

Corporate Assessment Report

July 2008



Corporate Assessment

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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Introduction

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

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

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

- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.
- 4 The JAR covers specific services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as relevant health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes especially concerning safeguarding; services for looked after children; and services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The separate JAR report also covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report and the most recently published Annual Performance Assessment from Ofsted which covers all of the Council's children services.

Executive summary

- 5 Overall, Tower Hamlets Council is performing strongly. As a result of its challenging ambitions for its diverse communities, sustained focus on service delivery, and exceptional partnership working, it has achieved significant and continuing improvements in performance.
- 6 The Council has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve for local people. This is strongly focused on improving their quality of life. It is underpinned by a detailed knowledge of the needs of the Borough's diverse communities, which include new migrants as well as established black and minority ethnic (BME) and white populations. The Council's view of diversity is wider than just race, also taking into account age, gender, social class and employment status. The Council understands which groups are disadvantaged and which have particular needs. This understanding is at the centre of the Council's plans and ensures that plans and services are designed to meet the needs of all local communities, including those which are hard to reach. It sees diversity as part of its everyday work and takes account of this in everything it does. Its success is recognised by the award of Level 5 of the Equality Standard for local authorities, and Beacon Council status for Community Cohesion, Getting Closer to Communities and Promoting Racial Equalities.
- 7 The Council's ambitions are based on a strong desire to reduce social inequalities, which are stark within a geographical area of just eight square miles. The 'One Tower Hamlets' approach has this aim at the core. Part of this is concerned with delivering high quality, tailored services to local residents, while other aspects are concerned with broader aspirations to build community capacity through increasing prosperity and reducing worklessness. Regeneration figures prominently in the Council's plans, including major projects linked to Canary Wharf, the Thames Gateway and the Olympic Games. Plans are innovative and far reaching, extending to 2017 and beyond. For example, a major scheme for redeveloping Aspen Way is linked with the new Crossrail station opening in 2017. The Council's strategic plans also take good account of the day to day issues which concern local people most, such as crime reduction, keeping streets clean, and the level of the Council Tax. Overall, the Council's plans are based on a sound knowledge of local needs.
- 8 Setting challenging targets has helped the Council deliver consistent improvements. The Audit Commission's assessment of the Council's direction of travel has rated it as 'improving strongly' for two years running. More than three-quarters of performance indicators improved over the last three years, making Tower Hamlets among the ten most improved Councils nationally. Even in strongly performing services, the Council constantly looks for opportunities for further improvement. The Council's high ambitions drive up its performance.

- 9 Partnership working is one of the Borough's greatest strengths and underpins everything it does. This operates effectively in both formal and informal ways. The Tower Hamlets Partnership (LSP) is well-established. Its structures include eight Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), which focus on different parts of the Borough and which are well supported by statutory partners, the third sector and local people. As well as acting as a focus for consultation, the LAPs have their own budgets for community projects. Other structures help coordination. The Council and the PCT share a Director of Public Health and a Director of Human Resources (HR), which makes for close collaborative working. Community engagement and user focus is strong. The Council is keen to listen to voluntary and community organisations and is helping them build capacity. Its approach is imaginative, for example in youth service commissioning and in the way it tailors services for Somali residents. Effective working with commercial partners is delivering extensive regeneration to the Borough.
- 10 The Council reviews its priorities regularly and makes changes according to the circumstances. For example, the Council has disinvested from high performing areas such as school improvement and adult social care to areas of under-performance such as recycling. Resources are shifted to priorities. The Council responds well to changing needs.
- 11 The Council is well led by councillors and senior officers. Their respective roles are clear and distinct. Decision making is transparent and takes good account of local circumstances. Where a decision is likely to be contested, the Council involves stakeholders in the debate. This means that some decisions take longer to reach but are rarely challenged successfully. Political leadership is clear. The Leader provides direction in a complex political climate where there are four opposition groups. New councillors are well prepared for their roles. The scrutiny function is effective and makes a real impact. The Chief Executive provides effective, purposeful leadership and is supported by an ambitious and highly committed management team. Clear leadership has allowed the Council to deliver its vision and secure continuous improvement.
- 12 There is good capacity to deliver the Council's ambitions. Financial standing is very good and the Council manages its budget well. It has made good use of opportunities to secure external funding to progress its priorities. The external auditor assessed value for money achieved by the Council as 'good' in 2007. Corporate systems such as the Efficiency Board deliver productive service reviews and achieve savings targets. The Council is now working to embed awareness of value for money throughout the organisation. Successful implementation of the Council's accommodation strategy has secured financial savings to allow reinvestment in priority areas and reduced the number of main office buildings from thirteen to five. Staff productivity is improving through flexible working and hot-desking arrangements.
- 13 The Council is self-aware and driven by a strong desire to improve services. Its performance management systems are highly robust and visibly support this aim. Councillors, senior managers and front line staff use information effectively and are proactive about learning from the best performing Councils and from external evaluation. The Council's self-critical approach helps it deliver improvements.

- 14 Performance is very good in most service areas. Successful, high priority areas include children's services, adult social care and making Tower Hamlets a safer place. However, the Council acknowledges that, until recently, it has not given sufficient priority to a small number of under-performing services (recycling and waste management) and to promoting environmental sustainability. Working closely with partners, it has now put in place plans for these areas. The Council is also aware that it faces challenges in meeting the decent homes standard. It has developed a range of plans to address this and is working towards an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) later this year. Overall, the Council is well aware of the services where it needs to focus effort and is putting appropriate plans in place.

