

# **London Borough of Harrow**

## **Residents' information pack Light touch review**

**Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

**Final Report**

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## **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Scope and Methodology</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Findings</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Section 1 – the need for an information pack</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Section 2 – contents of an information pack</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Section 3 – format of an information pack</b>	<b>15</b>	
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>23</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Other local authorities</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>Focus group findings</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>Information on contact centre statistics in other authorities</b>	<b>35</b>

## **Chairman's introduction**

A huge variety of services are available to local people in Harrow. There are services provided by the council – libraries, schools, adult education, social services, parks, sports facilities and recreation grounds, road repairs and transport improvements, licensing, planning and benefits administration to mention only a few. There are services provided by other public bodies – GPs' surgeries, NHS and private dentistry, the police, Transport for London. And there are a plethora of voluntary organisations, charities, residents' groups and hobby clubs which exist throughout the borough, along with a whole host of private businesses offering a range of services for residents – some local, some part of larger regional and national chains.

Currently there is no single source for even part of this information. Various different sources for local information exist, nationally<sup>1</sup>, regionally<sup>2</sup> and locally<sup>3</sup>, often contradictory and fragmented, relying on the research skills of individual residents to wade through a morass of information, much of it irrelevant to them. Relating to the council alone, various departments produce leaflets and information about the services they provide. Of late the way in which they do this has been controlled more by the Communications Unit, making matters more coherent.

This review was convened to consider whether a single paper or web-based source for borough information should be pursued by the authority – a service which would be able to provide a single source of information for local people who want to know more “headline” information about the borough.

At the moment, Harrow is at the beginning of the Access Harrow programme – a process by which the way that the council communicates with its residents will be revolutionised. This has provided us with an excellent opportunity to contribute in an area where policy is rapidly being developed, and we would particularly like to thank Ben Jones of Access Harrow, Peter Brown, Group Manager for Communications and Linzi Clark, the borough's Tourism Officer, who were able to help us a great deal in this respect.

Councillor Ashok Kulkarni  
September 2006

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<sup>1</sup> The government have established a number of national portals – the UK Planning Portal is one – with the intention of making access to local information easier.

<sup>2</sup> The GLA and the LDA (London Development Agency) provide some information on websites and on paper relating to activities in local boroughs in respect of issues which fall under their particular remits.

<sup>3</sup> A large number of groups, private and public, continue to make information available locally.

## **Scope and methodology**

The scope of the review is printed overleaf. Minor alterations were made to this while evidence was being collected, reflecting a slightly broader thrust for the review<sup>4</sup>. In brief, however, evidence gathering was carried out in the following way:

### **Group Meetings**

There were three group meetings, attended by review group councillors and the scrutiny officer.

Meeting 1: Matters pertaining to Access Harrow (AH) were discussed with Ben Jones, Project Manager on AH. Information on best practice evidence from other authorities was also discussed.

Meeting 2: Results of focus groups (see below). Also information on the borough's new residents, and statistical information from Ealing on information requested from one-stop services.

Meeting 3: Analysis of findings and formulation of final report.

### **Focus groups**

Public consultation formed a central part of the review. A total of seven focus groups were engaged to examine a number of issues. Three focus groups were facilitated directly by the Scrutiny Unit. Four were lead by Community Consultation Providers. More information on all seven can be found at Appendix 1 of this report.

## **IMPORTANT NOTE**

Readers should note that in the report, where we refer to an "information pack", this should be taken as including information available from a single point on the web. We have used the term to apply both to the web and hard copy.

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<sup>4</sup> More information on this is available in the next section.

## **Section 1**

### **The need for an information pack**

Before moving on to the wealth of information gathered in this project, it would be wise to explain the purpose behind producing an information pack for local residents.

The problem is that many people – even those who have lived in Harrow for some time – are unfamiliar with their borough<sup>5</sup>. For many people this means not knowing how to deal with basic problems – issues such as recycling, registration with GPs, social care assistance and benefits. While people may have an understanding that the council has a role in providing these services, they do not appreciate the demarcations between various public, voluntary and private bodies that most officers (and many members) take for granted. It would be going too far to suggest that this fosters a culture of alienation for local people, but it does make it more difficult for residents to go about their daily business when the borough, as a cohesive community, and in particular the services afforded by the local authority, remain opaque.

This is already a receding issue, we are happy to note. Harrow is in the beginning stages of implementing the Access Harrow initiative<sup>6</sup>, a significant step for the authority which will result in more meaningful engagement between Harrow and its residents. We have been informed as a group of the development of the one stop shop, allowing easy access to council services, and a call centre, allowing members of the public to call a central number to get information on a wide range of council services.

In this environment it might seem unclear why a further information pack for local people might be necessary. In fact, consideration of a pack of this type was not initially what we had intended to examine. When this review was initially planned, it was based on the assumption that an information pack would be appropriate only for new residents. A “welcome pack”, sent to people moving in to the borough, would provide information on matters of particular interest to new residents – for example, electoral registration, school enrolment, GP registration and so on. On examining the issues, however, we decided that for value for money reasons, and to ensure that benefits were spread to all council residents, such a scheme would have to be cross-borough in nature, including all of our residents. Design and planning costs would be identical irrespective of how many people were being provided with the pack (we have been told that these would cost around £10,000), and on that basis it would not be reasonable to limit its use exclusively to new residents.

In reaching this conclusion, we have decided that there is a powerful rationale<sup>7</sup> for providing information packs to local people<sup>7</sup>. Firstly, it pursues the council’s aim of making contact between itself and local residents, rather than waiting for those residents to approach it with particular problems and reacting accordingly<sup>8</sup>. This relates closely to direct community engagement and community involvement, which was discussed and commented upon at length in 2005/06’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of Community Engagement<sup>9</sup>. Secondly, in whatever form, it would relieve pressure on the one stop shop and contact centre, providing

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<sup>5</sup> See focus group information at Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> Access Harrow is the council’s first contact initiative, being carried out through the Business Transformation Partnership (BTP) in association with the borough’s private sector partner, Capita.

<sup>7</sup> The issue of whether they should be provided in hard copy or electronic format is considered later in this report.

<sup>8</sup> The Access Harrow projects aim to develop a more proactive approach to council communication, instead of a reactive approach which requires that residents navigate the council’s own communications processes to access the information they require.

<sup>9</sup> The “Hear/Say” review, carried out by a project group established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Review examined community engagement across the council, but by specific reference to two service-based case studies. All our findings and recommendations are informed by this work.

answers to some routine queries. Thirdly, it would provide local people with a useful holistic view of the borough – not just in terms of council activities, but activities of other bodies as well – which is increasingly being demanded by local people<sup>10</sup>. The growth of a culture in the UK where access to information is now a right rather than a discretion afforded by public bodies to a grateful populace does not only mean that previously secret information must now be made public, but that local authorities should make it as easy as possible for residents to access services and facilities provided for their benefit – and to have easy access to information that is important to them, rather than information which it is convenient for the borough to provide.

Some of these benefits are naturally contingent on the kinds of information the pack would likely contain.

