Harrow COUNCIL LONDON

November 2011

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Measuring up: Harrow Council's use of performance information
Phase 2 - Review Report

Members of the Challenge Panel
Councillor Sue Anderson
Councillor Nana Asante
Councillor Kam Chana
Councillor Jerry Miles
Councillor Chris Mote
Councillor Paul Osborn (Chairman)
Councillor Stephen Wright
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1. Chairman's introduction

Good performance management is crucial to any successful organisation. It is a vital tool in measuring the extent to which an organisation is meeting its goals and delivering against its priorities. It provides decision makers with timely information that helps them make informed decisions and then track the effectiveness of those decisions.

Bad performance management is corrosive to an organisation. It overwhelms that organisation with requirements to collect vast reams of data. This data is then poorly used to set arbitrary and inflexible targets that distort both priorities and performance.

It is therefore is important to get performance management right. What and how an organisation chooses to measure can have a profound impact on outcomes. As Bill Bratton, the former Commissioner of the NYPD and Chief of Police of Los Angeles, said "expect what you inspect".[1] If you are measuring the wrong things the chances are the wrong things will be delivered.

The removal of a large part of the Government's overbearing performance and inspection regime provides a real challenge to the Council. It is easy to keep doing things the same old way, slightly recast but largely untouched; valuing both the familiarity and the ability to benchmark across other authorities over the relevance, value and timeliness of both the data and the comparison. It is also easy given the financial climate to discard performance management as an unnecessary overhead, a burden on the organisation and an easy saving when set against possible cuts to frontline services. I would argue that would be a costly mistake, akin to throwing away the compass by which we navigate or continuing to steer by a flawed map.

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[1] Bill Bratton remarks to Policy Exchange, London, November 2010. Available at: http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Fighting_Crime_and_Disorder_-_Apr__11.pdf

Instead, the Council should grasp the opportunity and rethink what and how it measures, focusing on what matters to the residents – using data readily available through service transformation. The Council should ensure that timely data is used in a forward-looking way to continue drive forward improvement and deliver better services for residents.

I'd like to thank all those who contributed to the report, either through the meetings, surveys and focus groups or by giving up their time as part of the review group. I would particularly like to thank Seamus English and Julian Maw who, as local residents, brought that perspective and focus to our investigations. I would also like to thank Heather Smith for pulling all this work together.

I hope this report contributes to the debate.

Councillor Paul Osborn
Chairman of the Scrutiny Review

2. Executive summary

2.1 This report outlines the results of phase 2 of the scrutiny review examining Harrow Council's use of performance information.

2.2 It follows on from phase 1, a detailed review of the Council's corporate scorecard by directorate, which contributed to the Council's corporate process for developing new scorecards for 2011/12. The recommendations from the phase 1 report were agreed by Cabinet in April 2011.

2.3 Phase 2 of the review took a broader look at the future development of a local performance framework for the authority, in the context of the loosening Government requirements for performance reporting.

2.4 Phase 2 of the review reinforces the view that while it is tempting to search for an easy answer in devising a meaningful performance management approach, it is never that simple, partly because the Council has its own specific needs and challenges. Irrespective of the national drivers for changing local performance management arrangements, the development of a mature Harrow approach involves listening to local people, developing the right culture and not over-complicating processes.

2.5 The purpose of this review has been to consider the principles that should underpin Harrow's local performance management framework going forward. **Overall we recommend that Cabinet adopt the following principles**:

- **Performance information and data is the start of the conversation**. Both Members and officers must be active rather than passive users of information. Councillors should be more demanding of data and officers should consider what they are trying to demonstrate and how best to present it.
- **Managing performance with <u>data</u> rather than with too many indicators**. Given that there is less national pressure to monitor specific performance

indicators the Council should shift its focus to identifying indicators that are locally useful and making better use of data to understand performance and support decision-making.

- **To make more data public**. By doing so the Council can improve transparency and accountability as well as encouraging others to share data by leading the way.
- **A positive performance management culture**. This is one that is not ‘red adverse’. Improvement is much more than just measuring. The improvement cycle encompasses leading, setting priorities, planning, measuring impact, learning and revising. It is continuous and iterative – making things better step-by-step. Scrutiny has a constructive role to play in supporting such processes.

2.6 There is a need to make performance management fit for purpose in the public sector landscape. There is potentially huge freedom to recast and redesign how the Council thinks about improving services and responding to local people’s needs. It offers an opportunity to talk to local people about how to do this. It means putting performance management information – and evidence-based policy-making – at the centre.

3. Recommendations

BEST PRACTICE

For Cabinet:

A) We recommend that steps be taken to improve the timeliness of the performance reporting processes. By this we mean:
- The speed at which Improvement Boards take place at the end of the quarter. This includes, but is not limited to, streamlining the performance approach, for example by greater or more effective use of IT or by automating processes.
- The speed at which information reaches Scrutiny – the Executive and Scrutiny, in partnership, should examine the way in which potential barriers for information sharing could be overcome, for example by allowing the scrutiny process to overlap more with Executive review or by moving away from an approach that treats all information the same, regardless of the level of sensitivity.

B) We recommend that the format in which performance information reaches the public domain be reviewed and improved. While we agree that publishing a public scorecard is laudable, we believe that the Corporate Scorecard should be published online separately, as well as forming part of the Cabinet papers. See also Recommendation J.

C) We recommend that comments from scrutiny on performance issues be incorporated into the Corporate Strategic Board's (CSB) performance morning and reflected in the Strategic Performance Report (SPR), thereby more formally integrating scrutiny into the quarterly performance cycle.

D) We recommend that the Council's Corporate Leadership Group[2] be renamed and charged with a stronger remit for addressing cross-departmental operational issues.

E) We recommend that there is greater integration of performance and financial reporting to Scrutiny, in a format similar to that received by the Executive.

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[2] The Corporate Leadership Group is made up of the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Divisional Directors, and senior managers who report directly to the Corporate Directors from across the Council.

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

F) We recommend that the Better Deal for Residents Review consider how effectively the Council's transformation projects incorporate use of performance information and data – thereby providing tools for evidence-based policy making.

G) We recommend that the Scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs review arrangements for monitoring the performance of partners, in particular that of the police and health partners. While partnership scrutiny is already taking place, changes to the policy environment offers opportunities for the development of new approaches.

H) We recommend that Scrutiny Lead Members adopt a stronger role for their policy area in order to ensure:
   - That Lead Members take a greater responsibility for escalating and sharing of information pertaining to their brief;
   - That wherever possible Scrutiny Lead Members attend committee meetings for relevant items where they are not ordinarily a Member;
   - That Lead Members make use of the new Local Information System (LIS) in order to inform the scrutiny process.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

For Cabinet

I) The review group supports the development of the Local Information System (LIS) as a means of making public data more available to residents as part of Harrow's transparency policies. We recommend that the Council should examine how to reach residents without access to the internet.

J) We recommend that the Council adopt a cost effective approach and use existing communication methods to offer signposts to publicly available data and performance information. This should include links within the Harrow e-newsletter and other publications and could also include social media.

K) We recommend that the following general principles, arising from the focus group, should be reflected in the Council's approach to communicating performance information:
   - The Council should provide 'honest' information – not just carefully collected soundbites or what the Council wants residents to hear.
   - As much information as possible should be made accessible but it should be provided proportionately – i.e. the detail (including raw data) should be

accessible for those who need/want it but not universally. Summary information, with signposts to more detail, should be developed.

- The Council should provide what is cost effective – the Council should not waste money on providing everyone with detailed information as not everyone wants this (some focus group attendees perceived that the Council committed significant resource to producing detailed publications) but should focus on offering signposts to those wanting it.
- The Council should provide contextual information to enable residents to understand what the detail actually means.
- Information must be accessible to all – not everyone accesses the Internet – Harrow People, leaflets, notice boards, public meeting places.
- Information provided must be attractive and easy to read and understand, but not too simplistic.
- The Council should consider organisational blogs and Twitter to give residents a more real-time insight into how services work and the challenges faced.
- The Council must commit to responding to residents who offer an opinion.

