

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

<b>Meeting:</b>	Publications Advisory Panel
<b>Date:</b>	September 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2004
<b>Subject:</b>	Web Site Development
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	Executive Director, Business Connections
<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder:</b>	Finance, Human Resources and Performance Management
<b>Status:</b>	Part 1
<b>Ward:</b>	N/A
<b>Enclosures:</b>	None

### 1. **Summary**

- 1.1 The following is a report on the current development of the Harrow Council website following a recommendation at the May meeting of the Publications Advisory Panel asking Cabinet to look at the resourcing of the website. It includes further information.

### 2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 To note the report
- Or
- To note the report and make specific recommendations

### 3. **Consultation with Ward Councillors**

- 3.1 N/A

### 4. **Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)**

- 4.1 The website is an important tool in the council's aspiration to be open and transparent in its dealings and to inform residents

## 5. **Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

**We will strengthen Harrow's local communities** by promoting social inclusion amongst all our residents both young and old, by seeking to eradicate poverty and by reducing the fear of crime.

## 6. **Background Information**

- 6.1 There was a discussion at the May 2004 meeting of the Publications Advisory Panel about the development of the website at which members noted that comprehensive statistics were essential for the future development of the site. Members also resolved to recommend that Cabinet should look at the resourcing of the website, with a view to giving the Communications Unit control of the website budget.

### **e-Government and web site organisation**

- 6.1.5 The ICT member sub-group, under the chairmanship of the portfolio holder for Finance and Human Resources, has responsibility for overseeing the strategic ICT policy.
- 6.2 The Council has a number of targets to meet in order to meet the fundamental organisational change set out in the National Strategy for Local e-Government. Among the many targets is one stating that all transactions that can be undertaken with the council electronically should be enabled by the end of December, 2005. The Harrow target for the end of March 2005 is 73 per cent, so a considerable amount of work still needs to be undertaken in the remaining nine months of next year.
- 6.3 A number of other priority outcomes have been published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister with regard to e-Government targets, based ten priority service and four transformation areas. A list of these areas and a progress report is attached.
- 6.4 The council has established a Corporate Strategic Programme Board under the chairmanship of the Executive Director, Organisational Development and including the Directors of Strategy to direct and monitor the implementation of the IT Strategy. Reporting to the board is a sub group dedicated to the e-Government agenda. The sub group will be able to influence the allocation of resources to the website and aspects of e-Government work to ensure that targets and real service improvements are achieved. The Head of Communications will be invited onto the group. The first meeting is planned for September.

### **The Communications Unit and the website**

- 6.5 The Communications and Publications Manager has responsibility for the content maintenance, editorial competence and design and branding of the website, working with colleagues in IT. She must ensure the site is easy to read and, working with IT, easy to navigate.
- 6.6 The Web Editor, responsible to the Communications and Publications Manager, has the responsibility of keeping the editorial content of the site up to date and accurate, in addition to "policing" the whole site to ensure information produced on the website and intranet by web-authors throughout the whole of the authority is written in an easily understandable form and complies with the council's writing style.

- 6.7 In view of the increasing popularity of the website (see below) and the need to improve internal communications, an Intranet Editor is to be employed in the autumn, funded by savings made elsewhere in the unit. The Intranet Editor will also be able to assist the Web Editor. The training of staff to use the website is ongoing, using a trainer who has worked with the Communications Unit and is conversant in the council's writing style and branding. The training is funded by IT.
- 6.8 The content management system used on the Harrow website is called APLAWS. A new APLAWS framework was implemented in April, and it has been a significant undertaking to transfer and update information from the previous system to the new framework. Consequently there are still a few areas of empty pages and unlinked pages. Examples of jargon and clumsy phrasing have also slipped through. Work is progressing to ensure that the site is 100 per cent operational and it is anticipated that an upgraded system, called LAWS ( APLAWS Plus) will be installed by the end of September.
- 6.81 Editorial resources for the website have to be prioritised. There are constant demands on the updating and maintaining of the news sections of the site. Time needs to be found to ensure that information being placed on the site by web authors is jargon-free and written within style. There are increasing inquiries and requests from members of the public, partners and staff, and there is a need to promote and market the website itself, as well as its usage.
- 6.82 One of the government recommendations is that each councillor should have the opportunity to develop their own website, either as part of the council website or separately.

### **Web site usage**

- 6.9 The introduction of the APLAWS framework enables the council to obtain statistics of Website usage. There has been a steady growth in usage month on month according to figures from the last available quarter, April to June. In June the site obtained 3.7 million hits and hundreds of visitors a day. All users of the website see the Home Page containing the latest news and links to other areas. The most popular areas are web pages containing information on jobs, schools, planning and building control. The Library catalogue is also heavily used.

### **Issues for consideration**

- 6.10 In view of the fact that the editorial development of the website is part of a wider programme of meeting e-Government targets, the appropriateness of allocating a separate budget for the Communications Unit needs to be considered.
- 6.11 Consideration needs to be given to the editorial and training priorities for the continued development of the website. This may include the development of members' own websites.

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 None to date

**8. Finance Observations**

- 8.1 The new e-government steering group will help to direct resources to key areas to help the council move forward on e-government

**9. Legal Observations**

- 9.1 None

**10. Background Papers**

- 11.1 Outcome and Transformation Areas – part of IT Web Status report

**11. Author**

- 12.1 Peter Brown, Head of Communications