However, these benefits are by no means widely recognised, either regional or nationally. Nationally, the Department for Communities and Local Government offer no advice or guidance on how local authorities should disseminate information in this way<sup>11</sup>. Although many authorities are forging ahead with one stop shops and contact centres (and in this respect Harrow is somewhat behind the national trend) provision of basic information in an understandable and digestible form, either in a pack or easily navigated through a website, seems to be a niche area of policy development. Although the majority of local authorities in the country have an up-to-date communications strategy, which in many cases involves one-stop services either through contact centres or combined service receptions (as are being implemented in Harrow) following these initiatives through to the provision of generic information does not seem to be a priority for many. In many cases authorities have sought to provide information through existing means – as part of the statutory council tax notification booklet<sup>12</sup>, or through a regularly-distributed council communications newspaper/magazine<sup>13</sup>.

Although we consider that such methods can provide a solution in one respect, it is by no means sufficient. A list of numbers and an A-Z of council services, while certainly sufficient up to a point, does not meet the needs of many local people, a conclusion borne out by our focus groups. People want more detailed information – reflecting a desire for accountability in local politics – on council policies and procedures, and many more want information on more everyday issues – “how to get things done”<sup>14</sup>. The residents we spoke to felt that neither requirement is being adequately served at the moment.

That many local authorities have not grasped this nettle and made an attempt to expand the information offered to local people is often a result of cost pressures. There is a general presumption in some authorities<sup>15</sup> that information packs of this kind are not a particularly effective use of money. Notably, such authorities have tended to consider mainly the feasibility of providing hard-copy information. A full breakdown is provided in the appendices.

For many, though, the cost has been the principle concern, which we can understand. Harrow has somewhere in the region of 90,000 households – despatching a large (or small) information

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 1 and information on focus groups.

<sup>11</sup> The various e-Government initiatives and projects such as UK Online do not deal specifically with local government information. Steps have been taken to encourage local authorities to make more information available online, and to enable transactions to be carried out on the web, but this has not (nationally) been linked to council's communications strategies more generally.

<sup>12</sup> Councils are obliged to provide information to ratepayers on an annual basis, informing them of how their council tax is being used. Some authorities have used this as an opportunity to provide service contact information (for example, Tower Hamlets). More detailed information is available at Appendix 1.

<sup>13</sup> Harrow tends to do this at the moment through Harrow People, but see also Appendix 1 for context from other local authorities.

<sup>14</sup> A wish expressed by a participant in the first focus group – see Appendix 2.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 1

pack to that number of households would, for any authority, be prohibitively expensive. Even distributing bulky packs with other forms of council correspondence has the potential to provide huge logistical problems.

However, we consider that, carried out effectively, the provision of information in the form of a “pack” – whether in hard copy, on the web or a combination of the two – is crucial to a wider strategy of public involvement. People cannot relate to the council, or to their own local community, unless they are aware of the opportunities available to them. It is important that information be available on these opportunities, presented in a clear, readable and accessible manner, minimising the need for residents to navigate through reams of web pages, leaflets or telephone lines.

**Recommendation A: We are convinced of the need of a single source of key information about the borough, and services available within it, in the form of a web-based “information pack”.**

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## **Section 2**

### **Contents of an information pack**

Because the amount of information and type of information which we thought should be contained in an information pack would impact upon the format in which it was delivered, we thought it wise to consider this element first, before looking at delivery options.

Our initial thoughts coalesced around what the council already provides. Currently a large number of documents are available providing information to the public on a wide variety of council services – there is a hard-copy A-Z directory, produced only a few months ago and distributed with an edition of the council's Harrow People magazine. There is Harrow People itself, of course, which contains information on alterations to council services and advertises the existence of facilities for local people. And there are also a myriad of leaflets and booklets produced by all parts of the council.

However, early on in the course of our discussions we were persuaded by the idea that an information pack should not only contain information related to the council's activities, but that partners from the public and private sector should be involved as well. Residents have told us that they want to have easy access to information on NHS provision, the police and services provided by voluntary and amenity groups, as well as information on education and employment opportunities, and how to access the jobs market. We drew up a long list of the kind of information that we thought local people might want to know about – a list whose contents, in many respects, were mirrored in the findings of the focus groups we conducted. However, this was wide-ranging, detailed and, most importantly, long. We are convinced that information should aim to cover a wide area but should be targeted and joined-up, eliminating duplication and emphasising key priorities. Working with partners is a crucial part of this process.

Partnership working in Harrow is now mature, but we have noticed in looking at documents that the council produces (such as the A-Z of services) that the borough has not made a concerted effort to use the close relationships with many voluntary and residents' groups to both organisations' advantage by providing information on partners' services.

We consider that this is a missed opportunity. As a matter of principle, an information pack, whatever its format, should contain information on the borough in general, not merely on services that the council provides<sup>16</sup>. This will include information on the council's public and private sector partners as well. To provide an example, people may want to receive information on social care. However, some aspects of this service are being provided by the NHS, and some by the council. Although some people will know where the demarcation between these services lies, and some may find it useful to find out, providing information in this way will mean that people will have a quick and easy way of ascertaining who they should speak to in order to find out more about any given service.

**Recommendation B: We recommend that plans for developing an information pack be developed in partnership with voluntary groups, such as residents' associations, with any pack containing contact details, links and other information on such groups.**

**Recommendation C: We recommend that information packs also contain information relating to public and private sector partners such as the NHS and Metropolitan Police,**

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<sup>16</sup> A finding backed up by all of the focus groups – see Appendix 1.

as well as central government partners involved in training for employment and local colleges, for educational needs.

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## Experience from other local authorities

We have examined information made available by other local authorities, which can be found at Appendix 1<sup>17</sup>. This seems to have a number of similarities. Primarily, information (where identified as part of a defined “information pack”) has been provided in hard copy form. It appears in many cases to have been established as an additional, “tacked-on” service for local people, of medium or low priority when mentioned in communications plans and strategies – an approach of which we have explicitly disapproved in an earlier recommendation. Moreover, it seems to reflect predominantly the kind of information which the council thinks local people should know about itself, rather than being resident-led. The approach adopted by Kensington and Chelsea<sup>18</sup> seems to be a case in point.

The content of information packs, for those authorities that have introduced them, centres on services for which information is already generally available. Many authorities have produced a simple “A-Z” of council services<sup>19</sup> – in many cases online. Bexley is a good example. The authority has produced a separate page, listing services alphabetically but also grouping certain key services under a number of headings to ease user navigation. We have learned that this approach was adopted after a borough information pack, which Bexley had produced up until relatively recently, was withdrawn for financial reasons.

However, this level of provision has the potential to swamp residents with excessive quantities of information. An A-Z, for the most part, does not discriminate between services that people need information on and those that may be of more niche importance. Navigation is difficult (although Bexley have partly resolved this problem) because people may not know the name of the service they are looking for – in particular, the A-Z may use “officer speak” or council-specific terminology that is unfamiliar to residents. It relies upon local people having some knowledge of the way the council works. This is not something which should be taken for granted.

Results from focus groups have clearly indicated that people, fundamentally, want information on how and where to “get things done”, and many participants had strong views that more detailed information and basic “service” information should therefore be more effectively demarcated, with key services flagged up and an emphasis placed on transactions rather than reams of data on council structures and policies. Inevitably an A-Z will not always meet these requirements.

Providing an A-Z has the obvious and significant additional problem of covering only council services. Again, focus group data strongly suggests that local people have no interest in who is responsible for delivering a service, only that they should be able to access it effectively rather than being passed between different services, agencies and organisations.

