

‘THE FUNDING CHALLENGE – SAVING £75 MILLION FROM THE COUNCIL’S BUDGET’

A HARROW COUNCIL SCRUTINY CHALLENGE PANEL REPORT

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Chair's Foreword

The process of setting a budget is more than an accounting exercise. The New Local Government Network believes that 'budgets should be the financial expression of a Council's priorities and objectives'.¹ Therefore, within this current climate, where the Council is faced with the challenge of making £75million savings over three years, it is imperative that we as a Council make the best decisions for the residents of Harrow.

The incremental budget setting process that Harrow has traditionally used works by considering the previous year's budget and making incremental changes. Whilst this process has worked effectively in previous years, the Challenge Panel has sought to consider how an outcomes-based budget could contribute to making more savings in the coming years, whilst delivering good outcomes for people in Harrow. The Budget Challenge Panel, which took place on the 14th January 2015, therefore drew upon the evidence and experience of other boroughs that have adopted outcomes-based budgeting.

During the Panel, we have also sought to understand the Council's interactions with Harrow residents and how these have informed the Council's budget and have identified much good practice and hard work. We have come to the conclusion that an outcomes-based budgeting process would better reflect the needs of Harrow residents, as consultations can be based on what Harrow should prioritise or do differently, not just what it should stop doing.

I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the witnesses, whether external, officer or portfolio holder, who attended and provided evidence at the Challenge Panel. They provided us with valuable information, were open in discussions of their methods and processes, and joined us in the process of identifying potential solutions.

On behalf of the members of the review Challenge Panel group, I commend this report.

Councillor Pamela Fitzpatrick

Challenge Panel Chair

¹ 'Smart Budgeting: Integrating Financial & Strategic Planning for Outcomes', by C. Mansfield & M. Beresford, *New Local Government Network*, p. 33.

Executive Summary

It is clear that the next few years will see big budgetary challenges for Harrow Council. It is essential that Harrow Council's budget-setting process and other associated processes are as effective as possible at enabling Harrow to rise to the financial challenges ahead.

Incremental Budgeting uses the last year's budget as a starting point, and makes incremental changes according to new legislative requirements, additional or reduced resources, service developments, anticipated price inflation and labour costs. This approach has helped Harrow to make significant savings to date but it is less well suited to scrutinising the cost and effectiveness of spending. Further, since departments consider spending reductions separately, cross-departmental efficiencies are likely being overlooked.

The Challenge Panel supports the ideas of reform in the budget-setting process, particularly moving to an Outcome Based Budgeting approach, with zero-based budgeting elements. This allocates funds according to a set of pre-defined outcomes and priorities, focussing on what impact the wide variety of services run by a Council has on outcomes.

The Panel believes that the key benefits of such an approach could be:

- Providing the evidence to support investment in prevention and early intervention.
- Allowing us to be much clearer about the impact of capital programme proposals on outcomes and therefore to prioritise between them, or between revenue and capital spending.
- Encouraging innovative ideas to reduce duplication or improve outcomes in areas in which multiple departments operate, through new ways of thinking
- Using zero-base budgeting to re-set the expectation that funding levels for a service will be derived from adjusting previous funding levels, rather than the level of funding needed for a service to deliver outcomes.

The Panel believes that the Greater Manchester 'Cost Benefit Analysis' tool may help the Council advance along a journey to outcome based-budgeting, and perceive this to be very useful for advancing public sector partnerships to deliver public value and better outcomes too.

In this context, public consultation approaches will need to change to give the public a say on the Council's priority outcomes and help them understand the outcome impacts from various options featured in a consultation. Whatever the budgeting process, in future, consultations must give residents a choice and give them the information they need to understand the trade-offs involved in these choices.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Harrow Council to set a budget covering at least three years from 2016/17, to provide a greater degree of certainty and ensure that all budget decisions are aligned to a medium-to-long term strategic vision. Changes will need to be made on an annual basis, but these should be amendments to a complete three year plan, rather than a significant development upon loosely defined or partial plans.

2. Harrow Council to establish clear criteria or principles for budget decision-making for future budget-setting processes and communicate these clearly and widely within the Council and to the public.
3. Harrow Council to give much greater emphasis to understanding and improving how Council money is spent, rather than dedicating most of the available time and energy to deciding what the Council will not spend money on in the future.
4. Harrow Council to move away from a directorate-based budgeting process to an outcomes-based one that:
 - a. Is meaningful to residents, rather than based on the Council's internal structure.
 - b. Is based on residents' needs.
 - a. 100% outcomes-based by 2019/20 or earlier.
 - b. Draws on 'zero-based budgeting' elements: where new ideas are developed from the ground up, rather than incrementally developing upon past ideas.
5. Harrow Council to draft a proposal for a gradual transition to an Outcomes-Based Budgeting approach, for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny prior to finalisation and implementation.
6. Harrow Council to give careful consideration to getting the following right when planning and implementing an outcomes-based budget approach:
 - a. **Communication, culture change and change management:** Avoid confusion and uncertainty by planning in advance and dedicating sufficient resource to programme management; recognise that some members of staff may feel threatened and behave defensively and plan a response to this.
 - b. **Leadership:** Ensure that Members and everyone at Senior Management level have a common vision and are fully engaged in the design and delivery of an approach. Choose individual outcome leads on their leadership ability not their service knowledge.
 - c. **Contingency Plan:** In recognition that a changing approach is experimental and involves some risk. This may include setting key milestones and review points at which contingencies trigger.
7. Harrow Council to give consideration to whether additional resourcing is needed to support the budgeting process in light of the above recommendations and any other considerations.
8. In determining how best to deliver priority outcomes, Harrow Council should consider the totality of public spend in Harrow and work collaboratively with public sector partners to deliver shared objectives as effectively as possible. Use of the Greater Manchester Cost Benefit Analysis Tool (see below) should be investigated with partners, to see if this can be used as a Common Approach.
9. Harrow Council to equip all Members with the skills and knowledge needed to improve Harrow's journey towards outcome based budgeting. For instance by increasing awareness of which services are statutory, what this means and how much scope there is for altering the nature and scale of these services. The reason for this is because simply labelling something "statutory" doesn't inform about what it means for services in terms of outcomes, quantity or quality, or other features of a service.
10. Harrow Council to write to the Government, welcoming the 2014 Autumn Statement commitment to giving local authorities indicative multiyear budgets as soon as possible after the next Spending

Review, and lobby all relevant parliamentary political parties to deliver this if they are in Government after the General Election.