Areas for improvement

15 The Council should ensure that it gives:

- high priority to delivering its plans for improving performance on recycling and waste management, and achieving the decent homes standard; and
- greater priority to environmental sustainability.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	4
	Prioritisation	4
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement	4
Overall corporate assessment score**		4
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

Context

The locality

- 16 Tower Hamlets is a geographically small but densely populated urban borough in east London. As its name suggests, it covers a number of long established communities which grew up from villages, such as Spitalfields, Bethnal Green and Mile End; as well as areas of more recent, major regeneration such as the Isle of Dogs and Canary Wharf. The Borough contains a large proportion of high rise buildings, but it also has over 100 parks and open spaces. However, apart from Victoria and Mile End Parks, most of these are small. A number of events will take place in Tower Hamlets during the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012.
- 17 The current population is just over 200,000 but this is predicted to rise to 300,000 by 2026. Tower Hamlets is a relatively young borough with 24 per cent of the population aged under 18, compared with an England average of 18 per cent. Half of Tower Hamlets residents are from BME communities. The largest group is the Bangladeshi community who make up more than a third of the Borough's population. This community is over-represented on some indicators of deprivation, such as overcrowded housing. Following a long-established historical pattern, new communities continue to arrive in the Borough. Somalis now comprise the second largest BME group and this community continues to grow. A high proportion of residents (78 per cent) say they have a religious faith.
- 18 Tower Hamlets is a borough of contrasts. Immense wealth sits alongside some of the most deprived areas in the country. There are dramatic inequalities. While a quarter of households live on less than £15,000 a year, the average salary for those in work in Tower Hamlets is more than £68,000. At 8.2 per cent, the Borough's unemployment rate is significantly above the inner London average of 5 per cent. In 2006, only 56 per cent of Tower Hamlets residents of working age were in work or looking for work, compared with 69 per cent across London and 74 per cent nationally. All the wards in the Borough are amongst the most deprived 10 per cent nationally.
- 19 Health inequalities are particularly marked. Overall, life expectancy at birth is two years lower for men and more than a year lower for women than the England average, but this masks some major local variations. For example, life expectancy in the most deprived ward (East India and Lansbury) is 8 years and 3.7 years respectively less than the least deprived ward (Millwall).
- 20 The Council maintains a fifth of the Borough's housing stock (22,000 homes), making it the largest landlord in the Borough. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) maintain another 18 per cent. Overcrowding is a major issue because there are so many large and extended families in Tower Hamlets. In 2007/08, 59 per cent of properties did not meet the decent homes standard. The Council is working towards an ALMO later in 2008.

- 21 Fifty-five per cent of local people cite fear of crime as their greatest concern. This has increased from 49 per cent since 2005/06 but is still in line with the London average. Despite this perception, recorded crime has fallen by 22 per cent since 2003/04.

The Council

- 22 Tower Hamlets Council has 51 councillors of whom 27 are Labour, 8 Conservative, 7 Respect, 6 Liberal Democrat and 3 Respect (The Unity Coalition). The Labour party has held control of the Council for 14 years, although it has had a smaller majority since the May 2006 elections. The current Labour Leader has been in the role since May 2006. The ethnic mix of councillors reflects the ethnic mix of the Borough, with two-thirds coming from BME, mainly Bangladeshi, backgrounds.
- 23 The Cabinet has ten Labour members. As well as the Leader and Deputy Leader, there are portfolio holders for Children's Services; Cleaner, Safer, Greener; Culture; Development and Housing; Employment and Skills; Health and Wellbeing; Regeneration, Localisation and Community Partnerships; and Resources and Performance.
- 24 The overview and scrutiny function consists of an overview and scrutiny committee and a health scrutiny panel. The committee is made up of nine councillors and five co-opted members, including one Muslim community and two diocesan representatives for education issues. There is a scrutiny lead member for each of the five community plan themes: living well; creating and sharing prosperity; learning, achievement and leisure; excellent public services; and living safely. Four of the community plan leads are Labour and one Conservative. A Liberal Democrat councillor chairs the health panel.
- 25 The Council is organised into five directorates: Chief Executive's; Adults Health and Wellbeing; Development and Renewal; Children's Services; and Communities, Localities and Culture. The Chief Executive's direct responsibilities include resources; strategy and performance; democratic services; communications; equality and scrutiny; and legal services.
- 26 The Local Strategic Partnership, Tower Hamlets Partnership, was formed in 2001. There are three strands to the Partnership: a Partnership Management Group (PMG) which is chaired by the Council Leader and which is responsible for the overall strategy; a Community Plan Action Group (CPAG) for each of the five key themes in the Community Plan; and eight Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) which engage with local residents. The Council's first Local Area Agreement (LAA) began in 2006/07 and is undergoing a major refresh in 2007/08.
- 27 The revenue budget for 2007/08 is £280 million. The Council Tax is set at £1,140 for a band D property, which is currently the sixth lowest in London.

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

Ambition

- 28 The Council is performing strongly in this area. Its ambitions are clear, highly challenging and take exceptionally good account of the longer term needs of the Borough. Partners, stakeholders and local people are closely involved in developing ambitions. A clear and appropriate theme of reducing social inequalities runs through all the Council's strategic plans. The Council has detailed knowledge of the diverse needs of its communities. It takes particularly good account of geographical differences within the Borough.
- 29 The Council has a very clear vision of what it wants to achieve for the Borough through 'One Tower Hamlets'. This is to improve the quality of life of local people and reduce social inequalities. The vision is based on an explicit set of values summarised as: achieving results; valuing diversity; engaging with others; and learning effectively. The Community Plan (2001-2010 but now being refreshed to 2020) and the Council's own Strategic Plan (2006-2011) set out clearly what the Council and its partners want to achieve. The plans bring together the Council's ambitions for delivering national priorities (such as improving school attainment and health outcomes); local residents' priorities (such as reducing crime and cleaner streets); and ambitions identified by the Council (such as reducing worklessness and building cohesive communities). Clear plans are now in place for delivering improvements in recycling, waste management and environmental sustainability, on which the Council is now focusing strongly. Ambitions are set out in a way that local people can understand.
- 30 Although the Council's plans acknowledge that the Borough faces major challenges in terms of social inequalities, diversity of population and rapid growth, the Council does not accept that these factors should limit its ambition. Challenging, stretch targets allow the Council to deliver service improvements. Although some targets are set too high to be achievable in a single year, they have the effect of raising aspirations and motivating staff. Over the last three years, more than three-quarters of services have improved, placing Tower Hamlets among the highest performing Boroughs in London. The Council has also won Beacon status seven times.

