

February 2010

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Review of Sustainability

Members of the Standing Review

Cllr Seymour (Co-Chair)
Cllr Miles (Co-Chair)
Cllr Solanki
Cllr O'Dell
Cllr Idaikkadar
Cllr Kinnear
Cllr Teli

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CHAIRMEN'S INTRODUCTION

For a number of years scrutiny councillors have been keen to investigate the council's approach to delivering a sustainable environment and this was given added impetus with the introduction of new national performance indicators in 2008 to measure the council's and the borough's use of resources. However, the most significant driver of the investigation has been the onset of the recession. From our perspective, a sustainable community is one which makes the most effective use of its resources without endangering the life chances of future generations, it is one which maximises the viability of its communities ensuring that people from different backgrounds share in the development, promotion and benefits of the borough and it is one which supports a thriving economy. Whilst there are many other issues which the review could have considered, these are the components we prioritised for investigation. And these are the very issues that we felt could be most endangered by our experience of recession.

The review was commissioned as part of the Overview and Scrutiny committee's 2008-2009 work programme and commenced in March 2009. The first meeting of the review group was held on the 26th March 2009 where the initial scope for the review was decided upon by the members of the group, this is attached as Appendix.

The review was divided into three separate streams of work which looked at

- **Environmental sustainability**, - for which the review group considered the council's climate change strategy
- **Economic sustainability** - for which the review group considered the effectiveness of the council and partner's support for residents during the economic downturn
- **Community sustainability** – for which the review group considered the impact of the economic downturn on the cohesion of the Harrow community

The sections below outline the findings and recommendations from each of these streams. The observations and recommendations from the 'environmental sustainability' stream have already been circulated to officers in accordance with the consultation timetable for the climate change strategy.

The work of the review group has been greatly assisted by the many officers and colleagues who have provided information and advice and who have attended the review group sessions to discuss the specific issues. In particular, the review group would like to thank:

Climate change challenge panel

- Gemma Moore, Senior Climate Change and Environmental Officer
- John Edwards, Divisional Director of Environmental Services.
- Peter Barron, Planner, Economic Develop & Enterprise & Research
- Sally Crew, Group Manager Transport and Policy Programme, London Borough of Southwark
- Ollie Swan, Energy Manager, London Borough of Bexley

Responding to the recession challenge panel

- Terry Dackombe, Partnership Manager, Job CentrePlus (JCP)
- Mark Hall-Pearson, Mental Health Senior Professional, Harrow Council
- Jill Harrison, Chief Executive, Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Stuart Ward, Partnership Inspector, Metropolitan Police

Community Sustainability conference

The many local residents and community representatives who gave up their time to participate in the conference.

This has been a challenging project and, on behalf of the sustainability review group, we are delighted to commend our findings and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny committee and Cabinet



Cllr Anthony Seymour



Cllr Jerry Miles

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW

The overall recommendations of the Sustainability Review are detailed below:

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

1. Whilst taking into account that there is a need for a certain level of technical language, the language used in the strategy should be clear, concise and accessible to a range of different readers. Therefore the strategy should be re-written to achieve this.
2. A summary should be attached to the strategy which shows exactly what the strategy's goals are.
3. The strategy should contain and clearly communicate what the council has already done to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
4. A comprehensive action plan, subject to amendment as and when required, should be included in the strategy. The strategy should not only specify how it will tackle climate change in terms of the proposed actions but also have targets it has set for itself, states how it will progress, how it will measure its progress, a timescale to achieve these actions, the expected impact of undertaking said actions as well as a named lead responsible officer for each action. As items and actions are completed the action plan should be reviewed and amended.
5. The council should take a more proactive lead in educating and promoting climate change to residents and its own officers. It should not rely on the momentum which is being built up or on national campaigns.
6. A comprehensive book/leaflet which draws together all the basic things that can be done, how they should be done, where they can be done as well as any potential funding that can be obtained to help residents stem climate change should be published and sent to each household.
7. The council and its officers should not only be educating and promoting issues related to climate change but should take a tougher line internally about their own actions and policies so as to lead the way / be exemplars to Harrow residents.
8. The Climate Change Strategy should be more joined up and integrated with other plans and strategies to be more effective in reducing climate change. It should fully state what it can bring to the other strategies and how it can, where applicable, ameliorate them.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

1. We remain concerned about the potential impact the recession could have on our diverse community and urge that the council does not become complacent in its efforts to support the community to continue to develop constructively. As an example, we welcome initiatives such as the 'Declaration of Unity' which followed attempts by outside organisations to undermine the cohesiveness of our community, but would urge that these initiatives are part of a broader, strategic approach to community development and not one-off reactive projects.

2. Whilst we recognise that this conference has not offered an in-depth investigation of the complexities of maintaining a cohesive community, it has identified a number of issues which should be borne in mind in the council's ongoing work. To this end, we recommend that the debate which has started, particularly around the nature of community and the nature of cohesion is continued. It is only through this open and honest exchange of views that we can move forward together as a strong and cohesive community.
3. In this context we also recommend that the findings of this conference are referred to the Corporate Director of Community and Environment for inclusion in the refresh of the Community Development Strategy.
4. Consideration should be given to the recommendations made by young people interviewed as part of the community cohesion part of the review.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

1. The council and partners should consider how to make better use of all the assets in the borough such as libraries, children's centres and the premises of partner agencies. This is in keeping with the direction of change to share assets across the public sector. The panel recommend that some work is done to investigate how the council buildings are utilised to ensure they are being used to their full capacity. In particular, consideration should be given to address how/ whether the council buildings are utilised on weekends. Consideration should also be given to possibly allowing voluntary and community sector organisations use spare booths in Access Harrow. In addressing the latter point it should be ensured that the councils Third Sector Strategy is considered.
2. Communication to residents and small businesses should be an ongoing process. Better information to residents and local businesses should be provided about where to go for different services and support should be targeted and consistent. The council provided guidance to residents and businesses during the height of the recession and though the recession is technically over, many of the negative implications of the recession are ever present, further guidance and support should be issued.