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<sup>17</sup> The experience of other London authorities has been sought above that from further afield. However, background research did identify a handful of other authorities around the country who either already do or plan to produce information packs. The two-tier nature of many authorities outside London gives the task an added complexity, however, which would render their evidence of less use. Less culturally diverse authorities also have different challenges which are not directly relevant to Harrow’s position.

<sup>18</sup> See section 3.

<sup>19</sup> The council produces an A-Z of services – more information is provided in the next subsection.

Many authorities provide information through an official newspaper or magazine<sup>20</sup>. This dramatically affects content and gives rise to the potential allegation – raised by numerous participants at the focus group – that the council is continually trying to put a “spin” on the information it provides, and more interested in providing propaganda than information. Whether or not this criticism is justified (and we do consider Harrow People, the borough’s own magazine, to be an effective and valued source of information for local people) inevitably constraints of space and editorial considerations mean that this is not sufficient. The content would be limited and would not provide all relevant information in a single place, something we think that is particularly important. Moreover, this would again be delivery of the kind of information that the council thinks local people should know about, meaning that the council would be communicating on its own terms.

That said, the role of the newspaper is of significant importance when it comes to informing local people about significant changes in local services. This was an issue raised with focus groups over the policy around compulsory recycling. Therefore, we were disappointed to learn that September’s edition will probably be the last issue of Harrow People to be published. We have been told that the resources no longer exist to produce it. Its demise, we think, makes the provision of an information pack, in some form, all the more important, to ensure that local people are well apprised of the services and opportunities made available to them.

Experience from other local authorities, then, does not provide us with a clear way forward on content. Information provided elsewhere is minimal and patchy, based predominantly around what it is convenient for the authority to make available with little reference to the information needs of local people.

**Recommendation D: We recommend that Harrow develop an information pack as an element of the wider strategy for the council’s communication with residents, rather than as an add-on, and that as such it should be integrated within Access Harrow, and complement existing communications work. This will avoid the problems of cost-effectiveness that have rendered similar schemes elsewhere unattractive<sup>21</sup>.**

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## Duplication and links

Trying to find sources of information about the borough, residents have a number of sources to turn to. The council, as we have previously noted, produces a great deal of documentation itself, and other public bodies and voluntary groups issue leaflets, brochures and pamphlets. It is important that any information pack does not duplicate work already being undertaken elsewhere.

The most significant area of interface between this and another piece of borough-wide work relates to tourism promotion. Linzi Clark, the borough’s tourism officer, is responsible for promoting activities in the borough to residents and those from further afield. Naturally this includes providing information on a wide variety of topics – hotels, shopping facilities, restaurants and cafes, parks, gardens and golf courses and tourist attractions such as Headstone Manor to name several. Many of these will be directly relevant to local people, and

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<sup>20</sup> The bulk of authorities who did not provide an “information pack” as such said that their official newspaper was sufficient for the delivery of local information.

<sup>21</sup> More on how the format of the report, and its method of delivery, can emphasise this central focus can be found in section 3 of this report.

the document and the whole “Visit Harrow” campaign<sup>22</sup> is being marketed with local people in mind. As such, we consider that an information pack should complement this document, cross-referring to it where necessary but not duplicating the information it provides. This has the added benefit of making the information pack a more focused document.

The council’s A-Z – discussed above – represents a useful tool which is relatively new and up-to-date. It has been distributed to all households in the borough. Any information pack would have to offer something significantly different from the A-Z to be justified and worthwhile. We think that the format – specifically, the level of detail provided – will provide these key differences and as such that duplication would not be as much of an issue as would appear to be the case. We will examine these issues in more depth as part of the next section.

Finally, there is the risk of duplication with documents and information made available by partners outside the council. There having previously been no significant efforts made to draw this information together, it is difficult to say to what extent an information pack can or should take account of it. Views in our focus groups were mixed. Some participants were keen for an information pack to include more information on community groups operating in their area – effectively duplicating communications work that those groups are undertaking. Other participants, however, were concerned that the council should not impinge upon the community-building activities undertaken by local groups. We consider that an effective line can be drawn between these two priorities – but it raises a point about localised information which we will be looking at in the subsection below.

**Recommendation E: We recommend that steps be taken to avoid duplication of content with other documents produced by the council, and with the “Discover Harrow” document in particular.**

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## **Localised information**

A key problem with information packs in their traditional, hard copy form is that they are unavoidably generic. Ones we have seen contain general information about issues such as waste, schools, libraries and so on, distributed to all people in the borough regardless of need or geographical location. This is inevitable if information is provided on paper, because of the economies of scale required to distribute large amounts of material to large numbers of households – tailoring that information by geography or demography is simply not cost-effective.

However, the use of the web allows information to be targeted directly at specific groups. The council is driving forward plans to make the web more interactive and we consider that localised information could be one method to do this, and by so doing make it, and the information it provides, more relevant to local people.

We are particularly interested in opportunities afforded by Geographical Information Systems (GIS). GIS is a method of digital mapping, which allows aerial photos and maps to have key places or sites plotted on them to allow geographical searches for local services to be carried out. In common with other local authorities, Harrow operates a GIS which allows staff to access local information but this has not been rolled out to the public website. To contrast, Brent LBC has established a system which provides searchable mapping, enabling residents to tap in their postcode to find their nearest school, park, library or any other civic amenity on request. This has the potential to be an extremely powerful tool, providing exactly the basic information on

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<sup>22</sup> The campaign has been running for around a year, building on the council’s Tourism Strategy. Scrutiny has considered tourism as part of the 2005/06 work programme of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

services local people need. What is more, we have been told that updating the GIS database to map out local services would be relatively straightforward.

It is important to note that this would only be a component of a web-based solution, however (see the section below), and that the basic information GIS can provide should cross-refer to more detailed and general information elsewhere.

**Recommendation F: We recommend that local information be provided to residents, and that this should be provided through GIS, as the most cost-effective and easily navigable technique.**

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## Overview

Information from focus groups and from studies indicates that the following kinds of information are regarded as important to residents<sup>23</sup>.

### Localised information

- Rubbish collection/recycling
- Voluntary associations/community groups
- Schools, libraries and educational opportunities (incl library renewals)
- Ward councillors' information
- Healthcare information – nearest GPs, NHS dentists, pharmacies.
- Parks and recreation
- Local transport (including issues regarding local road closures and works, and bus, train and tube information relevant to local people)

### Generic information

- Contact details for key staff/departments
- Information on training and employment opportunities
- Information on benefits
- Culturally specific information (eg, women-only leisure clubs)
- Simple information on council policies and procedures
- Structure charts

These “core” priorities reflect the interests and needs of local people, as we have found them.

We have been able to gain some very useful statistical information from LB Brent and the City of Westminster, which tends to support most of these conclusions. Both sets of information are derived from experience from those boroughs' one stop shops and contact telephone lines – in Westminster's case, the line has been running for approximately two years, and Brent, as a pioneer in the field of first contact initiatives, has been running its contact centre for nearly fifteen years<sup>24</sup>.

