

London Borough of Harrow

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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for an independent overview
of local public services

London Borough of Harrow

Overall, London Borough of Harrow performs well

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	2 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	2 out of 4
Managing resources	2 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

Summary

Overall Harrow Council performs well. The Council makes sure that its services provide good value for money. It has improved significantly in recent years and has clear priorities which are the things residents want to see improved. The Council has managed a difficult financial position, strengthened its financial reserves, made substantive savings and invested extra money in priority areas. And in nearly two-thirds of the key performance indicators the Council can show improvements. Front-line services such as refuse collection, recycling and street cleaning have improved. People worry less about crime and anti-social behaviour while children and young people continue to achieve well in local schools. It scores two for how it uses its resources, but because important services are performing well and the Council has a wide range of good improvements, we have decided that overall the Council performs well.

Harrow Council scores three out of four for managing performance. The three areas that the Council gives most of its attention and effort to are delivering cleaner and safer streets, improving support for people who need it most and building stronger communities.

However, the Council plan has other important priorities and projects for the coming year to make sure that the needs of Harrow residents are well met. This includes making sure the Council delivers all of its services as well as possible, as well as focusing on specific services, such as those for adults and children. Other actions include managing the Council finances better, helping residents and businesses through the recession and improving the local environment.

Harrow Council can show significant improvements in the way it has provided

services over the last year. In 2008 nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of its performance measures improved. An independent study carried out on behalf of the Council shows that when measured against other London councils Harrow is the second most improved council in London. It was also recently runner-up in the Municipal Journal annual competition to find the best achieving council in the country. The Council is much more financially stable than it has been in the past and has made savings of over £45 million since 2006/07. This year council tax increases were held below three per cent.

Like all councils, Harrow will need to deliver ambitious savings over the next three years as the country makes tough choices around public spending. 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. It aims to help the Council balance its medium term budgets, deliver its Sustainable Community Strategy (the plan which describes the priorities and plans for the area), work well with residents and maintain its current rate of performance improvement.

Ofsted has rated the Council's childrens services as one that performs well. Young children get a secure start and achieve the same as other areas and nationally in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The large majority of primary schools are good or better than similar areas or national averages. Secondary schools perform well and all have good or outstanding standards of behaviour. All four school sixth forms are good and the sixth form college is outstanding, although general further education and other higher education providers are satisfactory. Of the four special schools, two are good and two are outstanding. This good provision contributes to achievement at age 16 which is well above the national average and improving. Very high numbers of young people continue in learning after 16 and at the age of 19 qualification levels are well above similar areas and national averages. Services for looked after children in Harrow are satisfactory and the rate of adoptions has shown very good improvement.

The Care Quality Commission has rated the Council's adult social care as performing well. The Council provides good support for adult social care and has invested extra money. The current transformation plan is driving improvement. Information from service users and carers is used well to help make services right for those who use them. Over the last year the number of people choosing a direct payment or personal budget has increased significantly. The Council has also continued to strengthen the way it protects adults needing care and support from abuse by raising awareness of abuse. But more work is required to ensure that all staff put this into practice.

The Council scores two out of four for use of resources. The Council provides good value for money for the services it delivers within its resources. The Council has managed its finances well and reduced the costs of its services while improving them. However, the Council needs to lead by example in the way it manages its own natural resources by having better plans and targets.

The Council understands residents needs better now and the way the Council communicates with its residents has improved. It is investing money to improve services that are important to them such as cleaner and safer streets. There is a strong commitment backed up by investment and plans to change and improve the way the Council works with residents. There are creative

plans and projects to improve value for money by delivering services in a different way.

About London Borough of Harrow

Harrow is an outer London borough in the northwest of the capital. It has an estimated population of more than 215,000. The population is increasing slowly and includes a growing number of older people and a richly diverse and changing child population.

Over half the population is from a minority ethnic background. Harrow has the highest number of different faiths and religions of any local authority in England and Wales. It has a particularly large Indian Asian community. This level of religious diversity gives Harrow a wide range experiences, cultures and skills and also challenges around communication and understanding.

Harrow is relatively prosperous - its residents enjoy an above average standard of living and low unemployment. But Harrow has big contrasts between its richest and poorest people and an increasing proportion of lower income families.

Harrow is a borough with high levels of commuting and freelancing and also a significant range of employment in local businesses. More than six out of ten Harrow residents work outside the borough mainly in West London and Central London. This level of commuting means that for many Harrow residents the car is an integral part of their lives.

Harrow has a good reputation for the quality and quantity of its green belt land. This provides access to nature and recreation for many local people. In contrast to the green belt the remainder of Harrow is intensively built up with little vacant, undeveloped or underdeveloped land.