L) We recommend that Directorates should take steps to embed performance reporting alongside service information. For example, performance against bin collections could, for example, be reported alongside or linked to information about bin collection days.

M) We recommend that a sample of performance indicators be included in borough-wide publications such as Harrow People or the Council tax leaflet in order to give residents a flavour of local performance.

N) We recommend that further work should be undertaken to analyse the information needs of Councillors in their ward role. It may be that Members' access to the Local Information System will address this going forward, but an annual pack of information for ward councillors might be a useful development. For example, councillors could be provided with a detailed spatial map of their ward, for example, on election, in order to support their understanding of their constituents and their needs.

TECHNOLOGY AND DATA PRESENTATION

For Cabinet

O) We recommend that the Harrow Local Information System (LIS) be linked into other sources – for example the London datastore[3] in order to increase the profile of Harrow's information.

P) In keeping with the new *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency,*[4] we recommend that the Council adopt the following three key principles when publishing data:

- responding to public demand;
- releasing data in open formats available for re-use;
- releasing data in a timely way.

Q) We recommend that there needs to be greater ownership of the role that good information plays in ensuring good customer service. For example, that a standard approach be set up to allow Access Harrow to report areas where the website is in need of updating.

R) We recommend that Members and officers also need to be more demanding consumers of data, asking, and if necessary insisting, that data is presented in a way that gives them as complete a picture as possible, making interpretation as straightforward as possible. Information in reports and at Improvement Boards should be relevant, of high quality and presented well.

S) We recommend that all service transformation projects consider how services can become more data-rich and how this intelligence can be used to improve services and performance reporting.

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

T) We recommend that the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee review the Corporate Finance scorecard with the Director of Finance. This was a recommendation for this review group in our phase 1 report but given

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[3] http://data.london.gov.uk/

[4] CLG (September 2011), *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency*. Available at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/transparencycode

the different emphasis of the phase 2 project plan we did not undertake this exercise.

U) We recommend that the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee receive a report at its February 2012 meeting on customer contact information in order to explore how this information might help to inform scrutiny activity.

4. Background

4.1 One of the first actions of the Coalition Government following the General Election in May 2010 was the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). This scheme had provided comparative information on the performance of public sector bodies in a local area. It comprised an organisational assessment of the performance of the individual bodies and an area assessment of how effectively these bodies worked together to meet the assessed needs of the local area. It also included a suite of performance indicators, the National Indicator Set, on which the Council was required to report.

4.2 The first phase of this review was intended to help the Council in responding to the abolition of the National Indicator Set. The second phase has attempted to consider how Harrow might respond to the loosening of performance management (if not data) requirements. Since the first phase was completed, the policy context is beginning to take shape. The Government has articulated its vision in the *Open Public Services* White Paper.

> "To make informed choices and hold services to account people need good information, so **we will ensure that key data about public services, user satisfaction and the performance of all providers from all sectors is in the public domain** in an accessible form. This will include data on user satisfaction, spending, performance and equality."[5] [Original emphasis]

4.3 This document, though still a White Paper, sets the tone; for Central Government, performance management is therefore less about hitting specific targets and more about openness and transparency, thereby enabling local people to bring together different sources of information to make informed judgements.

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[5] HM Government, Open Public Services (White Paper), Paragraph 3.4

4.4 This offers Harrow an opportunity to further mature local performance management arrangements and culture – this is both in keeping with the national context as well as reflecting a desire locally to improve Harrow's overall performance.

5. Scope of the review

Aims and objectives

5.1 The aims and objectives of the review were agreed as follows:

- To support the Council to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the abolition of national performance framework and to devise a local framework:
  - which enables councillors and managers to gather, analyse and utilise information on performance and value for money in order to support the delivery of local – resident – priorities and inform service planning
  - which reflects the reality of the local outcomes
  - which enables timely decisions to be made regarding performance
  - which facilitates public reporting/accountability.

Phase 2 – Methodology

5.2 For phase 2 three workstreams were devised to ensure that the review group could make best use of its resources as well as covering the most ground. Review group members chose which groups that they wished to participate in and findings were reported back to the rest of the group both verbally and in the form of a meeting note.

5.2.1 **Best practice –** This sub group considered what the organisation can learn from others with regard to managing performance. The Council's own Corporate Performance Team has produced two comparative reports; one of which focused on high performing local authorities and the other on five commercial companies. This evidence was reviewed, and the group also met with the Chief Executive to discuss his approach.

5.2.2 **Customer engagement** – This sub group considered how resident expectations could be better reflected in the performance management framework. It considered the needs of 'customers', where 'customer' covered a range of users of information, including ward councillors.

5.2.3 **Technology and data presentation** – This sub group considered the effective utilisation and presentation of information and best use of technology. It also considered how 'customer' (Members, officers, the public) requirements for information could be met.

5.3 The following meetings were held:

11 May	Full group meeting – Policy framework – presentation from Ed Hammond, Centre for Public Scrutiny
23 May	Customer engagement sub group – group discussion and briefing
24 May	Best practice sub group – presentation from Corporate Performance Team
20 June	Technology sub group – briefing on the Local Information System, Corporate Performance Team
28 June	Best practice sub group – preparation for meeting with Chief Executive
5 July	Best practice sub group – meeting with Chief Executive
5 July	Technology sub group – meeting with Divisional Director of Customer Services & Business Transformation
11 July	Customer engagement sub group – resident focus group
25 July	Full group meeting – review of evidence
6 September	Meeting with Head of Development and Improvement, Community and Environment
7 September	Full group meeting – review of draft report
14 September	Briefing – Libraries transformation
3 October	Briefing – Waste transformation
10 October	Full group meeting – finalisation of report

6. Findings – Best practice

6.1 The purpose of this workstream was to consider what Harrow could learn from others.

6.2 The presentation[6] the full review group received from the Centre for Public Scrutiny stressed the need for a focus on improvement, where emphasis is placed on learning lessons rather than merely following processes. There is a risk that performance management encourages people to think about the process of improvement (scorecards, PIs and so on) rather than on what that information tells them and how this might affect how services are provided to the public. Improvement is about much more than just measuring. The improvement cycle encompasses leading, setting priorities, planning, measuring impact, learning and revising. It is continuous and iterative – making things better step-by-step. This means that organisational culture has a significant impact.

Harrow's performance management system

6.3 Harrow's performance management system has been set up to reflect the needs of the organisation and the National framework and inspection regime that was in place (Comprehensive Performance Assessment followed by the Comprehensive Area Assessment). One hundred or so of the most important indicators are reported at the corporate level (forming the Corporate Scorecard). Quarterly Improvement Boards take place within each directorate to check on how these indicators and others are progressing; these boards include the relevant Portfolio Holders. The results from the Improvement Boards are reported to the Corporate Strategic Board's (CSB) quarterly performance mornings, with a quarterly report then going on to Cabinet. The Chief Executive also holds fortnightly meetings with each of his Corporate Directors individually. These processes enable a continual overview of how the organisation is performing.

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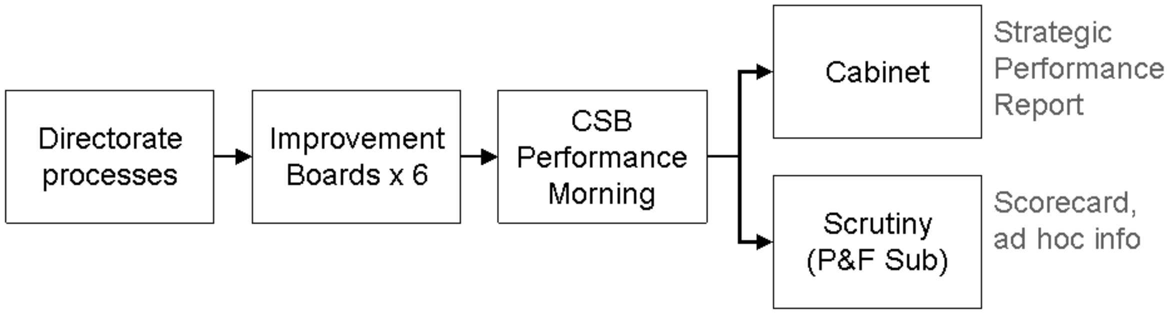
[6] Full group meeting, Wednesday 11 May 2011.