11. Harrow Council to consider how resources can be freed up to resource early intervention and prevention services.
12. Harrow Council to further develop evidenced-based decision-making, to make sure that resources are used as effectively as possible to deliver public value. In particular, it is recommended that Harrow Council pilots the use of the Greater Manchester 'Cost Benefit Analysis' Tool as a method to help us understand the costs and benefits of early intervention and prevention, and build evidence for pooling budgets with partners where benefits are derived by more than one public sector body. This could be for any or all of the following:
 - a. To evaluate a core service with strong preventative elements.
 - b. To evaluate a service with preventative elements that is at risk of being cut – to help the Council decide whether it should or shouldn't be cut.
 - c. To help us estimate the costs and benefits of a new service delivery model that the Council might invest in, to help the Council decide whether it should do so.
13. Harrow Council to adopt a consultation approach that focusses on public engagement in determining priority outcomes – linking outcomes to service options to some extent, in order to ensure that it is meaningful to the public.
14. Harrow Council to investigate and evaluate options for budget-simulation consultation tools, in which respondents select from cuts and spending options to form a balanced budget, such as that developed by the London Borough of Redbridge. These might need to be adapted to align with an outcomes-based budgeting approach, rather than an incremental based budgeting approach.
15. Harrow Council should at the very least, ensure that consultations encourage meaningful choices and encourage people to think about trade-offs in their responses. This may or may not be through the mechanism described in recommendation 14.
16. Harrow Council to investigate and feedback on how local businesses should be positively engaged in future budget-setting and consultation processes, including ideas for how they can contribute to the achievement of Harrow's vision and objectives.
17. Harrow Council to investigate the remaining concerns of the Voluntary & Community Sector Reps raised when giving evidence to this Challenge Panel (see appendix 2), report its conclusions to Overview & Scrutiny Committee and outline what it intends to do differently in the future as a result.
18. Scrutiny to increase its 'pre-decision' Scrutiny (on topics to be decided by Overview and Scrutiny Members). Council officers to notify Scrutiny of forthcoming 'key decisions' at least 6 months in advance to facilitate this, allowing Scrutiny to input at an early stage of policy, strategy and proposal development.

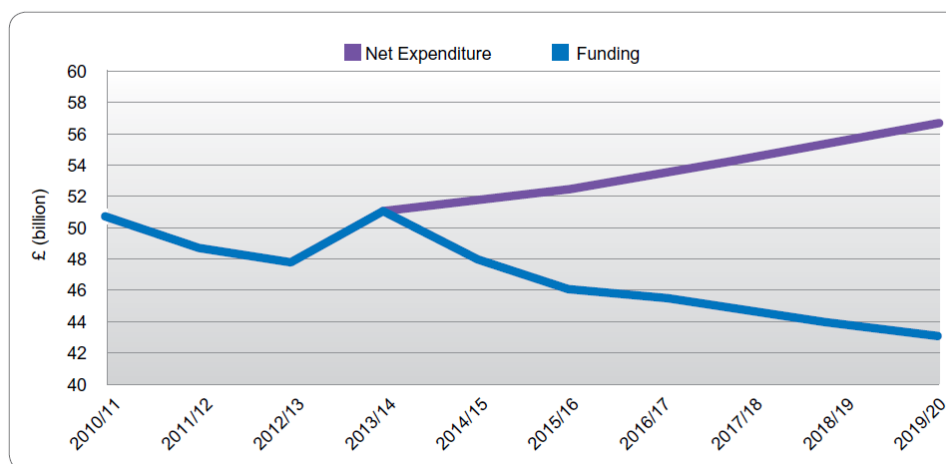
Introduction

From 2010/11 up to 2013/14, local authorities had made savings of £10 billion. The main political parties agree that public spending will contract at least until 2018/19. Over the period 2010/11 – 2019/20, total Council funding is predicted to fall by 26% in real terms, or 33% once the introduction of public health funding is accounted for.

However, LGA modelling predicts that an increase in expenditure in cash terms of 1.7% per year is needed to maintain 2013/14 levels of service, based on increasing costs and few remaining efficiencies.

Comparing projections for funding to projections for expenditure shows a funding gap growing by an average of £2.1 billion a year, adding up to £12.4 billion by the end of the decade (see graph).

Figure 6: Income against Expenditure 2010/11 to 2019/20



To close this gap, after expenditure on the services that can most clearly be identified as statutory (social care and waste management) is met, funding for other Council services would need to drop by 43% in cash terms by the end of the decade. However, within these “other services” are many statutory obligations, which impacts on the savings options available as they cannot be cut significantly: concessionary fares, libraries etc.

Authorities in relatively deprived areas, which are more dependent on Government grants, are the worst affected. In 2019/20, Councils in London will have 74% of the funding needed to maintain services at 2013/14 levels. This compares to 94% for shire districts, 82% for shire counties, 79% for unitary authorities and 71% for Metropolitan Districts.²

It is clear that the next few years will see big budgetary challenges for Harrow Council.

It is essential that Harrow Council’s budget-setting process and other associated processes are as effective as possible at enabling Harrow to rise to the financial challenges ahead.

The purpose of this Challenge Panel is to form a view on the effectiveness of Harrow processes in the past and generate recommendations for how it can be more effective in the future.

Panel Membership

² ‘Future Funding Outlook 2014’, July 2014

Cllr Pamela Fitzpatrick – Chair

Cllr Manji Kara

Cllr Kiran Ramchandani

Cllr Primesh Patel

Cllr Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Cllr Antonio Weiss

Cllr Chris Mote

Cllr Adam Swersky

Methodology

The Challenge Panel considered the following sources of information and evidence:

- **Literature Review** (drawing heavily on ‘Smart Budgeting’, New Local Government Network, 2014)
- **Budget Cabinet Paper 11 Dec 2014:** “Draft Revenue Budget 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19”. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lf4ah3x>
- **Commissioning Panel Papers**
 - The papers considered by Commissioning Panels in the Autumn of 2014, while developing the Medium Term Financial Strategy proposals considered at December Cabinet
- **Take Part (Budget Consultation) Background Papers:** Information Booklets x2; Questionnaire
- **Submissions from Voluntary and Community Sector organisations**
 - Voluntary & Community Sector Representatives (elected by the sector)
 - Relate London North West
 - Harrow Association of Disabled People (HAD)
 - MIND in Harrow
 - Linda Robinson
 - Clare Goldschmidt
- **Briefings and Presentations from Harrow Council Officers & Portfolio Holders**
 - Cllr Sachin Shah, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Major Contracts
 - Cllr Sue Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Community, Culture & Resident Engagement
 - Simon George, Director of Finance & Assurance
 - Carol Yarde, Head of Transformation Community Health & Well Being
- **Presentations from the following external speakers**
 - David Leigh, Business Adviser, Camden Council
 - Julian Cox, Deputy Director of Research, New Economy

- Mark Gillham, Chief Executive, Mind in Harrow, on behalf of the Voluntary & Community Sector Reps
- Deputy Director of Finance, Warrington Council
- Scrutiny Manager, Lewisham Council

Harrow's Financial Position

Harrow is one of the lowest funded Councils in London. A focused piece of work was recently commissioned from LG Futures to investigate Harrow's funding settlement and the reasons behind the variances from other London Boroughs and across England. The review identified that in 2015/16 Harrow's revenue spending power per head is projected to be £159 (or 17.3%) lower than the London average, which ranks Harrow 26th out of 32 boroughs. A similar comparison with the England average shows Harrow's revenue spending power per head is £127 (or 14.3%) below average and ranks Harrow 105th out of 120 top-tier Local Authorities.