Organisational assessment

The three areas that the Council gives most of its attention and effort to are;

- delivering cleaner and safer streets;
- improving support for people who need it most; and
- building stronger communities.

However the Council plan also has other important priorities and projects it will focus on to make sure that the needs of Harrow residents are well met. This includes making sure the Council delivers all of its services as well as possible, as well as focusing on specific services such as those for adults and children. Other actions include managing the Council finances better, helping residents and businesses through the recession and improving the local environment.

Harrow Council works well to identify and deliver important services for local residents. It has a clear process for identifying concerns using local

knowledge and information from local reports about the area. The Council regularly assesses how well they have delivered each service and councillors, council officers and local residents work well together to make sure that national and local policy is built into local actions. All of this helps to make sure that the priorities identified are those that matter to local residents. These priorities are described in the Councils Corporate Plan, which sets out their aims and targets for the coming year and over the next three years. Before being finalised the Council uses a number of ways to ask residents their views. These include publishing aims in the local press, discussion by local councillors with residents and linking with the Residents Panel. This is a group of 1,200 local people in Harrow who have signed up to give their views about anything the Council and its partners ask them. It is representative of the boroughs over 18 population and people who have different employment status.

Children and young people are also consulted about services in Harrow. The Youth Council has sub groups which look after the five important priority areas and this has been important in the development and design of the Childrens and Young People Plan. They are consulted on local services for children and young people and take part in planning future services. For example, they have been able to influence action for " Staying Safe" and have influenced and led on e-safety and anti-bullying plans. Their work has contributed to reduced anti-social behaviour and offending in the area.

Deliver cleaner and safer streets.

Keeping the streets clean is an increasingly important priority for residents although satisfaction with street cleaning has fallen in recent years. Harrow has high levels of recycling and recent figures show that it is the second best authority for recycling in London. It also has the best performance in London for composting green waste although more work is required to help people living in flats take part in recycling. A new approach has been taken to cleaning the streets. For instance, a " blitz" team of thirty additional sweepers is in operation around the town centre and stations. Also an " envirocrime" team has been created, which helps tackle problems such as fly-posting, fly-tipping and graffiti. Significant time and effort has been invested to ensure that areas such as Harrow town centre are clean.

Working with organisations such as the Police, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority, the Probation Service, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the London Fire Brigade, Harrow Council has implemented " weeks of action" . These are concentrated efforts to make a big impact in a small area and have been successful in improving or removing " grot spots" where rubbish, abandoned cars and other hazards have caused long standing problems. Examples of areas where these "weeks of action" have taken place include Rayners Lane, Wealdstone High Street and Herga Lane. Nearly three quarters (70 per cent) of residents feel that their "week of action" has improved their area.

Harrow is one of the safest boroughs in London and has been for some time. In 2007 crime in Harrow reached a 30 year low. Recent figures for knife crime have shown a reduction but fear of crime has been an issue, although this is now reducing with improved resident figures for fear of crime and perceptions of anti-social behaviour. These are generally lower than across London. Harrow now has in place a jointly funded policing team in the town centre.

The Council is adding more CCTVs to the boroughs network and has installed alley gates which increase security and deter fly-tipping.

Harrow Council wants to reduce pollution levels in the borough and has taken steps to restrict greenhouse gases from housing and transport. Currently a large amount of pollution comes from domestic sources and in order to help reduce pollution levels the Council has made adaptations to 1,100 council houses to make them more energy efficient. And working with other organisations, the Council has offered insulation and heating repairs to over 200 households with greatest need. Thirty schools will be installing solar panels.

Harrow also has a high level of car usage and one of the highest rates in London for people driving their children to school. To help this most schools in Harrow now have travel plans which reduce the number of car journeys, and over 500 adults and children have been trained to cycle safely. So far the number of car journeys taking children to school has fallen by one per cent in the last year. The Council is looking at its own activities and now understands its own part in creating pollution. It is making changes to its transport fleet and the journeys its vehicles make. Finally, the Council advice line can help residents with information on making the best use of energy, transport, waste and associated issues which can damage the wider environment.

Improve support for people with additional needs.

Adults who need social care are well supported. There are clear aims and strong leadership. And good progress has been made on improving services for the people who use them. There are clear priorities for further improvement one of which is giving people a personal budget or direct payment for their needs. This is an area in which Harrow has made very good progress. Independent surveys provide the Council with a widespread picture of people's views about their services and show improved satisfaction with services. In Harrow there has previously been a large use of residential care for adults with learning disabilities. This is now changing as more home based care replaces previous arrangements. There is a greater focus on giving skills back to people and helping them either relearn lost skills or acquire new skills and maintain their independence.