6.4 While the Corporate Scorecard is reviewed corporately by the quarterly performance morning, there are hundreds of other performance indicators dealt with elsewhere within the organisation; in 2010/11 the housing service alone had a scorecard of 120 indicators, of which about ten were included in the corporate scorecard.

Diagram 1: Quarterly Performance Cycle



Review of best practice – performance management systems

6.5 This sub group reviewed two exercises carried out by the Council's Corporate Performance Team:

- **High Performing London Boroughs:** this was researched in February-March 2010 and covered Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Wandsworth, Westminster (CAA[7] 4 star, 2009). The CAA and the national performance framework have since been dismantled. It is probable that some processes have changed in these Councils as a result but elements of good practice remain relevant to this review.[8]
- **Commercial companies:** this was researched in October-November 2010, and covered five companies drawn from FTSE Top 250, local Harrow companies and Harrow Council commercial partners.

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[7] Comprehensive Area Assessment.

[8] There have been some changes since the Council study, which is now over twelve months old. At national level national indicators have been replaced with the 'single data list'. There is a Code of Recommended Practice for the publication of data. There have also been changes within Harrow and other authorities especially post CAA. Harrow's Improvement Board templates have been reviewed and reduced, to ensure the boards are able to look at the key issues facing a directorate and also to reflect the progress made from when the boards were first introduced.

6.6 Both the commercial companies and boroughs reviewed the content of the reports and were guaranteed anonymity.

6.7 The main differences between **Harrow and the commercial firms** were:

- ***Monthly review with integrated reports*** – companies at all levels reported and reviewed financial and non-financial performance monthly in an integrated report. Harrow's formal reporting (Improvement Boards, CSB and Cabinet) is quarterly, though within Directorates there is monthly or even weekly reporting. Directorates review financial information on a monthly basis.
- ***Currency of performance information*** – within the commercial companies, performance information was delivered between 6 and 15 days from month end versus 5-8 weeks after the quarter for Harrow for Improvement Boards, CSB performance morning and Cabinet reporting. Information is in effect a whole quarter behind by the time it reaches the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee, though it reaches Portfolio Holders and managers earlier. The review group is of the view that the Council needs to give greater consideration to the information that it considers to be business critical. In addition the review group believes that there is significant scope to improve the timeliness of reporting processes. We accept that scrutiny should not be put ahead of the executive in terms of access to performance data. We believe that as the Council seeks to raise its game on performance management, a culture should be developed which allows information to be shared promptly, thereby improving transparency and accountability. This will also assist scrutiny in responding faster to issues arising and not spending time looking at issues that have already been identified and resolved.
- ***The critical role of line manager*** – in commercial companies, line managers at all levels in companies intervene to consolidate performance reporting – there is no central performance function to support this process. In the Harrow context, the Corporate Performance Team also has a role to play, for example in ensuring that there are accepted definitions across directorates for indicators reported within the Corporate Scorecard. In

addition, as the phase one report highlighted, there remain requirements for reporting data, if not performance indicators, to Central Government.

- ***Forward look reporting*** – all companies routinely include a forward look – pipelines, prospects, opportunities, calendars, rolling forecasts. Harrow data is largely historic, though budget forecasting is included. A manager forecast against an annual target has been introduced within SAP (see also paragraph 6.8).

6.8 The main differences between **Harrow and the other Councils** were:

- ***Local formats for reporting at Directorate level*** – only Harrow uses a standard format for reporting at directorate level (that is, the Improvement Board templates); only Harrow uses Improvement Boards. However, this does mean that the boards consider a cross-section of information such as human resources, customer information, complaints, risk, finance and performance at the same time.
- ***Most of the Councils do not report performance on Cabinet agenda*** – most others use Scrutiny not Cabinet to review performance formally – Harrow uses both. We think that it is positive that both Cabinet and Scrutiny fulfil this role but that there is a need for comments and recommendations regarding performance to be fed more formally into the performance cycle. We discuss this further in our section on improving the performance cycle (see paragraph 6.21).
- ***The Leader meets with portfolio holders to review performance*** (3 out of 5 councils). In Harrow the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Performance attend all Improvement Boards.
- ***Forecasting included in performance reports*** (4 out of 5). In Harrow a new field is being provided on the SAP performance management system that will enable managers to indicate each quarter whether the year end target is likely to be reached. This will be implemented initially on the Corporate Scorecard. While we support performance forecasting, we highlight again the importance of developing the right performance management culture, one which is not ‘red averse’.

- ***Standard office software used*** – (3 out of 5) the majority use standard office software like Excel to produce reports. Harrow uses a mixture of SAP, Excel and Word.

6.9 The Corporate Performance Team did some limited research in early 2010 on web-delivered area-based performance information for the public. However, it proved very difficult to identify best practice in this area, with many councils reporting that it was the direction they wished to travel but had not done so yet. This is still the case at the time of undertaking our work in phase two.

6.10 It was reported to us that Improvement Boards receive both financial and performance information although they are not fully integrated. From Q4 2010/11 the Corporate Strategic Board (CSB) now receives financial data formally as part of quarterly performance reports.

6.11 The review group notes the potential difficulties associated with meaningful value for money for benchmarking following the abolition of agreed national definitions. The review group is supportive of the Council's participation in London Councils' Local Area Performance Solution (LAPS), which enables some pan-London benchmarking across a suite of agreed indicators. The Council also subscribes to the CIPFA value for money benchmarking service.

Performance management culture

6.12 To better assess the progress of the organisation, the sub group met with the Chief Executive. [9] He alluded to the distinction between performance management *systems* and performance management *culture.* Without a *system* it is difficult to know what is going on, whether you are delivering on your objectives (a system ensures there are 'no surprises') and the organisation does not always make sufficient progress. However, *culture* was equally important in, for example, ensuring that meaningful and stretching targets were set as well as an honest assessment of associated risk. Without it there was a risk that targets could be set in such a way as to make them easy

[9] Best practice sub group, Tuesday 5 July 2011.

to meet, resulting in the organisation making only incremental progress.

6.13 The review group supports the Chief Executive in strengthening the strategic role of CSB so as to enable CLG[10] and middle managers to have a greater day to day responsibility for taking operational decisions and addressing cross-cutting issues. We believe that Corporate Directors should be expected to take on cross-Council corporate roles such as community engagement or equalities.

6.14 The Chief Executive reported that having significantly improved the 'vertical' performance of the organisation on a directorate by directorate basis, the next stage will be to better look at opportunities horizontally across the organisation and then with partners. The latter was essentially about community budgeting; the total public sector spend in Harrow amounts to £2bn, operating across 147 buildings. There is significant potential to rationalise both the assets and the public services spend in the Borough, to ensure services to residents remain robust and offer good value for money. The review group is supportive of this approach.

6.15 Performance management culture needs to be one where performance information is seen as a helpful tool rather than an irritating task.

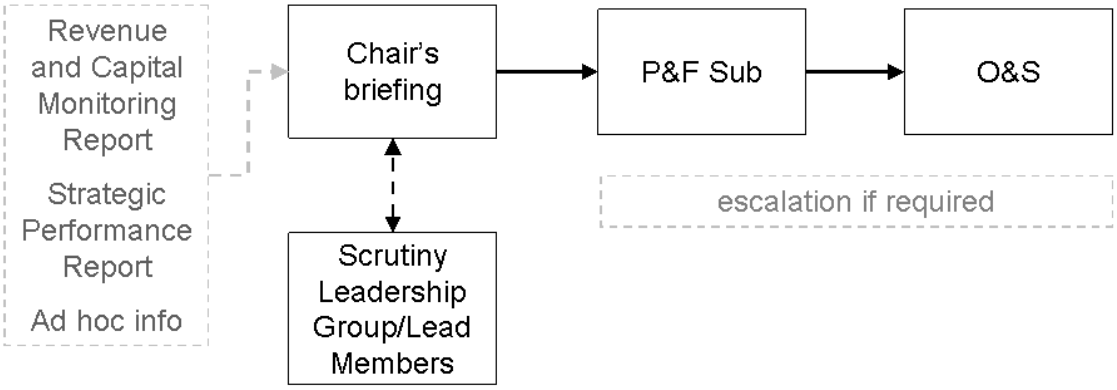
Scrutiny's role in the performance management framework

6.16 Given the role of scrutiny in considering service and financial performance, it would be remiss of this review not to consider whether there are areas in which scrutiny could improve.