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- 31** Ambitions for the Borough are challenging and innovative and not limited to better delivery of existing services. For example, the Council has plans to improve the quality of local people's lives through the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Council is particularly clear about its longer term vision and sets targets for this. It understands that it must plan well ahead to make the most of regeneration opportunities. For example, it is working with the Canary Wharf Group to create a park or open space bridging Aspen Way near the proposed Cross Rail station, scheduled to open in 2017. Linked with residential, commercial, leisure and retail developments, this project is designed to remove a physical divide between the wealthy and deprived communities in the Borough. This furthers the Council's ambition of reducing social inequalities.
- 32** The quality of partnership working in Tower Hamlets is exceptional. Partners, including the third sector, visibly share the Council's ambitions. The Tower Hamlets Partnership has identified common goals including safety, cohesion and prosperity ('One Tower Hamlets') and these form the basis of the refreshed Community Plan. Structures help deliver ambitions. For example, the Council and the PCT have agreed an integrated commissioning service for the next ten years. They have also appointed joint directors of public health and, unusually, of human resources (HR). Partnership working provides a sound basis for delivering ambitions.
- 33** Strategic planning takes good account of local people's views. Systems are well established. The Council engages regularly with stakeholders through the Community Plan Action Groups (CPAGs) and eight Local Area Partnerships (LAPs). There is an active residents' panel and regular programme of surveys, including one linked with the budget-setting process. For example, a detailed piece of work with 400 residents in August 2007 collected their views on topics such as social integration, CCTV, affordable housing and crime. It also confirmed that people wanted the Council Tax kept low. The outcome of this work is informing the new Community Plan, for example by further strengthening work on making the Borough a safer place.
- 34** The Council actively seeks the views of diverse sections of the community through a tailored consultation process. This is not confined to established groups. For example, consultation with women supported the establishment of WITHIN; a network of women's third sector organisations including a previously under-represented Somali group. Service users with learning difficulties have contributed to strategic planning for their area. Councillors and officers meet young people in 'Cotchin' sessions to discuss a wide range of issues, including helping to develop the Children and Young People's Strategic Plan (CYPSP). Young people helped evaluate the effectiveness of the youth service and plan future service delivery. The Council takes users' views into account well when planning services.

- 35** A good, evidence-based understanding of local needs underpins the Council's ambitions. The Tower Hamlets Information System (THIS Borough) collects detailed data at local level, which is available not only to Councillors and officers but also to LAP members and the wider public online. The data is broken down by social class, gender and ethnicity and allows the Council to target its ambitions. For example, it has been used to target under-achievement at school among white working class boys. Similarly, it helped target a PCT campaign on bowel cancer screening by identifying groups most at risk.
- 36** There are strong systems for communicating the Council's ambitions to stakeholders. The free weekly newspaper, East End Life, includes regular features on the Council's plans. A recent survey showed that 93 per cent of readers found it 'informative'. Staff are also clear about the Council's ambitions. In a recent survey, 84 per cent reported that they understood what the Council was trying to achieve. Overall, the vast majority of stakeholders understand the Council's ambitions well.
- 37** An understanding of diversity is at the centre of the Council's ambitions. This goes wider than the needs of BME communities and applies to its ambitions for service improvement and major projects. For example, work with older people and people with disabilities has helped the Council achieve a rating of 'outstanding' for its adult social care services. Regeneration schemes reflect the needs of diverse local communities well, for example by providing affordable homes as well as commercial developments, and new public open spaces and leisure facilities accessible to families from high rise flats. At the Ocean Estate, a community-led trust is being put in place to deliver improved stock while retaining community ownership.

Prioritisation

- 38** The Council is performing strongly in this area. Its priorities are clear and well communicated. Partners, residents and stakeholders understand and share these priorities, which take good account of their wishes. The Council adopts a rigorous but flexible approach to setting priorities which allows it to respond effectively to changing circumstances. Focus on reducing inequalities is strong. A robust financial and managerial framework supports delivery. The Council moves resources appropriately to fund its priorities. Councillors are willing to take and stick to difficult decisions where they judge these to be in the best interests of local people.
- 39** Priorities are set out clearly in the Community Plan, the LAA, and the Council's own strategic plans, which are explicitly linked to one another. Plans contain 12 priorities, grouped under the themes of: living safely; living well; creating and sharing prosperity; learning, achievement and leisure; and excellent public services. A strong focus on reducing inequalities means that, for example, there are clear objectives for improving the health, education and employment status of local people. Each priority is supported by clear and measurable milestones and targets. The plans are underpinned by a very good medium term financial strategy. This provides a robust framework for delivery.

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- 40** The plans reflect national priorities well and act as a driver for improvement. For example, Tower Hamlets' primary schools are now achieving above the national average in English and Maths. Similarly, a focus on smoking cessation led to the target being exceeded. The Council has put in place robust plans for delivering improvements in recycling and waste management which provide a clear basis for improvement.
- 41** Plans take good account of what local people say are their priorities. For example, over the past few years, annual residents' surveys have shown that respondents' greatest concerns are crime, cleanliness of streets, and keeping the Council Tax low. These remain priorities and have led to actions such as additional investment in CCTV and street cleaning. The Council Tax remains amongst the lowest in London.
- 42** Priorities are informed by good knowledge of local needs and preferences. Statistical information is good and community engagement extensive. A well-planned consultation calendar gives good coverage and minimises duplication. LAPs are a particularly effective forum for discussions about priorities. They are well-attended and some hard to reach groups, such as young people, contribute well. For example, LAPs' concern about health, crime and youth has ensured that these figure prominently in the Council's corporate priorities. Participation has quadrupled to 5,000 in five years. As well as contributing to borough-wide discussions about priorities, each LAP has its own budget of £0.5 million to fund smaller scale local priorities. Recent examples include improvements to parks and open spaces, work with young people and reducing drug dealing in public places. The input of local people helps identify and deliver priorities.
- 43** The Council has adopted a rigorous but flexible approach to deciding which priorities are higher than others. This acknowledges that not all priorities should remain the same over time. For example, environmental sustainability and recycling are now identified as high priorities and have been allocated additional resources. Conversely, the Council reduces the amount of effort it expends on services which have already improved. Examples include adult social care, once rated poorly but now ranked as 'excellent' by inspectors for four consecutive years. Similarly, the Council has disinvested from the school improvement service now there are no schools in special measures. This approach reflects changing needs well while remaining systematic and rigorous.