In addition, in 2012/13, Harrow's financial reserves were just 5% of revenue expenditure. This represents one of the very lowest reserve ratios in the country. In fact, Harrow has been significantly below the average for several years before this and Harrow's reserve ratio was increased in 2012/13 for the only time in the period from 07/08 onwards.³

Approaches to Budget Setting⁴

The below table summarises theoretical approaches to budget-setting⁵

Incremental Budgeting	A method of budgeting that uses the previous years' budget as a model and makes small, incremental changes each time.
Incremental Plus	As above, but mixed with elements of other models such as outcome-based budgeting, or zero-based budgeting.
Outcomes-based Budgeting	A method of budgeting in which funds are allocated accordingly to a set of pre-defined outcomes or priorities. This model often is part of a more commissioning-based approach to service delivery. (A variation on this is 'priority based budgeting': where resources are allocated based on 'priorities' e.g. should council tax rise, or should fees and charges increase – <i>CFPS, Raising the Stakes, 2014</i>).
Zero-based Budgeting	A method of budgeting that starts completely from scratch – from a 'zero base'. Each budgeting decision is made as if for the first time. This means that each decision must be justified, and services that previously received a certain

³ Audit Commission Financial Ratios Tool.

⁴ 'Smart Budgeting: Integrating Financial & Strategic Planning for Outcomes', by C. Mansfield & M. Beresford, *New Local Government Network*, pp. 11-12.

⁵ 'Smart Budgeting: Integrating Financial & Strategic Planning for Outcomes', by C. Mansfield & M. Beresford, *New Local Government Network*, p. 23, p. 37.

	amount of funding are not guaranteed to receive it again.
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The traditional approach to budget-setting in local authorities, 39% of Councils now use only 'incremental budgeting'. Another 39% use it in tandem with outcome or zero-based budgeting methods.

Broadly speaking, Harrow has followed an incremental approach for setting its 2015/16 budget.

Incremental budgeting is the process of taking last year's budget as the starting point and adjusting it for known factors such as new legislative requirements, additional or reduced resources, service developments, anticipated price inflation and labour costs. Typically, a Council working with a reduced budget will work out the scale of the cut it faces for the coming year, set targets for each directorate to meet, and then invite proposals for efficiencies and transformation. Options for savings are presented to Council Members who decide the Council's priorities, based on "how much things hurt at the margins".

The New Local Government Network offer the following critique of Incremental Based Budgeting.

Positives of this approach:

- Relatively low-cost in terms of time and labour intensiveness.
- Does not involve much conflict.
- For fairly minor financial changes, the process can be an efficient way of testing relative priorities.
- Allowed councils to make significant savings and deliver balanced budgets to date.

Limitations of this approach:

- Effective way to distribute new money, but much weaker at scrutinising the cost and effectiveness of existing spending.
- Often leads to salami slicing, where the headline budget for each silo service area is squeezed without fundamentally questioning the impact each cut has on outcomes.
- Duplication & Silos: Because each department considers its spending reductions separately, it is easy to overlook efficiencies that could be made across departments. Can hinder joined up thinking about problems and impede an integrated approach to service delivery.
- Can lead to a focus on the budget for next year rather than planning for the medium and long term. Many solutions will only deliver the desired positive outcomes and savings over a much longer period.
- An incremental approach is often alienating or demoralising for Councillors if presented with a menu of options for what not to spend money on, rather than considering how it could be spent better. Members elected with imagination and zeal can be given little real input into future plans for services.

Harrow's Internal Budget-Setting Process for the 2015/16 Budget

Revenue Budget Process

- The revenue budget setting process for 2015/16 commenced in approximately March 2014. The £75m target (2015/16 to 2018/19) was arrived at by using the estimated budget gap, per the finance model, of £24.74m for 2015/16 and £20.765m for 2016/17 (as reported to Cabinet/Council in February 2014) and assuming savings of £15m per annum for 2017/18 and 2018/19. Although the funding gap for 2015/16 was £24.74m, a working target of £30m was agreed to allow for slippage for those savings that required a long lead in time.
- Any methodology used for allocating the savings target has its advantages and disadvantages. It was agreed at Corporate Strategic Board (CSB) to allocate the target *pro rata* based on directorate net budget. In recognition of the desire to look at savings both directorate specific and cross Council, 20% of the target (£15m) was allocated to cross Council saving suggestions.
- Through the budget process there was a very clear steer that Officers must come forward with a range of saving proposals to give members options to achieve the indicative target of £30m. Following this steer and Cabinet agreeing the budget planning process in July, officers worked up a series of savings proposals in accordance with the process timetable.
- To ensure the indicative target of £30m for 2015/16 was achieved, a number of savings for 2015/16 were taken early in-year (2014/15). Cabinet agreed in-year savings of £1.601m and £131k in July and November 2014 respectively. All early savings were recurrent and could be counted against targets for 2015/16.

Commissioning Panels

- The savings proposals were presented to a number of Commissioning Panels (CP) which took place in late September/early October to challenge and scrutinise savings proposed. The dates were set as such to ensure draft 15/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) were presented to December Cabinet for consultation. The Commissioning Panels are not decision making bodies.
- There was a CP per directorate, except for Community Health and Wellbeing which was split into three, and one for cross council. The panels were chaired by the Leader of the Council and attended by Portfolio Holders and relevant officers.
- The emphasis of the CP pack was a high level summary of the directorates covering areas such as service purpose and offer, key challenges and opportunities, risk, finance and performance. The narrative was supported by a series of savings schedules and equality impact assessments. In the interest of openness and transparency, all CP papers have been published on the intranet.
- For each savings proposal the following information was presented to the CP: brief description, RAG status, estimated savings and their profile, and estimate of redundancy and pension strain costs, capital implications, risk, volumetrics, key milestones, equality implications and consultation required.
- The CP's looked at multi-year savings and not just 15/16.

After the Commissioning Panels

- 'Take Part', the start of a conversation with residents was carried out over an eight week period from 11 September to 8 November 2014. .
- The Autumn Statement was announced in early December and the central government grant settlement followed on 18 Dec. The implications of these were worked into the MTFs and financial model and presented to December Cabinet.
- The draft savings proposals were taken to December Cabinet, asking members to approve the draft budget for 2015/16 and the MTFs 2015/16 to 2018/19 for general consultation, being mindful of the results of the Take Part consultation and equality impact assessment.
- The consultation required for each individual saving proposal was detailed in the December Cabinet report. A number of individual public consultations have/continue to be carried out including consultations on Children's Centres, Libraries, Voluntary sector funding and services within the Environment & Enterprise directorate. Consultation results will be reported back to Cabinet to ensure informed decision making.
- The final budget and MTFs will be taken to February Cabinet asking for Cabinet to recommend the budget to full Council.

In his evidence to the Challenge Panel, the Director of Finance & Assurance outlined the following features of a good budget-setting process:

- Fair and transparent within the officer corps.
- Minimises opportunities for 'gaming' within officer corps.
- Process has to deliver options for members so that members can make decisions in line with administration priorities.

Administration Plans for Future Budget-Setting Process

At the Challenge Panel, Councillor Sachin Shah outlined the Administration's views on processes used for the 2015/16 budget and their plans for budget setting processes in future years as follows:

- Harrow has an incremental process: total spend is broken down into approximately 30 budgeting-areas, which are largely considered separately from one another, and incremental changes are made from a starting point of what was done the previous year. This is likely to see some odd spending patterns as in the last ten years much has changed in the Council and the context in which it operates, for instance, the technology available.
- This approach has operated in a time of reduced income by giving savings targets to Council Directorates, on an organisational structure basis. This has no meaning outside of the Council or to the public. The Administration would like to move away from directorate-based budgeting to a more outcomes-based budgeting approach that is more closely linked to what Harrow residents want, than what current approaches are.