Creative means and methods should be applied to disseminate the information for example through inserts in council tax documents, Harrow People, road shows etc. Communication to businesses should be done in collaboration with Harrow in Business and the Chamber of Commerce.

3. Some consideration should be given to acquiring funding for the voluntary and community sector through other means for example through the private sector. The council, voluntary and community sector should work with the private sector to maximise their investment.
4. The CAB and other community and voluntary organisations provide a valuable service to local residents through volunteers. Some consideration should be given as to how to support the advertisement of volunteering positions in the borough more effectively.
5. The council has put in place a number of measures and interventions during the recession, this needs to be reviewed at a later date to assess how successful the various initiatives have been and how they can evolve to support economic recovery.

Environmental sustainability

Climate change strategy challenge panel

INTRODUCTION

Harrow Council signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change in 2007. The Declaration requires local authorities who sign up to it to systematically address the causes of climate change and to prepare their community for its impacts. In response, the council prepared a draft Climate Change Strategy for consultation, which the review group decided to use as the focus for this environmental sustainability stream of the review.

The aim of the panel was:

- (i) to provide a critical assessment and impartial view on Harrow's draft climate change strategy; and
- (ii) to make recommendations, where appropriate, for more robust processes and additions to the strategy which we think would be beneficial to the council if adopted.

OBSERVATIONS

The review group's observations and findings are summarised in the paragraphs below:

COMMUNICATION OF THE STRATEGY

- The review group found that the language contained within the strategy was not accessible: it did not clearly explain all of the concepts and issues contained within it. The group felt that at times some of the language was overly technical and concepts and issues could have been expressed more simply.
- The strategy is divided into areas or 'themes' but the group found it hard to identify the overall and theme-specific goals that the strategy is striving to achieve. This should have been set out and explained more clearly. This would go some way to enabling people to understand not only what the issues are but how they are affected by them and what the council is trying to achieve.
- From discussions prior to and at the challenge panel, the review group found that it was not clear to whom the draft document had been sent for consultation.
- It would have been useful for anyone reading the document to see how the council is currently tackling climate change. The strategy only talks about the issues in broad terms and does not clearly communicate what the council has already done to mitigate and adapt to climate change, this may give the reader the impression that nothing has been implemented or is currently being done which is far from the case. In this context, the review group looked at a number of strategies from other local authorities (London Borough of Bexley's draft and finalised versions and Worthing Borough Council's strategy) and found that Harrow's draft strategy in comparison lacks a draft action plan which would have shown or given a more detailed indication as to how Harrow proposes to tackle climate change rather than speaking about it in broad terms. The review group is of the opinion that an action plan would enable Harrow to focus its approach further and should be included in the strategy.



EDUCATION AND PROMOTION

- The review group felt that whilst the strategy speaks of promoting and educating residents about climate change it does not go into any specific details about how this will be done. Whilst there is already promotion and education regarding climate change the council needs to increase its activity irrespective of national campaigns about climate change. Worcestershire County Council is a beacon local authority for climate change and has sought to educate and promote climate change not only as an issue in itself but also by appealing to peoples' drivers/ motivations and using those motivators to tackle the issue. This may be a useful tool by which Harrow can further educate its residents.
- Whilst there is a plethora of initiatives, they are not contained in one accessible easy to read guide for residents. Therefore, in conjunction with a clearer explanation of how climate change will affect local residents a comprehensive book or leaflet which draws together all the basic things that can be done to tackle climate change, how they should be done, where they can be done as well as any potential funding that can be obtained should be published and sent to each household.
- There is no joined up council-wide approach to how the council's actions have an effect on climate change. In addition, officer education is not as effective as it should be. If Harrow's residents do not see their own council officers championing this issue what motivation or trust will residents have in the council to effectively stem climate change? The council and its officers should not only be providing education and advice on climate change but equally as important, they should be leading the way as an example to the residents of Harrow. This may require the council to take a stricter stance not only on issues such as large scale procurement but also on of the number of permits and parking spaces that are afforded to council officers.

THE STRATEGY NOT IN ISOLATION

- From reading the strategy and from the discussion during the challenge panel, the review group noted that the draft strategy made mention of other documents and strategies, such as the *Sustainable Communities Plan*, the *Local Development Framework* and the *Sustainable Design Supplementary Planning document*. Having said that, the review group felt that whilst references were made to the other documents that was as far as it went: each strategy is concerned with its own issues and did not seem to be joined up or integrated fully with the others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings have led the Sustainability Review Group to recommend the following:

1. Whilst taking into account that there is a need for a certain level of technical language, the language used in the strategy should be clear, concise and accessible to all ranges of reader. Therefore the strategy should be re-written to achieve this.
2. A summary should be attached to the strategy which shows exactly what the strategy's goals are.
3. The strategy should contain and clearly communicate what the council has already done to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

