

Leaders Report on the Council's New Vision and Priorities

1. Introduction

In May (2010) a new Council was elected in Harrow with the overriding aim of putting residents first. Residents gave the Council a clear message that they wanted a more listening and involving council with a strong mandate to make the borough cleaner, safer and fairer.

Set against a backdrop where impending cuts mean that local government needs to change the way it works, largely moving away from a model of delivering services 'to' and 'for' people, to a model of delivering services 'with' people - The Council's new approach will seek to combine listening with leading to deliver better, more efficient and fairer services to all local people, and to work even harder with partners to create a more involved borough.

The new proposals aim to build on success by making Harrow a cleaner, greener, safer place to live where diverse and vibrant communities can flourish and live together, bound by a strong sense of belonging and community involvement.

The Council will be resolute in its determination to listen, lead and govern for the whole of Harrow by putting people first in everything it does; to build a Council that belongs to every part of Harrow, and where everyone can feel a sense of pride about Harrow and 'have a stake in its success'.

The Council's vision of Harrow is to build a community in which everyone can take part and take pride and where people can have their say on issues that matter to them most.

1.1 Context

The medium term financial outlook for Local Government has deteriorated in the last two years, and this has significant implications for the Council's medium term position. In the current Medium Term Financial Strategy funding gaps for the next three years are estimated at £16m for 2011/12, £14m in 2012/13 and a similar gap is expected for 2013/14. In total this means that over the next three years the Council will need to generate savings coming to approximately 30% of its controllable cost base. Given the nature of the challenges ahead, the Council cannot solve these problems alone. The Council will have to work with its partners and reconnect with people in Harrow to make a real difference to both their lives and to their neighbourhoods, reforming Council services through a new openness.

The upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review will set out a programme of retrenchment in public services, which will force the Council to make difficult decisions, both about the services it provides and how these are to be provided in future. In the face of these challenges the Council is committed to modernising its services in partnership with the entire community. The Council will start this new approach of involving residents and partners through a pilot programme of activities which will be launched as part of this Cabinet paper. The Council will review the success of these projects early in the New Year in order to feed into a more significant programme of involvement in 2011. The consultation on vision and priorities is a key component on how the Council will start to involve and inform local residents and partners on the implications for services and the challenges ahead for the community, proposals of which are set out in the Council's Better Deal for Residents

Programme: Shaping Harrow for the Future, which is a key element in the delivery of the Council's new vision and priorities.

1.2 A vision for Harrow

The Council wants Harrow to be a place where diverse and vibrant communities can flourish and live together, bound by a strong sense of belonging and community involvement.

The vision is to build a community in which everyone can take part and take pride, and where people can have their say on issues that matter to them most.

The vision is also of a Harrow where everybody works together with each other - working together across departments and directorates within the Council itself; the Council working together with Harrow's diverse local communities, residents and partners such as the Police, the NHS, schools and colleges, young people and old people etc, and also getting them all to work together and co-operate with one another.

The following vision is therefore proposed for consultation:

Working together: our Harrow, our community

1.3 Draft Priorities

The Council's priorities should show clearly how the Council will be led, governing for the whole of Harrow and putting people first in everything that the Council does.

The following four priorities are proposed for consultation:

Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe

United and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads

Supporting and protecting people who are most in need

A Town Centre to be proud of: changing Harrow for the better

Given the current financial climate and in the face of reducing budgets, the Council must be responsible and demonstrate that it is doing the right thing to address people's aspirations and priorities. It will be important to show residents where their money is spent and how success will be measured. To achieve this, the Council must be seen to be well run, delivering value for money services and living within its means. Strong, careful management and effective financial control will be essential to ensure that money is spent in the best possible way. The Council will do all in its power to protect front-line services. "The Council will be careful with your money and deliver the services you value".

The Council wants residents to be proud of their neighbourhoods and to ensure that the safety and cleanliness of local streets is a top concern. The Council is committed to keeping neighbourhoods clean, increasing recycling rates and working with partners such as the police so that residents feel safe. In recognising the financial challenges in achieving this

priority, the Council will work with residents so that limited resources will go as far as they can.