- The Administration would like to change to an approach that looks at what we are spending, not what we are cutting. Much larger sums of money are being spent rather than being saved and this spending needs to be considered further.
- For the 2015/16 budget, the Council has followed a one-year budgeting process. This approach means that every year we look for more and more cuts. The Administration intends to move to a balanced 2-3 year budget to increase stability for all relevant stakeholders. This was not possible for the 2015/16 budget due to timing of the election and the level of savings needed.
- It is unlikely that all of the above will feature in our next budget-setting process as these things take time to implement. This may take three or four years.

Voluntary & Community Sector Reps feedback on process for 2015/16

In advance of the Challenge Panel, voluntary and community sector organisations were invited to submit their views on the budget-setting process and the associated consultation processes. The Challenge Panel have considered the submissions received in its deliberations. At the Challenge Panel meeting, The Chief Executive of Mind in Harrow (at the request of the Voluntary and Community Sector Reps, who are elected by organisations in the sector to represent their views), presented the following key points:

- The Council has lacked a vision or strategy and needs to answer the question 'how do we together meet the needs of the most disadvantaged Harrow citizens with so much less money?' Strategic areas to consider include health and social care related partnerships, for instance with the NHS, voluntary sector and wider community of citizens.
- There has been a lack of any criteria or principles for the Council to decide in a transparent and rational way what to propose for savings. This has led to short-term thinking, a focus on some 'soft targets' like voluntary sector grants, and inadequate consideration of the impact of proposals. For instance there is likely to be higher social care costs in the future because of cuts to preventative services.
- Current proposals for voluntary sector funding cuts breach several Administration election manifesto commitments, which should be the Administration's minimum guiding principles.
- There has been lack of coordination across departments in the budget decision-making process. Examples include:
 - Care Act implementation: many voluntary sector services within the scope of the Care Act are proposed for cuts.
 - Health & Wellbeing Strategy: the budget-setting approach seems not to have shown any regard for the Mental Health & Dementia priorities in this strategy.
- National Policy drivers are being disregarded, for example there is an expectation of equity of funding for Mental Health, but Council budget proposals will create greater inequity.

The sector acknowledged and welcomed a number of positive elements to the Council's approach, namely:

- There was clarity on the total level of savings needed, as stated in the Take Part consultation document 'Help Shape Your Harrow of the Future' (September 2014)
- There were meetings between voluntary sector CEOs and Portfolio Holders to explain some of the budget in detail
- Commitments to minimise budget cuts that impact on the most disadvantaged people in Harrow were made (e.g. avoiding further Council Tax Support reductions).

Panel's Views

Whilst some of the specific concerns raised by the voluntary sector were too specific for the panel to explore in detail within the scope of the review, the panel agrees with a number of the strategic themes. It is encouraging that the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Major Contracts has also articulated many of these themes and the panel are pleased to see the emergence of a consensus on key issues.

Recommendations: A Strategic Budgeting Approach

1. Harrow Council to set a budget covering at least three years from 2016/17, to provide a greater degree of certainty and ensure that all budget decisions are aligned to a medium-to-long term strategic vision. Changes will need to be made on an annual basis, but these should be amendments to a complete three year plan, rather than a significant development upon loosely defined or partial plans.
2. Harrow Council to establish clear criteria or principles for budget decision-making for future budget-setting processes and communicate these clearly and widely within the Council and to the public.
3. Harrow Council to give much greater emphasis to understanding and improving how Council money is spent, rather than dedicating most of the available time and energy to deciding what the Council will not spend money on in the future.

Experiences of Outcome-Based Budgeting

Warrington and Camden Councils attended the Challenge Panel meeting to talk about their experiences of Outcome-Based Budgeting. In addition, the Panel considered written cases studies based on experiences at Lambeth and East Hampshire, from the NLGN Report 'Smart Budgeting'. The Challenge Panel found a high degree of commonality between the experiences of these Local Authorities. The content of this section is largely based on Warrington and Camden as their experiences were explored in more detail.

All authorities emphasised that they had taken positive steps towards full outcomes-based budgeting, rather than fully implemented it to a consistently high standard.

Approach:

- Priority outcomes were discussed and defined.
- Leadership: Each outcome was led by an Assistant Director, who was not necessarily the delivery lead for the outcome. In Camden, almost every AD took on an outcome. In Warrington, the AD

leads were chosen by leadership skills rather than knowledge of relevant service-areas. The leads brought together groups of relevant officers. In Lambeth, 13 outcomes were split into three Outcome panels, each led by a relevant Cabinet Member, whose roles were re-conceived as 'commissioners'.

- Wider strategic approaches underpinned or sat alongside the outcomes based budgeting process. These were similar in both authorities and included 'Investing in Local Growth', 'Developing New Solutions with Partners to Reduce Inequality', and 'Redefining our Role and Relationship with Citizens (self-sufficiency, community resilience and building trust)'. Camden also had a 'Right First Time/Systems Thinking' approach.
- Authorities were clear that a key outcome was the need to be making savings – but intended to do this in an evidence-based and/or transformational way. Camden required officers to evidence that services were delivering outcomes, not just outputs, to inform decision making about what should be cut.
- However, ideas and proposals for new investment were also encouraged. In Camden four 'investment tests' were used for both existing and new services: outcome focus; tackle inequality; invest in early intervention and the capacity to act decisively, make every pound count. Warrington found that many people adapted to the process quickly, generating some ambitious ideas and leaving 100-150 ideas for further exploration after the end of the 15/16 process.
- To create the evidence base for decision-making in Camden, processes of 'data discovery' (continued iteration and constant learning) were promoted and joined up support from policy and finance teams helped to enable this. Service design proposals were iteratively developed in line with the data discovery.
- Saving Targets: Warrington started off by setting no savings targets, although they were re-introduced later, whilst Camden asked for savings proposals at three levels for each service – from minimal through to severe.
- Camden were trying to set a three-year budget and looked for £100m worth of savings options to allow a degree of choice in where £75m of savings needed over the three years should be made.
- Political Decision-Making Broadened: Groups of portfolio holders received and discussed proposals put forward by officers – not just individual portfolio holders. One authority described this as 'breaking down silos at the Member level too'.
- Ambition & Contingency Planning: Camden agreed 'break points' at which the experiment would be scaled back or ended if milestones weren't hit. Similarly, Warrington ran an incremental process in parallel, aiming to get only 25% of their savings from the outcomes-based process (achieved 40%). Warrington also prepared for the possibility of the process failing to deliver a balanced budget through planning to use some of their financial reserves in the case of a shortfall.
- Engagement from Partners: The process increased this in Warrington. New Economy's 'Cost Benefit Analysis' Tool (see below) was unsuccessful in engaging partners a few years ago, but as partners were now becoming a lot more engaged, there is an opportunity to use this tool again.
- Administration: Were fully engaged and supportive; this is considered an important factor in the success.

- Statutory Services: Not seen as an excuse for protection – in Camden these had to demonstrate outcomes too and the authority is planning to cut some that demonstrated low outcomes.

