million and below its stated policy of having a minimum £3.5 million reserve. The Council's medium term budget strategy for the next three years reflects the need to reinstate an acceptable level of reserves.
- 26 The Council is part of the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP) which comprises key partner agencies as well as the voluntary sector in the borough. It has recently agreed a new Community Plan for 2006-2020 and is implementing a Local Area Agreement (LAA) through the partnership, which has now had its first six month review.

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

Ambition

- 27 Harrow is performing adequately in this area. It has a good understanding of its communities and local need and mechanisms to share this intelligence with partners. It demonstrates effective community leadership. It has developed a shared medium term vision for the future but a longer term strategic vision reflecting the distinctive nature of the borough is not clearly articulated. The immediate financial pressures faced by the council and some of its partners drive a short term approach which is realistic but at the expense of articulation of a clear longer term strategic vision.
- 28 The Council has a good understanding of its communities. For example it has effective methods of assessing local need through its detailed vitality profiles which map a good range of demographic and outcome information at ward level across the borough. It regularly assesses local views through consultation with a range of key stakeholders and the community, and uses annual quality of life surveys to assess changes in public views. This approach was used again recently in revising the Community Strategy, thus ensuring that the strategy is rooted in local people's perceptions of need.
- 29 The Council shares this information with its partners and has used it to good effect. For example it targeted regeneration projects, such as in Wealdstone, and the location of the first children's centres, based on an analysis of need and levels of deprivation. Profiles are applied also in community safety work to address issues such as cohesion. This provides for effective local consultation and identifying the right improvement.
- 30 The Council's consultation arrangements are adequate. The Council has recently consulted effectively on budget savings to deal with its finances, and taken extra steps to explain directly to the public the difficult choices it is making between competing demands. Recent feedback on social care changes reflects this increased emphasis. There are good examples of involving local people, including those at risk of disadvantage, such as the Rayners Lane housing renewal programme and involving young people in the re-design of parks. However, the Council does not consistently feed back on the changes made as a result of consultation. There is therefore a risk that citizens are uncertain that their voices are being heard.
- 31 Engagement with BME and groups at risk of disadvantage is variable. For example representation of BME groups in the cohesion management group of the HSP is good but the older peoples group has low representation in the context of high proportion of BME locally and a growing older population limiting the effectiveness of planning improvement.

- 32** Harrow has developed a medium term vision with partners but does not articulate a clear vision of Harrow in the long term. The new community strategy was developed promptly with partners following the change in administration. Its overall ambition is for the borough to be 'loved by its residents offering the best of capital and country'. This is supported by 14 longer term ambitions which place most emphasis on the sustainability of Harrow's communities by offering improved opportunities for living, working and leisure in the borough and avoiding any decline to a 'dormitory' borough. The plan recognises the context of the borough including high level goals on reducing health inequalities, strengthening cohesion and reducing pockets of deprivation. The high level goals are clear but broadly stated so do not fully reflect the distinctive nature of the borough. These goals are to be delivered over the next four to six years by specific aims in each theme of: Sustainable Communities; Stronger Communities; Safer Harrow; Healthier Harrow and Young Harrow. These aims include some challenging objectives, for example in relation to cohesion. Other objectives are less challenging, reflecting the financial position of key partners and their short term financial constraints. For example the partnership decided very few stretch targets would be pursued under the healthier communities and older people block of the LAA. The community strategy therefore provides a shared sense of direction and realistic ambition for the medium term but does not articulate a comprehensive longer term vision for Harrow.
- 33** The Council's corporate plan reflects the key areas of the community strategy but it too is broad in nature and addresses improvement in the short to medium term. Whilst improvements include some significant plans such as the Town Centre redevelopment, they also cover a range of shorter term, localised improvement and some less defined plans across a broad range of issues. In addition the weak financial position of both the Council and its partners has restricted ambitions for some services so that the aim is to only deliver statutory services to those who most need them. As a result it is not clear how the various elements of the plan come together to deliver a clearly understood ambition for the whole Borough in the longer term.
- 34** The lack of long term strategic focus contributes to variability in the level of ambition and specificity of major Council strategies. For example, in education there are some challenging targets for improving achievement in schools in the longer term. In contrast, waste and transport strategies do not express clear long direction through a commitment to challenging targets. The transport plan has clear targets for the future through London wide planning but the Council is doubtful these can be achieved putting emphasis is on shorter term actions such as increasing the speed of traffic at key points in the borough. Waste includes impressive challenge for increasing recycling rates, but not for areas which could support this aim, such as the target for access to kerbside recycling, currently reflecting worst 25 per cent performance. This lack of long term strategic focus creates a gap in planning to achieve the Council's ambitions.

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- 35 The Council in its work with partners in the HSP demonstrates effective community leadership. It has well structured and integrated decision making bodies which involves key statutory partners as well as the voluntary and community sectors. The partnership has matured beyond a useful information exchange and is now working more collaboratively around the joint commitments in the LAA. Agreeing a compact has given a sound basis for involving the voluntary sector, which helps the partnership's smooth running, for example when allocating resources. The Council is taking a visible role in community leadership through its new priority action teams (PATs) which are ward-based and provide funding for local improvement although it is too early to determine the impact these have made. Leadership on regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods demonstrate good impact on quality of life.