- 44 The Council's priorities are well understood and supported by its statutory, voluntary and private sector partners. For example, the Council and the police have responded to residents' concern about anti-social behaviour by using anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), creating good behaviour zones and running intergenerational projects. Activities to reduce worklessness involve statutory and voluntary sector partners and reflect the fact that the skills of the local workforce do not currently match the jobs available. For example, the Council is working with the PCT and the Royal London Hospital to recruit from the local community, many of whom are from BME groups. Another programme is designed to help local businesses secure contracts from developments such as the Olympics. The Council is developing the Whitechapel Centre as a focus for local community groups and entrepreneurs. Overall, the Council has the strong support of partners for its local priorities.
- 45 The needs of its diverse communities are well-reflected in the Council's priorities. For example, the growing number of under fives has led to greater focus on early years education. Demand for culturally appropriate services as the older BME population increases led to an award winning development for Bangladeshi elders at Sonali Gardens. Changes in ethnic groups mean new language needs. For example, extra funding has been allocated to the Catholic secondary school attended by most children from eastern Europe to support their language needs. Similarly, the Council works with a voluntary organisation to provide information for recent arrivals from Brazil, Columbia and Poland.
- 46 Resources are visibly aligned to priorities. Historically, the Council has been sufficiently well resourced by government to fund a wide range of priorities. However, financial settlements have become tighter and the formula grant increase is now limited to 2 per cent. This means that new priorities have to be funded through efficiency savings, which the Council has done successfully. For example, in the 2008/09 budget, additional funds are allocated to recycling (£1.47 million), community safety (£0.78 million for CCTV and £0.2 million for security at Mile End Park) and street scene initiatives (£0.26 million). Similarly, the capital programme focuses on high local priorities, many funded from capital receipts. Recent initiatives include estate improvements, Idea Stores (accessible libraries), improvements in parks, and redeveloping Mile End Stadium
- 47 Councillors are willing to make difficult decisions about priorities and stick to them. For example, the Council has faced considerable opposition from some individuals and groups to its plans for housing stock transfer and to its support for Cross Rail. However, Councillors are convinced that these developments are in the best interests of residents and have stuck to their decisions.

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

Capacity

- 48 The Council is performing well in this area. Leading councillors and senior officers provide clear leadership and direction. Decision making reflects the needs of local communities well. Scrutiny is well-managed and makes an impact. Staff are strongly committed to the Council and share its ethos of high aspiration. The Council has sufficient financial capacity to deliver its priorities. Processes for procurement, knowledge management through ICT, value for money and risk management have all been strengthened and are now being implemented across the Council. Partnership working is exceptionally strong and has increased capacity, including in the voluntary and private sectors.
- 49 The roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers are clear and distinct. They work effectively together. Decision making is transparent and takes good account of local circumstances. Where a decision may be contested, the Council takes considerable trouble to hear the various views and evaluate these. The future of the Robin Hood Gardens estate is a current example. Discussion at overview and scrutiny and Cabinet about tenants' legal status has led to a change in approach. The Council makes good use of scrutiny, to make sure that all opinions are heard and relevant factors considered. For example, the Council commissioned a review of strip clubs, to inform its planning and licensing decisions. Although decisions may take longer to make, the outcome is less frequently challenged and most people feel the process is fair.
- 50 Councillors and senior officers provide clear leadership. The Leader of the Council works effectively with a wide range of political interests to provide direction in a complex environment. The Chief Executive provides purposeful and effective leadership and is well-regarded by stakeholders. He is supported by an ambitious management team which acts in a corporate manner. Overall the Council is well led.
- 51 The scrutiny function has improved in recent years and is now effective. Recent reviews have been challenging and have made an impact. For example, a review of dental services led to an additional mobile van providing services for local children and older people. Member development programmes are well-planned and effective. The Council has a clear and transparent ethical framework. For example, councillors' timesheets are placed on the website so residents can see what allowances they are claiming. Complaints about Members are rare. Ethical standards are high.

- 52 There is a culture of high aspiration among staff, who respond positively to the Council's challenging targets. People enjoy working for Tower Hamlets. Staff turnover is 10 per cent lower than the London average. Vacancies are limited to a small number of hotspots, such as planning, specialist social workers and IT, where 'grow your own' schemes are making an impact. The Council and the PCT employ a joint director of HR and plans for the workforce are increasingly aligned. Joint workforce planning for children and young people is well-established. The Council's success in people management has led to the first award to a London authority of the new Investors in People Profile.
- 53 The Council has made significant progress on its priority of making the workforce to reflect the community. For example, the proportion of the workforce from BME groups has increased from 32 per cent to 42 per cent over the last seven years, although relatively few occupy the top jobs. More than half top earners are women. A positive action scheme has resulted in 96 people from BME backgrounds becoming qualified as social workers.
- 54 The Council's financial capacity is very good. Financial capacity has increased by successful bids for external funding including £9 million for step change in reducing health inequalities and more than £2 million for parks. The new Whitechapel Centre is part-funded through a lottery grant. The external auditor assessed value for money as 'good' in 2007. The Council is now working to extend value for money awareness across the whole of the organisation. Strong central systems such as an Efficiency Board have delivered savings worth over £30 million over three years. Some 80 per cent of the Council's services have been subjected to an appropriate level of review over the last two years and savings achieved in areas such as adult social care and insurance. Invest to save schemes, such as support for independent travel to schools by pupils with special needs, are on track to deliver financial and social benefits. Internal audit plans focus appropriately on areas of concern such as recycling and homelessness. Overall, the Council delivers good value for money.
- 55 An imaginative accommodation strategy has delivered efficiency improvements and won a national award. The Council has moved 4,000 staff and reduced the number of its office buildings from 13 to 5, saving £0.75 million on facilities costs in the first year. A programme of disposal of surplus buildings is now underway which is expected to release up to £30 million to reinvest in priority areas. In one team where hot desks and home working were piloted, productivity increased by 26 per cent.

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- 56 Risk management processes are clear and accessible following a recent review. These are used effectively at strategic level to mitigate risk and are becoming increasingly embedded across the Council. IT systems are effective and support service improvement, particularly the accommodation strategy. Local people make good use of electronic systems to contact the Council, for example through terminals in Idea Stores and one stop shops. The Council is piloting a community IT network in Langdon Park. However, the Council acknowledges that there is scope for greater value for money in this area. Procurement arrangements are improving following a review of the strategy. The Council has achieved savings of £1 million through a single provider agreement for temporary and agency staff, but other efficiency gains through procurement are limited. Procurement helps the Council deliver its objective to increase prosperity. For example, it has placed local small and medium term enterprises on its database for contracts under £50,000. As a result, more than half such contracts are placed with local business. New project management systems are in place and are being used effectively, for example in delivering the accommodation strategy to time and budget.
- 57 The Council works exceptionally well with partners and this has increased its capacity. Governance arrangements are robust and conflict resolution procedures extend to the third sector as well as major statutory partners, but are rarely tested because working relationships are so good. The Council and its partners work collaboratively to increase capacity. For example, they have developed a joint approach to the working neighbourhoods fund, based on a shared vision of desired outcomes. The Council is committed to building capacity in local voluntary organisations. For example, it has produced a guide to help them define outcomes and make them more attractive to potential funders, with positive outcomes such as funding for the Linkage project for older people. The Council also provides direct grant aid where it identifies an important gap, such as support for Somali women. Relationships are generally good, although some groups have reservations about the way tendering works and the effectiveness of their contribution to strategic groups. Overall the Council has supported the third sector in becoming active partners.
- 58 Effective working with the private and commercial sector has also increased capacity. For example, a partnership between the Council, Tower Hamlets College and the private sector has funded a financial services academy at Canary Wharf.