The principle difference is that the bulk of queries for both authorities related to housing benefit and council tax queries – which, although mentioned by focus group attendees, were not commented on in much detail. This may be because residents consider that the information

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<sup>23</sup> Printed below is a combined, prioritised selection taken from all seven focus groups. Full data can be found at Appendix 1.

<sup>24</sup> Both sets of data can be seen in full at Appendix 4.

they have received in these areas is adequate – but the large number of inquiries does, however, indicate that providing information on these services in different ways will significantly ease the burden on one stop and first contact services, as well as providing relevant information to local people in a timely manner.

The information from these two boroughs also reflects the view that recycling enquiries – very high at the moment in Harrow because of changes being made to the system of collections – will remain at a high level, and that services should adapt to take account of this.

**Recommendation G: We recommend that the information made available reflects local people's needs, reflecting cultural requirements, policy changes and the ordinary, transactional details that are of most use to local people.**

## **Section 3**

### **Format of an information pack**

All of the residents we have consulted as part of this review have been clear that it is crucial that an information pack, if produced, should be accessible to all. For this reason, it is vital that the correct format be adopted. Crudely, this boils down to a single question – what should the balance be between hard-copy and web-based solutions?

Up until this point, we have referred to an “information pack” – a “document”, bringing together information available from a wide range of disparate places and putting it all together in one easily-accessible form – and we have implicitly included the web in this description. This has been the impetus behind other schemes, although they have treated the words “pack” and “document” more literally – producing hard copy documents which do not directly connect to web-based resources. A typical example is Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). They have produced an information pack exclusively for new residents, which consists of an A5-size wallet into which have been inserted a variety of leaflets on brochures on subjects such as refuse collection dates, electoral registration information and information about councillors and portfolio holders. We considered recommending a similar format, but considered that it was inappropriate under these circumstances. Firstly, there is an issue about relevance. RBKC have attempted to provide key information for new residents but some of the leaflets contain information which, because designed for a general audience, and not specifically written with the information pack in mind, might contain superfluous material. Secondly, there is an issue of bulk and convenience. Providing a large number of leaflets or brochures – even if within a wallet or folder – produces the same problems as a single, larger booklet. Neither approach is effective; both would involve residents wading through large amounts of information before reaching what is important to them. Thirdly, updating is a significant problem. Unless the intention would be to redeliver the information pack every year – something which would be financially unsustainable - information would become out of date surprisingly quickly. In particular, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses, even if attempts were made to depersonalise the document by providing generic details. Having an out of date document circulating amongst residents would be counter-productive. Changes in policy and contact details would cause unacceptable confusion amongst local people if information were to be predominantly made available in a static format such as this.

The fourth and most significant problem with providing a significant amount of information in hard copy is undoubtedly cost. In an ideal world we are sure that the council would be in a position to provide a high-quality guide in hard copy that could, with thought and consideration, overcome the other three problems listed above. However, this would require significant financial and officer resources, which the borough does not have the ability to commit at the moment. In any case, even if the resources were available, we are not convinced that such an initiative would represent value for money. Any recommendation which we make must, on this point, demonstrate efficacy in terms of cost, and a mass-distributed pack or book fundamentally fails to meet that test. Although the figures we have gathered on costs are, at the moment, vague, in the council’s current financial situation it would be an unreasonable commitment for the authority to make.

That is by no means to say that no hard copy information should be provided at all. We are aware of the problems faced by many residents when it comes to new technology. A very low figure of 9% of people nationally have practical ICT skills at Level 2 or above (GCSE level). 38% have Level 1 ability<sup>25</sup>. This corresponds with an ability to navigate the internet and carry out

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<sup>25</sup> “The Skills for Life Survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and IT skills” (DfES Research Brief RB490)

other basic functions but does not inspire immediate confidence. Although the council is planning to ensure that more people can acquire these skills<sup>26</sup>, it is crucial that those residents who cannot and will not ever develop their skills (the elderly, for example, or those for whom disability might form a barrier) are catered for.

That said, this should not dilute the importance of the web as a method for delivering information. The council is currently looking at ways to expand the services it makes available on the web, and is planning to refresh and redesign the website at the beginning of next year. A Project Initiation Document (PID) is being drafted at the time of writing and is being consulted on – we hope that our recommendations will be incorporated within it. We will cover this in more detail below, but before we do so we should justify the balance that we have sought to reach between use of hard copy and electronic material.

The benefits of making information available electronically rather than in hard copy are clear. The web is cheaper, cross-referencing between different subjects is rendered much more straightforward through hyperlinks, and it is very easy to update. We were surprised, and pleased, to note that participants in our focus groups were more enthusiastic about using the web than we imagined they would be. Although we considered the possibility of providing information in navigable DVD format to present on televisions, which might circumvent some of the problems relating to computer literacy, on balance this would not be cost-effective for the whole borough and would raise similar issues regarding access to technology. In addition, there are problems related to distribution and susceptibility to either obsolescence of either the information or, in the medium term, the technology<sup>27</sup>. However, we consider that it may be appropriate to provide this information on a small scale for those with literacy difficulties, subject to costs.

Therefore, we consider that the case has been made forcefully for an overwhelmingly web-based provision of information.

**Recommendation H: We recommend that information should be made accessible in a almost exclusively web-based format.**

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## **Equal access**

The notion of accessibility must be crucial to any information pack produced. Provision of information in other languages, and in formats accessible for those with physical or mental disabilities, is an important part of the council's work. This issue was discussed at length by the 2005/06 Review of Community Engagement<sup>28</sup>. The review considered the issue of translation of documents and concluded that engagement documents should not be translated into minority languages as a matter of course, but that where appropriate alternative ways should be sought to enable members from such communities to participate<sup>29</sup>.

The question is whether an information pack should be considered as an engagement document or a service-provision document, because the recommendation makes a distinction between the two. We consider that an information pack, because it is providing service-based information, therefore should be subject to translation. As a crucial, one-stop document, it is

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<sup>26</sup> Access Harrow will be taking a key role in this, but national schemes such as LearnDirect are taking place through libraries and colleges to improve skills. Reaching all those with minimal ICT skills is expected to be slow.

<sup>27</sup> Technological changes imply that software and information will be delivered predominantly through the web in the coming years, rather than through discrete software packages that sit on local computers.

<sup>28</sup> See above, at footnote 9.

<sup>29</sup> Hear/Say, Social Inclusion Case Study (3a), Recommendation 11



vital that local people, even if English is not their first language, should be able to access it irrespective of ability. Naturally, this will involve an additional cost. However, the focus groups bear out the concern about availability of key information in people's native languages<sup>30</sup>.

Provision of information for the disabled needs to be considered carefully as well. The information pack will inevitably be a highly visual medium. Web-based availability will be much more accessible to people with visual impairments, as long as it can be assured that the text made available electronically is machine readable. However, more direct, intensive work may need to be carried out with those with learning disabilities. The council will need to work with voluntary organisations representing these and others who may find it more difficult to contact the council or read material in English to ensure that any approach taken is appropriate and proportionate. Again, this will have financial implications, but it is crucial that the council takes steps to reach out to groups who very often, as some of our focus groups reveal, feel disenfranchised precisely because they do not know about the public services available to them because they have difficulty in engaging with officers within the council and other bodies.