6.17 The Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee regularly reviews the Corporate Scorecard as well as the quarterly Revenue and Capital Monitoring reports at the chair's briefing; these discussions then determine areas of focus for the committee.

[10] The Corporate Leadership Group is made up of the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Divisional Directors, and senior managers who report directly to the Corporate Directors from across the Council.

Diagram 2: Performance reporting to Scrutiny



6.18 The Centre for Public Scrutiny commented to us that Harrow's scrutiny of performance management is still in the top quartile – very few local authorities reach beyond the reviewing of scorecards at committee, whereas Harrow uses performance management information to inform the scrutiny work programme. However, we should still review how partners and residents fit into the performance management agenda.[11]

6.19 As we have alluded to earlier, the timeliness of performance information provided to scrutiny needs to be addressed. Members of the review group have highlighted particular examples where earlier access to information would have meant that there was no need for scrutiny Members to seek follow-up because of concerns raised in an earlier quarter's data.

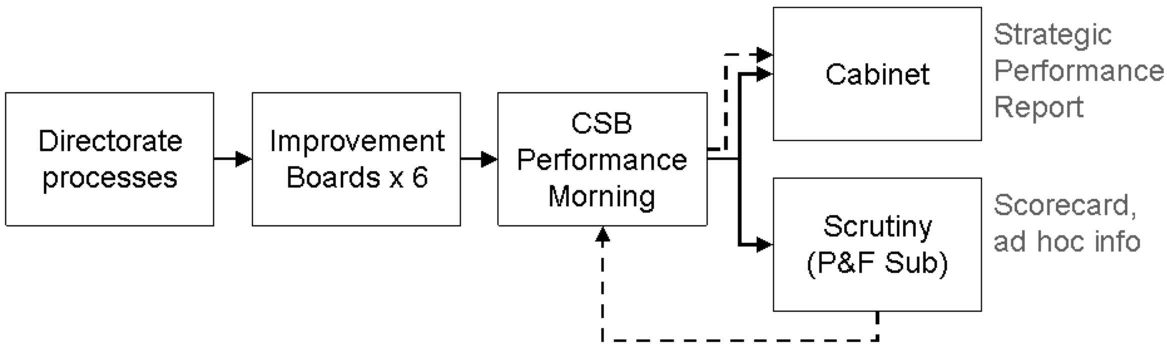
6.20 In discussing the Local Information System (see *Technology* findings), Members discussed the use of the system by scrutiny. It was felt that the system would be a useful tool, particularly for the lead members. It could also support scrutiny at committee, where Members could interrogate data in order to inform their questioning and consideration of items such as the community safety plan and strategic assessment. It was also felt that leads could take a stronger role by briefing the committee and by attending and leading on particular items at committee. Such an approach would strengthen the quality of discussion by adding an evidence-based dimension.

[11] Full group meeting, Wednesday 11 May 2011.

Improving the performance cycle

6.21 In addition to the improvements we have already mentioned, we believe that there is a need to formalise arrangements for feedback from scrutiny on service and financial performance. Diagram 3 indicates our suggested model of integration.

Diagram 3: Quarterly performance cycle – formalising feedback from scrutiny



6.22 The Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee's consideration of performance and financial information should continue (as per the process illustrated in Diagram 2), but by adding a formal feedback process into the cycle, CSB can be made aware of issues that scrutiny is monitoring. In addition scrutiny's areas of focus can be reflected in the Strategic Performance Report.

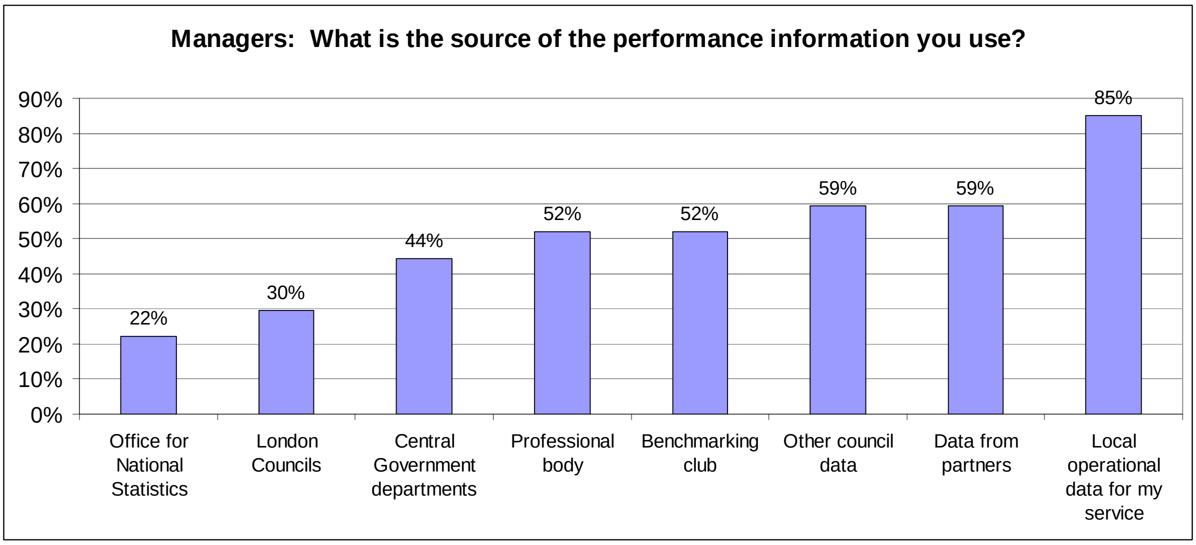
6.23 For example, feedback could include items that the Performance and Finance Scrutiny sub-committee chair and vice-chair have on their 'watch-list' as well as any recommended action. This would improve both the transparency of the scrutiny process as well as more formally linking the role of scrutiny into the Council's quarterly performance cycle.

6.24 As we allude to in paragraph 6.8, other Councils use scrutiny as a formal part of the process of examining performance information; what we are proposing is therefore in keeping with good practice elsewhere.

Managers' Survey

6.25 The sub group commissioned a short, on-line survey to capture the views of managers[12] on the performance management culture, as well as their use of performance management information. The survey was available for completion from 14 June to 8 September 2011. The response rate was 11% (27 managers responded out of 248 managers[13]).

6.26 When asked to identify the sources of performance information used, 85% of managers used local operational data, 59% used partner data and 59% used other Council data.

