



September 2006

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel

Corporate Assessment Self Assessment

Members of the Review Group

Cllr Brian Gate (Chairman)
Cllr Jean Lammiman
Cllr Margaret Davine
Cllr Mitzi Green
Cllr Richard Romain
Cllr Mark Versallion

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The challenge panel would like to thank council officers and partners for the time they contributed to the challenge panel. In particular the panel acknowledges the work that has been undertaken by Tom Whiting, Group Manager Strategy and Performance, Mala Kripalani, Corporate Assessment Project Manager and Paul Najsarek in producing the draft self assessment in time for our deliberations. We are also grateful for the contribution of the following officers who attended the panel session: Heather Clements, Group Manager Achievement and Inclusion; Penny Furness Smith, Director Community Care; Michael Hart, Director of Strategy, Urban Living; John Kennedy, Area Manager, Area Developments; Gareth Llywelyn Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer; Jon Turner, Head of Human Resources. We are particularly pleased that our deliberations were assisted by 2 of our key external partners Bob Carr, Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police Harrow and Julia Smith, Chief Executive of Harrow Association of Voluntary Service. Finally, our thanks to Lynne McAdam in the Scrutiny Team for her organisation and production of our report.

This report has been compiled by the Members named on the front cover. The views expressed are solely ours.

INTRODUCTION

In November this year Harrow Council will undergo its second corporate assessment. The corporate assessment is a key component of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) which was introduced in 2002 in order to draw together the significant elements of local authority audit and inspection work and to provide an overall view of councils' performance and their capacity to improve services to the public. The principle reference point of the corporate assessment is the self-assessment which helps to inform judgements made by inspectors and the decision made about the scope and focus of the inspection team's onsite work. The self-assessment is evidence of the council's self-awareness and needs to demonstrate a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the council and a realistic evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment should present a valid and balanced picture of performance.

This is a crucial event in the life of the council and the preparation of a robust self-assessment is essential. Although the self-assessment would be considered in a number of different forums, councillors felt that the Overview and Scrutiny committee should also contribute to the document before submission to the Audit Commission in order to add/offer a robust challenge and ensure its rigour.

To this end the challenge panel was established comprising:

Cllr Brian Gate (Chairman)

Cllr Jean Lammiman

Cllr Margaret Davine

Cllr Mitzi Green

Cllr Richard Romain

Cllr Mark Versallion

The panel met on 7th September and its findings and recommendations are included in the pages that follow.

METHODOLOGY

Councillors decided to undertake this project by means of a challenge panel as this approach was felt to be a more robust and challenging process than simply considering the document as an item on the committee agenda. The Corporate Assessment is a significant event which will have long-term implications for the council. The degree of inquiry offered by the challenge panel process was felt to be the most appropriate methodology for scrutiny to ensure that the associated self-assessment presents the most rigorous representation of the council to the Audit Commission.

Challenge panels were introduced in July 2006. On many occasions – particularly when a policy is being developed – officers appreciate feedback on proposals from members. The committee environment may not be suited to this, mainly because of time constraints. Challenge panels comprise a small group of officers and members that are able to discuss a particular policy or strategy, or in this instance, the corporate assessment self-assessment, more informally and in more detail. They provide an opportunity for members to provide an alternative, ‘real time’ perspective to council business, and lend additional accountability to the policy development process. This level of detailed challenge would not be possible as a single item on a packed committee agenda.

An initial briefing document, outlining some of the basic principles of Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Corporate Assessment was prepared for councillors in order that they had a basis from which to challenge the content of an early draft of the self-assessment. The document was very lengthy – almost 3 times the permitted 25 pages – and in order to focus their deliberations in the time available and to ensure a strategic approach, councillors held a panel preparation meeting to decide on their approach to the investigation. It was agreed that councillors would:

- Identify the key messages that they felt ought to drive each section of the self-assessment:
 - *Context within which the council operates*
 - *What is the council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?*
 - *What is the capacity of the council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?*
 - *What has been achieved?*
- Comment on the evidence that had been included in the document to support these messages.