**Recommendation I: We recommend that the design of an information pack takes care to take account of the needs of people with disabilities, and those for whom English is not their first language, working closely with voluntary organisations to do so.**

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## **Finance and resourcing implications**

We have been keenly aware throughout of the council's financial situation, and this and subsequent years' projected savings<sup>31</sup>. In making recommendations we have taken into account the necessity that all proposals constitute value for money – although the assessment can be difficult to make when the benefits, in this case, may not be directly apparent in terms of savings elsewhere.

The rough costs, however, are quite easily identifiable, and can be extrapolated from work undertaken on similar projects in recent years. Costs tend to associate themselves far more with hard-copy information. We were told that the preparation and distribution of RBKC's new resident pack was around £30,000. Harrow's A-Z was prepared and delivered for around £25,000. Although in the absence of concrete proposals it is difficult to precise, a figure of £30,000 seems to be a relatively realistic figure. Of course, this would not include the additional officer time and resources involved in pulling together the wide range of public sector information that we are proposing.

We had hoped that any hard copy information could be distributed as a pull-out section in Harrow People, but because of the termination of the magazine beyond September this is impossible, and separate distribution would naturally increase costs further.

On balance, then, provision of significant amounts of information (or even moderate amounts) is militated against by cost. Quite apart from our discussion in the above subsection, we do not consider that a business case can be made for a significant, hard-copy pack. However, we remain persuaded by the argument that hard-copy information in some form, although of a extremely limited nature, should be available. The precise nature of the pack, the costs involved (other than the estimated figure quoted above), can only be properly assessed if a full business plan is commissioned to examine the operational facets of the project, and the way in which they will fit within the framework we are defining in this report.

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<sup>30</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>31</sup> The council is trying to save £19 million in total this financial year; further savings are required in 2007/08 and 2008/09.

**Recommendation J: We recommend that a business plan to commissioned to examine the potential revenues and costs for the introduction of an information pack.**

It could be that money could be raised for the delivery of a project such as this through sponsorship or advertising. Although much of Harrow People's advertising has hitherto been internal, there is clear potential for external advertisement and sponsorship, demonstrated by the "Discover Harrow" booklet<sup>32</sup>. However, we would advise some caution in this regard. Some of the content of the "Discover Harrow" booklet has to an extent, been dictated by advertisers – in the parks and green spaces section of the booklet, information is geared towards golf courses rather than public green spaces per se, reflecting the financing being provided through advertising. This could present a problem for an information pack, where information would be targeted directly at the kind of thing local people want and need, and where utility to residents could be permitted to be diluted by the need to satisfy potential advertisers.

We have seen what problems might arise through sponsorship of a "borough guide", a proof of which was drafted a few years ago by a private company commissioned by the Communications Unit. The document provides basic information about the borough and has been filled out by a large amount of advertising, which makes it unappealing, and consequently frustrating to navigate. Even with this quantity of advertising, a project such as this cannot be self-funding. We have to accept that if we are to recommend a hard copy leaflet – however small – advertising will probably be able to no more than offset some of the costs, with the rest to be borne by the council.

We considered other options in the course of our investigation. The possibility of charging a nominal rate for the provision of a hard-copy information pack was discussed, but rejected – it would be unfair to residents who rightly expect to receive this information for free, and in any case the costs of administering such a system would most likely exceed any potential revenue. We also considered the possibility of charging for out-of-borough requests for an information pack but again this would be contrary to the council's aims under the Tourism Strategy and Economic Development Strategy. In any case, there are problems with charging for information where charges are not statutorily defined because of requirements imposed by the Freedom of Information Act.

**Recommendation K: We recommend that advertising be incorporated into a hard copy leaflet in a limited format.**

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### **Quantity and balance**

We will now move on to consider the quantity of information that we considered should be made available in hard copy. Although the financial constraints are significant we think that it would be possible to provide at least some information. It is crucial that this links in with the information being made available on the web, however. We have devised a suggested methodology for ensuring that information is balanced, which we provide below.

Hard copy – a leaflet which might be of A3 size when folded out. One side would display a map of the borough, with key points of civic interest highlighted. The lack of an easily-accessible map of the borough is something which has been brought to our attention repeatedly over the course of this review. We consider that it would be useful not only for residents, but for officers as well.

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<sup>32</sup> This is a booklet prepared by the borough's tourism officer, mentioned earlier in the report under "Duplication and Links".

The other side would display contact details for key services – central numbers for services such as social services, education admissions and recycling and waste, as well as non-council services such as NHS Direct, the police and local college and training providers – as well as information on portfolio holders and their responsibilities and members and their wards. Although we recognise that there might be a risk of some of this information (in relation to portfolio holders and their responsibilities, for example) being out of date in the future, participants of focus groups were very keen that this kind of information should be included. Information, where provided, would be cross-referenced with web addresses that would provide more detail on the services mentioned. As previously mentioned, a minimal amount of advertising – perhaps around the sides of the map on one side – could be an appropriate way to offset some costs.

We estimate<sup>33</sup> that producing and distributing such a leaflet would cost around £25,000. This is a significant capital outlay. We consider that it can be justified, however, as a one-off cost if the information provided is sufficiently generic, and assuming that the locations of civic facilities and portfolio holders' responsibilities do not change radically between now and the next election (when a new version would probably need to be produced to take account of new members).

Web-based information pack – it was suggested that a separate website, along the lines of "Visit Harrow" might be established to provide more detailed information on the local area. On balance we would prefer the information pack to be fully integrated into a new website. Key contact details and introductory information could be made available. This would be fully integrated within the GIS system. For example, the top-level webpage dealing with schools and children's services would provide a central number for general enquiries, links to basic, accessible information on the procedure for common queries such as admissions, statementing, and disciplinary policy, and a link directly into the GIS system to allow people to find the contact details for their nearest local school, or the school at which their child was already enrolled. The intention would be that this would make GIS an indispensable part of this web-based "information pack". Different sections of these basic information pages could themselves signpost other parts of the website, providing links across to other areas (for example, links from schools to information on childcare and nursery places, employment information and so on) as well as linking down further into more detailed policy information.

Different sections of these basic information pages could themselves signpost other parts of the website, providing links across to other areas (for example, links from schools to information on childcare and nursery places, employment information and so on) as well as linking down further into more detailed policy information, and online forms and business packages allowing people to carry out transactions such as applying for a school place online.

Either this information could be provided in an "Information for local residents" portion of the site, divided accordingly, or it could sit on top of the existing structure (or whichever structure is introduced after the web refresh exercise is complete). If effectively cross-referenced, we think that the former might be the most appropriate technique, since it allows the information to be focused directly at residents, with their interests and needs of central importance. Whichever solution is adopted, the basic information pages should also be made available prominently in PDF format to allow residents or staff to print information off, or to navigate it as a virtual version of one of the more traditional "information packs" that we have commented on.

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Brown provided us with assistance with costings – sums suggested were borne out by the cost of similar provision elsewhere in London.

**Recommendation L: We recommend a two-tier approach, marrying basic hard copy information with a central, web-based information resource that prioritises local people and exploits the opportunities provided by GIS.**

We have previously discussed localism in the context of information made available on the web, but providing relevant local information in hard copy is more complex. We would suggest that – if it could be made a self-funding – a more localised approach could be taken for hard copy information as well.