Learning:

- Selecting outcome themes was not a straightforward process. Warrington began with their Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities, but found that this didn't cover all aspects of the Council's work and some service areas were hard to place. Camden began with the political priorities in the Camden Plan, but found that these missed out aspects of the Council's work (e.g. safeguarding).
- Project Management: Insufficient resources for this led to some false assumptions, duplication and confusion in Warrington.
- Communication and Change Management: at Warrington, the evolving nature of the process meant that there was a degree of uncertainty that some found demoralising. Others believed this was the same process under a new name, and variable levels of support and engagement at a senior management level restricted progress. Other authorities are clear that they are only beginning to change managers' approaches and refine their data and systems for outcome-based budgeting.
- Time and Resourcing: These needs are high and need to be planned for, Warrington has planned to do 'best-value' type service reviews, but had to skip this stage in their first year.

Panel's Views

The Challenge Panel supports the ideas of reform in the budget-setting process, particularly moving to an Outcome-Based Budgeting approach. Besides the preventative spend benefits (see below), the Panel believes that the key benefits of such an approach could be:

- Impact of capital projects: OBB should allow us to be much clearer about the impact of capital programmes on outcomes (and reductions in demand for statutory services), and therefore to prioritise between them, or prioritise between current and capital spending.
- Cross-functional areas: OBB is a new framing, or way of thinking for officers and councillors, encouraging innovative ideas to reduce duplication or improve outcomes in areas in which multiple departments operate. A classic example would be health and social care, where focusing on the outcome (appropriate care tailored to need) creates a lot of opportunity to reduce costs and improve outcomes.

Recommendations: Outcome-Based Budgeting

4. Harrow Council to move away from a directorate-based budgeting process to an outcomes-based one that is:
 - c. Meaningful to residents, rather than based on the Council's internal structure.
 - d. Based on residents' needs.
 - c. 100% outcomes-based by 2019/20 or earlier.
 - d. Draws on 'zero-based budgeting' elements: with new ideas are developed from the

ground up, rather than incrementally developing upon past ideas.

5. Harrow Council to draft a proposal for a gradual transition to an Outcomes-Based Budgeting approach, for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny prior to finalisation and implementation.
6. Harrow Council to give careful consideration to getting the following right when planning and implementing an outcomes-based budget approach:
 - d. **Communication, culture change and change management:** Avoid confusion and uncertainty by planning in advance and dedicating sufficient resource to programme management; recognise that some staff may feel threatened and behave defensively and plan a response to this.
 - e. **Leadership:** Ensure that Members and everyone at Senior Management level have a common vision and are fully engaged in the design and delivery of an approach. Choose individual outcome leads on their leadership ability not their service knowledge.
 - f. **Contingency Plan:** In recognition that changing approach is experimental and involves some risk. This may include setting key milestones and review points at which contingency plans are triggered.
7. Harrow Council to give consideration to whether additional resourcing is needed to support the budgeting process in light of the above recommendations and any other considerations.
8. In determining how best to deliver priority outcomes, Harrow Council should consider the totality of public spend in Harrow and work collaboratively with public sector partners to deliver shared objectives as effectively as possible. Use of the Greater Manchester Cost Benefit Analysis Tool (see below) should be investigated with partners, to see if this can be used as a Common Approach.
9. Harrow Council to equip all Members with the skills and knowledge needed to improve Harrow's journey towards outcome based budgeting, for instance increasing awareness of which services are statutory, what this means and how much scope there is for altering the nature and scale of these services, as simply labelling something "statutory" doesn't inform anything about what it means for services in terms of outcomes, quantity or quality or other features of a service.

Recommendations: Lobbying

10. Harrow Council to write to the Government, welcoming the 2014 Autumn Statement commitment to giving local authorities indicative multiyear budgets as soon as possible after the next Spending Review, and lobby all relevant parliamentary political parties to deliver this if they are in Government after the General Election.

Greater Manchester Cost Benefit Analysis Tool⁶

The Greater Manchester Cost Benefit Analysis Tool (CBA) is designed to assess and evaluate service transformation proposals in a systematic way in order to better understand the benefits, and how these are apportioned across local and national organisations and communities. It has been refined with and backed by HM Treasury and the Public Sector Transformation Network.

It is a tool that can help Councils and other organisations make budget and investment decisions based on what service models give the most benefit for the available money.

It can also be used to help evaluate existing service arrangements to determine which are delivering most and least value.

In short, CBA can be used to deliver:

- Informed decision-making
- Cost-Effective decision-making
- Equitable decision-making

Cost Benefit Analysis Tool Overview

Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) is an appraisal method that aims to put a monetary value on the costs and benefits expected from a project. The aim of CBA is to measure on a consistent basis, the overall fiscal, economic and social costs and benefits resulting from a policy change. It aims to place monetary (£) values on benefits from a project and compares total value with total cost.

In a period of reduced budgets, it is important that decisions to spend money are based on as full an understanding as possible of what will result from that expenditure. CBA can tell us whether we will see a return; and provides intelligence on the scale of that return, i.e. the higher the Benefit to Cost Ratio, the bigger the return on investment.

The balance between benefits and costs can be used to decide whether a policy change is worth making, and to help choose between alternatives. Typically this includes analysis of alternatives to maximise economic, social & environmental outcomes.

CBA can be applied at the start of project planning, during delivery to support changes in project implementation; and at the end (commonly called ex-post analysis). As such, it can form an important part of project planning, alongside tools to support project management, performance monitoring, risk assessment; and evaluation.

Every CBA model is imperfect. No individual or agency could ever provide exact detail on how much it costs to deliver an activity, or forecast the exact impacts of an activity. Given these imperfections, the use of CBA models will always necessitate a 'leap of faith' on the part of the policymaker.

To reduce these risks, the model has been built using the best available intelligence, but it also uses a series of clearly outlined assumptions. The model's assumptions (and our approach to CBA modelling) are typically conservative in nature; and they help CBA users by providing benchmarks for measurement.

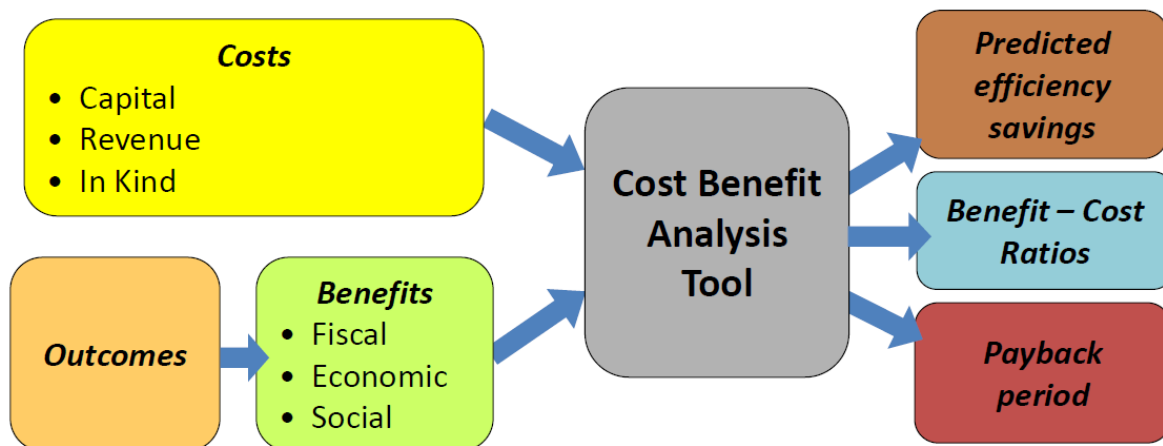
The model also uses a range of adjustments to account for any optimum bias. Project appraisers have the tendency to be over optimistic. Explicit adjustments should therefore be made to the estimates of a project's costs, benefits and duration, which should be based on data from past or similar projects, and adjusted for the unique characteristics of the project in hand.