4. A comprehensive action plan, subject to amendment as and when required, should be included in the strategy which not only specifies how it will tackle climate change in terms of the proposed actions but also has targets it has set for itself, states how it will progress, how it will measure its progress, a timescale to achieve these actions, the expected impact of undertaking said actions as well as a named lead responsible officer for each action. As items and actions are completed the action plan should be reviewed and amended.
5. The council should take a more proactive lead in educating and promoting climate change to residents and its own officers. It should not rely on the momentum which is being built up or on national campaigns.
6. A comprehensive book/leaflet which draws together all the basic things that can be done, how they should be done, where they can be done as well as any potential funding that can be obtained to help residents stem climate change should be published and sent to each household.
7. The council and its officers should not only be educating and promoting issues related to climate change but should take a tougher line internally about their own actions and policies so as to lead the way / be exemplars to Harrow residents.
8. The Climate Change Strategy should be more joined up and integrated with other plans and strategies to be more effective in reducing climate change. It should fully state what it can bring to the other strategies and how it can, where applicable, ameliorate them.

CONCLUSION

The comments of the panel in this report are designed to assist and help support the ongoing development of the Climate Change Strategy and generate a more inclusive, clear and specific approach to tackling the issue of Climate Change and educating the residents of Harrow about it. In this challenge panel, scrutiny intention has been to act as a 'critical friend' to help the strategy to develop and suggest ways in which this could be achieved.

Community sustainability

Conference on community cohesion in
the context of recession

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report outlines the findings of the Community Sustainability conference held on 29th July 2009. The conference was attended by over 35 people from a range of different organisations across the borough and we are very grateful that these participants were able to give up their time to enable the review group to understand in more detail and in the light of the recession, what can influence the degree of community cohesion in the area, and what needs to be done to improve cohesion and by whom in order to safeguard our community for the future.

METHODOLOGY

Conference participants were randomly allocated into one of six working groups, each comprising approximately 6 –7 people. Each group was asked to consider the following questions and to feed back the most important three points from their deliberations for the collective group to consider. The questions were:

1. How cohesive do you think Harrow is?
2. What factors do you think affect cohesiveness in communities?
3. In relation to Harrow, what practical action do you think should be taken to improve community cohesion and safeguard our diversity
4. Who do you think should be responsible for taking this action?

OBSERVATIONS

- This component of the review has been driven by concerns about possible decline in the level of cohesion within the borough as highlighted by the results of the 'Quality of Life' survey. These results however, were confused by subsequent responses to the 'Place Survey' undertaken last year, which gave a far more optimistic interpretation of the cohesiveness of our population. By not including an option to respond 'don't know' for respondents, the survey shifted response significantly towards the positive. The review is acutely aware of the impact that recession can have on the cohesiveness of a community and the review wanted to support the council to ensure that this positive appreciation of the diversity of the borough is safeguarded for the future.
- 'Don't know' seems a good place to start. It would suggest that there appears to be a general optimism but also might indicate that residents are unsure of how to respond beyond their immediate experiences. This would indeed be supported by the general sense at the conference that discussions of 'cohesion' on a borough-wide basis are difficult. The importance of '**neighbourhood**' was stressed on a number of occasions, in particular the importance of local issues as the immediate spark for uniting a local community and the role of local community leaders and councillors: in general the consensus seems to be that a borough-wide debate may be problematic as the 'borough is too big'.

- The importance of neighbourhood was further emphasised in discussions regarding the role of **schools**, positively as the place where young people from different backgrounds learn about each other's cultures and grow into the community together. **Young people** are very much viewed as the future for the borough. As such the importance of safeguarding the 'integration' which begins in the schools and ensuring that the young people are supported into successful adulthood was also a key theme.



- The impact of recession on the life chances of our young people and the subsequent impact of this on the borough as a whole, cannot be underestimated: **Regeneration** of our communities is essential.
- Schools play more than just an educational role. Whilst in many neighbourhoods schools are able to provide a focal point for the community, this is not always the case.
- The conference also raised a number of questions. In particular, what do we actually mean by '**good community cohesion**'? Participants' experiences suggest that people from different backgrounds can integrate at a number of different levels and rather than assume that one or the other is 'better', it might be appropriate for more discussions to take place within the borough. For example, it has been the case that some communities have preferred to **preserve their sense of difference** and remain somewhat isolated from the broader community. Others feel that **celebrating differences** as a broader community is the best way forward. Still others feel that the differences need to be subsumed into what unites us, that is, that we are **residents of Harrow**. The council may need to identify where on this spectrum it wishes to position itself before determining how it will achieve its ambition, and this must obviously be agreed as a whole community.
- It is also important to remember that **diversity is not just about ethnicity** and a truly cohesive community will enjoy engagement between people from different ethnic groups and religions, the young and the old and people with disabilities and the non-disabled.
- There is no question that the responsibility for developing a cohesive community **rests with all of us**, but there is also a responsibility for leadership and for setting the framework for and delivering a cohesive community: it is up to all of us, residents, community groups, organisations and the council to play our part. This is not a one-way process in that the framework and direction our strategies and actions take must be influenced by the grassroots but at the same time, the council must fulfil its community leadership obligations.
- All participants agreed that **communication** between groups is essential. But also within this, the role of the media is pivotal. An exploitative media can undermine the

confidence of a community and it is essential that communication within the borough is sufficiently robust to withstand any unscrupulous media activity.