The panel took place on 7th September as a round table discussion between councillors, council officers and representatives of partner agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Assessment challenge panel recommends:

1. The general messages identified during discussion been reflected in the tone of the final document
2. The specific points identified during discussion be considered as part of the overall edit of the document (It is acknowledged that the challenge panel is one of a number of consultation processes and in some instances comments made by the panel have been superseded by further comments and by the necessity of reducing the document from the draft seen to the final 25-page submission).
3. A final draft of the document be circulated to members of the panel
4. The document is signed off by the Executive before submission to the Audit Commission

FINDINGS

The principle points that the panel wished to emphasise are:

With regard to content

- There should be more emphasis on innovative partnerships
- Community engagement should be a key feature – Harrow People should be highlighted
- The reconfiguration of the directorates is a key strength that will enhance leadership
- There has been a cultural shift in the organisation – Partnership is a key message, Harrow as part of London and commitment to ending isolation and to working with others
- Communication and engagement is a priority for the council
- Harrow is a learning organisation and the lessons learnt and their application should be highlighted
- Staff are a valued part of the organisation – the ambition to achieve corporate Investor in People status needs to be emphasised

With regard to document design/structure

- The self-assessment should be signed off by the Executive
- All assertions in the document need to be substantiated
- The document should demonstrate main messages using case studies
- Thought should be given to 'shadowing' photographs into the background of the document
- Too many people have contributed to the document – a consistent style needs to be derived

The self-assessment was considered in more detail under the following headings:

- *Context*
- *What is the council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?*
This measures:
 - Ambition for the community
 - Prioritisation
- *What is the capacity of the council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?*
This measures:
 - Capacity
 - Performance management
- *What has been achieved?*
This measures achievement in terms of the shared priorities:
 - Sustainable communities and transport
 - Safer and stronger communities
 - Healthier communities
 - Older people
 - Children and young people

Context

The general points with regard to this section were:

- The organisation has undergone significant change over the last 4 years, particularly in relation to children's services and the impact of the New Harrow Project and the Middle Management Review

- Community engagement has a growing importance for the council and the work around extended schools, the Hear/say scrutiny review and the community engagement strategy. There has been a cultural shift in the way councillors and officers work with local people with far more complex issues being dealt with on a ward basis.
- Resident express high fear of crime and there is an imbalance between the actual incidence of crime and residents anxiety.
- Partnership working in the borough is successful in particular the through the Safer Harrow Partnership, the safer neighbourhoods work and this offers the council and partners an excellent platform from which to expand neighbourhood working.

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

The general points with regard to this section were:

- The section is not strong enough - the council is a 'flagship that is not waving'
- Partnership is a key priority for the council and in particular partnership with local people – there should be greater emphasis on the community engagement principles and strategy
- Prosperity Action Teams offer another opportunity for revitalising the relationship between local people and the council.
- The diversity of the borough is its driving force. It is being successfully replicated in the diversity of the political leadership of the council
- Vitality profiles have been an excellent resource which have enabled the council to successfully profile the borough and target resources appropriately

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

The general points with regard to this section were:

- The document needs to incorporate comment regarding the capacity of councillors – this has a growing importance in relation to the development of members and their increasing responsibilities for community leadership
- The successful procurement exercises and their strategic relevance should be emphasised
- Business Transformation Partnership will make a significant contribution to the capacity of the organisation
- The development of children's centres and the opportunity they bring for enhanced partnership working will again increase the capacity of the organisation
- Partnership is a key component of the council's capacity – not just in terms of business relationships but also within the organisation and between the council and other organisations
- The council has increased its capacity by learning from previous experience – e.g. learning from the MMR process
- The position of the Chief Executive/Acting Chief Executive needs to be addressed. We note that there is now an official acting chief executive pending the new appointment.

What has been achieved?

Sustainable communities

The general points with regard to this section were:

- The section feels 'dry'
- Case studies would benefit from being cross-sectional
- There are a number of useful examples that could be woven in to the document
- The examples could highlight – and link back to engagement of local people.

Safer and stronger communities

The general points with regard to this section were:

- The section needs a better structure – Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Local Area Agreement should be the drivers for the section
- Consistent statistics need to be used throughout the document – linking evidence in one section with another
- There is insufficient information re stronger communities – evidence could include successful community cohesion, community development officer, response to emergency situations

Healthy communities

The general points with regard to this section were:

- The vitality profiles should be the context around which this section is structured with case studies built in as illustrations
- There are good stories regarding supporting people
- The council still has an older people's champion and reference should be made to the Partnership with Older People (POP) panel
- The positive contribution to public health should be highlighted but in a way that acknowledges current financial difficulties

Older People

The general points with regard to this section were:

- This section should not just be about statutory provision for older people but should be about how the council and partners contribute to the health, well being and quality of life of older people. In this context the POP panel, the voice of older people on all matters relating to older people needs to be emphasised should drive the structure of the section
- The implications of ethnicity and age should be addressed

Children and Young People

Although the corporate assessment will not consider the provision of children's services (this will be investigated through the concurrent Joint Area Review) the self-assessment may still wish to make reference to children's experiences under some of the other headings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

WHAT IS COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT?