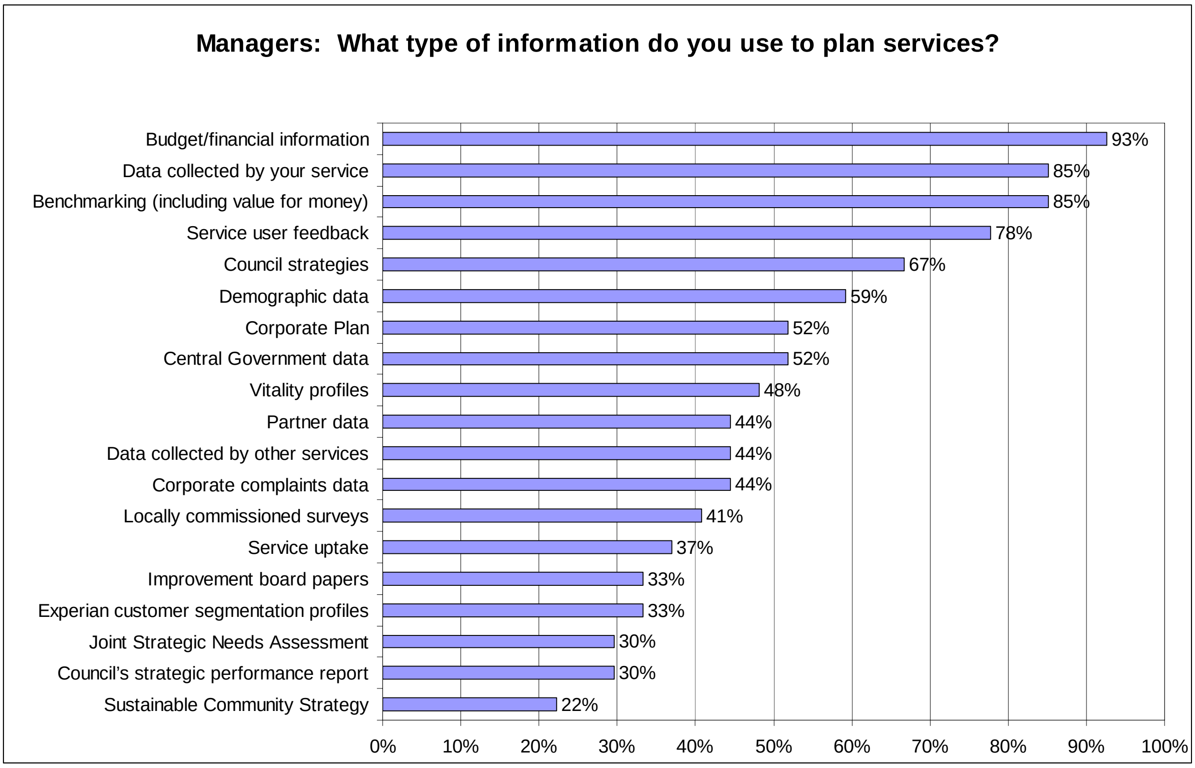


6.27 When asked to describe what information managers used to plan services, 93% used budget and financial information, 85% used data collected by their service and 85% used benchmarking information. Service user feedback also featured near the top of the list at 78%.

6.28 These results demonstrate that performance management is clearly part of the "day job" of managers at all levels.

[12] This group covered Corporate Directors, Senior Managers (Directors/Divisional Directors, Heads of Service) and Middle Managers (Service Managers and Senior Professionals).

[13] As at 5 September 2011.



6.29 When asked to rate Harrow's performance management practice in general, 7% thought it was excellent, 52% of managers considered it to be good, and 41% considered it to be average. No managers considered it to be poor.

6.30 With regard to improving the information managers currently use, some were in favour of more automation along the lines of a dashboard or cockpit; others mentioned reducing manual intervention. Clearly such improvements would have a cost implication and it is for the Executive to consider whether the cost of further automating processes outweighs the cost of manual manipulation. The Executive should also consider the extent to which increased automation would have the potential to speed up reporting or whether the time taken is the result of other factors.

6.31 With regard to improving performance management a number of managers responded that there could be more focus on key issues and areas of poor performance. Others commented that the process could be more forward looking. Others stressed the importance of understanding resident satisfaction.

This was also alluded to in the context of the impact of targets upon each other and on satisfaction.

Summary – Best practice

The review group believes that Harrow's *current* performance management approach is on a par with other high performing boroughs. However, all boroughs are facing the challenge of how to respond to the loosening of performance management (if not data) requirements – there are no 'leaders' here as such. This offers Harrow the opportunity to be a leader.

There is a need make better use of information at all levels of the organisation by bringing together different sources of data and performance, thereby developing a broader picture of true performance. This will require moving the organisation towards an improvement culture.

Harrow's performance and finance scrutiny is ahead of other authorities but there is still the potential to improve.

Recommendations – best practice

For Cabinet:

A) We recommend that steps be taken to improve the timeliness of the performance reporting processes. By this we mean:
   - The speed at which Improvement Boards take place at the end of the quarter. This includes, but is not limited to, streamlining the performance approach, for example by greater or more effective use of IT or by automating processes.
   - The speed at which information reaches Scrutiny – the Executive and Scrutiny, in partnership, should examine the way in which potential barriers for information sharing could be overcome, for example by allowing the scrutiny process to overlap more with Executive review or by moving away from an approach that treats all information the same, regardless of the level of sensitivity.

B) We recommend that the format in which performance information reaches the public domain be reviewed and improved. While we agree that publishing a public scorecard is laudable, we believe that the Corporate Scorecard should be published online separately, as well as forming part of the Cabinet papers. See also Recommendation J.

C) We recommend that comments from scrutiny on performance issues be incorporated into the Corporate Strategic Board's (CSB) performance morning and reflected in the Strategic Performance Report (SPR), thereby more formally integrating scrutiny into the quarterly performance cycle.

D) We recommend that the Council's Corporate Leadership Group[14] be renamed and charged with a stronger remit for addressing cross-departmental operational issues.

E) We recommend that there is greater integration of performance and financial reporting to Scrutiny, in a format similar to that received by the Executive.

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

F) We recommend that the Better Deal for Residents Review consider how effectively the Council's transformation projects incorporate use of performance information and data – thereby providing tools for evidence-based policy making.

G) We recommend that the Scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs review arrangements for monitoring the performance of partners, in particular that of the police and health partners. While partnership scrutiny is already taking place, changes to the policy environment offers opportunities for the development of new approaches.

H) We recommend that Scrutiny Lead Members adopt a stronger role for their policy area in order to ensure:

- That Lead Members take a greater responsibility for escalating and sharing of information pertaining to their brief;
- That wherever possible Scrutiny Lead Members attend committee meetings for relevant items where they are not ordinarily a Member;

[14] The Corporate Leadership Group is made up of the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Divisional Directors, and senior managers who report directly to the Corporate Directors from across the Council.

- That Lead Members make use of the new Local Information System (LIS) in order to inform the scrutiny process.

7. Findings – Customer engagement

7.1 This sub group was tasked with considering how resident expectations can be better reflected in the performance management framework. It also considered the needs of 'customers', where 'customer' covers other users of information, including ward councillors.

Resident Engagement

7.2 In the context of drives to make services more locally accountable, this sub group was tasked with better understanding the needs of local people with regard to performance management information. To do this a resident focus group was held on 11 July 2011. Attendees were selected from the Council's residents' panel[15] with the aim of ensuring that the group was as representative of the borough as possible. There were twelve attendees who formed two groups. Members of the review group were also in attendance to listen to the discussions.

7.3 An icebreaker exercise indicated that in general attendees did not feel well informed about how Harrow Council is performing. The top three sources of information about how Harrow is performing were local papers, the Council Tax leaflet and Harrow People. This is not surprising given the universal or near universal coverage of these types of publication.

7.4 Following a brief introduction to the work of the review, the attendees were divided into two groups to identify the information they would like to see, including the format (website, flyer, blog – or something else). Groups were given some examples of different ways to present information. They were asked to think about the level of information, format, types of information and frequency of provision.

[15] Harrow Council has a Residents' Panel of more than 1200 residents who have signed up to give their views about anything the Council or our partners ask them. The panel is representative of the borough's over-18 population by age, ethnicity, gender, geographical spread and employment status.

Conclusions from the focus group

7.5 While the attitudes of the two groups were markedly different, there were some common themes that are of benefit to the review. In particular a common theme related to transparency and accountability; while the first group did not *want* performance information they did want honesty and accountability.

7.6 The findings, particularly with regard to the need for cost effectiveness and proportionality of information provided are highly relevant. Those who felt quite ambivalent about what they were asked to do at the focus group stressed the need for a cost effective approach. While the second group did want to access performance information they were very realistic about avoiding excessive expectations and costs.

7.7 The focus group findings support the Council's current approach in developing a Local Information System to hold local data. This system will allow pre-existing profiles of information to be set up to allow residents to have a snapshot of, say, the demography of the borough (ideal for publicising in other publications or email correspondence) while also allowing those with a *specific interest* to delve further into the datasets.

7.8 With regard to *performance* information, the second group's discussion around, for example, bin collection performance points to the greater embedding of *service performance information* with information about services. For example, performance against bin collections could, for example, be reported alongside or linked to information about bin collection days.