Performance management

- 59 The Council is performing strongly in this area. Across the organisation there is an exceptionally strong commitment to improving outcomes for the community. The Council sets high aspirations through demanding targets and has a robust approach to targeting areas of under-performance. There is an exceptionally clear link between its ambitions and service and individual targets. These are visibly shared with staff and partners. Despite the Council's strong track record, it remains self-critical and continues to seek ways of further improving performance.

- 60 Performance management is securely embedded across the Council and its partnerships. The Council's strong shared values mean that staff at all levels have a strong commitment to improvement. Systematic and regular performance monitoring places a strong focus on identifying under-performance. This extends across the Tower Hamlets Partnership. There is a regular cycle of performance monitoring by senior officers, partners and members based on an appropriate basket of key indicators. This allows targeting of under-performing areas. For example, joint working with the police led to identification of street robbery hotspots so concentrated action could be taken to reduce crime.
- 61 The Council uses information intelligently to help improve performance. An excellent range of data from across the partnership is combined as the THIS Borough information system and made widely accessible through the Council's website. This is used very effectively to target services to particular local areas. Examples include projects on certain housing estates to increase understanding between the generations and tailored activities for the Somali community. Performance reports are accessible and fit for purpose and show clearly by traffic-lighting where performance is not meeting targets and the direction of travel. Benchmarking is used extensively to compare Tower Hamlets' performance with similar authorities and with national averages. It is the basis for target-setting. Information on resources is increasingly being brought together with performance data. The annual service and financial planning process links financial and service performance well, enabling the Council to make well-informed judgments.
- 62 Reports are in an appropriate format for different audiences. The most detailed reports go to the community plan action groups (CPAGs); information on local outcomes is produced for LAPs; and more summarised, graphically presented information is included in the annual report to the public. The latter was re-formatted following consultation to include clearer information on under-performance and wider comparisons. As a result the partnership and local stakeholders know how well services are performing.
- 63 A range of effective mechanisms tackles weaker performance, including the Performance Review Group (PRG), scrutiny reviews and challenge sessions, service reviews and the continuous improvement programme. The PRG, chaired by the Chief Executive with the lead councillor for resources and performance and one of the corporate directors, meets monthly to examine areas of low performance. It combines challenge with collective problem-solving. For example, it contributed to an improvement in collection of council tax by encouraging segmenting of the non-returns; sickness absence decreased as a result of closer monitoring and targeting of particular services. The continuous improvement programme reviews difficult performance areas which need a broader focus. For example, it helped mobilise a wide range of services to tackle the relatively high number of young people not in education, employment or training. These approaches drive improvement by closer examination of the issues which are holding back performance, by giving particular service areas a higher profile and through finding innovative joint solutions.

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

- 64 Councillors are involved actively in performance management through lead councillors' work with directors, Leader's Advisory Board (a forum for policy discussion) and reports to scrutiny. Cabinet is genuinely collaborative and discursive and engages in open debate about performance with members of the public, political group leaders, backbenchers and overview and scrutiny. Lead councillors take responsibility for performance in their portfolio areas and present this annually to overview and scrutiny in a spotlight session. Scrutiny is systematic and well-run and has an impact on performance especially through reviews. For example, the review of leaseholder services led to changes in working practices to increase the transparency of maintenance charges and increases in administration charges were reduced.
- 65 The Council sets very challenging targets to reach top quartile performance in all areas or to improve continuously. Less than half of the targets within the Tower Hamlets Index were expected to be met in 2007/08. Despite this they are fully owned by councillors, staff and partners as an expression of their high expectations. There is a very clear consensus that it is preferable to miss an aspirational target than to meet a less exacting one. Targets are clearly-defined and measurable and those in service plans and for individuals reflect the Tower Hamlets Partnership's strategic priorities.
- 66 Residents and users are involved effectively in performance management. LAP steering groups include residents and monitor outcomes at ward level. There are specific targets to monitor attendance of different groups at LAP meetings to ensure wide representation. LAPs also hold wider consultation events, for example to look at proposals for enhancing Victoria Park. Councillors' enquiries and complaints from the public are collated by LAP areas and local responses made, for example to reports of littering. LAPs also influence local service provision, for example through targeting the work of the safer neighbourhood team.
- 67 The Council and its partners are not complacent and are constantly seeking ways of further improving their performance. The partnership is reviewing and simplifying its arrangements for managing performance against the revised community strategy and LAA as part of the 2008 refresh process. Both internal and external inspection and review is used to evaluate initiatives such as the implementation of the common assessment framework for social care. Satisfaction levels strongly influence the partnership's improvement priorities. For example, lowered satisfaction with street sweeping led to further investment in targeted cleaning. Complaints are also monitored regularly and lead to action such as improvements to parking for people with a disability at an Idea Store.

What has been achieved?