Prioritisation

- 36 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Its priorities link with key areas of the community strategy and reflect local people's views. It has given priority to improving its financial position and identifying more areas of saving but also to increasing efficiency. It has made clear choices, such as reductions in funding for older people's services. Some priority areas are supported by well developed plans like community safety but others vary such as the 'empowering young people' priority, and all reflect a mix of short and medium term improvements. There have been some good responses to meeting diverse needs. However the system for service planning is complex which reduces the clarity of action planning. The revised MTFs indicates a further changed emphasis on eligibility for service provision which is a further development on the priorities set out in the corporate plan.
- 37 The Council has clear plans to address its weak financial position and this is a high priority understood by councillors, senior management and staff. It is planning a sustainable budget for the next three years so that reserves can build to the minimum level. This priority occupies the political leadership and senior staff to a significant degree. They have put resources into progressing key review areas such as changing organisational structures, so that the budget overspend can be reduced as quickly as possible. Increased staff training in financial awareness and management also supports this high priority area.
- 38 The corporate plan clearly sets out the Council's medium-term actions in support of its priorities and the pledges made in May 2006 and links with key areas of ambition in the revised community strategy, reflecting residents' views. The current six priorities are; Making Harrow safe, sound and supportive; Tackling waste and giving real value for money; Protecting our precious environment; Empowering Harrow youth getting Harrow moving; and Giving more choice in sport, leisure and amenities.

- 39** The absence of a longer term focus for improvement in Harrow means that the priorities comprise a collection of short term and medium term improvements with several areas in which strategies to support priorities are still in development. Priorities in addressing safety and increasing efficiency represent the clearest and most robust priorities with clear plans and outcome targets. Priorities within environment and the empowering young people themes are not fully supported by clear strategies or clear joint strategies such as the aims to increase youth facilities and develop an open space strategy. Giving more choice in sport, leisure and amenities includes some specific plans such as the new Gayton library but the overall strategy for future provision in sport and amenities is at a formative stage. The absence of robust plans limits the Council's ability to deliver on its stated priorities.
- 40** The medium term financial strategy reflects the Council's plans to improve its financial position, taking some difficult decisions but trying to accommodate local people's views. It seeks to stabilise its finances not solely through service reductions but also greater efficiencies such as reducing back office costs and rationalising office accommodation. There is evidence the Council takes account of local people's views in devising its savings programme. For example with the reductions in care costs for older people the Council intends to use consultation results to refine exactly how the restructuring of subsidies will be applied. The Council's search for savings and efficiencies is not confined to services previously identified as low priority. Children's health and social care services will be an early review in 2007/08. This will determine a clear savings target, reflecting the Council's position that it will meet its statutory duties but make savings on more discretionary areas.
- 41** Older people and the provision of adult social care is a lower priority for the Council. The new political leadership has stated clearly that it does not intend to provide for those who can afford to make their own choices. Planned reviews of the eligibility for care services signal the Council's direction on future levels of provision. Consultation exercises on social care have made the Council's direction more explicit to stakeholders and this is now reflected in savings plans. However, these lower priorities are not explicit in the corporate plan so Council policy will not yet be clear to local people.

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- 42** There is a lack of clear outcome targets in plans supporting priorities. For example some important local targets are missing such as Access Harrow, which aims to improve call waiting but lacks clear targets to do so. There is measurement of activities but few targets for levels of customer service. The corporate plan includes a number of broad objectives with few targets, for example 'ensure proper funding of Harrow's open spaces'. CPA-related targets and standards steer many areas of service delivery such as adult social care. These provide a useful basis for setting annual priorities but place more emphasis on national priorities rather than achieving a balance between local and national issues. Detailed plans in community safety provide most locally-derived targets as well as cohesion targets in the LAA. The detailed action plans and targets to deliver the revised community plan have not yet been drawn up. There are some key outcome gaps therefore in guiding delivery of the Council's priorities making it difficult for staff to understand if they have achieved what is wanted.
- 43** The Council's service planning structures are complex and the required financial resources are not clearly specified. A complex structure of plans links the community plan and corporate plan through directorate and group level plans to team plans. The higher-level plans generally reflect the corporate priorities but not all team plans reflect these explicitly, so that it is not clear how they contribute to delivery. For example, team plans in community safety are fairly clear but not those in some children's services and social care teams. These layers of plans are confusing. As a result, some staff find it difficult to use them to drive improvement. Although service planning is linked to the financial planning cycle, the resources needed for some outcome areas are not specified or consistent in plans such as in Children's Services and Urban Living. This leaves it unclear whether these are funded or the costs understood.
- 44** Service planning which reflects the diverse needs of the local community is good in several areas but not consistent across the Council. There are very good examples of work to address disadvantage such as work with refugees in children's services and initiatives on meeting diverse needs of local disabled people. Libraries provision has met BME needs such as materials for the Tamil community. Work with the voluntary and community sector has also provided for diverse need such as the 'Blossom' group supporting Asian women's health through fitness. A more strategic and systematic approach on diversity is called for in mainstream service planning such as in adults social care. Involvement of new user groups in leisure is starting to identify appropriate service responses to diverse needs.