7.9 Focus group attendees indicated that they were interested in the following **types of information**:

- The demographic make-up of the borough
- Borough and ward level information (both general information and performance information)
- Signposts – to highlight that there is information on a particular topic available (for example within the Local Information System) and directing

the resident to where they can find out more or, for example, obtain raw data

- Comparative information – other boroughs and over time
- Service cost and service outcome with explanatory information if necessary (value for money)
- Performance against publicised standards
- Mixture of perception and objective measures

7.10 **General principles** for the Council arising from the focus group are:

- The Council should provide honest information – not just what the Council wants residents to hear.
- As much information as possible should be made accessible but it should be provided proportionately – i.e. the detail (including raw data) should be accessible for those who need/want it but not universally. Summary information, with signposts to more detail, should be developed.
- The Council should provide what is cost effective – the Council should not waste money on providing everyone with detailed information as not everyone wants this (some focus group attendees perceived that the Council committed significant resource to producing detailed publications) but should focus on offering sign posts to those wanting it.
- The Council should provide contextual information to enable residents to understand what the detail actually means.
- Information must be accessible to all – not everyone accesses the Internet – Harrow People, leaflets, notice boards, public meeting places.
- Information provided must be attractive and easy to read.
- The Council could consider organisational blogs and Twitter to give residents an insight into how services work and the challenges faced.
- The Council must commit to responding to residents who offer an opinion.

7.11 It is reassuring that these findings strongly relate to those found in national research[16] identifying good practice in this area. It is particularly useful to know that such approaches are borne out in the Harrow context.

Box: Best practice

In terms of the content, format and timing of performance information:

- Information needs to be relevant to the circumstances of citizens
- Information needs to be available in a variety of formats
- Information needs to be presented in a way that makes it meaningful for citizens.

In terms of the strategic approach for reporting performance information:

- There is a need to be cost effective in the methods that are used to disseminate performance information
- The need for a strategic response
- The need for strategic 'fit' rather a stand alone activity
- Provision needs to be based firmly on evidence of what works and what citizens want.

Department for Communities and Local Government, Reporting Performance Information to Citizens (July 2008)

Reporting to residents

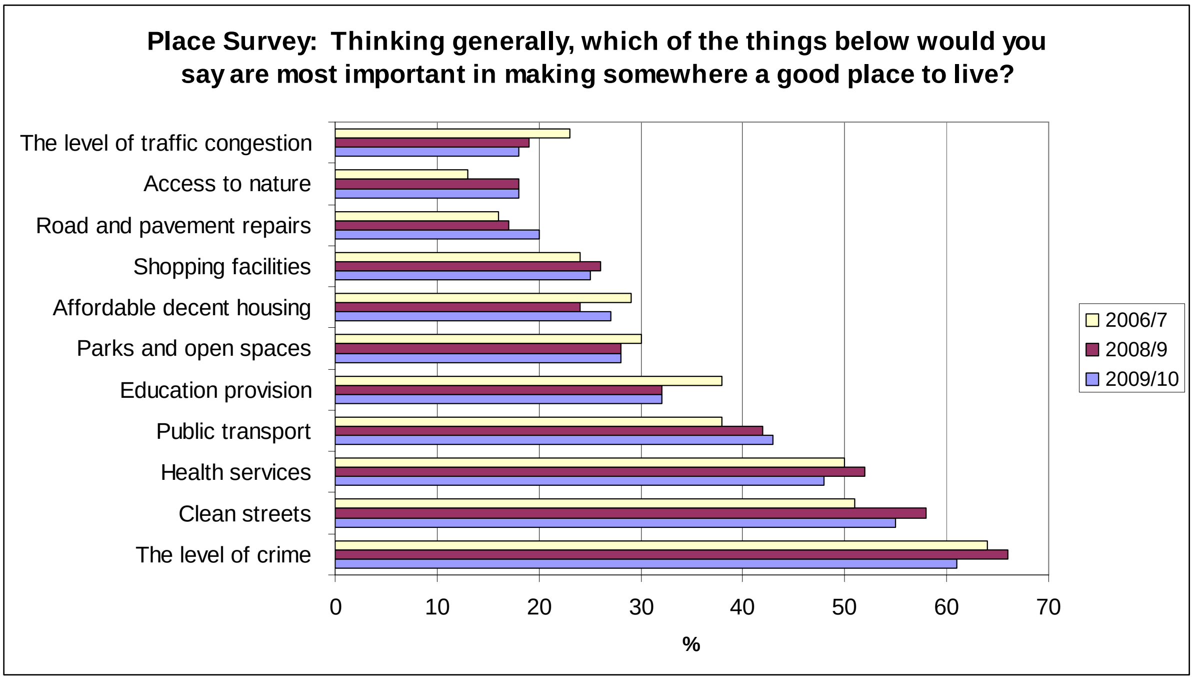
7.12 Over the course of the review, the group has debated the advantages and disadvantages of identifying a series of top issues for residents against which performance could be reported.

7.13 This is not a new idea in that, under the Best Value regime, local authorities were required to produce a performance plan that was published annually and outlined Council performance against key performance indicators.

7.14 Over the years, various resident satisfaction surveys have provided insight into

[16] CLG, Reporting Performance Information to Citizens (July 2008), p. 68-69. Available at http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/performanceinformation

the types of issues of highest concern to residents. In 2009/10, the Ipsos Mori Interim Place Survey, for example, generated the following list in response to the question “Thinking generally, which of the things below would you say are most important in making somewhere a good place to live?”[17]:



7.15 While there has been some change over time, the chart demonstrates that there is a reasonable degree of consistency with regard to the types of things that local residents consider to be important.

7.16 Understandably, each administration will have its own interpretation on what these top issues might be (and in any case would need to be subject to periodic refresh), but we believe that consideration should be given to whether a sample of performance information be included in borough-wide publications such as Harrow People or the Council tax leaflet in order to give residents an honest flavour of local performance.

Social media

7.17 The scrutiny leadership group gave authority for scrutiny to use new ways of

[17] The chart is based on the top ten things raised by residents. “Traffic congestion” and “Access to nature” were equal tenth in 2009/10.

working to improve resident engagement in scrutiny. Given the technological and consultative elements of this review it was agreed that the sub group pilot the use of social media as a means of accessing resident input.

7.18 Social media simply represents another set of tools for social engagement. It should be considered as another form of civic engagement with residents. It is often referred to through the tools that are used to enable it – which put the power of publishing in the hands of ordinary residents – but it is another route through which the Council can listen to its residents.[18]

7.19 A blog,[19] Facebook page[20] and Twitter account[21] were established in the hope of reaching sections of the community that are more interested in engaging in consultation activity online or those with an expert/technical perspective on the use of performance information – for example members of the online community with experience of using open data.

7.20 These tools have generated a little interest online, but social media is certainly still in its infancy for scrutiny. However, social media was viewed positively by focus group so should not be ruled out as another method of reaching residents.

Ward Councillors

7.21 While the review group initially felt that the needs of ward councillors could be addressed by the review group alone, councillors on the group felt that they were to some extent self-selecting in that they had agreed to participate because of a specific interest in the subject.

7.22 Little national research seems to have been dedicated to the information needs of ward councillors; more energy seems to have been taken to improve the

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[18] Ingrid Koehler, Presentation – *Performance Management: the future* (LGID, September 2010).

