

Cabinet – 10 February 2022

Reference from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 8 February 2022

200. Borough Plan – Key Achievements and Future Intentions

The Committee received the Borough Plan – Key Achievements and Future Intentions report, which set the council's progress to date against the Borough Plan 2020-2030.

In his opening statement, the Director of Strategy and Partnerships provided a brief update on the borough plan, outlining a number of key points:

- The Plan had been developed with partners, voluntary and community sector colleagues to set out aspirations for the borough for 2020-2030.
- It had been intended that a detailed delivery plan be provided, to support the Borough Plan. However, due to the Council's capacity and the upcoming Borough Elections in May 2022 it had been felt that the plan should set out the priorities of the Council and partnership, and that the more detailed delivery plan be developed with the incoming Administration in May.
- The plan covered a significant amount of achievement that the Council and Partnership had delivered over the previous years and set out intentions for the Council and Partnership against the eight priorities and the two cross cutting themes.

The Leader of the Council added that the past two years had been very challenging but was pleased with what had been achieved and this was reflected within the report. In addition, where there had been a lot of change in recent years, there was an opportunity for service delivery to be rebuilt. It was added that partnership working within Harrow and across west London had been enhanced because of the challenges. A number of key services had continued to be delivered during that time and though some services had to be paused they were to be resumed with new services being offered.

Members thanked the Director of Strategy and Partnerships and the Leader of the Council for their introductions. In the session which followed, questions around the borough plan were asked as set out below.

- The Chair asked if any of the priorities set out in the Borough Plan had changed since November 2020 and was advised that changes had not been made and that the set of priorities and cross cutting themes remained the same as those in the November 2020 version.

- A Member of the Committee stated that the report noted two risk implications that were graded as red in that the Borough Plan was not affordable and that there was a lack of strategic leadership capacity. The Member questioned how risks could be reduced.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that there was a need to be as transparent as possible in terms of the Council's own funding position. The long-term funding position of Local Government was still to be finalised by Government so the current planning horizon needed to assume savings being made, which in turn would mean that perhaps not all the ambitions may be realised with the Borough Plan. He added that it would not mean that the Borough Plan would be undeliverable but that choices would need to be made on what could be delivered.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships noted that in terms of strategic leadership capacity a number of changes were planned across the senior leadership team in the Council; these positions would be filled following appropriate recruitment processes. However, this could present capacity challenges in the short term.

The Leader added that capacity continued to be an issue, but some things were above target.

- A Member indicated that whilst staff turnover could not be foreseen community safety remained a big issue and that a personal safety strategy should be a priority and built upon further. The Member sought clarification in terms of the timeframe for the Community Safety Strategy.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that the community safety strategy had been due to be presented to the February Full Council meeting. However, the pandemic and current capacity of the Council meant that the strategy would be delayed. This report would also set out the final Mayor's Police and Crime Plan and that the updated plan would set out a greater focus on public safety and would be developed with the next Administration.

The Member added that safety should be considered for everyone and that all protected characteristics should be encompassed within the safety strategy where the previous strategy could be surpassed. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that these would be included in the aspirations of the strategy; however, funding would be a critical issue. The local engagement by the Police was a key part of this work as well. In addition, recent planned activity around women's safety included things like training for frontline staff across the different services.

The Leader of the Council noted that Harrow had been one of the safest boroughs and a lot of work had been done around Harrow's town centre, as highlighted in the Borough Plan. Main concerns raised from a recent consultation raised how a fear of crime was found within schools and positive work had been done to address this.

A Member of the Committee added that personal safety for everyone needed to be considered and that future policies that would be expanded upon and carried out would be welcomed.

- A Member of the Committee asked if the large number of priorities had been a help or hindrance to the borough plan, to which the Leader of the Council explained that with the high volume of services the Council provided it was felt that these eight priorities ensured that no one would be at risk of being left out and it would not be right to remove a priority, they also set an ambition and direction for the Council.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships added that the priorities should not be considered individually as multiple priorities could be supported by major pieces of work, such as the Harrow Strategic Development Partnership.

- The Chair raised that the priorities within the report appeared broad and highlighted that there was a lack of depth as previous borough plans had included objectives. It was also noted that the current document did not address or measure progress against the objectives that had been set out in the November 2020 Borough Plan. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships recognised these limitations but noted that due to the capacity of the Council being stretched in order to keep core service delivery going and responding to the pandemic, as well as the Council approaching Borough Elections in May 2022, it was felt that the Borough Plan needed to set out the strategic direction of the Council and partnership.
- A Member of the Committee understood that many services were to be digitised but highlighted that not all residents had access to the internet or could use computers and relied on phones and letters. The Member sought clarification as to how these residents were being supported.

The Leader explained that a lot of work had been undertaken to move services online and how people could access services. For those who had found accessing services online difficult, alternative routes of support would be given and that this was working well. In addition, although staff had been working remotely, the ability to receive calls remained with the technology the Council had.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships added that an approach should be digital by design as opposed to digital by default and that the design needed to recognise that some residents might either be unable or be in need of greater support to access digital service and that the Council would need to allow for this in its service design.

In addition, the Director of Strategy and Partnerships added that as two examples, the community hub, which was set up during the pandemic, made outbound calls to support those people Shielding within Harrow

during the pandemic; and the work at North Harrow Library which supported residents to improve their digital and IT skills.