A fresh approach is being developed that will involve residents more in the work of the Council during a period when difficult decisions will have to be made. The Council aims to ensure that future service improvements will be made through understanding and involving Harrow's communities more, putting people first and aspiring to connect with everyone, but not being afraid to take difficult but necessary decisions— listening and leading. Equality, fairness and unity will underpin future choices on the services that the Council runs and will demonstrate its commitment to bettering the lives of hard working people across Harrow's communities.

Through improving how the Council works with residents, a new conversation will be opened up about what people 'want' from the Council and how they are able to 'give back' to the community. In particular these proposals seek to enhance the role of councillors as community leaders and advocates, as they are best placed not only to bring out ideas from residents but to collect feedback and intelligence too, and encourage others to gather ideas and mobilise community activity.

The borough faces a number of real pressures, which create an increasing demand for Council services and further pressure on budgets, from significant increases in referrals in Children's Services, to a growing elderly population. One of the Council's main priorities in this difficult climate will be supporting those most in need, protecting and defending them where it is right to do so. It is important to the Council that all residents have an equal opportunity to thrive, in social, work and family life and the Council will work hard to ensure that those most in need, receive the support that can really make a difference to their lives.

It is recognised that some individuals will move out of 'need' at some point in their life, and the Council will look to empower individuals to take steps to achieve this, such as those experiencing the worst impacts of the recession. It will be important to try to reduce need where people can genuinely support themselves, but the Council recognises that there will be some who need its support and is committed to do this. The Council will stand up to central and regional government where necessary in these difficult times and speak out over decisions they make that will have a negative impact on people in Harrow. The Council will also stand shoulder to shoulder with our residents to help protect them from the worst effects of economic uncertainty, and ensure that they get a better deal for people in Harrow.

The Council aspires to have a Town Centre that local people can be proud of, both for the opportunities and activities it provides, such as shopping, entertainment and leisure pursuits, but which also has a look and feel which creates a sense of pride, attracting visitors from outside the borough as well as serving Harrow residents well. Distinctive neighbourhoods are important to the prosperity of the borough and the Council is committed to supporting district shopping centres. Working with local traders and communities, the Council will aim to create a network of thriving district shopping centres as well as working with developers to manage the successful regeneration of key sites and areas across the borough.

1.4 The Foundation – Better Deal for Residents Programme: Shaping Harrow for the Future

In order to achieve the draft priorities set out above the Council must be seen to be well run, delivering value for money services and having strong and effective financial management

ensuring that residents' money is spent in the best possible way. The Council will therefore have to become an even more efficient and effective organisation, living within its means. The 'Better Deal for Residents Programme: Shaping Harrow for the Future', was launched in July 2010 and looks ahead for the next three years. This transformation programme will set the foundations for how the Council will deliver its new vision and priorities.

Although the 'Better Deal for Residents Programme' is a three year programme, the Council is already starting to deliver against it. Notable progress has been made on the following to date:

Becoming a more efficient and effective organisation living within its means and delivering value for money services

The Council is currently achieving this through:

- Exploring opportunities to enable staff to work more flexibly and from different locations, reducing the need for office space
- Improving the effectiveness of the Council's procurement processes which will deliver £2 million of savings
- Modernising the Council's IT
- Reducing sickness absence across the Council to below 7.5 days per employee through better performance management
- Reducing the number of administrative jobs and cutting the use of paper
- Aspiring to move to a new fit for purpose Civic Centre as a hub for local public services, contributing to the regeneration of the Town Centre and joining up services for residents
- Realigning Children's Services to deliver a new multi-agency front desk and redesigning services to support delivery of this approach
- Putting a programme in place to decommission and dispose of property assets that are no longer needed
- A West London Alliance collaboration to improve unit costs in Home Support services

Joining up and personalising customer services for our residents

The Council is currently achieving this through:

