

REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND
FINANCE SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE

Date:	19 January 2010
Subject:	Outcome of the Comprehensive Area Assessment
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting (Assistant Chief Executive)
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Corporate Effectiveness - Councillors Stanley Sheinwald and Mark Versallion
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 – CAA scores across London Appendix 2 – Area and Organisational Assessments, December 2009

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

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

Recommendations:

The Sub-Committee is requested to

- i) note the outcome of Harrow's first Comprehensive Area Assessment
- ii) endorse the actions in hand to learn from the Council's own experience in round one of the CAA and from other authorities' best practice.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

The Sub-Committee on 16 November 2009 received a report on the Use of Resources Improvement Plan and requested information on the first results for the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which has replaced the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The latest assessment shows a much improved picture.

The results of the last CPA were published in March 2009. At that point, 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 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 Area Assessment is an unscored narrative that looks at how well local public services are working together to deliver the area’s priorities in relation to three questions:
 - How well do priorities for Harrow express community needs and aspirations?
 - How well are we performing?
 - What are the prospects for future improvement?
- The Organisational Assessment is scored from 1-4 (the higher the better) and is Council focussed, comprising these elements:
 - Use of Resources – a judgement against defined Key Lines of Enquiry by the external auditors
 - Managing Performance – a joint assessment by all inspectorates involved with the Council

Background

Organisational Assessment

Under the new CAA regime Harrow has moved up to an overall score of 3 (out of 4) for the Organisational Assessment, which is the highest score the Council has ever achieved under CAA or CPA, since the latter started in 2002. 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. Contributory factors are described in more detail below.

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).

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. 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 eight 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 assessment. 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 Services 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.

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 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.

The Audit Commission can apply green or red flags to particular elements in the Area Assessment: red to highlight where something more or different needs to happen to ensure that the most important challenges are addressed, or green, where public bodies are achieving exceptional outcomes in priority areas, or something innovative, that others can learn from. No flags of either sort were applied to Harrow.

The Commission describes how the Council, health services, the police, the voluntary sector and others are working towards a common vision for Harrow set out 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.

The picture across London

In their Organisational Assessments,

- 6 scored a 4
- 24 scored a 3 (including Harrow)
- 2 scored a 2
- 1 scored a 1

Only Harrow and Hillingdon improved their scores compared with the last CPA. All others remained the same (17) or dropped a score (14).

It is difficult to compare Area Assessments as they are not scored. In terms of flags:

- 22 green flags were applied to 18 London authorities
- 5 red flags were issued to 4 London authorities

Nationally, 74 green and 62 red flags were issued.

Lists of the scores and flags in London are in Appendix 1. Further details of flags and scores nationally are published on the CLG's OnePlace website at <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk>. It is the intention to source best practice learning from authorities identified in this way, who have either green flags or scores of 4 in any of the Use of Resources elements.

Next Steps

A comprehensive Use of Resources Improvement Plan has been drafted and is currently being revised in the light of workshops facilitated by Deloitte Touche. This, together with an updated self-assessment to be produced in the new year, is directed towards achieving an overall 3 for Use of Resources next time. Auditors expect to start work on the next assessment in late February.

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.

A report will be made to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February, assessing issues identified for action against the Council's current plans.

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.

The full versions of the Area and Organisational Assessments are at Appendix 2.

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.

Corporate Priorities

This report covers performance across the Council and the Harrow Strategic Partnership and therefore touches on all three Corporate Priorities.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Martin Randall, Senior Performance Officer, 020 8424 1815
Trina Taylor, Senior Policy Officer, 020 8420 9324

Background Papers: Organisational Assessment and Area Assessment Narratives, appended, and other data from <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk>.