

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	17 December 2009
Subject:	Outcome of the Comprehensive Area Assessment
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Paul Osborn, Portfolio Holder Performance, Communication and Corporate Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Organisational Assessment Area Assessment narrative (To be circulated as a supplementary agenda item)

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out Harrow's results for the first Comprehensive Area Assessment, which was published on the 9th December 2009 by the Audit Commission.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to note the Audit Commissions judgement for Harrow's first Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Reason:

To inform Cabinet about the positive outcome of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

This report provides an update on the Council's first performance rating under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which has replaced the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The results of the last Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) were published in March 2009. The Council improved its Direction of Travel rating from "Improving Adequately" to "Improving Well" and saw improvements in Children's Services, Housing, Culture and Use of Resources. The Benefits Service continued to be graded 4 out of 4. However the Council remained 2 stars overall.

This level of performance improvement was also recognised in the PWC benchmarking of Councils which rated Harrow as the 2nd most improved in London and the 6th best performing Council in London. The Council was also a finalist in the MJ Best Achieving Council Award in 2009.

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) was introduced in April 2009. Compared to CPA, the CAA is more focussed on outcomes than processes, and represents a change in the approach by reviewing how well local public services are delivering for local people and how likely they are to improve in the future. CAA has two main elements, which inform each other. The Organisational Assessment which is given a score from 1-4 and is Council focussed and the Area Assessment which is a narrative and looks at how well local public services are working together to deliver the areas priorities.

Under the new CAA regime Harrow has moved up to an overall score of 3 (out of 4) for the Organisational Assessment component of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which is the highest score the Council has ever achieved under CAA or CPA. This means that overall the Audit Commission has described Harrow as an organisation that is performing well. This is a clear demonstration that the Council has continued its rate of performance improvement in the last year. Much improved leadership and staff performance are identified as contributing to the improvement. This score also acknowledges the good value for money provided by our services and our clear priorities which reflect the things residents want to see improved.

Organisational Assessment	3 out of 4
Managing Performance	3 out of 4
Use of Resources	2 out of 4

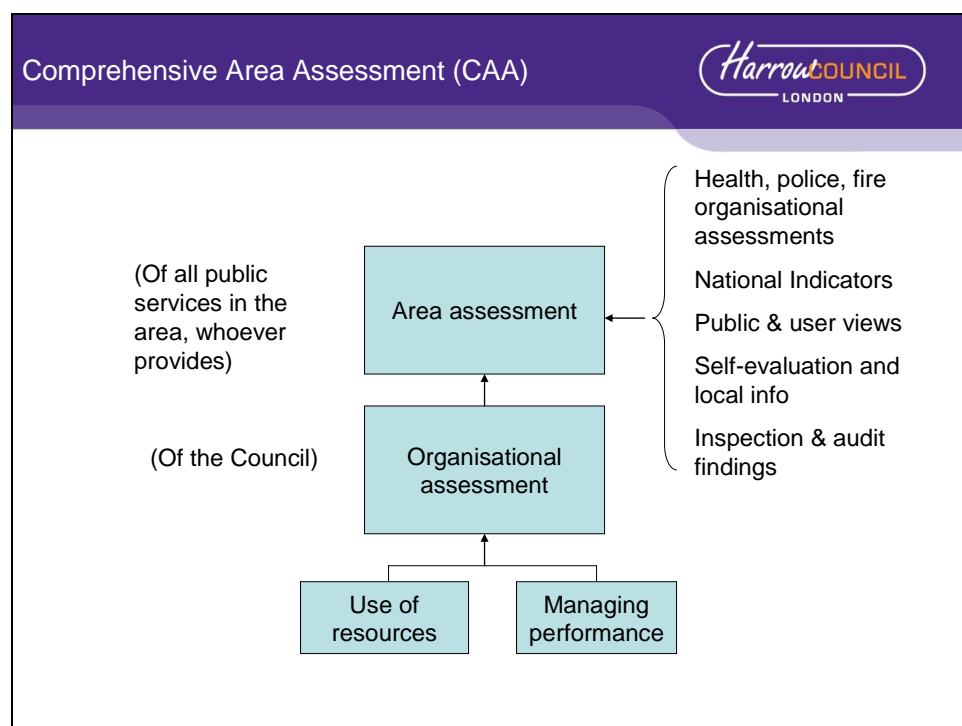
The Area Assessment component of the CAA highlights the work that the local public services are doing to work towards the common vision for Harrow as described in the Sustainable Community Strategy. The report recognised that partnerships were working well across Harrow and delivering good outcomes for residents.

Options Considered

Not applicable

Background

The Comprehensive Area Assessment is made up of two components, the Organisational Assessment, which judges how well the Council uses its resources and manages performance and the Area Assessment, which looks at how well the borough's local public services are working together to tackle the major issues facing the people of Harrow.



The Organisational Assessment consists of two sections, Managing Performance and Use of Resources. Both of these sections are allocated a separate score and then an overall judgement score is made. This ranges from 1 (performs poorly) to 4 (performs excellently).

Unlike the Organisational Assessment, the Area Assessment is not scored and is instead presented as a narrative of how well public sector partners of the borough are doing against the 3 key questions;

- How well do priorities for Harrow express community needs and aspirations?
- How well are we performing?
- What are the prospects for future improvement?

Throughout the Area Assessment narrative, the Commission uses red flags to highlight where something more or different needs to happen to ensure that the most important challenges are addressed, or a green flag, which means that public bodies are achieving exceptional outcomes in priority areas, or something innovative, and that others can learn from.

