

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	19 June 2008
Subject:	Council Improvement Programme
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Interim Divisional Director, Strategy and Improvement, Tom Whiting
Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services, Councillor Paul Osborn
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	<p>Gantt chart detailing the project sponsor and project manager/s for each project within the council improvement programme, the milestones within each project and the timescales on which they will be delivered – circulated separately</p> <p>Key service delivery projects</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Report of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel on the council improvement programme</p> <p>Unison response to the council improvement programme</p>

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the council's improvement programme for the period up to the end of March 2011.

Recommendations:

1. Cabinet is requested to approve the council improvement programme
2. Cabinet is requested to grant delegated responsibility to the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive to approve subsequent iterations of the council improvement programme
3. Cabinet is requested to approve the council's key service delivery projects

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The aim of the council improvement programme is to prioritise and sequence the authority's improvement activities in order to ensure it uses its resources in the most effective way in seeking to deliver improved outcomes and services for local people. This is in a context of the IDeA peer review in December 2007 having highlighted the council's improvement activity as an agenda that poses a challenge to the council's capacity. With the peer review having fully endorsed the Chief Executive's 'nine step' plan, the council improvement programme maps out in more detail how it will be delivered.

Background

As is widely recognised, the 2007 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) scorecard deemed Harrow Council to be a '2 star authority' that is 'improving adequately'. In addition, the peer review highlighted the need for a step change in performance if the council is to fulfil its ambitions. Key issues highlighted through the CPA corporate assessment report in March 2007 and the peer review included the following:

- The challenging financial position of the council
- The short-term focus of the organisation
- The requirement for a long-term vision for the borough of Harrow
- Low levels of staff morale in some areas
- Managerial capacity and some inconsistency in managerial leadership
- Key skills gaps in parts of the organisation
- Elected member capacity
- Difficulties around the SAP/ERP system

Current situation

The peer review report cited Harrow Council as ambitious, demonstrating a strong desire to progress and reflecting a clear sense of momentum. This is reflected in the tangible progress that has been made recently in a range of key areas, including the following:

- A clearer vision and priorities have been established, backed up by a set of flagship actions against which the council is happy to be judged
- £35million of savings delivered in the last two years and further savings of nearly £10million identified in the budget for 2008/09
- Investment of nearly £2million in council priorities in the current budget, including many front facing services such as street cleansing, environmental crime and Access Harrow
- Contribution of £1million to the council's reserves
- Positive external judgements in key areas - children's services progressing from two to three stars and housing benefits as a four star service
- Performance management infrastructure established, including improvement boards
- Structural change and increasing managerial capacity
- Significant enhancements made to the internal and external communications infrastructure and communication channels, including bringing in an external provider
- Range of officer and elected member development activities underway, working with such organisations as the Local Government Leadership Centre, Roffey Park and Capita
- Staff achievement awards introduced, plus the Innov8 awards

However, this solid progress now needs to be built upon. The peer review indicated this would require concerted and sustained effort across the authority and a need for the council to ensure it doesn't get distracted from its main areas of focus. The council improvement programme responds directly to this challenge.

Developing the programme

The council improvement programme maps out how the Chief Executive's 'nine step' plan will be delivered, with the Gantt chart attached to this report identifying clear milestones, timescales and accountabilities for each project. It is the culmination of work that has been taking place in the authority over the last three months to develop a clear sequencing of improvement activities for delivery between now and March 2011. This has been done to ensure the organisation's improvement effort is focused upon supporting and enabling the delivery of the corporate priorities, flagship actions and other key outcomes that will benefit local people. Specific outcomes that the improvement programme seeks to enable are:

- Increased customer satisfaction
- Strengthened financial position
- Enhanced reputation as a council
- Increased levels of staff morale and staff advocacy
- Harrow Council as an 'employer of choice'
- Corporate Investors In People accreditation
- Enhanced organisational culture
- Achievement of level 5 of the Equalities Standard
- More flexible organisation better equipped to respond to changing circumstances and future opportunities

The process has involved a review of the council's current improvement activities against the findings and recommendations of the CPA, peer review and Access to Services Inspection reports and the most recent Direction of Travel and Use of Resources judgements. There have been a series of discussions concerning the programme and the projects within it, involving Corporate Directors, project sponsors, project managers and other members of staff across the council. In addition, the programme has been shared with trade unions. The response from Unison is attached to this report and the GMB indicated they intended to outline their views to Cabinet members in writing.