- Answering the phone within 5 rings or 30 seconds in 90% of cases
- Acknowledging 85% of email and web forms received in 24 hours and replying to 85% in 5 working days
- Seeing 60% of customers within 15 minutes at Access Harrow, the Council's One Stop Shop
- 95% of customers satisfied with the One Stop Shop
- Developing opportunities with local partners to join up service delivery locations with the Council that will provide more integrated services to local people
- Continuing to roll out personalised budgets to users of Adult care services
- Developing the on-line citizen account to enable more Council services to be accessible through it

- The introduction of self service into all of the borough's libraries to make it quicker and easier to borrow, renew and return books
- Delivering the Housing Ambition Plan which is focused on improving resident and tenant satisfaction

Building on the community spirit of residents to be more involved in the future of their Borough

The Council is currently achieving this through:

- Making it easier for residents to adopt the lowest cost ways of transacting with the Council, accessing services over the internet and paying by direct debit
- Giving residents the opportunity to take greater levels of neighbourhood responsibility, e.g. through Neighbourhood Champions
- Developing new models of supporting Special Needs Transport which will support more independent travel for current users
- Launching a new scheme to encourage housing tenants to take greater levels of responsibility for the condition in which properties are left when they leave them

1.5 Evidencing the delivery against the draft corporate priorities

In the development of the four priorities it is important to set out the evidence which we will use to demonstrate their achievement. Each of the draft priorities is set out below with detailed measures which the Council is happy to be judged against during the remainder of the financial year. A new programme for the forthcoming financial year will be set out alongside the budget in February next year as part of the Corporate Plan.

Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe

The Council is currently achieving this priority through:

- Increasing the level of waste recycled to 50%
- Making a difference to the rate of burglary and other acquisitive crimes
- Making a difference to the fear of crime
- Improving street cleanliness and the appearance of streets
- Increasing satisfaction with open spaces in Harrow
- Planting 850 more trees across the borough by March 2011
- Providing electric car charging points within Harrow by Oct 2010
- Delivering a programme of work to address Climate Change, such as:
 - Committing the Council to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions by 4% each year and our water consumption by 2.5% each year; and
 - Using less energy as a Council, supplying energy more efficiently and using renewable energy
- Protecting Harrow's green spaces and encouraging local people to get more involved in looking after them

United and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads

The Council is currently achieving this priority through:

- Recruiting and training 1000 Neighbourhood Champions by April 2011
- Launching a new programme of community engagement activity with such things as open days to meet Councillors and managers and road shows to get out into the community
- Delivering the Preventing Violent Extremism Action Plan and Hate Crime programme, through more comprehensive reporting of incidents to support interventions
- Improving the rates of volunteering in the borough to above 25%
- Delivering Harrow's 2012 programme linked to the London Olympics, "Championing Harrow"
- Increasing the number of residents who feel they can influence Council decisions to above 34%
- Increasing the number of residents who feel informed about the Council to above 40%
- Continuing the successful 'Under One Sky' event and developing the cultural calendar
- Delivering its Adult user engagement strategy

Supporting and protecting people who are most in need

The Council is currently achieving this priority through:

- Supporting 800 vulnerable people to control their own social care budgets by March 2011
- Supporting 2,600 carers to receive a service that will improve their quality of life by March 2011
- Offering up to 500 people the opportunity to choose their support using the new innovative on-line catalogue, 'Shop-4-Support'
- Launching a new 'Reablement Service' in October 2010 to provide intensive programmes of support for people leaving hospital to enable them to live independently at home
- Ensuring all 16 Children's Centres will be open by 2011
- Making a difference to business prosperity through the Harrow Pledge, by ensuring that transactions with the Council are quicker, more efficient and effective
- Helping residents who are eligible for benefits to receive their entitlement
- Maintaining our excellent processing time for new benefits claimants and changes in circumstances, despite an increase of 20% in claimants in the last two years and working with partners to support those on out of work benefits to regain work
- Ensuring the Council pays 95% of invoices on time, to support local businesses
- The work of the Council's 'Recession Busting Group'