[19] http://scrutinyharrow.wordpress.com/measuring-up

[20] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Scrutiny-in-Harrow/205146626189923

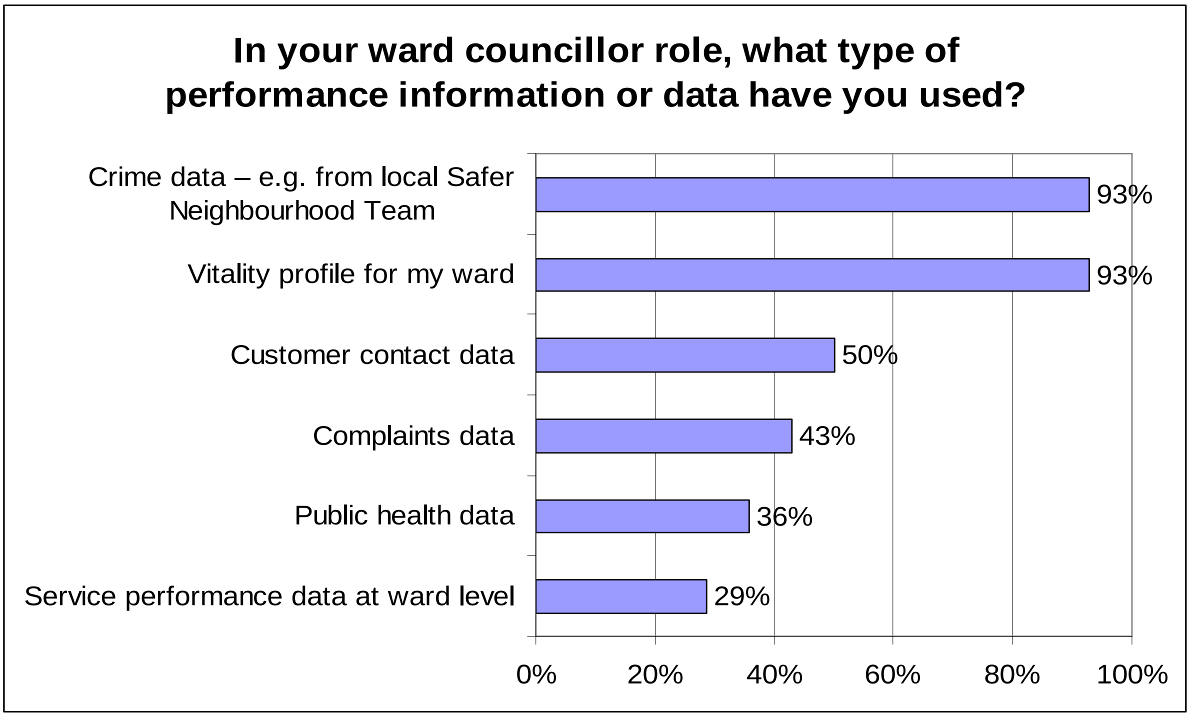
[21] http://www.twitter.com/#!/ScrutinyHarrow

quality of decision making, such as the Audit Commission's *Is there something I should know?*[22] As a result the review group commissioned a short, web-based survey of all ward councillors during August 2011. In total fourteen councillors responded, representing 22% of the 63 Harrow councillors.

The ward councillor role

7.23 In response to the question "how long have you been a ward councillor?" there was a good spread of responses, with 21% in their first term, 29% in their second term and 50% having been a councillor for three terms or more.

7.24 With regard to types of performance information or data used, most councillors had made use of their ward's vitality profile and data from their local Safer Neighbourhoods Team. 29% had made use of performance data at ward level.



22 Audit Commission (July 2009) *Is there something I should know? Making the most of your information to improve services.* Available at: http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/istheresomething/Pages/Default.aspx

Accuracy and timeliness of information

7.25 57% regarded the accuracy and timeliness of information they used as a councillor as good, while 29% regarded it as average.

Level of contextual information

7.26 71% considered that they received about the right amount of contextual information while 29% wanted more. None felt that too much detail was provided.

Scrutiny

7.27 92% of respondents to this question were either a current or former scrutiny Member. Of these 50% had reviewed performance information by looking at scorecards, and 71% had done so as part of a review.

7.28 Only 7% reported doing this at committee. This is a favourable response given the decision taken to undertake detailed review of performance information away from committee, reviewing it separately in order to inform agenda setting and work programming. Of the respondents who only answered "at committee", all had been a councillor three terms or more, which is consistent with this view.

Executive

7.29 Of the 57% of respondents with Executive experience, 50% regarded performance information they received as excellent and 38% considered it to be good. In terms of improvements proposed, respondents suggested:

- "Cost of services per resident compared to costs per resident in other boroughs. Ditching a whole raft of "information" that is not relevant or useful and is costly to collect, e.g. disability/ethnic monitoring - residents want low cost/high quality services and don't much care how things are provided."
- "More timely, up to date information. More operational data."
- "More narrative behind the data."

7.30 One respondent noted that “there is always room for improvement but has to be balanced against cost”.

7.31 In terms of specific data respondents said they would like to see:

- “Comparators with other Boroughs.”
- “Cost of services broken down to individual house/road level - so that individual residents can see how their Council tax is spent; and this to be compared to other boroughs.”
- “Complaints received on Council services on a ward by ward basis”.

7.32 While it is positive that Members are accessing performance information and data, what Members actually receive seems quite arbitrary in the sense that it depends on what individual Members are aware of or have asked for. This is probably sufficient for Members’ general needs but we would hope that, going forward, Members should have the opportunity to ask for more, as appropriate, to support them in fulfilling the role.

Summary – customer engagement

While residents exhibited varying attitudes towards the Council, the common theme was the need for transparency and accountability. This is closely related to the reputation of the Council. ‘Honesty’ was also highly prized by the focus group – the Council should not just communicate the good news. Residents also supported a proportionate and cost effective response, and the use of signposting to enable those wanting more to find it easily. Services should also consider how they can embed performance reporting alongside service information. There was support for online delivery of information, but the Council must consider access by others without that facility.

While some residents will rely on the what they see when they open their front door others sought to understand Harrow’s performance in the wider context; neither of these approaches is wrong – in fact the Council needs to get both right in order to demonstrate its performance.

For Cabinet

I) The review group supports the development of the Local Information System (LIS) as a means of making public data more available to residents as part of Harrow's transparency policies. We recommend that the Council should examine how to reach residents without access to the internet.

J) We recommend that the Council adopt a cost effective approach and use existing communication methods to offer signposts to publicly available data and performance information. This should include links within the Harrow e-newsletter and other publications and could also include social media.

K) We recommend that the following general principles, arising from the focus group, should be reflected in the Council's approach to communicating performance information:

- The Council should provide 'honest' information – not just carefully collected soundbites or what the Council wants residents to hear.
- As much information as possible should be made accessible but it should be provided proportionately – i.e. the detail (including raw data) should be accessible for those who need/want it but not universally. Summary information, with signposts to more detail, should be developed.
- The Council should provide what is cost effective – the Council should not waste money on providing everyone with detailed information as not everyone wants this (some focus group attendees perceived that the Council committed significant resource to producing detailed publications) but should focus on offering signposts to those wanting it.
- The Council should provide contextual information to enable residents to understand what the detail actually means.
- Information must be accessible to all – not everyone accesses the Internet – Harrow People, leaflets, notice boards, public meeting places.
- Information provided must be attractive and easy to read and understand, but not too simplistic.
- The Council should consider organisational blogs and Twitter to give residents a more real-time insight into how services work and the challenges faced.

- The Council must commit to responding to residents who offer an opinion.

L) We recommend that Directorates should take steps to embed performance reporting alongside service information. For example, performance against bin collections could, for example, be reported alongside or linked to information about bin collection days.

M) We recommend that a sample of performance indicators be included in borough-wide publications such as Harrow People or the Council tax leaflet in order to give residents a flavour of local performance.

N) We recommend that further work should be undertaken to analyse the information needs of councillors in their ward role. It may be that Members' access to the Local Information System will address this going forward, but an annual pack of information for ward councillors might be a useful development. For example, councillors could be provided with a detailed spatial map of their ward, for example, on election, in order to support their understanding of their constituents and their needs.

8. Findings – Technology and data presentation

8.1 Central Government sees technology as a key way to enhance transparency and get more information into the public domain. However this will need to be done in a manner that is useful to customers, professionals, businesses, contractors and partners. In this context the Council's approach to transparency, open data and complaints is relevant; as is the way that this information is fed into the performance management system.