MEETING WITH YOUTH PARLIAMENT AND STUDENT ADVISORY PANEL

As part of the 'community cohesion' strand of the review, members of the group met with Harrow Youth Parliament and the Student Advisory Council to discuss the following questions:

- Do you feel that there is a "sense" of community within the borough and amongst its residents?
- How well do you think all the different groups of people who live in Harrow get along?
- Do you have much interaction with older residents and different cultural groups that live in Harrow?
- What initiatives and schemes are you aware of in Harrow, that allow the different groups to get to know one another better or spend time with one another?
- Do you think Harrow Council is doing enough / doing a good job to promote a strong sense of community? If not why not?
- What could be done to make it better?

These meetings concluded that:

- People need to have opportunities to meet with each other. Whilst there have been opportunities for members of the same community to meet, the same opportunities have not been set up for members of *different* communities to meet.
- The leaders of different religious groups should set an example in this
- That whilst large scale initiatives are good, more localised, street based activities would also assist people from different communities to get along.
- The activities must be sustainable: one-off short-term projects will not deliver long-term cohesion.

The following recommendations were proposed by the young people involved:

1. Residents should organise a week of action in their neighbourhoods to foster community cohesion and the council should help to fund it.
2. In addition to the residents week of action there should be an international week or international event that lasts more than one day that and continues to foster community bonds.
3. Rather than concentrating on organising big community events more energy should be put into organising smaller local events that can evolve and grow into bigger events over time. Advertisements should be placed in the Arrow or Harrow People encouraging people to have street parties. The council should consider whether financial assistance can be provided to support this
4. Where possible community centres should be made available / built as they would help facilitate a forum where the community can meet and start to bond with each other.
5. A cultural orientation programme should be devised for parents who come from outside of the UK to help them to fully engage in UK culture

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations above, the sustainability review would like to make the following recommendations:

1. We remain concerned about the potential impact the recession could have on our diverse community and urge that the council does not become complacent in its efforts to support the community to continue to develop constructively. As an example, we welcome initiatives such as the 'Declaration of Unity' which followed attempts by outside organisations to undermine the cohesiveness of our community, but would urge that these initiatives are part of a broader, strategic approach to community development and not one-off reactive projects.
2. Whilst we recognise that this conference has not offered an in-depth investigation of the complexities of maintaining a cohesive community, it has identified a number of issues which should be borne in mind in the council's ongoing work. To this end, we recommend that the debate which has started, particularly around the nature of community and the nature of cohesion is continued. It is only through this open and honest exchange of views that we can move forward together as a strong and cohesive community.
3. In this context we also recommend that the findings of this conference are referred to the Corporate Director of Community and Environment for inclusion in the refresh of the Community Development Strategy.
4. Consideration should be given to the recommendations made by young people interviewed as part of the review (as detailed in the section above).

CONCLUSION

The community sustainability conference has provided a rich source of evidence and experience which the scrutiny review would not have been able to gather through a simple analysis of current policy. It has given the members of the review a sense of the reality in our borough and an awareness of our strengths and what needs to be done to preserve our cohesion. It means that the conclusions that the review reaches will be based in a real understanding of the local environment. It has also highlighted for the review some of the differences of opinion and focus that the council must recognise if it is to make informed, realistic and realisable policy decisions. For this, the members of the review are extremely grateful.

Economic sustainability

Challenge panel to investigate the support provided to residents through the recession

INTRODUCTION

Detailed in this section of the report are the outcomes of the 'Community Sustainability: Responding to the Recession' challenge panel which took place on 20 January 2010. The main objective of the challenge panel was to consider how well the council and partners have responded to the impact of the recession and what is being done to mitigate the effects of the recession on residents. The challenge panel also sought to address how this additional pressure is impacting on the work of the council and partner organisations themselves and how this impact is being managed.

The way in which we respond to the impact of the recession and manage the after effects of the economic downturn has huge implication on all elements of sustainability. Community, economic and environmental sustainability are all interlinked and to an extent rely on one another to succeed. With the economy still in a vulnerable position, this could have a considerable impact on future policies and plans for the borough.

The recession started at the end of September 2008 (as per the technical definition) after the second consecutive quarter of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contraction. However, official definitions of GDP are only part of the economic picture and there are a number of economic and social changes that are considered components of a recession such as an increase in unemployment, repossessions and less consumer spending etc.

The recession has been felt on a global scale and nationally a number of interventions have been put in place but equally important is the ability of local authorities to respond to the recession on a local level to meet the needs of the communities which they serve. Numerous guidelines have been issued to support local authorities with this work. The challenge panel is aware that there are many initiatives and policies in place that indicate the council is moving in the right direction in terms of managing the impact of the recession and supporting the community, but this momentum must be maintained. Even though the recession is technically over, the economic recovery is unlikely to be immediate and sufficiently strong enough to lead to a net increase in jobs and general economic stability.

The panel sought an insight into how the council and partner agencies have responded to the recession by taking evidence from a number of key individuals in the council, other public services and the voluntary and community sector, including:

- Mark Billington, Head of Economic Development, Harrow Council
- Terry Dackombe, Partnership Manager, Job CentrePlus (JCP)
- Mark Hall-Pearson, Mental Health Senior Professional, Harrow Council
- Jill Harrison, Chief Executive, Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Stuart Ward, Partnership Inspector, Metropolitan Police

We were particularly grateful for the useful contributions from the various organisations at the meeting.

METHODOLOGY

The challenge panel opened with brief presentations from the colleagues in attendance. A question and answer session then followed where members of the challenge panel were able to respond to the briefings and presentations they were given.