A Town Centre to be proud of: changing Harrow for the better

The Council is currently achieving this priority through:

- The work of the newly set up Major Developments Panel
- Developing the Area Action Plan for the Town Centre and its neighbouring areas –the so-called ‘Intensification Area’
- Ensuring all developments in the Town Centre accord with the Area Action Plan
- Completing the Town Centre section of Station Road and improving the street scene in the Town Centre
- Enhancing the quality and capacity of public transport in Harrow Town Centre, working with Transport for London
- Developing Area Action Plans for our district areas, building on their existing character and distinctiveness
- Working with local communities, traders and developers to improve district shopping centres
- As part of our commitment to greater community involvement, establishing more community and developer involvement via the Major Developments Panel
- Engaging with Land Securities on the development of the Kodak site

2. Consultation and Engagement: A new approach

In the Council’s priority to improve how it works with residents, a new conversation will be opened up about what they ‘want’ from the Council and how they are able to ‘give back’ to the community. In particular these proposals seek to enhance the role of councillors as community leaders and advocates, as they are best placed not only to bring out ideas from residents but to collect feedback and intelligence too, and encourage others to gather ideas and mobilise community activity as well.

This section of the report launches the new approach to involving residents more in the work of the Council. The proposed approach is set out for involving the community in a conversation about the Council’s draft vision and priorities, what it means to them and how they wish to become more involved. As part of this new approach, the communications team will take a more active role in understanding the needs of councillors and their constituents to design the most appropriate local mechanisms for councillors to be at the forefront of resident involvement. The Council wants to develop a longer term programme of involving the community and wants to get this right. The pilot projects set out below will make up part of a longer term programme of community involvement activity and will be reviewed in the New Year. This will enable the Council to understand what worked well, so that future programmes are shaped accordingly. From here, the Council will be able to launch a more detailed approach to how it will involve its communities in the ‘big decisions’ going forward.

2.1 Feedback on how local residents feel about the Council

The following table shows how the Council has performed in the last two national Place Surveys against indicators associated with involving communities. In the key areas of whether people feel informed about the Council and whether they are able to influence decisions, although the performance is only slightly below the best quartile in London, significant improvements should be expected as a result of the approach being put forward within this report.

Place Survey Results	2009 Result	2008 Result	Change from 2008 to 2009	London Best Quartile 2008
Do you strongly or very strongly feel that you belong to your immediate neighbourhood	54%	55%	-1	51%
Do you agree that local public services promote the interests of local residents	38%	35%	+3	43%
Do you agree that local public services act on the concerns of local people	42%	41%	+1	44%
Do you agree that local public services treat all types of people fairly	70%	68%	+2	70%
Do you agree that you can influence decisions affecting your area	33%	32%	+1	34%
Do you feel well informed about what the Council is doing	38%	31%	+7	37%
Would you like to be more involved in the decisions affecting your local area	40%	39%	+1	42%
Do you volunteer at least once a month	24%	24%	-	21%
Have you been treated with respect and consideration by your local public services all or most of the time	66%	64%	+2	67%

However, local data from the Council's Reputation Tracker in March 2010 suggests the challenge is greater. For example:

- 29% of residents agree that the Council takes account of residents' views when making decisions, whilst 34% disagree (a 'net agree' of -5%)
- 30% of residents agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area, whilst 47% disagree (a 'net agree' of -17%)
- Overall satisfaction with the Council fell from March 2009 to March 2010 from 58% to 52%

In terms of the priority to become a listening and leading Council this performance data indicates that there is significantly more that the Council needs to do to get more residents to agree that they can truly influence local decisions. This is especially the case given 'net agreement' with the first two statements is negative, i.e. more people think that the Council does not take account of resident views than think that it does, and that significantly more people think that they cannot influence local decisions than do.

2.2 Engaging and consulting on the council's vision and priorities: 'Better Deal for Residents' and 'Harrow's Big Conversation'

The Council wants to open up a dialogue with the community on its new vision and priorities. The proposal is to test the vision and priorities with the community using the new approach to involving and listening through a programme of pilot activity.