Keeping adults with additional needs safe is an important Council priority. A recent independent review found good areas of work and some areas for improvement. Extra staff have been recruited to support this work and current staff made more aware of the right standards. A new quality plan is being put into action which will help all those responsible deliver improved safeguarding. More work is required to increase safeguarding training for both Council and independent sector staff and make sure that this continues to improve.

The Council management team responsible for adults with additional needs has been strengthened and works well with other organisations. Following an independent review the Council, with other organisations, has strengthened the Learning Disability Partnership Board (the group responsible for looking after the needs of people with learning disabilities) to make it more effective.

A plan has been developed which has had input from users, carers and staff. However, it is not yet possible to show that this has resulted in noticeable improvements for people.

Work has started with the private sector to develop a wider range of services, but this work is at an early stage and needs to be continued. The Council has worked with two of their main home care providers to improve services which are now adequate.

Other Council developments include building new neighbourhood centres which will improve the day care support for people with learning difficulties. Also, the first purpose-built extra care (this is very sheltered or assisted living) housing in Harrow is planned for this year. This will provide suitable accommodation for older people and people who need a lot of additional support to live independently. These actions are all part of the plan to modernise day care facilities for all service users and supporting people to live at home, including those with a complex range of needs.

The Council wants to increase the employment opportunities for people with disabilities. To increase this area of support the Council has now introduced “slivers of time” a project which offers suitable work in small packages to individuals and so far nearly 300 hours of employment have been provided in this way. Additionally, the “Xcite programme” helps people to find their way back into the workplace and provide income for people who have been out of the workplace for a long time.

Build stronger communities.

Harrow is a place with a wide range of communities and faiths. Over half the population is from a minority ethnic background and Harrow has the highest level of religious diversity of any local authority in England and Wales. Harrow has a large Indian Asian community and is often a place where new migrants choose to settle in London.

Harrow Council values its specific and unique identity and does not have serious problems with the level of respect people show to each other. This is better than many places in London although in recent years the number of people who think that their local neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together has declined. The Council is working to address this by supporting new and existing communities and residents. This work is targeted at new arrivals who tend not to have networks and can become isolated and disadvantaged. To help overcome this and help new migrants settle in the borough the Council provides the “Welcome to Harrow pack”. This is distributed through community networks and helps residents access services such as health and housing advice. The Council has also provided a “myth busting leaflet” for existing residents which aims to encourage a better understanding of different faiths and communities and their places of worship. New populations generally want to speak English and the Council has helped fund additional English courses for people where it is only spoken as a second language.

The Council is helping build stronger communities through the launch of the year long community and cultural calendar and one-off events, such as the “Under One Sky” festival. In June 2009 this brought together over 13,000

residents from different backgrounds. Other actions include promoting new and existing cultural activities to encourage participation from people in Harrow. An example of this is the establishment of the "Harrow Heroes" awards, an annual event which promotes and celebrates community volunteering. The Council works closely with the local community to build resilience to violent extremism, for example Harrow Central Mosque accommodates Council community officers so that they are at the heart of the community. The Somali Interagency Task Force has been set up to address problems in one of the fastest growing and most disadvantaged communities in Harrow. Examples of projects led by them are role modeling, translation and interpretation services, extended homes and community outreach.

Adults and housing.

The Council has a range of actions to improve the way it supports adults who need additional care. This includes modernising services and involving adults who use the services in making changes. In addition to helping people to live at home longer, the Council wants to increase the numbers who will receive an annual review of their needs. They have also provided more opportunities for people with physical and learning disabilities and mental health issues to find, and stay in, employment.

The performance of housing services in Harrow has improved in recent years and is now performing well. The Council is good at meeting housing needs and allocating affordable housing. It also manages its own housing stock well.

Levels of home ownership in Harrow are high (nearly nine out of ten homes are privately owned and only six per cent of the total housing available is Council owned). Last year the number of Council homes meeting the Governments decent home standard fell slightly below the target. However, this is expected to be met by the end of 2010. The relatively small number of Council houses puts extra pressure on the availability of affordable housing.

To help this 271 new affordable homes were completed in Harrow in 2008/09 which was 52 more than the agreed target for the year. And by March 2010 a further 219 homes that are affordable to local people should be completed. The Council has impressively met a government target of halving the number of households in temporary accommodation a year ahead of schedule.

Harrow Council continues to deliver an excellent housing benefits service, achieving the highest possible scores of performing strongly for the last four years. This includes the speed that they deal with claims from people who need benefits, as well as making sure that claims are received by the right people and are for the right amount.

Childrens services.

Council staff and others with responsibilities for children and young people work together very well. Their priorities are clear, they tackle problems early and they support disadvantaged children, young people and families well.