- 68** The Council is performing strongly in this area. Priorities in its strategic plan relate directly to national priorities such as reducing crime, improving health outcomes and better services for children and young people. The Council and its partners have placed these aims clearly into a Tower Hamlets context. Their ambitions for the Borough are underpinned by a strong desire to reduce poverty and social inequalities and their priorities visibly reflect this.
- 69** Priorities reflect local needs well. For example, a key priority from the Community Plan concerns sharing prosperity and improving access to employment. This is reflected in the LAA targets to significantly improve the overall employment rate, reduce the difference between the local employment rate and the overall employment rate for England and increase employment for targeted groups. These aims are linked to the Council's regeneration strategy and showing results. Through its Skillsmatch partnership with the Canary Wharf Group, Tower Hamlets College and Jobcentre Plus, the Council helped 527 local people into work in 2006/07. In the same year, 597 people gained employment through the employment consortium job brokerage scheme, exceeding the partners' target.
- 70** Ambitions and priorities also reflect the wishes of local people. Making Tower Hamlets a safe place, having cleaner streets, and keeping the Council Tax low are high priorities for citizens and consistently highlighted in the annual residents' survey. All are reflected in the Council's strategic plans.
- 71** The Council has robust systems for delivering outcomes. The key documents (the Community Plan, Strategic Plan, LAA and service plans) are all underpinned by action plans and clear targets. Performance management systems are robust enough to identify any under-performance at an early stage and take remedial action. For example, the Council has identified recycling as an under-performing service and has changed its management arrangements, produced a new strategy, and allocated additional resources. The Council manages its finances well and has enough resources to deliver its priorities.
- 72** The measurable outcomes delivered are very good. Tower Hamlets is one of only ten Councils assessed as 'improving strongly' for the last two years in the Audit Commission's Direction of Travel assessment. Thirty-eight per cent of Tower Hamlets' performance indicators measured by the Audit Commission are in the best quartile nationally. Three-quarters of all indicators improved during the last year, making Tower Hamlets one of the ten most improved Councils nationally. Services which perform well, and which are well-established Council priorities, include crime reduction, education, and social care for children, young people and vulnerable adults. However, there is under-performance in some services which have only recently become priorities for the Council, notably recycling and waste management. Overall, the Council's performance is good and improving strongly.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 73 The Council works well in partnership to help local people into employment. There are more jobs than residents of working age in Tower Hamlets, but there is a mismatch between skills and vacancies. The Council's Skillsmatch initiative is highly effective in getting people into work and is on track to exceed its target of 1,702 jobs by 2008. A further 190 people have entered sustainable employment, through the Olympics preparation and local employment training networks. The Council also supports small businesses to boost the local economy. For example, it includes them automatically on tender lists for Council and PCT contracts worth up to £25,000. This has proved successful. Several hundred contracts, worth some £0.5 million and over 50 per cent of the total volume, have been placed with local business. The Council is contributing effectively to securing jobs and wealth in the Borough, particularly for local residents.
- 74 Although it has adopted a flexible approach to meeting the decent homes standard, the Council will not achieve this for all its properties by 2010. It has secured over £420 million of investment through its stock transfer programme, Housing Choice, which has delivered some, but not enough, improvements. The Council is now working to establish an ALMO and has made a bid for £260 million for decent homes. Even this will be insufficient to meet the standard. The Council plans to tackle the gap through a range of measures on different estates and attracting private investment in developing mixed communities. The Council is unlikely to meet the decent homes standard on all properties, although it is doing all it reasonably can to do so.
- 75 Performance on housing management is variable. Good work on mediation and effective rent deposit schemes have reduced the number of people accepted as homeless. However, the Council is not currently on track to meet the government target of reducing use of temporary accommodation. Tenant satisfaction is relatively low as are rent collection rates. Overcrowding is a major issue in the Borough as most social housing stock is flats and there is high demand from large extended families. It has re-housed a small number of severely overcrowded families but is unable to meet current demand. However, the Council is meeting its target to reduce the number of under-occupied council homes by 110 per year.
- 76 The Council has exceeded its targets for the supply of new housing over the past three years by over 50 per cent. In the last year, it has exceeded its 35 per cent target for affordable homes. The Council recognises the imbalance in the housing market and is working effectively to address issues of affordability and low cost home ownership.

- 77 Recycling performance is poor but improving now that it has been identified as a Council priority, albeit from a low base. Resident satisfaction levels with street cleanliness are in line with other London boroughs but not improving. Litter is particularly visible around transport hubs. The Council has agreed additional investment in the street scene and is targeting those parts of the Borough which concern residents most. Performance on waste management is also below average. The Council is developing a waste strategy which it expects to agree in 2009. Meanwhile, it is putting in place interim arrangements for basic services while it develops a longer term, more sustainable approach. It is too early for the impact of these plans to be demonstrated and performance has not yet improved significantly.
- 78 The Council is making very good use of planning powers on regeneration schemes to secure investment in infrastructure and other benefits. For example, this has helped the PCT deliver the Barkantine Health Centre, which has extended opening hours and which provides a wide range of accessible services to local people, including dentistry which was previously under-provided. Creative use of section 106 funding in the Millennium Quarter is securing community benefits such as a new DLR station, community health facilities and new bus routes.
- 79 The Council's achievements on environmental sustainability are limited. There are few examples of recent initiatives to address climate change and most of these are small scale, such as low energy light bulbs in major Council buildings. However, the Council is successfully delivering on its policy to require 20 per cent energy generation on sites for new developments.
- 80 Local residents are increasingly satisfied with the quality of life in Tower Hamlets. Public satisfaction with parks and libraries are all improving, reflecting the Council's investment of over £40 million in Idea Stores, leisure centres, parks and green spaces. Visits to libraries and participation in sport are increasing significantly. For example, satisfaction levels with leisure centres is well above the London average. Parks are well managed and improving. The number of parks with green flag status has increased to five and the Council has won several awards, including 'Best Park in London' for King Edward Memorial Park.
- 81 The Council and its partners have worked effectively to develop a sustainable transport infrastructure and to link this to deprived communities. Work to develop the Langdon Park DLR station and bus route improvements have been highly effective, acting as a catalyst for regeneration in the Teviot and Lansbury estates. Air quality is improving in line with government targets. The new sustainable transport strategy sets out clearly how this will be taken forward. Good public transport links encourage local people to avoid car travel. Local residents' satisfaction with bus travel was low in 2003/04 but increased to one of the highest levels in London by 2006/07.