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

Capacity

- 45 The Council is performing inadequately in this area - below minimum requirements. The level of the Council's financial resources is weak with inadequate reserves in a climate of challenge over financial responsibilities with the PCT. Managerial leadership has not been consistent and staffing levels are stretched in several areas. The workforce plan does not have SMART targets for future staffing across the Council and there are skill gaps, for example in procurement. Work on increasing value for money has not yet been successful, and risk management is at a formative stage. Private sector partnerships and improved use of voluntary sector partnerships add to the Council's capacity to deliver its priorities. However, overall the Council's capacity is insufficient to achieve its priorities.
- 46 The capacity of the Council and its principal partners to achieve its plans is restricted by its weak financial position. The Council needs to achieve savings of £19 million in 2006/07. For two years it has failed to achieve its minimum reserves policy, and it is unlikely to do so next year. The PCT also has financial difficulties, needing to save £13 million this year. This has led to the Council and PCT re-examining their funding responsibilities, which is putting additional pressure on the Council's financial plans. Plans for more pooled budgets with the PCT have not been implemented and work to develop a joint commissioning strategy in children's services has been delayed. The impact of the reduced financial capacity is already evident in service delivery such as environment services, and further savings will affect work on safer neighbourhoods.
- 47 The management of change to improve capacity in Harrow has not been effective in key areas. Key priorities to improve financial stability and value for money have not been achieved over the medium term. There have been negative staff reactions to a slow reorganisation which impacted on the staff survey in 2005 with no appreciable improvement from that of 2003. Managerial leadership is weakened in the absence of a permanent Chief Executive, creating additional demands on senior councillors to manage short term pressures such as the budget. This means that the Council's capacity to develop a strategic direction has been reduced at a time when it is most needed to inform the budgeting process and ensure continuity in delivering its highest priorities.

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- 48** The capacity of the Council's senior political leadership is mixed, with strong financial awareness, strategic thinking and attention to public communications by the leadership team but under-developed strategic direction provided by newly appointed executive councillors to children's services and housing. The defined portfolios reflect the Council's priorities and there are clear officer links. Portfolio holders bring useful knowledge and experience, such as in customer service, but currently there is a mix of operational and strategic contributions from councillors which means roles between managers and councillors are not clearly differentiated. Relations between officers and councillors are professional and positive, allowing the Council to now respond purposefully to the financial position. The work of the Standards Committee promotes the adoption of high ethical standards, and councillors and officers work effectively within the ethical framework. Councillor development opportunities rightly focus on governance issues and induction but do not currently cover other complex areas of their role such as performance management, which lessens internal challenge.
- 49** Staff capacity is insufficient to meet priorities. Despite some good work on staff development, the Council's staffing resources are restricted. The size of teams is small in some areas so staff can be overstretched such as in speech and language therapy, and delays in filling posts have slowed development work, for example in recreation and sports. Access Harrow has modified staffing levels due to financial pressures. Worsening sickness absence rates reduce capacity. The Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) assesses prospects for improvement in adult social care as uncertain in due to the vulnerability of resources and the slow pace of improvement.
- 50** The Council's use of private sector partnerships to increase capacity is good. The highways partnership with AccordMP has increased strategic as well as operational capacity. The BTP partnership with Capita has brought expertise such as good project management, support to implement major IT enhancements as well as helping to define future strategy for example, by examining the potential for future web-based services. The partnership is helping build expertise in the in-house procurement team following inconsistent performance in successful procurement. The Council is in the process of seeking a partnering arrangement for property management which will help support its priorities on efficiency such as improving performance against the Decent Homes Standard (DHS).
- 51** The Council is moving to a more strategic use of grants to support the community plan priorities, and its use of the voluntary sector is effective in places. It has a new compact with the voluntary sector and agreed longer-term Service Level Agreements with some groups. The home visiting scheme with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Age Concern has led to increasing benefit take-up by older people. Partners report some problems in locating the right lead officer in the Council and that the level of join-up between services is not strong; but they consider that - once identified - staff are helpful and responsive.

- 52** Risk management is embedded and effective at strategic level and in high level directorate planning, but is not yet fully extended and embedded at service level. Risk management in partnership arrangements is embryonic in some high-risk areas such as with the PCT, but has been introduced in other partnership areas such as the BTP agreement with Capita. This inconsistency in risk assessment increases the risk of exposure to service and financial failures.
- 53** Value for money is judged as adequate, meeting minimum standards by the external auditor. It is a high priority for the Council but efforts to increase overall value for money as measured by the external rating have not resulted in improvement. The Council has recently developed some value for money indicators as a result of the work it commissioned to target improvement. These mainly measure the relationship between satisfaction and cost. Monitoring at the end of quarter two indicated that several of these were underperforming. The Council is working to achieve better value for money such as the through the AccordMP partnership.
- 54** Harrow has a good basis for ensuring equality of access to its services through its policies and procedures and has achieved level 3 of the Equality Standard. This approach is starting to impact on Council plans. It is now using equality impact assessments in service planning. For example, the Youth Justice Plan was influenced by a race audit and an equalities impact assessment of choice-based lettings was undertaken to ensure equality of access. The Council subsequently provided extra training for voluntary groups to support applications on behalf of local BME applicants. It provides interpretation services although overall there are limited out of hour's services available. The Council's work under the race equality scheme has resulted in support for BME older people with physical disabilities, expanded specialist day services for Asian elders, and specialist meals for BME elders.
- 55** The Council has established a good overall employee strategy, but this is not yet complemented by directorate level plans and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) targets to support workforce planning. The Strategy for People provides a clear vision for the future which fits well with the corporate plan, and several supporting projects are planned such as the equal pay review and succession planning strategy. Detailed progress is evident in some areas of staff shortage such as the implementation of the children's social care workforce strategy, but there is no overarching strategy for children's services. Urban Living has made less progress in workforce planning and has difficulties in recruiting staff such as planners. This means the Council does not have a clear view of what staffing requirements it is working towards in the long term limiting effective service and financial planning.