Almost all places where children and young people go to learn, for example schools and colleges, are particularly strong. Young children get a secure start

and achievement in the Foundation Stage has improved to average. The large majority of primary schools are good or outstanding. Secondary schools are either good or outstanding with very good achievement which continues to get better. All secondary schools have good or outstanding standards of behaviour and the numbers of pupils who are often absent are about the same as in similar areas and nationally. Improving attendance in schools that do not do quite as well is a priority for the Council. Minority ethnic groups show average and generally improving attainment. Narrowing gaps in educational achievement is a key priority and the gaps between those children who do well and those who do not are mostly closing. Few children and young people report being bullied, partly because of successful anti-bullying campaigns, for example MissDorothy.com.

School sixth forms are good and the sixth form college is outstanding while other educational provision after the age of 16 is satisfactory. In Harrow very high numbers of young people continue in learning at age 17. Their achievement is much higher than average and continues to improve. The numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training are amongst the lowest in London. And more young people from low income backgrounds go on to higher education than elsewhere in the country.

Children and young people in the care of the Council, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in need of protection are provided for and supported well. For children in the care of the Council the target for adoption has been exceeded. Children in care can expect their situation to be reviewed on time and they tend to be kept in one home much longer than in the past. Although the high number of young people leaving care who are in education, employment or training has fallen, almost all have a suitable place to live. All children in need of protection will have their situation reviewed on time and because of successful work, numbers needing this protection for two years or more has fallen.

Levels of substance misuse in children and young people are relatively low as are hospital admissions for injured children. Good numbers of young people take part in activities organised to prevent criminal behaviour and the "Summer Uni" programme has contributed to a significant fall in anti-social behaviour and crime.

There are far fewer than average first time offenders, very low rates of re-offending and small numbers in custody. Average numbers of young offenders are in education, employment or training. There are, however, some concerns for Harrow's children and young people. These are understood and action to improve matters is well underway. In the Foundation Stage, there remains a very large gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest. Although pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and make good progress, the gap between them and children without learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average at the end of secondary schooling. This reflects in part an overall improvement in results that are already very high. Permanent exclusions from schools are above the national average and similar areas.

Communities and environment.

The Council is doing a number of things to improve the environment, including

planting an additional 500 street trees. A weed control team will help the area look tidy and more Council staff and money will help make Council allotments easier to use and more attractive. The frequency of the “weeks of action” is being increased which will tackle additional “grot spots” and more alley gates will be installed to increase security and reduce fly-tipping.

National indicators show that satisfaction with Council services has generally fallen since 2006/07. This is most marked for services such as sport and leisure services, parks and open spaces and libraries. Satisfaction with cultural and recreational services is also lower than in most other parts of London. However, the Council's reputation tracker survey with more recent local data shows that satisfaction levels have been increasing in the last two years. The Council recognises that current sports and leisure facilities are in need of renewal and has advanced plans for the Anchor leisure centre in Wealdstone. These have been delayed by the recession, but in the meantime extra monies are being spent to improve current facilities and reverse the fall in usage.

A better, more efficient and more effective council.

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. Their plan, which covers 2008-2011, includes having a clear understanding about what the Council needs to do, and radically changing the way the Council is organised to make sure the right people have the right skills to do their job well. The plan also includes making sure that the Council is focused on its residents needs through actions such as improving access to services. The Council's “CREATE” programme for all its frontline staff puts the needs of service users at its core. And Harrow residents should now see changes in the way the Council communicates with residents particularly through "Access Harrow". This is the Council one-stop shop with a call centre based at the Civic Centre which has recently received customer service accreditation. Since replacing customer reception areas the Council can show improved efficiency, better customer services and improved staff and customer satisfaction.

Leadership, capacity and capability.

The ability of councillors and senior officers to focus on the important issues for Harrow is good. In recent years the Council has focused on making the services which matter most to Harrow residents as good as possible. This has been achieved while improving the financial stability of the Council, keeping within its budget and making savings of over £45 million since 2006/07. The Council was recently short-listed by the Municipal Journal as one of the Best Achieving Councils in the country. 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. Councillors measure and challenge performance well and have improved their skills and knowledge in

this area through training and linking with other councils. The Council is also looking further into the future. By 2020 it wants Harrow to be recognised for joined-up quality services which can focus on preventing problems and give users choice, availability and control. It wants to balance environmental, economic and community issues. And be a place which remains one of the safest boroughs in London and where there is respect between different community groups. Harrow also faces challenges - for example, the population is not just increasing but the number of older people is also growing, and the expectation of residents is increasing. Costs are increasing - and the current recession means public sector funds will come under large pressures in the coming years.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

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Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Telephone: 0844 798 1212
Fax: 0844 798 2945
Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946
www.audit-commission.gov.uk



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