We have looked at the possibility of making a ward-specific A4 fold out leaflet available. This would contain a map, but only of the ward, with information on civic facilities available (as with the larger, borough-wide A3 document). Providing more space for advertising could raise revenue. Although some members of our group have anecdotally indicated that local businesses would be keen to advertise in such a way, we have been unable to conduct a survey ourselves, nor have we been able to establish to what extent advertising might be able to offset costs. The costs of designing and printing different guides for each of Harrow's 21 wards would constitute a significant expense. However, if feasible we consider that highly localised information such as this would be extremely useful to local people<sup>34</sup>.

**Recommendation M: We recommend that officers examine the feasibility of providing ward-based information in hard copy, in addition to the larger, A3 document already mentioned.**

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## **Delivery**

We will first consider how the hard-copy leaflet might be delivered, before moving on to consider the more substantial web-based information.

Initially, we thought that a leaflet could be distributed – like the A-Z some months ago – through Harrow People, but as it will not be produced beyond September this is not an option.

Instead we recommend that officers examine the possibility of carrying out the project through Access Harrow, through the council's Business Transformation Partnership with Capita. We consider that the provision of an information pack sits well within Access Harrow's current projects. We have been told that the provision of an information resource of this broad nature was on their work programme for consideration in the upcoming months – furthermore, our recommendations to bring in information from outside the council and disseminate it from one source join up well with the first contact initiatives being undertaken through the one stop shop and telephone contact centre.

Links with Access Harrow would limit the potential for duplication, bringing the provision of information under one umbrella. It could serve to reduce the necessity to provide services exclusively through the one stop shop and telephone contact centre, which have just been launched and have proved to be extremely popular<sup>35</sup>. Having information easily available on issues which are of importance to local people will ensure that enquiries on these routine matters will hopefully be less frequent.

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<sup>34</sup> This suggestion was made by two focus groups and independently of this by members.

<sup>35</sup> Use figures have been consistently high since the launch of the facility. The One Stop Shop received 5935 visitors in June, 7129 in July and 7074 at time of writing in late August. The contact centre has received 63,826, 60,165 and 53,844 callers respectively.

Delivery of the hard copy document would, we expect be essentially a one-off capital cost. We considered the possibility of minimising delivery costs by making the leaflet available in libraries and other civic locations rather than distributing it to people directly – however, this would mean that certain parts of the population – the housebound, elderly and otherwise infirm – might not then have access to it. One option – although we have not expressly investigated it – could be to distribute it through the homecare or meals on wheels service. Despite the cost, and notwithstanding some potential uncertainties regarding effective delivery, we think that we can and have demonstrated a case for distribution to all of Harrow’s households. It could be that the most effective way to do so may be to include it within the next council tax statement in April, if time constraints allow.

Information would need to be sent to new residents on an “as and when” basis. We do not consider that this would increase costs disproportionately. We would suggest that the leaflet be distributed through new residents’ first council tax bill or statement.

**Recommendation N: We recommend that the hard copy and web based information packs should be resourced and implemented by Access Harrow in consultation with the Communications Unit.**

**Recommendation O: We recommend that the hard copy leaflet be made available to all households within the borough, and to new residents when they move in.**

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## Conclusions

We recognise that some of these recommendations require the expenditure of significant amounts of money. However, we consider that this expenditure is necessary to continue an effective relationship with members of the public. As an authority, we must take every step to inform people of the services available to them, so they can be assured that they can access the services for which they pay easily.

Ensuring that local people have access to local information is crucial for building stronger communities as well. A number of our focus groups raised this issue. Many participants, although having lived in Harrow for many years, were not aware of services and facilities available on their own doorsteps. There was a general, low level concern about fragmentation of local communities. Although providing people with information on local community groups, leisure centres, libraries and so on might not transform people's quality of life overnight, it is a first step to enabling more engagement with their neighbours at a local level. Providing information on voluntary activities, community groups and other facilities in a way that effectively "links up" services in the minds of local people – even when those services are delivered by different bodies – empowers residents to approach bodies operating in the local sphere to get involved with their local community.

This may sound ambitious, but effective comprehension of the way that the council delivers services with its partners among the public – and a better understanding by the council of the way that local people increasingly want to do business with it – will take one step to help to develop relationships and understanding. The fundamental issue remains that, without a coherent approach by the council, and a clear commitment to providing information in a way that is accessible, this will not be possible.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1**

**Appendix 2**

**Appendix 3**

**Matrix of evidence from other local authorities**

**Focus group findings**

**Information on contact centre statistics from other authorities**

# APPENDIX 1

## PRACTICE IN OTHER LONDON BOROUGHS

<b>Authority name</b>	<b>Hard copy pack</b>	<b>Web information</b>	<b>Integration of information with other services</b>	<b>Integration with first contact initiatives, if known (not known = NK)</b>
<b>Harrow</b>	Not currently. A-Z only.	Basic site map and online A-Z only.	No.	Planned.
<b>Brent</b>	No.	GIS-based.	Fully integrated through GIS.	Yes, fully linked.
<b>Ealing</b>	No.	Basic site map and online A-Z only.	No GIS integration.	No.
<b>Westminster</b>	No. A-Z and some general leaflets.	Some use of GIS but not specific to ward.	GIS not fully integrated with other systems.	No.
<b>Tower Hamlets</b>	No. Borough newspaper used.	GIS providing ward-based information.	Fully integrated with other services, linked through.	Links with one stop shops.
<b>Bexley</b>	Not currently – service recently withdrawn.	A-Z available on website with links to key services listed by type.	No GIS integration.	No.
<b>Richmond</b>	No.	A-Z, list of important council contact numbers (no central contact number).	No GIS integration.	NK
<b>Islington</b>	No.	A-Z only. Some introductory information available on some web pages, but not cross-referenced.	Searchable GIS-based system, but not integrated with other info provision.	NK
<b>Kensington &amp; Chelsea</b>	Yes.	A-Z exists. Not integrated with information pack.	Not integrated.	No.
<b>Camden</b>	In a form (distributed as	Searchable GIS system and	Fully integrated through GIS but	Some links with first contact.

	part of council newspaper)	introductory pages on some key services, but some quite officer-centric.	no personalisation of information.	
<b>Southwark</b>	No.	Website divided according to local area. "Life events" portion of website dedicated to key transactions.	No.	No direct connection.

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## **APPENDIX 2**

### **FOCUS GROUPS**

Information on the first two focus groups and one of the CCP-provided groups is provided below. Further information on other groups will be made available in due course.

#### **GROUP 1**

This group of nine people were mainly long-term Harrow residents. Most were white, although there was a fairly even split between the sexes and ages ranged from the mid-thirties to seventies.

##### **Section 1**

The group was initially asked about their general satisfaction with the aspects of service in the borough at the moment. Recycling was an issue which was particularly prominent, although a couple of participants expressed general satisfaction with the way that services were provided. Concerns, when they were addressed, generally centred around a feeling that the council was remote in the way it delivered services.