⁶ Greater Manchester Cost Benefit Analysis Model: User Guide Version 1.0

The CBA tool draws on a unit cost database that may be useful when making budgetary and investment decisions regardless of whether the full CBA Tool is used. It brings together more than 600 cost estimates in a single place, most of which are national costs derived from government reports and academic studies. The costs cover crime, education & skills, employment & economy, fire, health, housing and social services. For instance, the database contains an estimate of the average cost of a 'common assault' offence, and apportions this cost differently to police, probation, courts, prisons and the NHS based on research findings.

The below diagram indicates how the CBA Tool works:

The GM CBA model



CBA Tool in a Partnership Context

CBA provides a common approach for initiating joint analysis and ventures between investment partners, as well as comparing costs and benefits for periods of a year or more. It can also provide investors with more detailed pieces of information regarding project delivery, such as the point in time when an activity's benefits will begin to exceed its costs (the payback point or period), the absolute amount (£s) by which an activity's benefits will exceed/undershoot costs; and the Benefit to Cost Ratio experienced by different investors in an activity.

CBA Tool use by the West London Alliance

This tool was used by Harrow Council and the West London Alliance as part of its 'Community Budgets' work. During this period the WLA was supported by the 'Public Sector Transformation Network' to develop business cases for investment in new delivery models, several of which are now being piloted, including the following two that Harrow is involved with:

- 'Skills Escalator' – Assisting low income, low skilled people in employment and in temporary accommodation to increase their skill level to secure higher income.
- Employment Programme tailored to the needs of people with mental health issues.

Further Information

For more information about the Greater Manchester CBA Model, please see the key slides at appendix 1.

Recommendations: Early Intervention and Evidence-Based Policy Making

The Panel strongly support the principle of investing in prevention and early intervention, both as a way of achieving social value for residents and as a way of reducing demand for and spend on responsive public services in future years.

This approach has also been a feature of all outcome-based budgeting approaches investigated for this review. Frequently, Harrow only counts savings if they're immediate, that is the Council invests in changing processes to allow us to reduce staff in an area. Preventative spend requires us to estimate the impact of investment in preventative services on the demand for higher-cost services in later years. Outcome Based Budgeting should allow us to include those estimates in budget forecasts, which makes the business case for preventative services much more compelling.

In his evidence to the Challenge Panel, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Major Projects acknowledged that investment in prevention and early intervention could have been a greater area for focus in the 2015/16 budget, but that the post-election timescales for budget-setting and the related decision to set a one-year budget combined with a need to make high levels of savings quickly to limit focus on this.

The Administration's intention is that setting a multi-year budget will allow greater early investment/prevention, as demand reductions on responsive services can be factored into cost savings in the later years.

The Challenge Panel welcomes this, but notes that the need to find high levels of savings will continue in the coming years and that the full benefits of prevention and early intervention may not always be realised within a timeframe of 2-4 years. In this context, the Administration will need to be resolved to make tough, principled decisions for the long-term benefit of Harrow residents and to deliver public value. Using robust methodologies to create the evidence-base needed for early intervention business cases would help decision-makers have confidence that they are making the right decisions.

11. Harrow Council to consider how resources can be freed up to resource early intervention and prevention services.

12. Harrow Council to further develop evidenced-based decision-making, to make sure that resources are used as effectively as possible to deliver public value. In particular, it is recommended that Harrow Council pilots the use of the Greater Manchester 'Cost Benefit Analysis' Tool as a method to help us understand the costs and benefits of early intervention and prevention, and build evidence for pooling budgets with partners where benefits are derived by more than one public sector body. This could be for any or all of the following:

- a. To evaluate a core service with strong preventative elements.
- b. To evaluate a service with preventative elements that is at risk of being cut – to help the Council decide whether it should or shouldn't be cut.
- c. To help us estimate the costs and benefits of a new service delivery model that the

Budget Consultation in Harrow

The Challenge Panel was convened whilst the consultation on the 2015/16 Budget Proposals was still underway.

Approach Taken

The Council Budget Consultation was branded 'Take Part' and was a two-phase process.

Phase one was carried out over an eight week period from 11 September to 8 November. Information was provided about the context, proposals and options and residents were asked for their overall priorities for the Council, which proposed cuts would impact most on their families and their communities, if they would support a Council Tax rise, and whether they had other ideas for how the Council could save money.

Respondents were also asked if they would be interested in volunteering and what ideas they had for how residents could volunteer to help save the Council money.

An information booklet and an 11 question survey (plus equalities monitoring questions) were produced and distributed – 100,000 via Harrow People and 6,000 at events. It was also available online. This first phase also involved 361 face-to-face in depth conversations and 50 community meetings, with 52 Councillors and 23 Senior Officers involved in road show/drop-in sessions. Some events were supported by British Sign Language interpreters; others were conducted in languages other than English, whilst easy-read versions of the background information booklet and the consultation form were produced for those with learning difficulties.

This phase was intended to be the start of conversation with residents about changes the Council needs to make over the next four years to save £75m, rather than to purely focus on the 2015/16 budget.

3,451 responses to Take Part were received, including 468 from Harrow Youth Parliament (who debated the budget, and devised a survey for their peers), 15 petitions with 15,845 signatures in total, 53 emails, 33 letters, 32 telephone calls, 4 videos, approximately 50 communications to the Labour office, 245 respondents to a survey devised by the voluntary sector for their service users, and letters from a Jenny Jones (Green Party Assembly Member) and English Heritage.

The Challenge Panel heard that 66% of respondents felt better informed about why the Council needs to make savings.

As a result of the consultation, the following changes to budget planning were made:

- Proposals for Arts Centre and Museum (continuing Council subsidy for one year to allow time for alternative operating models to be devised and implemented).
- Reduced level of cuts to the voluntary sector (adult social care and voluntary sector grants programme).
- Reduced number of libraries proposed for closure.
- Reduced levels of cuts in Children's and Family Services.

- Proposed increase in Council Tax (by 1.99%).

The second phase was a follow up consultation regarding specific proposals that the Administration wished to take to the next stage of consultation. At the time of the Challenge Panel these were (ongoing consultations unless otherwise stated):

- Children’s & Families individual consultation completed (findings to be reported at Feb. Cabinet)
- Environment & Enterprise individual consultation (findings to be reported at Feb. Cabinet)
- Library Strategy (report going to March Cabinet)
- Voluntary and Community Sector consultation

Panel’s Views

It was clear to the Panel that a wide range of consultation and engagement approaches were used in Phase 1 of the 2015/16 consultation, with considerable efforts made to reach a large and diverse group of residents. This was a sentiment echoed by the Voluntary & Community Sector Reps in their evidence. The Panel commends all Officers and Portfolio Holders responsible for designing and delivering this approach for this with limited resources and within time constraints.