Overview and Scrutiny members conducted a Challenge Panel on the draft council improvement programme and their report is attached. The final version of the programme has been revised to respond to the following specific points raised by the panel:

- The 'succession planning' programme has been re-titled a 'career planning' programme

- The first line managers' development programme will commence in April 2009 rather than January 2009, in order to provide greater opportunity for it to be informed by the evaluation and learning from the middle manager's development programme

The governance arrangements for the programme reflect the desire of the panel to see the Overview and Scrutiny committee and Performance and Finance sub committee playing a role in monitoring both the implementation of the overall programme and a number of specific projects within it. This will serve to form a key strand of the robust monitoring processes that the panel highlighted as being necessary for successful delivery of the programme. The panel outlined the need for any blockages to the programme to be addressed in the most vigorous manner. The programme management arrangements will meet the need, highlighted by the panel, for the inter-relationship between a number of projects in the programme to be understood and managed accordingly. The panel also saw the human resources stream of the programme as being pivotal to its' success and urged the council to ensure this function is adequately resourced. Other specific points raised by the panel will be considered by project managers as they work up their respective project plans.

Taking the Programme Forward

Looking at the governance arrangements for the programme in more detail, monitoring delivery against the milestones of each project within the improvement programme will take place through a monthly meeting of the Chief Executive and all of the project sponsors. The Corporate Leadership Group, made up of the council's top three management tiers, will review progress on a quarterly basis and there will be regular reporting to elected members, including Cabinet updates and progress reports to the Portfolio Holder, and the close involvement of Overview and Scrutiny as indicated earlier. The Improvement Programme Team within the Strategy and Improvement Directorate will be responsible for maintaining an on-going dialogue with project sponsors and project managers to identify any delays or barriers to progress, working with them to develop and implement mitigating actions and generally supporting the reporting process.

Contents of the Council Improvement Programme

The final version of the programme is shown in the Gantt chart attached to this report, which details the project sponsor and project manager/s for each project within the council improvement programme, the milestones within each project and the timescales on which they will be delivered.

Key Service Delivery Projects

Alongside the council improvement programme, a number of key service delivery projects that are integral to the council's improvement have been identified. These projects have been identified using the following criteria:

- Contribution to flagship actions
- Impact on finance

- Impact on public satisfaction indicator
- Impact on Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) indicator
- Impact on delivery of a corporate priority

A list of the projects concerned is attached to this report. These projects are likely to benefit from close monitoring by Directorates and Improvement Boards. The Improvement Programme Team will support the monitoring of these projects initially, but it is anticipated that over the coming months Directorates will assume this responsibility.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications relating to the council improvement programme itself, given it mainly draws existing and already resourced activity together into an overall plan. Should any of the projects within the programme identify additional resource requirements, these will be considered through the council's established budget planning process.

Risk Management Implications

Discussions involving the council's risk management team have identified a number of opportunities and risks relating to the council improvement programme. The opportunities include the beneficial effect that successful realisation of the programme will have on the council's reputation, which in turn would impact positively in such areas as recruitment and retention. Another opportunity around the programme is the chance it offers to identify common risks across the different projects and manage them more efficiently and effectively. There is also the opportunity to bring a wider corporate perspective to issues that cut across different areas of responsibility, helping to address issues highlighted to the authority previously around it operating too much in silos.

In terms of risks, effective internal communication of the programme is vital to ensure buy-in and confidence in it and an internal communications plan has therefore been drawn up to underpin the programme. In addition, successful delivery of the programme requires robust governance, strong management, consistent and effective corporate leadership and the 'organisational appetite' necessary to ensure projects turn into a reality on the timescales committed to.

The Improvement Programme Team will work with each project manager to ensure a project plan and risk management arrangements have been established. They will also look across the programme to ensure the pressures placed upon the organisation by the individual projects, for example the roll out of new processes and systems or consultation with staff, are co-ordinated to spread the demands placed on services.

Performance Issues

The recommendations in this report directly impact the following key regulatory judgements:

Regulatory Judgement	Current Score	Impact of Proposals
Corporate Assessment	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves performance management arrangements Addresses capacity shortages in the organisation – elected member development, addressing sickness absence, management development
Use of Resources	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves procurement savings delivery and income generation to improve financial standing Improves financial management and reporting processes
Access to Services	TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses key recommendations from recent inspection
Direction of Travel	Improving Adequately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Codifies council's overall improvement programme to increase pace of change

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Jennifer Hydari	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 20 th May 2008		
Name: Helen White	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 16 th May 2008		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Tom Whiting



Divisional Director
(Strategy and
Improvement)

Date: 15th May 2008

Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Tom Whiting, Divisional Director Strategy & Improvement

Background papers:

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) scorecard 2007

Peer review report