- The Chair advised that some residents had reported difficulties reaching the Council via phone and that reporting via the website had not resulted in a response. The Chair questioned how these issues could be addressed. The Leader of the Council stated that the website had won national awards but acknowledged that issues might be found and could be reported, and that the website had been regularly improved.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships recognised that there was always room for improvement for all Council services and with regards digital services, feedback was continually sought. It was recognised that to be fully digital would have its limitations and that there would always be a need to accommodate service accessibility in other ways.

- A Member of the Committee noted that only achievements were listed in the report and not challenges faced. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that in the diagram where the eight priorities were depicted, the top five priorities were where improvements could be made and bottom three were areas where performance had been good and needed to be maintained.
- A Member stated that benchmarks had not been noted in the Borough Plan and it was difficult for progress to be tracked and that it would have been useful for results to be noted so that costs could be justified.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that if the delivery plan accompanied the borough plan, more metrics would have been included and this would be developed with the new Administration. Some benchmarking had been undertaken with regard to the climate emergency, looking at carbon footprint and external expertise was being commissioned to support how this benchmarking work could be used to develop options for the Council to consider.

The Leader of The Council added that metrics and measurements to see if a project had been effective were important and that these would be part of the business cases which would include the appropriate data.

- A Member raised that further access to the outcomes of strategies would be welcomed. The Member indicated that they would welcome information on how the carbon footprint would be impacted by the new civic centre. The Director of Strategy and Partnership mentioned that one option could be that the climate emergency strategy and associated work could be incorporated into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work plan. In addition, it was noted that strategies such as the Economic development strategy included key performance indicators (KPIs) and did not necessarily need to sit within the Borough Plan and could be found in the sub strategies.

- The Chair asked how the achievements within the report had been verified, as it appeared the council leadership was marking its own homework. The Chair also raised concerns that the quarterly strategic performance reviews had not been undertaken or published for two years, which would have provided a more robust assessment of performance, and were important to assess the services and value for money provided to residents. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships advised that achievements would not be published if they could not be verified by supporting evidence. In addition, through the annual audit, there was an assurance process including the Annual Governance Statement that had been signed off externally which provided a level assurance. Further, quarterly performance reports had not been produced due to pressures from the pandemic, although the data continued to be collected and an abridged data set was used for a monthly report that had been provided to all Members. It was planned to re-introduce the quarterly performance reports with the new Administration.
- The Chair asked if there were any areas where the Council had not performed as well as it could have and where improvements could be made. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships noted that lessons had been learnt through the pandemic.
- A Member, who was not a member of the Committee, welcomed the report but raised concern that the safety of every community within all wards should be treated equally and suggested that some wards had more CCTV cameras than others. In addition, it was important for the delivery of projects to be transparent.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that CCTV was one aspect of the council's response to community safety and that not all wards have the same level or same types of crime and the Council had engaged with the police to support community safety.

The Leader of the Council explained that CCTV had been a tool to solve crime, not the sole solution, and was there to support the police and community. Some wards had used funds on mobile cameras to support communities.

- The Chair asked if the short-term delivery plan had arisen from the 2020 Borough Plan and was advised that the first wave of pandemic had impacted on the initial plan to develop a delivery plan and by the time the first lockdown had ended the Borough Plan was being refreshed to take account of the racial disproportionality cross cutting theme. There were then two further lockdowns and the planning for this current refresh had only started in the summer of 2021 at which time, given the stage of the political cycle and organisational capacity, that it had been decided that a delivery plan would come after the election.
- A Member, who was not a member of the Committee, expressed the view that it would be a good opportunity to reflect on how the pandemic

had been handled and for what could have been done differently. In addition, the Member praised the booking system for the recycling centre but noted that some residents had experienced issues accessing online services and that this should be addressed, in particular access to the recycling centre's booking system.

The Leader of the Council explained that the recycling centre's booking system had been introduced to reduce traffic flow in and around the area and that it had been effective in doing so. However, he added that a review of the system had taken place to find areas of improvement.

A Member asked if more than one slot could be booked at the recycling centre, to which the Leader explained that this restriction had been put in place so that unlicensed waste carriers could be better managed but mentioned that a system review was planned.

- A Member stated that the Council had responded well to the pandemic but sought clarification if a resilience team would be put in place to continue strategy and performance at times of crisis as the lack of performance reports had made it difficult for progress to be monitored. The Leader advised that system would be reviewed.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships explained that in terms of the strategic resilience of the Council during the pandemic, the additionality had been due to all staff working longer hours, and during the first wave capacity was re-allocated to meet different priorities. There was no reserve capacity, although this would be welcomed if the funding position allowed. However, this stretch on the Council was unsustainable in the medium term and across Local Government in general further challenges on strategic capacity would exist in the short term as a significant number of senior staff were choosing to step down from their roles.

- A Member of the Committee raised concern over tooth decay in children and welcomed that it was made a priority within 'Work for Harrow'.

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted;
2. the comments in terms of how the Committee would want to be involved in the further development of the Borough Plan and for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme be considered noting that the Committee expressed that they would want to future versions of the Borough Plan included in their work programme.
3. That the comments from the Committee on the Borough Plan be referred to Cabinet.

For Consideration

Background Documents:

- Agenda of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 8 February 2022:
- Supplemental Agenda of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11 January 2022

Reports on:

- Borough Plan – Key Achievements and Future Intentions
- Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 8 February 2022

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