However, as noted above, the Panel agrees with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Major Projects that the Council needs to articulate a clear and hopeful vision for the future of the Council in a time of considerably reduced budgets. Doing so would enable consultation respondents to feedback on the vision as a whole (for instance on whether they agreed with what was being prioritised), or on individual proposals in the context of the vision, rather than considering them in isolation.

At the Challenge Panel, Officers and Portfolio Holders noted that financial information in relation to proposals should have been incorporated into the core consultation literature. Financial information was put on the website in response to early requests for this information. The Panel agrees with this perspective and would welcome the inclusion of this information in future consultations to allow respondents to give a more informed response to proposals, based on the relative costs and (perceived) benefits of different services and budgetary options. The inclusion, of data for services on which the Council would *continue or start* to spend money on would be helpful to provide more context and allow for informed suggestions on alternative ways to find savings.

The introduction of an outcome-based budgeting approach would benefit from public consultation on priority outcomes, and from linking the proposals and their costs to their outcomes.

The Voluntary & Community Sector representative at the Challenge Panel raised additional concerns about the consultation process used in 2015/16. The Panel feels that there was not time for a full response to all of these by Portfolio Holders or Officers, or to understand the concerns in more detail. As such, the concerns not covered in this section of the report have been included in Appendix 2 and Cabinet are asked to consider them in detail and respond appropriately.

Recommendations: Budget Consultation in Harrow

Budget Consultation:

13. Harrow Council to adopt a consultation approach that focusses on public engagement in determining priority outcomes – linking outcomes to service options to some extent, in order to ensure that it is meaningful to the public.
14. Harrow Council to investigate and evaluate options for budget-simulation consultation tools, in which respondents select from cuts and spending options to form a balanced budget, such as that developed by the London Borough of Redbridge. These might need to be adapted to align with an outcomes-based budgeting approach, rather than an incremental based budgeting approach.
15. Harrow Council should at the very least, ensure that consultations encourage meaningful choices and encourage people to think about trade-offs in their responses. This may or may not be through the mechanism described in recommendation 14.
16. Harrow Council to investigate and feedback on how local businesses should be positively engaged in future budget-setting and consultation processes, including ideas for how they can contribute to the achievement of Harrow's vision and objectives.
17. Harrow Council to investigate the remaining concerns of the Voluntary & Community Sector Representative raised when giving evidence to this Challenge Panel (see appendix 2), report its conclusions to Overview & Scrutiny Committee and outline what it intends to do differently in the future as a result.

Budget Scrutiny

Budget Scrutiny in Lewisham

The Challenge Panel were given a presentation about the Scrutiny process in relation to budget setting in Lewisham:

- 1) All savings proposals go to one or more of their six 'select committees' in October/November. Any proposals that they are concerned about get referred to the 'Public Accounts Select Committee.
- 2) The Public Accounts Select Committee, attended by the standing members, the chairs of the five other select committees, the directly elected Mayor and various cabinet members and senior officers, discussed all referred proposals. Remaining concerns or suggestions are formally referred to Cabinet.
- 3) Where further concerns or questions remain, task and finish groups are set up to investigate in more detail.
- 4) The final proposed budget is taken to the Public Accounts Select Committee again in February. This meeting is again attended by the Mayor, portfolio holders and senior officers. This meeting again makes referrals to Cabinet.

In addition, once a budget has been set, there is quarterly budget monitoring by the Public Accounts Select Committee. This includes the submission of a report highlighting areas of overspend and underspend, corporately and in each directorate. This process has identified topics for further scrutiny; in Lewisham this includes looking at 'No Recourse to Public Funds'.

It was noted that whilst there are a number of advantages to the above approach, it was time consuming and this meant that there was less time for other Scrutiny work.

A key strength was that this led to thorough pre-decision Scrutiny, which therefore allowed an influence on decision-making before it was too late to change plans. Lewisham's Scrutiny Manager advised that pre-decision Scrutiny required on-going efforts from both Scrutiny Councillors and Officers supporting Scrutiny to identify planning at a very early stage.

Recommendations: Scrutiny

18. Scrutiny to increase its 'pre-decision' Scrutiny (on topics to be decided by Overview and Scrutiny Members). Council officers to notify Scrutiny of forthcoming 'key decisions' at least 6 months in advance to facilitate this, allowing Scrutiny to input at an early stage of policy, strategy and proposal development.

Conclusion

Whilst there is no doubt that Harrow Council will be confronted with big challenges in the next few years, the Panel believes there is much that we can do to ensure that these challenges are risen to as effectively as possible. It is time for a clear and hopeful vision, new ideas and ways of working, and an unwavering focus on making as much impact as possible with the resources available to us, which include Harrow's workforce, partnerships and citizens.

The Panel urges the Council to act upon the recommendations in this report and make our budget-setting and related processes fit for the future.

Appendix 1

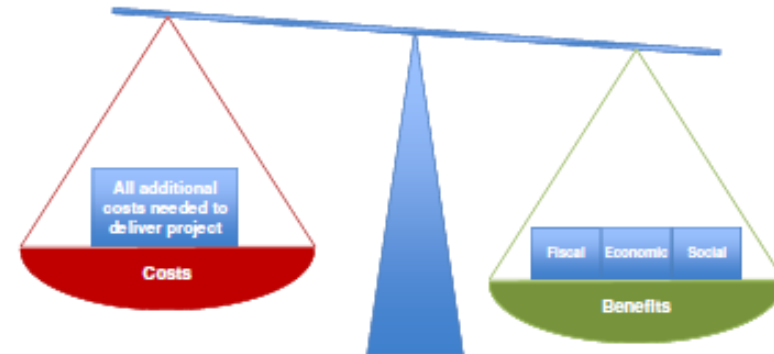


Cost Benefit Analysis – overview Harrow Scrutiny Challenge Panel

Julian Cox, Deputy Director, Research

14th Jan 2015

What do we mean by costs and benefits?

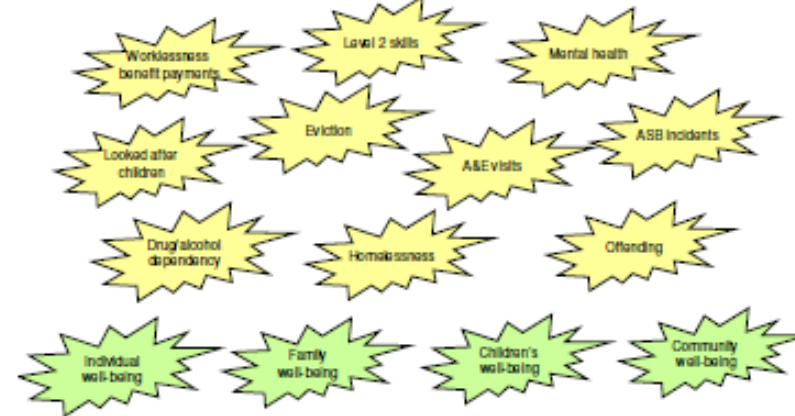


Types of benefits

Example	Fiscal benefits	Public Value benefits
Employment mentoring programme for people with mental health problems	Reduction in unemployment payments as individuals gain employment	Increased output resulting from increased employment Improved health with related impacts on well-being (e.g. confidence and self esteem)
Programme to tackle antisocial behaviour	Reduction in police, housing and local authority time spent responding to incidents.	Opportunity cost of avoided time spent by public sector agencies. Increased patronage of local businesses resulting in net growth in local economy once displacement has been taken into account. Reduced fear of crime amongst local residents.
Drug treatment programme	Savings in reactive health and criminal justice costs - emergency hospital visits, long term health costs, responses to crime.	Opportunity cost of avoided time spent by public sector agencies. Improved health and life expectancy of individual