Comprehensive Performance Assessment was introduced in 2002 in order to draw together the significant elements of local authority audit and inspection work and to provide an overall view of councils' performance and their capacity to improve services to the public. The assessment is published annually and enables the relative performance of local authorities to be compared. Its predecessor, the Best Value regime, also made public announcements about services that were subject to Audit Commission inspection but did this only for specific services and not the council as a whole.

CPA has been seen as an important driver for improvement which it has delivered by:

- Reporting publicly how well each local authority is performing **overall**
- Supporting councils to focus on their own improvement and targeting support for this
- Providing an independent challenge to local authorities and thus contributing to the improvement in public services

CPA has 4 component parts the first 3 of which are summarised below, the 4th is the key focus of the challenge panel:

- Direction of Travel judgement
- Use of resources assessment
- Service assessment
- Corporate assessment

The annual **Direction of Travel** assessment assesses an authority's duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvements. There are 4 levels of judgement:

- Improving strongly
- Improving well
- Improving adequately
- Not improving adequately or not improving

The direction of travel assessment is carried out by a council's Audit Commission relationship manager using set key lines of enquiry to determine:

- What evidence is there of the council improving outcomes
- How much progress is being made to implement improvement plans to sustain future improvement

The **Use of Resources** assessment is also conducted annually and examines an authority's:

- Financial reporting
- Financial management
- Financial standing
- Internal control
- Value for money

The assessment is carried out by the council's auditors.

Service assessment scores are also published annually and combine a score for the performance indicator set relevant to the service with the score from any relevant inspection published during the previous 3 years. Where inspection information is used it is only the score on the performance of the service (how good is the service) that counts. Annual assessment scores for children's services, social care services for adults and benefits services are provided to the Audit Commission for the annual service assessment and overall CPA refresh by Office

for Standards in Education (OFSTED), Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) respectively.

The Corporate Assessment

'Corporate assessment focuses on the importance of a sound corporate engine to drive good services. It measures how effectively the council is working corporately and with its partners to improve services and deliver improved outcomes for local people..... Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) measure how well councils understand their local communities and neighbourhoods and provide community leadership; how this understanding of local people and places translates into council's ambitions and priorities; their capacity to deliver these; and what, in practice, councils are achieving'¹

In its latest guidance, the Audit Commission has determined that all councils will undergo corporate assessment once in the period 2005 – 2008. After this time there are proposals for a change in the means by which the relative performance of councils is assessed, the Audit Commission is currently consulting on arrangements to replace CPA². This means that this is likely to be the second and final time that the council will go through the process and that therefore the results of this assessment will last for the foreseeable future and it will possibly be what the council carries as its final reputation for many years – if the system is radically changed. It is worth noting that the corporate assessment is now much tougher than at the council's previous assessment in 2002 and the Audit Commission has placed much greater emphasis on how a council addresses the following issues:

- Community leadership
- Diversity
- User focus
- Value for money
- Partnership

This tougher test will make it much harder for the council to improve on its current corporate assessment score of 2 (fair) and emphasises the importance of us being able to present a robust and well articulated assessment of our performance.

Under corporate assessment a council is assessed against the following key lines of enquiry (KLOE):

Question 1: What is the council, together with its partners, trying to achieve

This measures:

- Ambition for the community
- Prioritisation

Question 2: What is the capacity of the council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

This measures:

- Capacity
- Performance management

¹ CPA – the harder test framework for 2006

² Assessment of local services beyond 2008 – Corporate Discussion Paper August 2006, Audit Commission

Question 3: What has been achieved?

This measures achievement in terms of the shared priorities:

- Sustainable communities and transport
- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthier communities
- Older people
- Children and young people

Self-Assessment

The key component of the corporate assessment is the submission, prior to the actual on site inspection period of a self-assessment of the council's performance. The self-assessment is the principal reference point for the corporate assessment and helps to inform judgements made by inspectors and the decision made about the scope and focus of the inspection team's onsite work. It is evidence of the council's self-awareness and needs to demonstrate a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the council and a realistic evaluation of our strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment should present a valid and balanced picture of our performance.