This programme will utilise all channels at the disposal of the Council to engage with the community and the key is to have a clear set of opportunities for people to take part within a cost-effective framework. The programme will run from October to December 2010 with a special edition of Harrow People in January 2011 feeding back findings and telling residents what the Council plans to do in order to 'close the consultation loop' by responding meaningfully to the community. This will also provide a timely platform to explain the

Council's decisions and demonstrate how they have been based on priorities set with the community.

The Council will also plan the next stage of the involvement programme and ensure that it becomes something which is integral to the way that it works. With the major challenges that are coming up, the Council will want to ensure that residents have fed back on the ways that they want to be involved. In reviewing the success of the pilot programmes we will take forward those which have been successful and launch a major consultation in February 2011 on the choices facing the services provided by the Council. Through this the Council will consider how it will increase the level of involvement in the borough when compared to previous consultations the Council has undertaken.

2.3 Key Pilot Activities during October to December 2010

The plan is to combine existing channels with one-off events to ensure we reach out to the community at large. Even if people choose not to engage, it is important that they feel they had the opportunity to do so when announcements are made in January. The proposals are as follows:

Roadshows:

'Harrow's Big Conversation' roadshows will allow the Council to have real conversations with residents about what is important to them, and to find out their ideas on saving money, as well as an opportunity to give people information about Council services. The road shows should be held in five High Streets in the borough, throughout November to encourage residents to have their say, by completing comments cards, utilising video-booths, and discussions with Councillors and officers (which will be noted and fed back).

Open Days:

The Council will host a series of open days at the Civic Centre and other venues where there will be an open invitation to the community to come in and give their views. These will be hosted by the Cabinet and Senior officers who will be on hand to talk to groups and individuals.

Scrutiny:

The Council will ask Scrutiny to seek responses from partners, residents and community groups on the draft vision and priorities, and report their findings to the Executive. It is suggested that wherever possible events should be held away from the Civic Centre and within communities. It is hoped that Scrutiny will be enabled to act as a key partner in the Council's new approach to community involvement.

Harrow Community events:

Between now and December there will be a number of events going on across the borough, some organised by the Council and many by community groups. The Council will seek to have a presence at these events where people can have their say on local issues at for example 'Harrow's Big Conversation Café' with the opportunity to meet a number of councillors and officers informally.

Better Deal for Residents Programme consultation:

There are a number of innovative individual consultation activities being planned between now and December with residents and specific service users. The Adult Social Care consultation on delivering sustainable services over the coming years will be a large part of this and will be innovative in its methodology for engaging residents. This approach to engaging residents on difficult financial decisions should be built upon to test the overall vision and priorities.

The Role of Councillors:

It is important that local councillors get involved by raising awareness of the engagement programme through local surgeries, when going door to door, at local meetings and events they regularly attend. As part of the Council's renewed commitment to community involvement, the role of councillors will be actively promoted, with a new focus on activities such as surgeries that are currently under-promoted. Support will be offered to councillors to enable them to act consistently in their ward duties by providing regular updates on activity and packs to enable them to record resident feedback.

Harrow's online conversation:

The Council will create a section on the website called 'Harrow's Big Conversation' providing a way for people to give their views and make suggestions on-line. A key feature of the on-line presence will be the visibility of the results and forums, as this allows residents to see the views of others and get an idea of what the general consensus is. The Council will also be launching a facility for e-petitions which will be available through its website for residents to raise issues about Council services.

Harrow People:

The next edition will feature the 'Big Conversation' and direct people to events, road shows, and on-line to give their views. The January edition will be used to feedback.

Harrow Strategic Partnership:

It is important to involve partners in developing the vision and priorities and this will be the subject of the Harrow Strategic Partnership Summit in November.

Residents' Panel:

The Council will use the Residents' Panel to offer their views on the Council's draft vision and priorities during the autumn, as in previous years.