Due to the detailed and varying evidence that was presented, the final part of the meeting consisted of an interactive group work session involving the challenge panel members and

colleagues. Each group was able to explore some of the emerging issues further, addressing the following three questions:

1. What can we do to help resolve some of the issues we have heard about?
2. Who should lead on it?
3. What can we do at a local level?

THE IMPACT OF THE RECESSION IN HARROW

Detailed below are the headline points and key issues that were presented to the challenge panel in respect of the impact of the recession on their customers and the services that they provide.

Terry Dackombe, Partnership Manager, Job CentrePlus (JCP)

- Increase in number of Harrow customers claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) from 3,944 in November 2008 to 4645 (+701) in November 2009.
- Year on year (Sept 2009) – percentage of customers signing off JSA after 13 weeks – 59.9%; 26 weeks – 75.6%; 52 weeks – 93.7% so more people are also coming off at a faster rate.
- Initial interview at JCP is within three days of claiming JSA and the staff work hard to tailor the services to individual requirements
- Increase in staffing resource across west London 50% from March 09 - Jan 2010
- JCP also tries to encourage volunteering as a route into paid employment.

Jill Harrison, Chief Executive, Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

- The CAB provides advice on employment, social and domestic issues, benefits, debt, mortgage, housing advice and legal advice.
- All CAB's nationally have reported an increase in demand for advice in relation to benefits & tax credit advice - up 22%, debt advice - up 27% and employment advice - up 14%
- In Harrow CAB enquiries rose from 10,297 clients with 17,152 problems seen in 2007/8 to 11,118 clients (8% increase) with 18,918 problems (9% increase) seen in 2008/9
- Although the figures for enquiries as detailed above show an 8%/9% rise in enquiry, these figures do not express the real demand in Harrow as there is a limit to how many people can be seen by the CAB because they have to turn away 20% of the people who come through the door.

30th October 2009

44 - new clients came to drop-in
36% - were seen and dealt with on the day
34% - got some help (e.g. through a referral or appointment later)
30% - received no advise/ support at all

An average day at Harrow CAB

- The CAB is equally unable to respond sufficiently to telephone enquiries as detailed in the table below.

Month	Call attempts	Calls answered by adviser	Percentage of calls answered
June 09	2,213	35	2%
July 09	2,606	94	4%
August 09	1,523	70	5%
Sept 09	2,440	57	2%
Oct 09	1,979	85	4%

Call attempts and calls answered in 2009

- The advisers in particular have noted a rise in people seeking advice in relation to unfair dismissals as many employees are simply dismissing people, often for just minor reasons as it is cheaper than redundancy payment.
- In terms of staffing the CAB's core funding does not allow for the employment of paid advisers or allow investment in training more than one or two new volunteers a year, this has been insufficient to replace those leaving (many of whom have left due to the demanding nature and stress of the role which increased during the recession).

Stuart Ward, Partnership Officer, Metropolitan Police

- Initially of the view that there would be a clear correlation between the recession and an increase in crime, however, this has not proven to be the case. The crimes figures are generally varying which do not allow for a distinct judgement on whether the recession has had an impact on crime. However, crime has gone up by 7%.
- Unemployment, as measured by the claimant count, began to increase in Harrow in July 2008. To enable assessment of whether crime has increased as a consequence of unemployment, crime in the most recent twelve month period, October 08 to September 09, is compared with crime in the 12 months prior to this, October 07 to September 08. The results of this comparison are shown in the table below.

Offence type	Oct 07 to Sep 08	Oct 08 to Sep 09	change	% change
Violence Against the Person	2859	3292	433	15%
Rape	41	57	16	39%
Robbery of the person	497	432	-65	-13%
Burglary in a Dwelling	1583	1608	25	2%
Burglary in Other Buildings	697	727	30	4%
Theft/Taking of M/V	540	359	-181	-34%
Theft From M/V	1615	1695	80	5%
Theft From Shops	646	792	146	23%
Pick pocket + snatch	533	454	-79	-15%
Theft and Handling Total	5055	5206	151	3%
Fraud or Forgery Total	674	800	126	19%
Criminal Damage Total	1707	1921	214	13%
Drugs Total	905	917	12	1%
Total notifiable offences (TNOs)	14359	15337	978	7%

Changes in crime levels in Harrow

The table indicates an increase in overall crime of 7%. There were also increases in several categories of crime:

- violence against the person: which includes minor assault, serious assault and harassment
- rape: a high percentage increase, but with relatively few offences
- burglary (residential) increased by 2%
- Theft from shops increased by 23%, 146 offences. As under-reporting is very high, this is likely to significantly understate the actual increase
- Criminal damage increased by 7%.

There were falls in the number of offences for several categories:

- Robbery of the person fell by 7%
- Theft of motor vehicles decreased by 34%
- Pick pockets and snatches fell by 15%
- Comparison of crime figures for the latest 12 months with the 12 months prior to this show an increase in many categories of crime. It is likely that the recession has played at least a moderate contributory role in this increase. In particular the rise in violence against the person could indicate an outcome of the recession but it may also be due increased reporting following a road show to promote support for victims of domestic violence which took place recently. There has also been an increase in racial incidents which could indicate an impact of the recession on community cohesion but this may be due to a communications campaign encouraging reporting of hate crimes.
- In terms of police employment, it is not evident that there has been a significant impact however there are an increasing number of volunteers which possibly indicates an increased number of people that are unemployed as a result of the recession. There will be a 5% reduction in funding in the next financial year and so some staff will be re-deployed. The effects may be felt next year but the proposed shift change may also assist to manage the resources.