The self-assessment is divided into two sections:

Context and summary – outlining the general background of the authority, the challenges and opportunities it faces and the impact of these. This section sets the scene providing information about the locality and the council's structures and financial resources. The corporate assessment now requires council to demonstrate its community leadership, the diversity of the community and how it focuses on the needs of the user. This section of the self-assessment should demonstrate how well the council understands its community and how well this understanding underpins the decisions and choices made. Information on the locality can include:

- Economic and business opportunities
- Major initiative, projects or pilots
- Key features of the communities – demography, deprivation

Contextual information about the council can include:

- Information about decision-making structures
- Key partnerships
- Arrangements for consulting and engaging with residents/undertaking research
- Financial resources
- Areas of work which are not part of local or shared priorities but are nonetheless important to understanding the borough

Corporate assessment – which should evaluate the performance of the council under the headline questions above. It should 'tell the story' of the borough, demonstrating how we understand the locality as outlined in the context section and how this is translated into ambitions and priorities for the community and how the capacity of the council is being developed to turn these ambitions and priorities into real outcomes and achievements. It should identify both strong performance and areas for improvement under each theme.

The achievement theme needs to demonstrate how well the council balances local needs with national policy objectives. In the achievements section, the self-assessment should show how and why priorities have been chosen and the rationale for how resources and activities are targeted.

APPENDIX ONE

SCOPE FOR THE CORPORATE ASSESSMENT CHALLENGE PANEL

1	SUBJECT	Corporate Assessment
2	COMMITTEE	Overview and Scrutiny committee
3	REVIEW GROUP	Councillor Brian Gate – Chairman Councillor Jean Lammiman Councillor Margaret Davine Councillor Mitzi Green Councillor Richard Romain Councillor Mark Versallion
4	<u>AIMS/ OBJECTIVES/ OUTCOMES</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To challenge the integrity of the council’s self assessment for corporate assessment and ensure the most robust case for the council’s performance has been made• To challenge the evidence base upon which the self-assessment is based and to make sure good practice has been captured.
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS OF REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel provides robust challenge to the self assessment• Scrutiny input into the final self assessment document agreed
6	SCOPE	The panel will consider the council’s self-assessment under the key lines of enquiry of the corporate assessment: Context within which the council operates What is the council together with its partners trying to achieve? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Ambition</i>• <i>Prioritisation</i> What is the capacity of the council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Capacity</i>• <i>Performance management</i> What has been achieved <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Sustainable communities and transport</i>• <i>Safer and stronger communities</i>• <i>Healthier communities</i>• <i>Older people</i>• <i>Children and young people</i>

7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	Making Harrow safe, sound and supportive Getting Harrow moving Protecting our environment Tackling waste and giving real value for money Harrow youth Sports, leisure and amenities
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	Acting Chief Executive
9	ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Corporate Assessment/Joint Area Review Board
10	SUPPORT OFFICER	Service Manager Scrutiny
11	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	Scrutiny Review Administrator
12	EXTERNAL INPUT	Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police Service Chief Executive, Primary Care Trust Chief Executive, Harrow Association of Voluntary Service
13	METHODOLOGY	Preparatory meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider draft self assessment and identify key questions Panel meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To receive presentation from officers • To put key questions to officers under each of the key lines of enquiry and to ensure that the self assessment addresses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leadership • Diversity • User focus • Value for money • Partnership Panel report
14	EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	Diversity and User focus are key components of the framework against which the council's performance will be measured. It is critical therefore that the self assessment addresses this effectively and that the panel highlights this in its investigation
15	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	The completed self assessment must be submitted to the Audit Commission by 16 th October 2006. Therefore the panel's deliberations must be available for incorporation in accordance with this timetable.
16	SECTION 17 IMPLICATIONS	The extent to which the council addresses section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is one of the key lines of enquiry within the 'Safer and Stronger Communities' achievement block. This is being addressed by a challenge panel by the Safer and Stronger Communities scrutiny sub committee.

17	TIMESCALE	Panel to meet on 7 th September 2006 Draft report to panel by 22 nd September 2006 Report to Corporate Assessment/Joint Area Review Board by 29 th September 2006 Self assessment submitted to the Audit Commission by 16 th October 2006
18	RESOURCE COMMIMTENTS	See attached
19	REPORT AUTHOR	Panel members Lynne McAdam
20	REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS	Outline of formal reporting process: To CA/JAR Board <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By 29 th September To Portfolio Holder <input type="checkbox"/> When..... To CMT <input type="checkbox"/> When..... To Cabinet <input type="checkbox"/> When..... To O&S committee <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 10 th October 2006
	FOLLOW UP ARRANGEMENTS (proposals)	Corporate Assessment report to Overview and Scrutiny committee March 2007