Safer and stronger communities

- 82 The Council and its partners work exceptionally well together to reduce crime and fear of crime, both at strategic and operational level. Crime and fear of crime are acknowledged as important local issues and addressed through well-planned projects and operations, based on good use of shared intelligence. Performance is good in a challenging local context. Although overall crime rates are marginally above the London average, levels have reduced by 22 per cent since 2003/04 and are on track to meet the Public Service Agreement target in 2008. The partners are tackling a recent increase in youth on youth violence. Despite this, crime remains the greatest concern identified by residents in the Council's 2007 survey.
- 83 The partners share data effectively to identify and target crime hotspots. For example, the Neighbourhood Drug Dealing Project successfully tackled dealing in eight areas where previous work had been ineffective. Outcomes achieved in one year included significant seizures of drugs and cash as well as 38 crack houses closed. Similarly, the Priority Prolific Offender programme shows a 40 per cent decrease in offending.
- 84 The Council has supported a wide range of successful multi-agency initiatives such as Operation Curb, to which it contributed resources such as park rangers, a professional witness team and a joint licensing team. Successful outcomes include a 25 per cent reduction in incidents of robbery and violence in the Curb Patrol Zones and a fall of 59 per cent in youth on youth robbery in November 2007 to March 2008, compared with the same period in the previous year.
- 85 Innovative projects have reduced fear of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). The partners have put in place a comprehensive and wide ranging programme of interventions to encourage young people away from offending, such as the Cleveland Estate intergenerational project. This led to a significant drop in reported crime and perceptions of ASB between 2005 and 2006. The Council's Rapid Response team has a high profile and is well regarded by partners. Outcomes of enforcement action are good. For example, in 2007/08, 79 per cent of young people given support by the youth offending service are not entering the youth justice system. Only 13 per cent went on to offend. However, the challenge of youth offending, and especially first time offending, remains. There are some tensions between partners as to appropriate ways of identifying young offenders and screening for weapons in schools. The Council's performance on reducing re-offending has been recognised with a Beacon award.

- 86 Partners work proactively together to tackle drug and alcohol misuse. They provide a range of culturally sensitive services, for example for Bangladeshi heroin smokers. Other new services include needle exchange and a detoxification facility for those with non-complex needs. Take-up of the drugs intervention programme is good and 60 per cent of criminal proceedings have been discontinued as a result of participation. Other successful projects include enforcement of controlled drinking zones and the Ocean Estate Drugstoppers Project, which lasted three months, focused on hotspots like stairwells. As a result, residents' concern about drugs fell by more than half and the number of ASBOs reduced by 50 per cent.
- 87 The Council is working effectively to promote road safety. Three-quarters of the Borough's roads now have 20 mph limits. Analysis identified older people as being at high risk of accidents and the partners targeted this group. As a result of action, the number of casualties has reduced by more than 10 per cent. Overall, during the year 2006/07, deaths and serious injuries on roads reduced by 16.5 per cent. The partners are on track to meet their 2010 accident reduction targets.
- 88 Emergency planning is effective. The Council and its partners have learned from recent large scale incidents and developed comprehensive emergency and business continuity plans which take account of the needs of diverse communities. For example, these include identifying and caring for vulnerable people such as those who are housebound. Exercises and experience of genuine emergencies have demonstrated the effectiveness of emergency plans. The Council is well-prepared for emergencies.
- 89 The Council's approach to community cohesion is exceptionally strong. It has been awarded Beacon Status for Community Cohesion, Getting Closer to Communities and Promoting Racial Equalities. Partnerships with ethnic and faith groups are effective. BME communities, particularly Bangladeshis, are well-represented on the Council. The newspaper East End Life promotes community cohesion. Reports of race hate crime are tackled proactively. Employment schemes help secure work for BME communities. For example, half the participants on construction training programmes are Bangladeshi. The Council supports a range of festivals and events. The Refugee and New Migrants Forum helps the Council address the needs of new communities including those from Eastern Europe. Overall, the Council has given exceptional support to its different communities by listening and responding with tailored solutions. Community cohesion is strong.

Healthier communities

- 90** The Council and its partners have identified health inequalities as a key priority and are delivering significant improvements. They have set out their vision clearly in the Healthier Communities Strategy and in the Community Plan. These plans are supported by detailed action plans and measurable targets. Outcomes for identified priorities in 2006/07 have been met or exceeded. For example, smoking cessation targets were exceeded by 23 per cent. Life expectancy at birth is improving more rapidly in Tower Hamlets than nationally. This increased by 5 per cent for men and by 3 per cent for women between 1996 and 2004. Overall, the partners are on track to exceed the 2010 health inequalities targets.
- 91** Partnership working is exceptionally strong and reinforced by a joint Director of Public Health. In 2007, the Department of Health's Health Inequalities National Support Team described the leadership in the Council and the PCT as 'superb'. Professor Darzi's recent report on Healthcare for London cites Tower Hamlets as a case of best practice in reducing the life expectancy gap, founded on a strong partnership between the PCT, the Council and voluntary organisations.
- 92** The Council and its partners have a comprehensive understanding of health inequalities in the Borough. They have developed separate health profiles across the eight LAP areas which take account of the needs of particular communities. As a result of this, the partners have put in place a range of specialist provision to meet particular local needs. For example, the Bangadeshi Stop Smoking Programme is targeted at that section of the community where cardiac disease rates are high. Similarly, extra support is being provided to people with moderate depression, half of whom are from BME groups. The Council has a good understanding of where it should target its effort on health improvement.
- 93** The Council itself has made a distinct contribution to improving the health of local communities. Some of this has been directed towards children and young people. For example, it exceeded its December 2007 target of 60 per cent of schools achieving healthy schools status; developed oral health initiatives in children's centres and other early years settings; expanded sex and relationship education and successfully piloted an evidence based peer led smoking prevention initiative in eight secondary schools. Fifty four children attended weight management programmes, of whom 83 per cent completed the course. A football programme for 7 to 11 year olds delivered in schools attracted 37,956 attendances. However, it is too early to fully assess the impact of these measures.
- 94** Other health initiatives have benefited residents of all ages. More than 340 walkers participated in the Council's healthy walking scheme. Half of the 300 residents with cardiac problems who completed a GP exercise referral course took up membership at a Council leisure centre. In response to consultation, the Council has used neighbourhood renewal funding to increase GP surgery opening hours on Saturdays and weekday evenings, giving working residents better access to healthcare.