##### **Section 2**

Participants were asked which information, on which subjects, they would be most keen to receive from the council through an information pack, and were then asked to prioritise this information (most important first). Briefly, issues which seemed most important were as follows:

- Provision of contact details for key services/departments
- Recycling.
- Crime information – police contact details and crime statistics
- Information on complaints procedures
- Contact details and profiles for councillors
- Information on voluntary organisations and local amenity groups (such as residents' groups)
- Public realm infrastructure issues
- Information on parks and recreation
- Information on local transport

Other issues, which were not prioritised, including information on NHS dentists, GPs surgeries, contact details and other information for local schools, information on budgets and council income (which is already provided as part of the annual council tax statement), understandable information on planning policy, places of worship, care homes, local by-laws and parking restrictions, and a clear explanation of what directorates' names "mean" and what they do.

##### **Section 3**

Methods of delivery – the advantages of paper vs web delivery were considered.

Paper advantages – it would help those who were not computer literate. This was considered to be particularly important by a couple of members of the group. It would also provide direct, guaranteed awareness for all residents, rather than a web page which would not be particularly high profile. And delivery could be flexible – through local phone directories or other media.

Paper disadvantages – these are all quite obvious and have been discussed before. Provision in different languages would be difficult (although similar problems might occur with web-based information). Costs would be significant. A document would get out of date, and would need to be updated, probably on an annual basis, involving more expenditure. And the group also thought it likely that people would throw the information pack out, or lose it.

Web advantages – it would be cheaper and quicker. An interesting advantage expressed by one member of the group was that the use of hyperlinks cross-referencing different areas would make it very effective and usable.

Web disadvantages – people might not know that it existed – a separate publicity campaign would be necessary, and even then people would forget about it as time went on and new people moved into the borough. Portability and connection issues were also raised.

Balance – the potential balance between hard copy and web was discussed. In general it was agreed that paper would be suitable for a brief summary of information only, including information unlikely to be updated. It would provide a pointer to a more detailed web-based resource, which could provide more detailed information, and links through to source documents (such as bye-laws and council policies).

Harrow People could be used to distribute and publicise the paper version and website.

The important point was raised by one participant that the pack show how to get things done. It should be focussed on how to solve problems, and how to get results.

## **GROUP 2**

Again, most residents were relatively long-term. There was more of an ethnic mix in this group but it was still predominantly white.

### **Section 1**

The group considered that the website is difficult to navigate, and that its search engine was inadequate. The council's phone lines were not seen as adequate either. Different methods of access are required.

### **Section 2**

Priorities included:

- Providing direct telephone numbers to people with names and roles
- "Core contacts" for service areas.
- Consultation and notice of local developments (although this would require updating)
- General information on services – structure charts, complaints information
- Providing genuine information rather than political propaganda
- Information on current issues (eg road works) – again an updating issue
- Local democracy – information on local councillors etc
- Information on residents' associations

### **Section 3**

Methods of delivery:

Web advantages – easier to update, possible to put up large amounts of information, cheaper than printouts, more environmentally friendly, enables more flexibility with design, enables use of hyperlinks, allows direct submission of comments (although reply is needed!) and potential for greater interactivity.

Web disadvantages – people would not necessarily look regularly – prompts would be needed, eg through local press. And many lack access (elderly, low income).

If it doesn't work, it could be impersonal.

Paper advantages – everyone can have a copy, easily accessible. It would provide pointers from where information on the web and by phone can be accessed. And you can raise revenue through advertising.

Paper disadvantages – 99% would throw it away – it would also cost a great deal of money. It would be environmentally unsound as it would require frequent updating. There would be less scope for updating. Group suggested that one option might be to use Harrow People.

### **GROUP 3**

Most residents were long-term although a small number had lived in the borough for a shorter time. The group was more ethnically diverse but still predominantly white.

#### **Section 1**

The group thought that the council did not communicate with people well enough – it was not effective at disseminating information. They thought that a lot of information made available contradicted itself (particularly in relation to recycling). Some also considered that the one stop shop might represent a “barrier” preventing people speaking to officers who are experts in the issues they want to find out more about.

#### **Section 2**

Priorities included:

- Recycling
- Planning issues
- Parking
- Information on voluntary services
- Localised information relevant to specific wards
- Cycling
- Key council phone numbers
- Street cleaning
- Neighbourhood policing
- Leisure centres and activities
- Tourism

#### **Section 3**

Methods of delivery:

Paper advantages – universal accessibility, for those with computer problems or physical difficulties. It would also allow incorporation within Harrow People.

Paper disadvantages – cost and distribution would be big problems. Providing up to date information is a big problem as well. Environmental concerns, and limitations on the amount of information that could be provided, also problems.

Web advantages – accessibility (generally), easy navigability, easy updating, cheaper, more environmentally friendly, and allows links to other sources.

Web disadvantages – new technology may disenfranchise the elderly. The web is also only as good as the data available on it.

## **CCP GROUPS**

### **Focus Group 1 (Leader: Amal Liban)**

All 13 participants were Somali women.

A different, simplified brief was presented to the CCP volunteers. This is reflected in the findings.

Findings:

- Participants agreed that information depends on what their needs are and were unable to provide answers on specific services they required information on. Not understanding English tends to be a barrier – there was a feeling that some council staff do not have the patience to deal with those for whom English is a second language. It was also thought that more information on local community organisations might be required, as they sometimes appear “closed” to some people. Named services for which more info would be required included:
  - Information on nursery provision for 0-3 yr olds
  - Women-only leisure clubs
  - Detailed information about local community representatives
  - Where to go for training and voluntary work in order to gain experience for employment
- A single source of information for key information on the borough was welcomed, but it was suggested that some of the key information (eg, doctors and benefits info) might be provided in Somali or other languages.
- Most women were in favour of provision of information on-line, but the others preferred it in a loose-leaf pack, booklet or brochure.
- Participants were in favour of financing the pack at least partially through advertising.

### **Focus Group 2 (Leader: Cabdulqadir Mohamed)**

There were ten participants, of mixed ethnicity, interviewed in a community centre.

Findings:

- It was difficult to get straightforward information about the local area.



- Internet-based resources are sometimes not helpful, and not regularly updated, and do not provide information on things which are of direct interest to participants – eg training and employment opportunities.
- Information provision should be followed up through local communities and through other fora, such as local newspapers and radio stations, rather than more “traditional” forms of engagement.
- People wanted more information about benefits and healthcare.
- People were generally in favour of providing information in web format.

### **Focus Group 3 (Leader: Cabdulqadir Mohamed)**

This group was similarly constituted to Focus Group 2, and also conducted on community premises. There were ten participants.

Key findings:

- Participants mentioned how sources for some local information seems to be shifting. For example, the post office now longer provide key services.
- If an information pack were to be produced in hard copy, it would lie around and be forgotten like another piece of junk mail.
- More information about health issues – such as drug misuse – and information relating to police services would be useful.
- People were confused about the launch of new agencies and services – for example, the one stop shop – so information about the links between agencies and organisations would be helpful.
- The kind of information which should be produced and disseminated should be of general use for all people, rather than all being exclusively targeted at particular segments of the local community.

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## APPENDIX 3

### Detailed information from other authorities

#### Brent

#### General Information about Brent's One Stop Service

The Brent One Stop Service is made up of 6 Local "face to face" Offices and a Telephone and On-line Centre.

The face to face offices deal with enquiries for all council services and we have offices at:

Brent House  
Harlesden  
Kilburn  
Kingsbury  
Town Hall  
Willesden.

The telephone and on-line centre has:

- A line which deals with all enquiries (Generic Line).
- A dedicated line for Streetcare
- A dedicated line for Housing Benefit
- A dedicated line for Council Tax
- The Brent Switchboard.