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- 56** Overall use of IT to support the Council's priorities is effective, and management systems are now starting to support service delivery. IT developments such as Frameworki used in children's and adult social care and the HOST domiciliary care system have led to user benefits. Access Harrow is supported by a customer relationship management system which has the potential to deal even more effectively with customer enquiries. Implementation of major systems as part of the BTP programme is proceeding to plan, and the Council provides good support to staff to enable change.

Performance management

- 57** The Council is performing adequately in this area. A clear performance management framework is in place across the Council and applied very well in some areas. The framework provides timely information which the Council is using more effectively and, with greater internal challenge, some very weak service areas have improved as a result. The overall pace of improvement is slow however, due to unambitious improvement targets. Performance management with partners is developing well. Councillor scrutiny and challenge of performance is not fully effective and external challenge is limited, with few examples of service user involvement although some new arrangements are being set up.
- 58** The corporate performance management framework operates across the Council using a system of scorecards to provide clear links and accountability for corporate objectives down through directorate plans to team level and individual plans to steer performance. The Council aims for all staff to have personal targets under the Individual Performance Appraisal and Development (IPAD) system by the end of year. At September 2006 it had achieved 61 per cent coverage against a target of 80 per cent. The Council has good IT systems in place to enable more effective monitoring and analysis of performance, at service level and also by geography, allowing performance to be compared between areas of the borough.
- 59** The framework has been implemented with good effect in some areas. For example in CYP performance management of the Children and Young People's Plan is based on a scorecard for each outcome monitored by the relevant sub-group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and by the CYPSP itself. In children's social care, reports monitor performance, show trends over time, benchmark against national comparators and good practice, and identify action to improve performance where necessary. With clear managerial leadership the framework is utilised fully and helps prevent previous problems of slipping to unacceptable levels of poor performance.

- 60 The Council has increased its determination to use performance information together with greater organisational challenge to improve its weakest areas of performance. As a result this has driven improvement in benefits (which was at risk of intervention by DWP) and children's and adults' social care. The system provides clear and timely top-level performance information which identifies under-performance against target. Quarterly 'Strategic Performance Reports' are prepared using a traffic light system that identifies key areas for improvement and are considered by Cabinet as well as the Corporate Management Team (CMT). Targets are also monitored at Improvement Board level, on weekly, monthly and quarterly bases as necessary. Performance measures include BVPIs and progress on key projects, and are aligned with corporate priorities. These mechanisms have been effective in driving improvement and provide a sound basis for managing performance across the Council.
- 61 The level of improvement can vary however within one service and the overall pace of improvement of the Council's services has been slow, resulting in static service assessments in major areas for four years. Performance against the latest basket of indicators for all single tier councils shows 63 per cent of PIs between 2004/05 and 2005/06 have improved. However, this is below the average for all councils at 67 per cent and performance against the Council's own targets for priority areas is mixed although there is some improvement from a low base. While the Council is taking action on its most critical areas of under-performance its targets to improve elsewhere are not stretching. The level of challenge in targets is further constrained by the tighter financial position. This means that local people will not benefit from a range of high performing services in the short to medium term.
- 62 The Council has effective performance management arrangements with partners for the LAA and systems are developing in key partnership groups of the HSP. For example, the CYSP is now receiving progress reports against priorities though some targets and baseline are still being developed. Council officers and councillors meet with the police on a fortnightly basis and review information down to ward level, as the basis for active monitoring of performance and assist tasking. The framework for the new Community Plan is developing, awaiting the formation of medium term plans and objectives. The Council's new business warehouse aims to allow partners to input their data on performance directly into the Council's system in the future to help support greater joint review.
- 63 Performance management by councillors is not fully effective. A key aim of the scrutiny committees is service improvement but it is not clear what impact local scrutiny has made. For example, while the Hearsay review led to a new community engagement strategy it is not clear whether this has made the Council's engagement more effective. There is mixed knowledge of some service areas which limits councillor challenge to officers and partners, such as in sustainable communities and housing. Performance monitoring information is provided but there is lack of skill in interpreting the content. Portfolio holders are now involved in target-setting and are giving increased attention to public-facing performance, but in places targets have been set by officers so direction in improvement has not been fully shared. Without a clear input from councillors on what is required, performance cannot be effectively managed.

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

- 64** Involving users in service monitoring and review is under-developed. Some services involve users at a strategic level such as the adult and social care management group of the HSP. Some of these have made an impact such as a better links between housing and adult social care. User forums have recently been set up to provide feedback on services in arts and culture and the Council has a new compact with tenant and leaseholder representatives but these are as yet untested. The Council gathers user feedback in many services and through its annual MORI polls, but it is difficult to assess how this shapes performance targets or how it is used to gain more localised perspectives and steer improvement.

What has been achieved?

