

## **Summary Review and Plans from Council Leader for O & S – April 2004**

At the May 2002 Annual Council I announced the New Harrow Project to modernise and re-organise the work of the Council; to become more customer focussed, to drive up standards across all services, and to make step changes to the environment and 'public realm' in Harrow. The need for such a radical shake-up was confirmed in the CPA report published in the autumn. A clean and green pilot project was soon implemented in South and West Harrow – with great success by the end of the 2002-03 Council year. Top level re-organisation commenced at chief officer level and plans were developed for new directorates, extending reform into middle management and to lay the foundation for a more responsive area based service delivery.

The development of the Medium Term Budget Strategy took up much work in the autumn and winter of 2002-03. The adoption of the twin aims of raising service standards to achieve a 'good' CPA rating and diminishing Council Tax rises to inflation levels were central to the strategy. In the short term it was necessary to put the revenue budget on a sound footing and plan the achievement of improved levels of reserves. This meant a one-off adjustment to Council Tax levels in April 2003 to secure long term stability. Work is now also well under way to apply the lessons of the MTBS to the capital budget process.

As a result of taking tough decisions in 2003, we are now in a position to assure delivery of our promise of 'better services' and minimal CT rises. As a result of working smarter and buying smarter it was possible to see a NHP dividend worth over 5% points off Council Tax this year. Of course the news that the Audit Commission has revised our overall rating to being a Council that is fair in treating its residents underscored the validity of NHP strategy. The clean and green project has now won two national awards. The IdeA revisited the authority in the new year 2004 and reports that it is impressed with the progress made since 2002, when it produced its first report (that was a precursor to the first CPA report). Senior and middle management re-organisation is now in train following upon the formal establishment of the new directorates in October last year. At the same time the opportunity was taken to modernise the visible image of the Council with the introduction of the new Council logo.

Current priorities for the administration are now set out in the Corporate Vision and Plan recommended by Cabinet this year.

In particular, it is worth noting that the pace of work is accelerating with respect to:

- Town centre development plans
- Making ICT work for the Council at both front of house (First Contact) and in the back office
- Performance and project management.

The administration's basic challenge is simple: To deliver the objectives of the NHP and MTBS. Politically the greatest challenge is to maintain a stable administration within a NOC Council!

Finally 2004 presents opportunities to celebrate success and civic pride from the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations to the new awards event for staff.

Archie Foulds  
Leader, Harrow Council