Mark Hall-Pearson, Senior Professional Mental Health, Harrow Council

By considering mental health problems, the challenge panel sought to address some of the impacts of the recession on the community in respect of individual well being. Health and mental well being may prove in future to be one of the secondary effects of the recession, however there is never any way of quantifying this.

- Poverty, poor education, social isolation and major life events all have an effect on mental well being and the socially excluded are at higher risk
- Mental health problems and unemployment are interlinked and one can cause the other. In this instance someone who may be highly qualified may choose to work at a lower level due to their health problems
- There is a stigma related to mental health problems in the work place and people with mental health problems often feel unsupported in the work place
- 1/3 people suffering from mental health problems are in debt
- There is an over representative number of people on benefits with mental health problems

Mark Billington, Head of Economic Development, Harrow Council

The council is taking a leading role in managing the impact of the recession through the Harrow Strategic Partnership, the Recession Busting Group (RBG) and Enterprise Harrow and there are a number of council policies and schemes in place that support the development of partnership working as an effective way of minimising the impact of the recession on residents and local business. The RBG is a group that meets on a six weekly basis and includes senior

officers across the council and external partners. The RBG works to reduce the impact of the recession in the borough by:

- Providing advice and support to residents, businesses and the voluntary and community sector
- Managing the impact of the recession on service delivery
- Preparing Harrow for economic recovery

The group has used different forms of media including the website, local press to distribute a Recession Survival Guide to alert residents and businesses to the support that is available to them. The group also developed a dashboard including a range of relevant performance indicators to measure the impact of the recession and respond to areas of need. It measures employment, rent arrears, homelessness, repossessions, business rate collection, business start ups, empty commercial property, community safety, planning application receipts, and public perception. The dashboard has received positive feedback and was praised by the Local Government Chronicle.

Detailed below are some of the measures that have been implemented:

- A Recession Survival Guide was published and issued to every householder in the borough. The guide provided advice on financial management, the benefits system, and housing (mortgage arrears and homelessness).
- Harrow was cited for its website advice on debt in a joint report by the NCVO and Local Government Association ("Backing Communities Local solutions" February 2009.).
- There was a Love Harrow, Shop Harrow campaign
- Additional housing benefits advisors have been employed to cope with increased demand from residents who have become unemployed.
- The Harrow Business Directory has been produced and is ready for launch. This will promote trading between local suppliers and be used as a tool by the council to increase procurement of goods and services from Harrow businesses.
- The Xcite Employment Outreach has been established and as of April 2009, over 90% of the clients it had seen have been supported into training or work placements.
- Marketing, advertising and networking opportunities have been generated for companies engaged in tourism/ visitor attractions. This includes discounted advertising to 40 local tourism businesses at Gayton library, an Events Workshop at Harrow School. Media coverage national, regional and local media (Harrow Observer, BBC Radio London, Guardian and London paper) and the Visit London website.
- Strategic Property - agreed rent review with a major tenant, agreed payment plan for arrears over 6 months. Another tenant announced ongoing financial difficulties and council facilitated an external business consultation, to help the tenant reduce costs and boost income.
- Slivers of Time was launched as a means of providing additional income and employment to residents.
- The roll out of business debt support to companies, through Harrow in Business, providing a free business health check, reviewing cash flow, profit and loss, credit control, stock control application of small business rate relief, application for extension in payment of business rates, and identifying remedial actions to ensure business survival.

General economic data on the current economic climate in the borough:

- JSA claimants in west London up by 70%, London wide up by 61.7%, national increase of 73.1%

- Aside from the JSA claimants there are also 14,000 workless in Harrow
- Empty commercial property 68% higher than June 2008
- Leisure – library use up 16.6%, leisure centre up 27%
- Town centre vacancy rates (6.8%) - half of national average, lower than London average and Bromley, Croydon, Camden, Ealing, Fulham, Hammersmith and Shepherds Bush (Local Data Company June 09)
- Only Uxbridge & Wembley have lower vacancy rates than Harrow
- Rate of return for investors in Harrow Town Centre had been increasing up to recession
- The Recession Busting Group is working on the economic recovery plan by ensuring policies and plans are in place to promote economic growth and attract inward investment into Harrow

OBSERVATIONS

The challenge panel's discussions and observations arising from the question and answer session and the group work session are summarised below.

Unemployment in the borough

Although the recession may be technically over, the number of unemployed people in the borough still remains high at around 4,700 and is likely to do so for a while.

There is a disproportionate number of women in the borough (as is similar to other London boroughs) that have been affected by unemployment. The Partnership Officer, Metropolitan Police explained that because a disproportionate number of women have been affected, this could possibly have had an impact on the crime rates as women are usually less likely to come to the notice of police through crime, even in times of recession.