Outcomes included in the GM CBA model



Turning outcomes into benefits

Outcome	Fiscal benefit	Public Value benefit
Getting someone into a job	£9,800	£14,610
Gaining a Level 3 apprenticeship	£1,391	£1,925
Reduction of one child taken into care per year	£63,362	£70,822
Reduced incident of crime	£609	£2,933

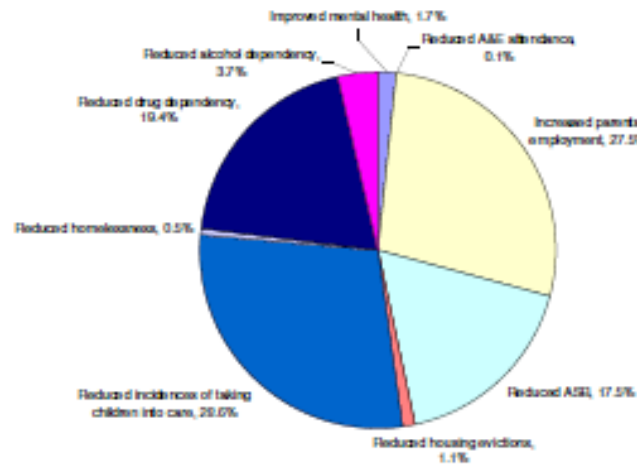
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Example outputs from CBA model

Intervention	Fiscal Return on Investment	Payback period
Family intervention project	1.4	5 years
Intensive Community Orders	14.5	<1 year
Integrated Health and Social Care	0.9	N/A

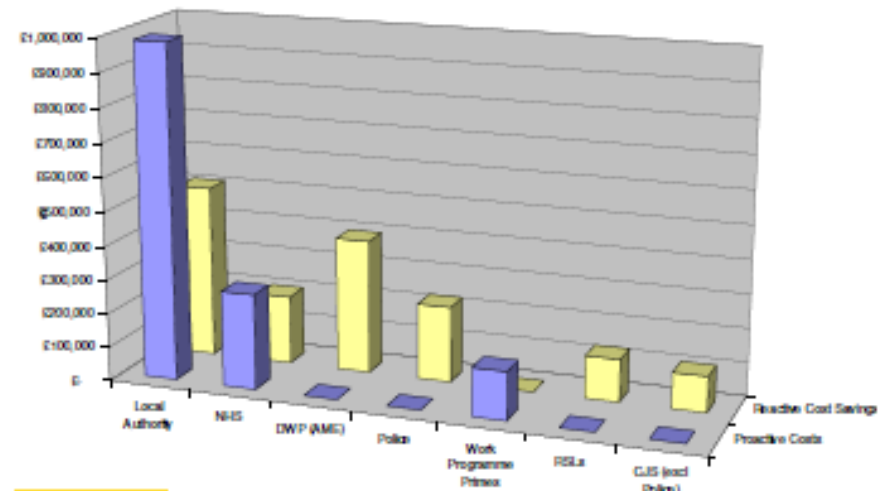
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Family Intervention Project – fiscal value of outcomes



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Family Intervention Project



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Appendix 2: Voluntary & Community Sector Representaives Feedback on 2015/16 Budget Consultation Process (selective)

Key Points	Evidence references
<p>Flaws in the consultation process 1: Phase 1</p> <p>It was very misleading and inappropriate to frame the Take Part consultation Phase 1 public consultation survey using the wording for questions 5 and 6 to assess impact: ‘Cut funding provided to the voluntary sector’. The consultation should have been framed in terms of the services or client groups impacted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary organisations had regular feedback from service users that they did not realise that this could mean that the service that they accessed could be totally cut. This feedback was communicated by voluntary sector organisations to David Perry in a letter dated 7 October and at the Take Part EqIA meetings. • For example, from Findings report for the Take Part phase 1 public consultation in December Cabinet papers it is evident that for the Youth Parliament consultation, when described as ‘the voluntary sector’ (on page 28) the services were voted as one of the high priorities for cutting but when described in another section as ‘support provided to other and disabled people’ (on page 30) the services were voted as one of the highest priorities NOT to be cut. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From some voluntary sector organisations: an Open letter to David Perry 7 Oct and Harrow Councillors 17 Oct • Findings report for the Take Part phase 1 public consultation in December Cabinet papers
<p>Flaws in the consultation process 3: Phase 2</p> <p>At the Voluntary sector consultation event on 25 November, voluntary sector organisations were misled by a written and verbal statement that the Administration was proposing ‘around 9.5%’ cut on voluntary sector funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There can by no excuse or explanation for the misleading nature of this verbal and written statement. It is absolutely clear from the written notes of 25 November event that people present believed the proposed cut to be ‘around 9.5%’. • Voluntary sector organisations wrote a letter stating concerns about this misleading information to Cllrs Sue Anderson and Sachin Shah dated 10 December. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harrow Council written statement circulated at 25 November consultation event • Notes of 25 November consultation event • Voluntary sector organisations’ letter to Cllrs Sue Anderson and Sachin Shah dated 10 December

Key Points	Evidence references
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am calling on the Administration to end their ‘spin’ on the proposed funding cuts for the voluntary sector services. You cannot fulfil election manifesto commitments by proposing a budget cut which is an outrageous breach of your manifesto and then proposing bad breach of your manifesto, as though a success and response to consultation feedback! 	
<p>Flaws in the consultation process 4: Phase 2</p> <p>Voluntary sector organisations wrote in the letter dated 10 December many concerns about the phase 2 consultation process to Cllrs Sue Anderson and Sachin Shah. A number of these concerns were also recorded at the EqIA meeting on 16 December.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is welcomed that Cllrs Sue Anderson and Sachin Shah addressed some of these concerns in a statement circulated on 23 December, particularly by extending the consultation period from 19 January to 13 February and by committing to no less than 3 months’ notice of any funding reductions. <p>We continue to haven many concerns about other aspects of this phase of the consultation, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In order to be able to have a fair chance to respond to the consultation via this survey, we request the ‘analysis’ which ‘shows that a number of organisations deliver the same or similar services (advice, advocacy etc.) for the same or similar demographics’ under question 8, as this analysis is not provided in the supporting document and is therefore an un-evidenced statement. This question is leading and does imply that a decision has already been made to cut services, although this is meant to be a consultation. We note that both organisations and service user surveys ask for very little information about the potential impact of services reductions, which we would understand to be one of the main purposes of the consultation so that the Council can complete an accurate Equality Impact Assessment. It appears that online surveys only for service users are being offered, which will be inaccessible for many service users who do not have access to or the capability to use online surveys. No face-to-face events appear to be planned to explain the consultation process and information. There are a number of inaccuracies in the information about services in the supporting information documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary sector organisations’ letter to Cllrs Sue Anderson and Sachin Shah dated 10 December Action points from 16 December EqIA meeting Take Part voluntary sector specific online surveys for organisations and service users with supporting information. Harrow Council’s website Take Part pages.