- 65** The Council is performing adequately this area. Council priorities and those of the Community Plan and LAA reflect local and national priorities and shared priorities, but progress against them and national performance indicators is mixed.
- 66** There are positive signs that the introduction of the LAA is increasing the effectiveness of joint working against shared priorities. However delivery of national and local priorities is often based on short term plans and objectives. The lack of key outcome measures such as with congestion means it is difficult to judge progress. In this context, performance has improved for 63 per cent of PIs between 2004/05 and 2005/06. However, this is below the average for all councils, while performance against the Council's own targets for priority areas is mixed and some improvement is from a low base. Furthermore, since the introduction of the CPA rating scheme four years ago, assessments show no improvement in the children, adults and environment blocks, and adult social services are still subject to intensive improvement support by CSCl.
- 67** Achievement in sustainable communities demonstrates some innovative work and good outcomes in some areas of the borough and good improvement in recycling, but other improvement is limited and major challenges remain in transport congestion and housing. Performance on safer and stronger communities remains good and fear of crime has reduced, but it is too early to see clear outcomes from some local initiatives. There are some improving health outcomes, but the Council's contribution to these except for supportive work in schools is not clearly evident. Older people are not a priority so while there are some services available there is no clear emphasis on preventative work to maintain a high quality of life. The Council's contribution to outcomes for children and young people are adequate overall with some high achieving areas such as education.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 68** The Council's performance in achieving sustainable communities and transport has had some positive results but overall outcomes are mixed and some key challenges in the borough are yet to be met. The Council demonstrates some innovative work and good outcomes to regenerate neighbourhoods, there has been a significant improvement in recycling, but outcomes in relation to transport and housing are mixed.

- 69 There is some evidence of Harrow knitting together its economic, environmental, and housing work to create a sustainable community, particularly in physical projects. One example of joined-up working is the Wealdstone centre, where the sale of land resulted in new affordable housing, a new library, youth centre, and healthy living centre. Another is the Rayners Lane redevelopment which involved housing and environment improvement but also set up a local labour and construction scheme. These projects demonstrate effective working with a range of partners, and major improvements for local communities and the life chances of people at risk of disadvantage.
- 70 A focus on open space builds on the work to use parks more constructively as a leisure opportunity and facility for young people but also build public confidence that they are safe to enjoy. Latest national surveys indicate comparatively low satisfaction with the Council's parks and open spaces as well as most leisure facilities except for libraries. The Council's own survey this year indicated residents were more positive about access to nature and parks but more critical of sports and leisure facilities. The condition of footpaths, now the public's top priority, remains good with good disability access.
- 71 Transport congestion is a high priority of the Council and local people but clear improvement is not yet evident. Car ownership is high with lower than average use of public transport, cycling or walking compared to London overall. Recent schemes reflect the new administration's priority on reducing congestion and lower focus on cycling and road safety measures such as zoning. As yet, however, the Council can not demonstrate improvements such as reduced school car journeys, road priority to public transport or regeneration which seeks to change transport patterns. This is also a product of the lack of outcome measures to assess if the Council is achieving what it set out to do. Some important schemes to improve travel flow are underway involving good partnership working such as improving a major bottleneck at Petts Hill Bridge, controlled parking zones, and better co-ordination of streetworks by utilities to reduce the need for trenches and thus disruption. Road safety performance is good but the condition of principal roads is below average nationally although better against London boroughs.

- 72 The Council's progress in addressing the housing needs of residents of Harrow is mixed. The Housing Strategy 2002-2007 aims to increase the availability of affordable homes for local people. It outlines how the Council will ensure new homes via the planning system, engage the private sector in re-using existing private sector property, and make better use of social stock to free up existing affordable housing for those in need. Latest data shows the Council has not met delivered on its preferred ratio of new affordable to other homes, nor met its targets to provide larger, 4+ bed properties. Only three became available for rent in 2005 for 367 families on the waiting list. However the Council is continuing to work towards these stated aims and there are additional larger properties in the pipeline up until 2010 to address local need. There has been progress on more shared ownership schemes to address key worker shortages and the first units built under the new policy are coming through at Honeypot Lane. Completion of affordable homes has increased this year and use of brownfield redevelopment is good. The Council is providing better information on housing options to support those looking for homes and its homelessness service performs well overall. The Council has made slow progress towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). It is reviewing its housing plans following a tenant vote to keep the Council as landlord, and is hoping to increase its capacity to deal with DHS by use of a partnering agreement. In line with other out of London boroughs, the waiting list remains high: an estimated 1,900 existing households on the housing waiting list cannot afford market housing. Challenges remain in meeting the Council's aims for housing.
- 73 Harrow is working to promote business, job creation and skills in its overall ambition to avoid it becoming a dormitory area but the impact of this is mixed or at an early stage. The Council provides effective vocational training, supported by a good 14-19 education and training policy and good work experience scheme with 2,000 work experience placements made each year. The new Skills Centre provides enhanced opportunities for vocational training. Retention and pass rates are generally good, but poor for work based learning. The town centre strategy shows good links between improving transport hubs, housing, education (such as the new Harrow College) and retail alongside issues such as improved access for people with disabilities. Planning service performance has worsened in comparative terms with performance on major applications, vital to supporting local development worsening in absolute and comparative terms.

- 74 There is a mixed picture of achievement in the areas of waste and a clean environment. Recycling rates have improved significantly and are ahead of target, but the future long term direction on waste management is not clear. The recycling rate has improved from 19 to 27 per cent (against a target of 24 per cent) between 2004/05 and 2005/06. The 'slash the trash' campaign effectively linked environmental and social aims, and 65 per cent of Harrow residents think recycling has improved in the last three years. The Council accepts that it badly managed the introduction of its new refuse collection scheme in summer 2006, and had to find significant extra resources to respond to complaints. Recycling targets remain high, but the target for access to kerbside recycling was lowered and performance is now in the lowest performing group. The amount of waste collected has improved though is in the worst performing group and latest targets are less stretching than actual performance. The standard of cleanliness in Harrow's streets fell in 2005/06 and is amongst the worst performing group. Public satisfaction has increased in the latest national survey in late 2006 although the level of satisfaction is low compared to other boroughs. This reinforces the overall unclear direction on the environment in Harrow, as performance had dropped before the Council reduced the level of service.