It also handles all the enquiries which are sent via the customer services email address or those which are completed using the on line form on the Brent Website.

The following statistics are taken from the One Stop Service annual report for 05/06 and have been categorised under main service area headings.

A more detailed breakdown of enquiry types can be provided for some services, but these will take longer to produce if they are required.

#### Local Offices

Total number of face to face enquiries for 2005-06 = 230,900

These are broken down into Information Requests and Service Requests. Information Requests are quick requests for information which are dealt with by our reception desk. Customers with more complex Service Requests are given a ticket to wait to see a more experienced officer at our Main Counter service.

**2.1** The top 10 most popular **Information requests** (simple information requests) were:

	<b>Enquiry Type</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefits	45%
2	General Enquires about the	16%

	Borough of Brent	
3	Council Tax	11%
4	Housing Needs Unit	8%
5	Brent Housing Partnership	6%
6	Education	4%
7	Private Housing	4%
8	Social Services	2%
9	Committee Service and Member services	2%
10	Environmental Services	1%

## 2.2 The top 10 most popular Service Requests(complex enquiries) were:

	Enquiry Type	Percentage
1	Housing and Council Tax Benefits	57%
2	Council Tax	18%
3	Brent Housing Partnership	9%
4	Planning	6%
5	Housing Needs Unit	2%
6	Physical Disability	2%
7	Building Control	1%
8	Older Peoples Services	1%
9	Education	1%
10	Streetcare	1%

## 3.0 Telephone and On-Line Centre

**3.1 Generic Telephone line** – the generic line handled 94,300 enquiries and the top 10 enquiries for 05/06 were:

	Enquiry Type
1	General Information about the Borough of Brent
2	Social Services
3	Council Tax
4	Housing and Council Tax Benefit
5	Committee and Member Services
6	Environmental Services
7	Brent Housing Partnership
8	Education
9	Housing Needs Unit
10	Benefits Agency (DWP)

**3.2 The Streetcare line** handled 123,100 enquiries, the top 5 were:

	Enquiry Type
1	Special Collections

2	Refuse Collection
3	Abandoned Vehicles
4	Recycling
5	Fly Tipping

**3.3** The dedicated Council Tax telephone line handled 141,500 enquiries

**3.4** The dedicated Housing Benefit line handled 109,100 enquiries

**3.5** Our Switchboard handled 317,900 enquiries.

**3.5** The On-Line and Email Service – handled 11,400 enquiries – the top 10 were:

	Enquiry Type
1	Council Tax
2	Streetcare
3	General Information about the Borough of Brent
4	Environmental Services
5	Housing and Council Tax Benefits
6	Social Services
7	Parking
8	Education
9	Committee and Members Services
10	Brent Housing Partnership

**Notes to information provided.**

a) Brent One Stop service holds a wealth of information on services in the Borough which are external to the council. e.g. health information, places of worship, community groups, bed and breakfast accommodation, DWP info, local transport & information about other local facilities and events which customers may find useful. Hence we have a high number of enquiries which are classified as General Information.

b) Brent Housing Partnership is the Arms Length Management Organisation which manages Brent's Housing stock . The One Stop Service provides the face to face customer services for Brent Housing Partnership and handles rent, tenancy and repairs enquiries.

c) The One Stop Service also provides the customer services for all Revenues and Benefits enquiries, both face to face and telephone.

d) The One Stop service provides the main face to face service for Planning and Building Control, but this service is only available at our Brent House local office. Although it appears in out top 10 for generic face to face services, these enquiries are all handled by a dedicated counter at Brent House.

Information provided by Jill Tabernerl, Service Performance Manager, One Stop Service.

## Westminster

**Important:** in viewing this information readers should be aware that certain services have not yet been incorporate within Westminster’s customer service initiative. The most frequently requested service is library renewals (see below).

Action_Taken	(All)
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Sum of Total		
Directorate	Service	Total
Community Protection	CP Contaminated Land	0.01%
	CP Food Safety	0.39%
	CP Health & Safety	0.48%
	CP Pest Control	1.74%
	CP Pollution Eco Mark	0.08%
	CP Residential Environment	0.63%
	CP Street Licensing Enforcement	0.00%
	CP Trading Standards	1.60%
Community Protection Total		4.93%
Transportation	HL Skips	1.08%
	HL Temporary Structures	0.79%
Transportation Total		1.87%
Customer Services	AA Arts Admin	0.10%
	AL Approved List	0.03%
	LI Chinese Information	0.08%
	LI Enquiries	13.60%
	LI Marylebone Info Centre	0.20%
	LI Reference	0.43%
	LI Renewals	28.96%
Customer Services Total		43.41%
Environment & Leisure	CW Admin	0.00%
	CW Containers	0.03%
	CW Environmental Service	0.04%
	CW Pre-Paid Bags	15.63%
	CW Recycling	0.02%
	CW Special Collections	0.12%
	CW Waste Enforcement	0.00%
	PL Leisure	0.08%
	PL Parks & Gardens	0.09%
	PL Trees	0.18%
Environment & Leisure Total		16.19%
Planning & City Development	DP DS Applications	1.85%
	DP DS Complaint	0.01%
	DP DS Dangerous Structures	0.01%
	DP DS Disabled Access	0.00%
	DP DS Fire Safety	0.00%
	DP DS Invoices	0.00%
	DP DS Non-Compliance	0.00%
	DP DS St Naming Numbering	0.02%
	DP PA Authorised Use	0.19%
	DP PA Change of Use	0.13%
	DP PA Comment	0.86%
	DP PA Committee Reports	0.01%
	DP PA Complaint	0.02%

	DP PA Confirm Receipt	0.06%
	DP PA Conservation Area	0.35%
	DP PA Current Applications	0.55%
	DP PA Fees	0.16%
	DP PA Forms	0.14%
	DP PA Listed Building	0.94%
	DP PA Pre Meeting	0.01%
	DP PA Property History	0.87%
	DP PA View Archive Docs	0.28%
	DP PA Weekly Lists	0.00%
	DP PE Advertising	0.01%
	DP PE Complaint	0.01%
	DP PE Enforcement Officer/Technical	0.11%
	DP PE Report Unauth Devt (RUD)	0.06%
	DP PI Copy Pub & Guidance Notes	0.01%
	DP PI Economic Devt Strategy	0.00%
	DP PI Major schemes	0.00%
	DP PI Unitary Devt Plan (UDP)	0.09%
	DP DS History Records	0.19%
	DP DS Named Surveyor	1.40%
	DP PA Named Planning	0.84%
	DP DS Duty Surveyor	1.92%
	DP PA Duty Planning	2.78%
Planning & City Development Total		13.89%
Legal & Admin Services	EL Electoral Services	3.40%
	LL Local Land Charges	3.53%
	RE Births	3.52%
	RE Citizenship	1.39%
	RE Deaths	0.31%
	RE Divorce	0.03%
	RE Family Records	0.02%
	RE Marriages	6.62%
Legal & Admin Services Total		18.83%
Children & Community Services	VS Voluntary Sector Unit	0.25%
Children & Community Services Total		0.25%
		0.64%
Total		0.64%
Not Known Total		0.00%
Grand Total		100.00%