Older people

- 95 The Council's ambitious plans for older people are identified clearly in the Improvement Plan resulting from its 2006 review of Older People as Citizens. This review emphasized wider needs beyond health and social care, and took good account of the areas which were important to older people themselves. The importance of older people to the Council is emphasized by the designation of a high profile figure, the Mayor, as older people's champion. The Council is clear about what it wants to achieve for older people.
- 96 The Council works effectively with partners to provide coordinated and appropriate services for older people. The Director of Public Health is a joint appointment by the Council and the PCT. Tower Hamlets is a national pilot for the LinkAge Plus programme, which has brought over 30 statutory and voluntary organisations together in a network of community based services. There are now five Community Network Centres in the Borough, each hosted by a different community organisation on behalf of the Partnership. Services include access to information, social care, learning, health (including dentistry through a mobile van), leisure, and housing benefits. Effective preventative work through LinkAge Plus has reduced the rate of admission to residential care by some 30 per cent in 2006/07.
- 97 Provision is based on need. The Council and the PCT operate a single assessment process which is seamless to users. Services are culturally appropriate. For example, the Council maintains specialist day centres for the Bangladeshi and Somali communities which offer a range of therapeutic and recreational services, based on individual need. These services are highly valued by users.
- 98 Traditional social care services perform well. The Council's home care service was rated 'excellent' by inspectors in 2007. Effective work by multi-disciplinary teams means that there is no delayed discharge and the number of emergency bed days has reduced.
- 99 The Council also provides a wide range of innovative services for older people. It is committed to improving relationships between the generations and ethnic groups. The Magic Me project brings together some 350 children and older people a year for mutual benefit, learning and enjoyment. Older people have free access to swimming and exercise classes at leisure centres. Take up increased by 5 per cent last year to 4,000 sessions.

- 100 The Council is active in engaging with older people. An Older People's Partnership Board plans and coordinates services and engages extensively with users. Some 300 older people, including some from hard to reach groups, were surveyed for the 2006 review. A reference group of older people helped develop the LinkAge Plus model, to ensure this reflected their needs. Other planned changes identified by older service users include making call centres more accessible, acting as advisors to staff in these centres and undertaking mystery shopping. The Council has already made some changes to service design as a result of consultation, such as the Neighbours in Poplar scheme, which locates services in a range of accessible buildings rather than concentrating them in one place. The Council is committed to consulting older people and involving them in designing services.

Children and young people

- 101 Outcomes for children and young people in Tower Hamlets are outstanding for being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being and good for staying safe. Very good progress has been made against some key health indicators including infant and peri-natal mortality, breast-feeding and smoking amongst expectant mothers. There has also been a substantial drop in incidences of teenage pregnancy and targets for sexual health screening have been exceeded. Safeguarding indicators are good overall. Educational achievement between the ages of 5 and 19 has risen substantially, though remains lower than national. The achievement of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good and that of looked after children is good. The proportion of young people completing an apprenticeship is well above national figures. Participation rates for young people are excellent and there is early indication that action to tackle crime levels is having an impact. The numbers of children and young people not in education, employment or training, though reducing, remains high.

- 102** The joint area review concurs with the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) judgement that service management in Tower Hamlets is outstanding. The partnership's ambitions for children and young people are excellent. Investment in children and young people is seen as key to building cohesive, inclusive and sustainable communities in Tower Hamlets and children and young people are a strong focus in the strategic plans of the council and its partners. The challenging ambition to achieve a step change in outcomes for children and young people is clearly understood and shared by partners and reflected in their own plans. Prioritisation is outstanding. As a result, the common objectives and targets specified in the Children and Young People's Plan are translated into a wide range of highly focused and well resourced activities to drive improvement, with an increasing focus on prevention and early intervention. Capacity is good, major investments in multi-agency working through co-ordinated joint work and the joint commissioning of services have enhanced capacity to deliver services across the community. Senior officer leadership is creative and highly effective and there are many examples of dynamic leadership at other levels. Councillors work well with officers and engage actively with the community and with young people. Performance management is outstanding. The targets in the children and young people's plan are very ambitious, measurable, clearly linked to the priorities and owned by staff and providers. Performance reporting is transparent and weaker performance is challenged. Young people from across the community are involved in the performance management of services in many ways.
- 103** Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. The arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are good. Early intervention and preventative services offer a wide range of effective support to vulnerable families, including for young people at risk of offending. However, there are variations in the timeliness of initial and core assessments and a lack of consistency of performance between social care teams. Good, co-ordinated multi-agency support is provided to children and young people considered to be at significant risk of harm, with strong leadership from the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Multi-agency procedures to track missing children are strong and support for looked after children and care leavers is outstanding.

- 104** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is outstanding, and the recognition of the need to further improvement standards is reflected in ambitious targets for all groups. The authority has put in robust moderation systems to ensure that assessment of learning is accurate and raises expectations of children, a significant proportion of whom enter the settings as learners of English as an additional language. From very low starting points, children make generally good progress in the Foundation stage, however, the proportion of children achieving age related levels at five is below national expectations. Standards over time at all key stages are improving at a faster rate than nationally. Children and young people make good progress, well above national rates, between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 and the proportion attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is in line with the national average. However, although increasing at twice the national rate, the proportion of young people attaining these passes including English and mathematics is well below the national average. Looked after children achieve well compared with those in other authorities, and the gap between their achievement and that of their peers is beginning to reduce. Access to recreation, leisure and cultural activities is very good, with some excellent targeted provision.
- 105** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. Children and young people are engaged actively in shaping and evaluating the authority's services. The youth service reaches very good numbers of young people through a range of community based services. In the evaluation of the youth service, young people expressed high levels of satisfaction with the provision. Youth participation in activities such as the youth inclusion support panel and the multi-agency youth inclusion programme is very good; of the 161 young people supported by this programme only two re-offended while on the programme. The number of first time offenders to the youth justice system increased in 2007, but recent local data shows a small reduction. There has been a reduction in recidivism.
- 106** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is outstanding. Through a detailed needs analysis and wide ranging consultations, the authority has an accurate understanding of the needs of its young people and the barriers they face in achieving economic well-being. The authority, along with its partners, targets resources effectively to improve outcomes. There is an extensive range of initiatives and programmes in place to tackle the high rate of unemployment and worklessness in families. Young people at risk of not entering into education, employment or training are identified by the end of year 11 and supported by designated staff over the summer to engage them in available opportunities. There has been an increase in the number of young people who stay on in education post-16 and substantial increases in the number of young people who are going onto higher education.

- 107** The capacity of council services to improve is outstanding. The council, working with its partners has a strong culture of self-challenge and a demonstrable track record of improving outcomes for children and young people. There is highly effective leadership and high levels of commitment to children and young people throughout the partnership. Planning is ambitious, rigorous and strongly focused on further improving outcomes for children and young people and their families. The partnership is very successful at working across agencies to identify opportunities to add value through co-operation, for example in reducing re-offending. It finds innovative solutions to complex problems such as involving the community in targeted intergenerational projects to develop relationships between younger and older residents and reduce tensions. The partnership is self-aware and manages performance extremely effectively.

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 Tower Hamlets was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 31 March to 11 April 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.