Safer and stronger communities

- 75 Performance in safer and stronger communities shows some positive results in the context of low crime and some improvement on local priorities. There has been a reduction in the fear of crime and concerns about indicators of anti-social behaviour have dropped. Outcomes as a result of recent investments in local and neighbourhood working are not yet clear. There has been improvement in several crime priorities though progress to achieve the PSA1 target, a CDRP target, is not on track. Levels of cohesion are positive in a climate of changing communities. The partnership can respond well to changes in crime levels and types and has produced some good schemes to increase safety and assurance. Work on accident prevention is not yet co-ordinated across the Council and partners.
- 76 The Council's understanding of crime and the fear of crime is clear and reflected as a priority in the Corporate Plan, Community Plan and LAA targets. The local CDRP, Safer Harrow, is a management group in the HSP structure and an effective delivery mechanism, The Council's partnership with the police is strong and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams being established will increase local visibility and aim to improve problem solving, intelligence and responsiveness through joint tasking. The Council shows good commitment to community safety priorities by funding posts to support projects to combat anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and hate crime.

- 77 Harrow enjoys low rates of crime overall and local people feel safer. CDRP partners can evidence some reductions in levels of crime and an understanding and a strategy for addressing fear of crime levels. The CDRP performs well in four out of six national crime priorities which continue to improve and significant improvement has been achieved in local priorities such as burglary. The partnership is not on target to reduce crime levels in its PSA1 target of 15 per cent. Robbery is the biggest problem - latest available figures show this is increasing and the borough ranks among the poorest performers on all comparison groups. The targeted use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders on illegal DVD selling in the town centre and joint work with trading standards shows an emphasis on dealing with regular nuisance crime. The public consider that most forms of anti-social behaviour are less of a problem than three years ago. However, the Council's recent reductions to area working and street cleaning budgets will make it difficult to sustain its joined-up approach.
- 78 The Council is keen to promote partnership working with the police, and has made some positive impacts in service delivery to residents. Innovative projects have resulted such as Borough Beat involving council staff volunteers, the Sanctuary Project and Miss Dorothy.com (to support families who are victims of domestic violence), and the Community TV initiative. The Safer Neighbourhood Teams are being rolled-out ahead of schedule and are supported at local ward level, as are joint approaches to tackling anti-social behaviour. The impact of the local teams is not yet established. The CDRP recognises the importance of communicating effectively with local residents, and is examining joint approaches to funding the Council magazine.
- 79 Sustaining community cohesion is a priority in the community strategy. Outcome measures show a mixed level of performance, but a number of arrangements are being put in place to support local cohesion. Measures of BME and non BME communities feeling positive about their neighbourhoods are consistent at 61 per cent. Attitudes to younger people are less positive. Three quarters of residents consider they have been the victim of some form of anti-social behaviour and nuisance from teenagers was cited most often. Levels of racial incidents (BVPI 174) and those which have led to action (BVPI 175) are in the worst performing group compared nationally. The newly-launched third party reporting scheme will help reveal the true level of incidents as measured by (BVPI 174) but the Council's target to improve on the action taken is not challenging, leaving it amongst the worst performing group. The HSP's Community Cohesion management group involves a range of representatives from different BME communities, including some of the newest groups, and its work is supported by good systems and data sources. The Council is taking a more corporate approach through a new community development strategy, community development worker and new portfolio holder.

- 80 Performance in reducing drugs and alcohol abuse is around average, with 57 per cent of drug users remaining in treatment for at least 12 weeks. Targets to get drug users into treatment showed good performance in 2005/06 and targets for problem drug users exceeded. The Council participates effectively in this work, the Drugs Action Team is co-located with other CDRP services, and it jointly commissions pooled treatment budgets with the PCT. The National Treatment Agency has commented favourably on the partnership working. The Council has made positive use of its new licensing powers, has introduced an alcohol exclusion zone in the town centre and runs training in licensing issues. The result is a reduction in alcohol-related crime.
- 81 The Council has a number of good approaches to preventing accidents but there is scope for strengthening accident prevention across council services. Good multi-agency preventative work is targeted towards families living in areas with higher rates of childhood accidents. Road safety performance has met targets well for some time. Preventative work with older people is not a high priority but targeted fire checks in homes of over 65's are available. The new Telecare grant will provide support for about 20 people suffering dementia or at risk of falling. Voluntary sector work has added services such as the handyman scheme to reduce hazards and prevent accidents at home.
- 82 The Council has put serviceable emergency planning arrangements in place, which it has tested through Exercise Adelaide, and has undertaken risk assessments. It is part of the West London Resilience Forum and has a mutual aid agreement with councils in the West Midlands. Business continuity planning is underway, but the business continuity strategy is yet to be agreed by the Council and plans have not been completed in all areas although services are prioritised by level of risk.

Healthier communities

- 83 There are some positive health outcomes in Harrow and LAA performance is good but the Council's contribution to health outcomes overall is not yet clearly evident. With its partners the Council is developing greater priority for the health agenda as part of the new Community Plan. The previous plan set the scene for addressing local needs but was a collection of individual partners' strategies rather than a joint approach, so that many actions on health were National Health Service (NHS) responsibilities.
- 84 Overall the local population is a comparatively healthy one, with deaths from cancer and chronic heart disease (CHD) falling and within target, and there is good GP provision locally. However the local profile of Harrow shows a high prevalence of diabetes (the second highest nationally) and CHD among its BME communities. The emerging integrated health strategy and associated well-being strategy are aiming to reduce these problems by promoting healthier lifestyles via diet and exercise. The strategy recognises that more community-based health training through volunteers and front line staff could help address these problems.