BIGGEST AND SMALLEST RATES OF INCREASE IN DOLE				BIGGEST AND SMALLEST RATES OF INCREASE IN DOLE						
WOMEN		April 2008	Nov 2009	% change	MEN		April 2008	Nov 2009	% change	
Biggest				Biggest						
Kingston	334	902	170	Kingston	722	1,683	133			
Richmond	349	883	153	Richmond	753	1,637	117			
Sutton	507	1,223	141	Havering	1,577	3,414	116			
Hillingdon	872	2,099	140	Hillingdon	1,879	4,033	114			
Harrow	752	1,628	116	Sutton	1,133	2,375	109			
Smallest				Smallest						
Tower Hamlets	1,949	3,080	58	Tower Hamlets	5,533	7,379	33			
Newham	1,938	3,180	64	Newham	4,921	7,098	44			
Haringey	1,883	3,177	68	Waltham Forest	3,896	5,661	45			
Barking&Dag'ham	1,086	1,842	69	Camden	2,637	3,861	46			
Southwark	1,810	3,076	69	Brent	4,173	6,160	47			

Evening Standard, Monday 18 January 2010

In contrast to a number of organisations, the JCP has had an increase in staff of 50% to deal with the demand for services. The JCP is amongst the few growing business in the UK. In March 2009 amongst the 16 job centres in west London there was an increase in staff from 883 to 1,200.

There are an increasing number of professionals presenting as unemployed at the job centre including architects, surveyors, teachers and librarians. Advisers at JCP try to match people to ideal jobs on the basis of their transferable skills.

The panel discussed the situation that at times when professionals in need of employment are able to acquire new jobs that are less well paid than they are used to, though they are able to

use their transferable skills, they are often not able to adjust their expenditure. Inevitably many of these people end up at the CAB disappointed and frustrated. This is despite the 'better off' calculations (a calculation carried out by JCP to measure salaries against benefits) that are reported to be carried out by JCP.

The panel also touched on the issue of whether or not it is essential to have a National Insurance (NI) number to take up employment as there are a number of people able to legitimately work but do not have an NI number. It was confirmed that employers are able to issue emergency NI numbers whilst the employees NI number is acquired. A number of small organisations in the borough need to be informed/ reminded about this and other statutory rules and requirements in relation to employment.

The Citizens Advice Bureau

At present the CAB is experiencing a number of resourcing problems which are having major implications on the service provided. Along with the increased work, the CAB is not coping well due to the fact that there has been a 40% loss of income this year and pressure on volunteer staff employed by the CAB is leading many of them to leave the job.

It is ironic that the JCP has been well supported in this period of increased demand whilst the CAB is in need of more volunteers and is struggling due to reduced resources but increased demand. Both organisations are equally important and relied on by communities, especially during times of recession.

In the hope of managing the increased influx of people, the CAB is adopting a new system whereby everyone in the team tries to see all the people that present themselves at the reception in the hope of dealing with general enquiries and problems quickly. People with more complex enquiries and problems are invited for an interview at a later time/date. However, this system could prove potentially insufficient in the case of people who come in with emergencies such as domestic violence problems needing immediate attention and support.

Consideration was given to other ways of possibly dealing with all the calls that come through to Harrow CAB that are left unanswered. The Chief Executive of the CAB explained that a national number/ switchboard type system which is operated in Wales is unlikely to operate successfully in England due to the vast amount of people in England requiring CAB support.

In terms of the loss of income, the Chief Executive of the CAB has put forward 20 funding bids since being in post for 9 months. The challenge panel suggested that possibly accessing private funding should be explored in conjunction to seeking funding through various other government and public sector funding streams both internally and externally.

The panel discussed the option of adopting a 'one-stop-shop' system with key organisations and support systems available to residents all under one roof (including representative from the job centre, CAB, health agencies, benefits and housing). This system has worked successfully in other boroughs such as Brent and Camden. In line with this the panel also discussed how the council should explore how to make better use of local assets to support partners such as using children's centres, libraries and other community buildings.

RECOMMENDATION

The group work sessions provided the opportunity for more detailed consideration of the issues covered. There was unanimity between the two groups in respect of some of the

Scrutiny review of sustainability

possible solutions to the problems and concerns raised. Both groups felt that the council is ideally placed to take the lead and set the framework to support residents and local businesses to try to mitigate some of the effects of the recession.

In view of the key issues discussed, the panel would like to make the following recommendations to support some of the work already in place.

1. The council and partners should consider how to make better use of all the assets in the borough such as libraries, children's centres and the premises of partner agencies. This is in keeping with the direction of change to share assets across the public sector. The panel recommend that some work is done to investigate how the council buildings are utilised to ensure they are being used to their full capacity. In particular, consideration should be given to address how/whether the council buildings are utilised on weekends. Consideration should also be given to possibly allowing voluntary and community sector organisations use spare booths in Access Harrow. In addressing the latter point it should be ensured that the councils Third Sector Strategy is considered.
2. Communication to residents and small businesses should be an ongoing process. Better information to residents and local businesses should be provided about where to go for different services and support should be targeted and consistent. The council provided guidance to residents and businesses during the height of the recession and though the recession is technically over, many of the negative implications of the recession are ever present, further guidance and support should be issued.

Creative means and methods should be applied to disseminate the information for example through inserts in council tax documents, Harrow People, road shows etc. Communication to businesses should be done in collaboration with Harrow in Business and the Chamber of Commerce.

3. Some consideration should be given to acquiring funding for the voluntary and community sector through other means for example through the private sector. The council, voluntary and community sector should work with the private sector to maximise their investment.
4. The CAB and other community and voluntary organisations provide a valuable service to local residents through volunteers. Some consideration should be given as to how to support the advertisement of volunteer positions in the borough more effectively.
5. The council has put in place a number of measures and interventions during the recession, this needs to be reviewed at a later date to assess how successful the various initiatives have been and how they can evolve to support economic recovery.

CONCLUSION

Through the challenge panel and by holding discussions with key local organisations, the panel have developed a clearer idea of the impact of the recession on residents and the borough as a whole. The challenge panel has provided the opportunity for the panel to see the people behind the headlines. The panel are also more aware of some of the measures in place to mitigate some of the negative impacts of the recession.