Organisational Assessment

The Audit Commission has judged the Council's important services as performing well and that the Council has a wide range of good improvements. Because of this the Audit Commission has decided that overall the Council performs well and therefore achieves a score of 3 in the new tougher inspection regime.

The Council achieved 2 (out of 4) for Use of Resources. This consisted of a score of 3 for managing finances and 2 for governing the business and managing resources (which includes natural resources). A comprehensive action plan has been developed to help us achieve an overall 3 next time. The assessment noted that the Council provides good value for money for the services it delivers within its resources.

The Audit Commission notes that "the Council has managed a difficult financial position, strengthened its financial reserves, made substantive savings and invested extra money in priority areas." "Front-line services such as refuse collection, recycling and street cleaning have improved" and "people worry less about crime and anti social behaviour while children and young people continue to achieve well in local schools".

The work that the Council has undertaken in improving its understanding of residents' needs was highlighted and the Audit Commission found the Council had improved communication with its residents.

The Council scored three (out of 4) for Managing Performance. This is a reflection of the attention and effort that the Council puts in to delivering against the three corporate priorities and the focus on specific services, such as those for adults and children. The Council has also shown significant improvement in the way it has provided services over the last year and improved two thirds (63 per cent) of its performance measures.

Adult social care has achieved an improved rating of 'performing well' from Care Quality Commission (CQC). This is a score of 3 out of 4 for Adult Services, which contributes to the Organisational score of 3 out of 4. This is the first star rating improvement in Adult Social Care in nine years and represents a major achievement for the service. CQC recognised a "step change in performance," "strong leadership" and a "clear strategic direction". CQC also noted strong improvement in personalisation and carers services and that service users "noticed a difference", particularly those with learning disabilities.

Children's Services retains a score of 3 out of 4 in Ofsted's annual inspection. Ofsted did not carry out any on-site work as part of their Annual Performance Assessment but confirmed this rating based on a review of indicators and inspection results. This means that Children's Service continues to be rated as excellent for Making a Positive Contribution and Achieving Economic Wellbeing for children and young people, and good for all other outcomes, including safeguarding children. This also contributes to the score of 3 out of 4 for the Organisational Assessment of the CAA.

The Audit Commission noted improved leadership and the very strong contribution of staff in delivering the highest level of performance the Council has seen.

“The leadership of the Council has improved markedly in the last three years and it has set the foundations for becoming a high performing authority. And Harrow is a low spending Council which is currently implementing a three year plan to help it deliver better services in a less expensive and more efficient way”.

“Staff performance has also improved. Sickness levels have fallen and staff surveys show increases in the number of people who would recommend the Council as an employer and the number who feel that they are provided with good direction and leadership. Harrow residents will have seen improved customer access and service and a marked increase in the amount of positive media coverage”.

Area Assessment

The Council, health services, the police and others are working towards a common vision for Harrow in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement. The Area Assessment highlights the work taking place by Harrow’s partners to meet future financial challenges and improve services through sharing staff, buildings and joining up services.

In particular the Audit Commission has recognised:

- The high quality services for children and young people in Harrow
- The low numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training
- The good support provided for young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities and in need of protection
- The good progress that is being made on transforming services for adults who need additional care.
- The above average life expectancy in Harrow and the low levels of drinking, teenage pregnancy and levels of drug misuse in comparison to the rest of England
- The cross agency work that local organisations are doing to tackle the economic issues through supporting employment locally.
- The broad range of agencies who work together to further develop a ‘sense of community’
- The low crime levels in Harrow as a result of effective partnership working resulting in fewer people now having a fear of crime.
- The work that is taking place to improve the Harrow environment including having one of the best recycling performances in London.

Harrow was not allocated any red or green flags for its Area Assessment by the Audit Commission.

Next Steps

A Use of Resources Improvement Plan has been developed in direct response to the Audit Commission findings and is now being implemented. The next audit will start in March 2010.

Identified challenges in the Area Assessment have been forwarded to the appropriate individual organisations and partnership groups to develop action plans on how these issues will be addressed. Actions against these areas will be monitored through the Harrow Strategic Partnership and Harrow Chief Executives Group.

Like all councils, Harrow will need to deliver ambitious savings over the next three years. The Audit Commission has acknowledged the programme that the Council has put in place. "The Council has started to address these challenges and has launched an ambitious "Better Deal for Residents" programme to look at new ways of delivering services and new ways of working with local partners and residents." This will be through sharing staff, buildings and increasing efficiency over the total public spend. The programme aims to help the Council balance its medium term budgets, deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy, work well with residents and maintain its current rate of performance improvement.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications. The Use of Resources Assessment scores the Council's financial management processes and internal governance. This is reflected in the Council's Use of Resources Managing Finances sub-section where a score of 3 out of 4 was achieved.

Performance Issues

This assessment recognises the advance in performance and performance management made throughout 2008/09.

Environmental Impact

There are no direct environmental impacts. Harrow's performance on environmental impact is assessed through the Use of Resources judgement and the Area Assessment.

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Myfanwy Barrett



Chief Financial Officer

Date: 4 December 2009

Name: George Curran



on behalf of the
Monitoring Officer

Date: 7 December 2009

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Alex Dewsnap



Divisional Director
Partnership,
Development and
Performance

Date: 4 December 2009

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards



Divisional Director
(Environmental
Services)

Date: 4 December 2009

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Trina Taylor, Senior Policy Officer, 0208 420 9324

Background Papers:

Organisational Assessment Narrative
Area Assessment Narrative