- 85 The Council's role and input into improving the health of local communities has not been fully effective or integrated across its plans. An emphasis on health is clearest for children and young people. There is good collaboration between the PCT and schools in health assessments and promotions and healthy eating, and there is good engagement with young people on sexual health services. Progress on achieving the Decent Homes Standard is slow, while the energy efficiency of council housing is showing some improvement but from a low base. The Council is reviewing how its own strategies such as sports and recreation can support the wider review with partners of the priorities for integrated health work. To date, it has not made a clear contribution and impact on the healthier agenda.
- 86 However, outcomes against local health priorities are on track or performing well. Key health priorities identified in the LAA include reducing smoking, increasing breastfeeding rates and reducing obesity levels. The partnership is on track to meet its stretch targets for both the level of sign-up to smoke-free homes and numbers of four-week smoking quitters. Targets to reduce obesity are also on track, especially increasing levels of active participation in exercise which is in the highest Sport England group.
- 87 Work to reduce health inequalities and meet diverse needs is not yet effective. Life expectancy has improved overall from a good level but work to address health inequalities such as differences in ward level life expectancy is not yet showing results. Infant mortality improved in 2003 but is high in comparison to regional and national rates, and reflects the diversity in Harrow where low birth weight is common in some BME communities. There is some provision to meet diverse needs such as dedicated health visitors for asylum seekers, and children's centres sited in the areas of highest need. Extended schools offer their local communities parenting support, including accessing health advice and services.
- 88 Although rates of teenage pregnancy in Harrow are relatively low, the rate of increase is one of the highest nationally which means the national target is unlikely to be achieved. The Council provides supported accommodation for young mothers, and practical and social help is available through targeted groups with effective links between agencies. Further developments are underway to support children with special needs, such as through children's centres, but families with disabled children do not routinely receive co-ordinated family-centred assessment and services.

Older people

- 89 The Council's approach to older people's services does not yet extend beyond care services. Services are currently too focused on over-65's requiring health and social care support. However, councillors, partners and the Council's senior managers recognise the need to improve and widen the services for older people as far as resources permit. The Council has a strong partnership with the PCT and voluntary sector, and clear governance arrangements to deliver the community strategy and LAA outcomes which are aligned with those for children's services. Once agreed, the new commissioning strategies and pooled budgets should provide a good basis for these developments.
- 90 Engagement with older people is effective through some very active consultation and reference groups and representation on partnership boards. The powerful main consultative group is organised by older people themselves. The partners have recognised that there are few BME members of these groups and has appointed additional BME representatives to the partnership boards overseeing delivery of the HSP outcomes for older people. Parts of the voluntary sector also have active involvement in strategy and oversight through representation on key HSP boards, and through providing a range of services for older people.
- 91 Two portfolio holders have complementary briefs leading on wider cross-service issues for older people and the statutory services respectively. The former acts as the older people's champion. Their cross-service work is at an early stage for example the Council is exploring use of external bids to fund improvement, but they recognise that cross service work should be strengthened. They have considerable contact with the public, and with the two main consultation and user groups.
- 92 However, major challenges remain which restrict investment in a wider and more preventative approach. Older people's services are not a key priority for the Council, so funding for new initiatives must be found from within existing services. There is no overarching older people's strategy and the well-being strategy, intended to bring together initiatives across the Council and partners, is in draft. Officer leadership lies currently with the Director of Adult Social Care, so does not reflect a wider strategic approach. The joint commissioning strategy with the PCT focuses primarily on the health needs of over-65 year olds, while the health economy faces strong financial pressures and older people's well-being is not a major focus of the Healthy Harrow strategy. The Council is currently consulting on reduced subsidies for home care and the meals on wheels service and from amalgamating two day centres for the elderly - which may all affect some older people's independence. As a result of these pressures, and the slow rate of improvement in adult social care, CSCI recently assessed adult social care services as one star with uncertain prospects for improvement.

- 93** The Council and its partners offer an increasing range of activities for older people though they are beginning from a low base. These include adult education, family learning at the extended schools, and some sport and leisure activities such as healthy walks and over-50s sessions at a leisure centre. Some activities are focused specifically on BME groups such as English language lessons in day centres and specialist Asian residential care. There is floating housing support from Supporting People funding. The older people's day centres offer a good range of different activities under one roof such as advice on avoiding falls, exercise sessions, demonstrating assistive technology equipment and IT classes - but they are focused at those in need of high levels of support and their capacity is limited.
- 94** A range of services is offered in partnership. The Council and police are tackling fear of crime among older people through the safer homes project which provides advice and support on home safety and crime prevention to first-time elderly victims of burglary. This has led to a clear reduction in repeat burglaries. Other effective joint work includes work with the Pensions Service, which has increased the take-up of benefits by older people, and the joint voluntary sector and Council-run Trans-age project which brings together older and younger people at schools and in the day centres. The Council and PCT use a pooled budget to commission a joint equipment service run by the Council.