The fact that the second part of the challenge panel took the form of a group discussion, allowed for the challenge panel to gather more information and explore some of the possible solutions to the issues that came up during the challenge session in a more interactive way.

The effects of the recession, especially those connected with unemployment, will be felt for many years which is why it is even more important for the council and partner agencies to work together and be consistent in supporting residents and local businesses. In moving towards recovery this will be even more important in order to ensure no duplication of effort so positive outcomes can be realised. A lot of consideration will now need to be given to exploring how to prepare, plan and manage any of the secondary impacts of the recession.

In the long term funding from central government will be squeezed further and this along with an increased demand on services is likely to impact the council negatively. There is a real balance to be struck in terms of the council leading and supporting residents and businesses whilst simultaneously having to operate in a time of depleting resources. The council will need to have a robust economic improvement plan ready to be implemented.

Whilst we recognise that the challenge panel has only touched on some of the issues that have arisen as a result of the recession and has not allowed for an in-depth analysis of the complexities of the recession, there has been the opportunity for some discussion and the outcomes should be borne in mind in the council's ongoing work as we move towards economic recovery.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The Sustainability Review has provided an opportunity for scrutiny councillors to consider the impact of the recession on the people and businesses of the borough and the effectiveness of the council and partners responses

Our deliberations have really only allowed us to scratch the surface of some of the very real issues being confronted by our community and we feel that there is significant merit in this work continuing. With this in mind, the final recommendation from the Sustainability Review is made to the next Overview and Scrutiny committee following the elections in May this year. We recommend that:

- The work of the sustainability review continues in order that councillors are able to monitor the effectiveness of current projects and plans and that the longer-term impact of the recession is monitored. In particular the panel recommend that the continued work considers the views of the actual people through consultation and the details behind some of the indicators of the economic dashboard such as the rate of council tax collection, the increase take up of benefits etc.

APPENDIX

REVIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY- SCOPE

1	SUBJECT	Review of Sustainability
2	COMMITTEE	Overview & Scrutiny
3	REVIEW GROUP	<p> Cllr Miles (Chair) Cllr Solanki Cllr O'Dell Cllr Seymour (Chair) Cllr Idaikkadar Cllr Kinnear Cllr Teli </p>
4	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES/ OUTCOMES	To investigate how far the council has progressed with incorporating sustainability into its objectives and priorities and whether, where possible, there is joined up cross-cutting work regarding this.
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS OF REVIEW	A number of recommendations to support the operation and implementation and embedding of sustainability and for the use of the executive's arrangements.
6	SCOPE	<p>To examine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Climate Change Strategy; • Economic Sustainability; • Community Sustainability; and <p>To make recommendations, where appropriate, for a more robust system to be put in place.</p>
7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	<p>Building Stronger Communities Deliver cleaner and safer streets</p>
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	
9	ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny
10	SUPPORT OFFICER	<p>Ofordi Nabokei, Scrutiny Officer Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny Fola Beckley, Scrutiny Officer</p>
11	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	None
12	EXTERNAL INPUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Climate Change Professionals • Community Leaders • Residents • Neighbouring Local Authorities (where appropriate) • Police (where appropriate) • Partner organisations
13	METHODOLOGY	In-Depth Review looking at the following areas:

		<p>1) Climate Change Strategy</p> <p>Critical analysis by the review group of the draft Climate Change Strategy followed by a Challenge Panel with the report authors and input from external professionals. The group will make a number of recommendations in light of this and produce an interim report.</p> <p><i>(If possible and if time permits, critically assess the response to the consultation of the strategy).</i></p> <p>2) Economic Sustainability</p> <p><i>Impact of Recession on Economic Sustainability:</i> Investigation of successful economic sustainability policies and best practice through desktop review, evidence gathering via focus groups and or questionnaires. Following the completion of a conference by the Economic Development Team, a challenge panel to analyse and assess how well Harrow is performing in this area The review will make a number of recommendations to back up its findings.</p> <p>3) Community Sustainability</p> <p><i>Community Cohesion and what the Harrow has done to increase integration:</i> Evidence-gathering obtained through information provided by officers, partnership officers, policies and initiatives in Harrow, through canvassing the views of residents and the police (where appropriate). In addition, this information will be discussed with these groups. The information is to be reviewed and assessed in light of the fact that Harrow has missed the LAA target measuring the 'number of people who think people from different backgrounds get on well together'. Following on from that, the review group will put forward a number of recommendations from its findings.</p>
14	EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	None
15	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	Involvement of officers and partnership officers in the relevant services will be dependent upon resources (staff time in particular). The scope takes account of this constraint and evidence gathering will be designed to minimise undue workload on officers and partnership officers.
16	SECTION 17 IMPLICATIONS	None
17	TIMESCALE	Review to commence from March 2009.
18	RESOURCE COMMITMENTS	Ofordi Nabokei, Scrutiny Officer Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

		Fola Beckley, Scrutiny Officer
19	REPORT AUTHOR	Scrutiny Team with Chair's and Review Group
20	REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS	Outline of formal reporting process: To Service Director [] TBC.....N/A..... To Portfolio Holder [] TBC.....N/A..... To CMT [] When.....N/A..... To Cabinet [] When.....N/A.....
21	FOLLOW UP ARRANGEMENTS (proposals)	To go to Performance and Finance for 6 monthly updates.