Children and young people

- 95** Social, educational, health and economic outcomes for children and young people in Harrow are good overall as the majority are above national averages. The contribution of council services overall to improving outcomes is adequate. The education service is good and the contribution of the council social care service is adequate. The capacity of the council to improve the management and quality of services is adequate but the budget situation in the council and health economy and the establishment of a formal structure for integrated working across partners remain a significant challenge.

- 96 The management of the council services for children and young people is adequate at a time of significant organisational change and uncertainty in the council. The recent election of a new administration has led to a re-consideration of some strategies and priorities, a clear focus on financial savings to balance the budget and build reserves, a rolling programme of large-scale service reviews and a sharp focus on the impact of the financial pressures within the health economy. Notwithstanding this challenging environment, relations at a senior level between the council and the local health service and police service are good. Where partnerships were once fragile, problematical and under-developed, they are now increasingly evident at a strategic and operational level. The impact of this improvement is beginning to be seen in greater joint working and co-location of staff. The council has led the production of the Children and Young People's Plan on behalf of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and, though comprehensive, the plan does not make sufficiently clear which of the many, cross-agency actions is a key priority. The impact of the council's serious financial position on its services to children in need, at risk and looked after is being risk managed effectively so as to retain a focus on the statutory and regulatory duties being discharged at least adequately. However, given the history of fragile partnerships in Harrow, the council has made only limited progress in leading partners towards more formal frameworks and processes to support greater partnership working as a way of developing capacity. Value for money is adequate and performance management is good based on an effective framework and IT system.
- 97 The contribution of council services in partnership with the commissioners and providers of the health services to improve the health of children and young people in Harrow is adequate with some good features. Health outcomes are mostly good. This is reflected in many of the national health indicators such as low and falling rates of smoking among pregnant mothers, high rates of initiation of breast-feeding and the percentage of looked after children with timely health checks. Where outcomes are less good the council is working closely and effectively with the PCT to review the commissioning arrangements and, as a result, some key services have been re-commissioned and are beginning to show improvements. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are now adequate and Sexual Health Services have improved. Whilst there are a number of good community health services the school nursing and community midwifery service are under developed and now subject to review. The PCT with the council has prioritised appropriately areas for development for this year and next year.

- 98 The work of the council in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Outcomes are adequate. The incidence of deaths and serious injuries is below the national average as are the numbers of children and young people on the Child Protection Register and the numbers looked after. However, too many children are placed in residential care and outside of Harrow and too many looked after children continue to experience an unacceptable number of changes of placement although this improving. The council's leadership of the Local Safeguarding Children Board is effective and this has laid a foundation for effective multi-agency working particularly with the local police. Children and young people at risk of significant harm are safeguarded adequately but social care services to children looked after, whilst under review and improving, remain variable. There is a good range of advice, information and initiatives to enable parents and carers to keep children safe and the work to combat bullying and domestic violence is beginning to make an impact. Support to safeguard children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate overall, but there is insufficient social care provision.
- 99 The contribution of council services to helping children and young people enjoy their education and recreation and achieve well is good with some outstanding features. Children and young people achieve very well. Attainment in 2006 was above national averages and in line with other similar areas despite significant movement of pupils in and out of Harrow. Attendance at school is well above national averages and was the best among London Boroughs in 2005/06. Permanent exclusions from school remain high although they are reducing. The progress of children and young people with statements of special educational needs at all key stages is in line with expectations. However, looked after children do not make sufficient progress in school. Children and young people achieve well through sports, music and arts activities. However, within the Youth Service, young people's achievements are poor overall. The council and its partners give a high priority to ensuring children and young people enjoy and achieve. This is evident in the effective support and good services provided to parents, carers and schools, particularly those in the more disadvantaged neighbourhoods. School improvement and the council's overall relationships with schools are a particular strength. The strategy for child-care and early years is good and the development of the Children's Centres and Extended Schools is progressing well. The range of recreational opportunities for children and young people, including those with special needs is good, although some young people feel these are not sufficiently well promoted.

- 100 The contribution of the council services to helping children and young people make a positive contribution to society is good. Empowering the youth of Harrow is a clear corporate priority. Services and outcomes are good with young people developing good personal qualities such as confidence and self-esteem. There is a wide range of activities provided by the council and voluntary groups. Whilst the Youth Service has provided some effective activities during the summer it has not used these to identify young people who would benefit from continued participation. Mentoring opportunities and activities to combat anti-social behaviour, prevent offending and re-offending are helping improve motivation, learning skills and behaviour amongst children and young people at risk of under-achievement or social exclusion. Through such initiatives, young people have developed new skills in activities such as cricket and football. However, the first time offending rates and rates of re-offending have risen although youth crime in Harrow is low. The contribution of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is variable. Many young people take advantage of opportunities to give their views on the design and quality of specific services and are benefiting from this experience. This includes children and young people looked after but similar opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are less developed. Vulnerable children and young people receive good practical and personal help but the services to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are less developed.
- 101 The council's contribution to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Outcomes are good with high rates of participation and progression in education and training by young people post 16. Retention and pass rates are generally good but less so for work-based learning. The council works effectively with the Local Learning and Skills Council and there is a clear and cohesive strategy for the development of education and training for those young people aged 14-19 years. The council works well with the Connexions Services and most schools in providing objective advice and guidance. Help and support to families to achieve economic well-being is good as is the support to young people leaving care and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Regeneration initiatives are focused on the three areas of greatest deprivation and are having a positive impact on opportunities for young people to achieve economic well-being and on the built environment.

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 Harrow was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 27 November to 8 December 2007.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.