Harrow Local Information System

8.2 The Harrow Local Information System is a web-based, centralised data hub of national demographic and local service information. The sub group received a demonstration of the test system.[23] The live system will be available as part of the offer on the Council's website. It will include partner data as well as Council data and work with partners to achieve this is taking place through the Joint Analytical Group (JAG).[24]

8.3 Data will be available at ward and lower super output area (LSOA) level. Data can be downloaded as an Excel file, .csv or .xml, meeting open data requirements.

8.4 It will also allow users to bring datasets together, for example enabling the creation of apps (applications) or mashups (a web page or application that uses and combines data from different sources to create new services). Using the system does not require specific GIS[25] or data analysis skills.

8.5 Instant Atlas, the local information system software, is used by a number of other local authorities. Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OSCI) have been contracted to supply and format the data for the system, which will save

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[23] Technology sub-group, Monday 20 June 2011.

[24] Partners involved in the JAG are Harrow Council, Harrow Police, Harrow Primary Care Trust, The voluntary sector in Harrow, Harrow Fire Service.

[25] Geographical information system.

considerable time for local analysts in that there would be a single source of data for them to interrogate. Data will include demographics, deprivation, economy and employment, equalities, education and skills, health and well being, crime, environment and access to services.

8.6 Testing is also taking place on some local service data. The LIS system also has the capacity to allow authorised users to access sensitive data on the same platform.

8.7 Within the system some pre-formatted information will also be available. This information will be dynamic. Links will also be given to key documents and strategies. It was intended that around six profiles offering pre-formatted information be provided; these would initially focus on Harrow people, economy, education, crime, health and deprivation. A future upgrade will also mean that information could also be added to include static features such as schools. This would allow analysis of, for example, complaints against location of premises.

8.8 The live system will be launched in October 2011, initially with national data. It will be of benefit to both data experts and non-experts, including residents.

Customer relationship management information

8.9 Data collected within the Council's customer relationship management (CRM) system is highly detailed so it is possible to identify the cause of the contact as well as how it was addressed. The system is also flexible in that additional 'process identities' that describe the type of contact can be added. For example a new process ID was set up recently to track calls relating to a problem with the online payments system. Managers are provided with a monthly report outlining contacts and are therefore able to identify why performance was affected each month. It is then possible to understand the impact, extract issues and identify exceptions; for example an increase in calls about bees and wasps led to the decision to raise the profile of this information on the website.

8.10 Members were provided some sample reports outlining the top 20 reasons for contact/avoidable contact for April 2011. For example, in order to pay a parking penalty charge, callers are phoning an agent, yet the Council has an automated payment line as well as the facility to pay online. There are plans to introduce an IVR (interactive voice response) for these calls which would mean that this would reduce call volumes by about 1800 calls per month. This type of information is already used actively but there are plans to further develop information to issue to services and also to include it in information considered at Improvement Boards.

8.11 Members were advised that some reports are already set up in the Business Warehouse toolkit (for example on avoidable contact) but some manual analysis is also required. More reports could be automated but officers want to ensure that the reports are agreed beforehand as there are costs associated with programming. Going forward the Local Information System will also have the potential to hold and map the Council's own data such as customer contact information.

8.12 Some ward councillors receive a quarterly report outlining contacts in their ward. Some information could possibly be presented geographically periodically but it would be difficult to provide this on a regular basis because of resource implications and might not be that useful graphically because of the volume.[26] Data will be provided to Improvement Boards. The information is also provided to service areas each month.

Data presentation

8.13 *Good* information is relevant, of high quality and well presented. Residents attending our focus group stressed the importance of well presented information. As well as supporting the needs of our residents, performance information needs to support Members in making decisions as well as facilitating good scrutiny.

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[26] Members were provided with a summary of *query resolution at first point of contact* (for April – June 2011). The full document stretched to 60 pages as it covered all tickets.

- The way that information is presented needs to be tailored for both the audience and the purpose at hand. Research on reporting to citizens illustrated that they felt that tables alone could be impenetrable and data without appropriate explanations and comparators was also criticised.[27]

- How information is presented can affect the response; while performance indicators are useful, they only tell part of the story and, as such, form the start of the discussion rather than the conclusion.

- When adding data to reports officers need to consider why they are adding the data, what the data is showing and what is the best way to present it. It is important to show trends and to show the data in a context that can allow meaningful analysis.

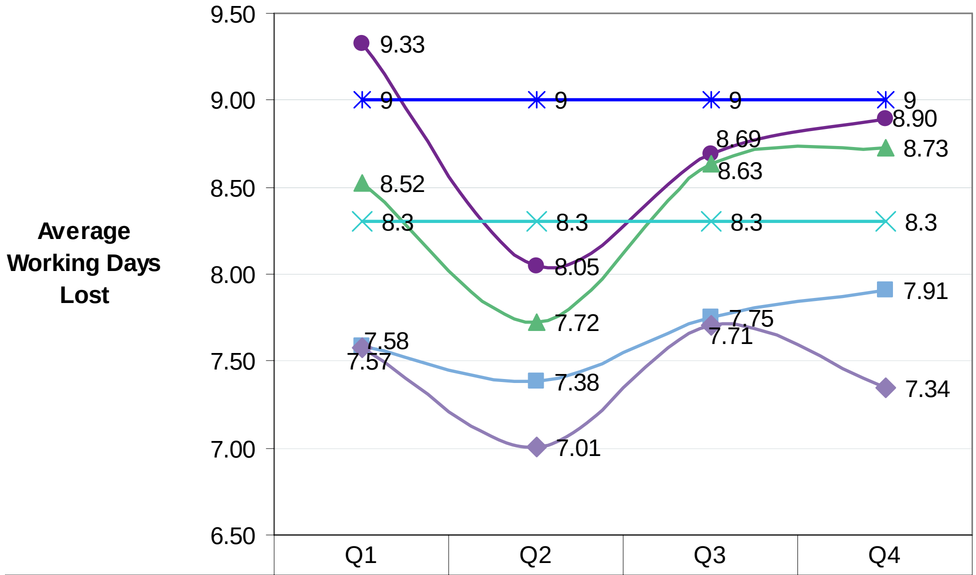
- Members and officers also need to be more intelligent consumers of data, asking and if necessary insisting that data is presented in a way that gives them as complete a picture as possible, making interpretation as straightforward as possible.

8.14 The review group is pleased to note that there are Harrow examples of good presentation of data. To illustrate our views on the importance of good data presentation we include an extract from analysis of BV12 (working days lost to sickness absence) in this report. Relying on the table alone, it is very difficult to arrive at an understanding of how well the Council is performing; presenting the information graphically as a trend enables the data to be interrogated at a glance.

[27] CLG, Reporting Performance Information to Citizens (July 2008), p. 60.

		BVPI 12 (Working Days Lost Due to Sickness Absence)									
		CF	**CEX**	**CS**	**Schools**	**A&H**	**CES**	**L&G**	**PS**	**Directorates**	**All**
2008/09	**Q1**	4.56	6.98	7.79		10.43	11.19	N/A	N/A	-	8.52
	Q2	5.19	5.78	6.79		10.18	10.37	7.94	N/A	-	7.72
	Q3	6.98	6.81	11.23	6.92	11.45	11.33	8.03	N/A	-	8.63
	Q4	6.75	6.41	10.63	7.29	11.42	11.33	7.62	N/A	-	8.73
2009/10	**Q1**	6.96	2.81	8.61	6.92	11.49	8.18	7.79	3.52	8.33	7.58
	Q2	8.82	6.33	8.58	5.38	11.99	9.83	9.32	4.93	9.43	7.38
	Q3	8.27	5.86	8.99	6.05	11.49	10.34	9.38	5.70	9.53	7.75
	Q4	8.40	5.28	9.70	6.27	10.68	10.23	7.57	5.67	9.45	7.91
2010/11	**Q1**	7.20	2.54	9.38	6.56	8.74	10.88	1.28	7.00	8.69	7.57
	Q2	6.95	3.82	10.40	5.25	9.40	10.37	1.26	5.92	9.03	7.01
	Q3	7.66	4.11	10.67	6.35	9.27	11.05	2.21	4.58	9.38	7.71
	Q4	5.74	5.52	9.60	6.27	9.41	9.94	2.04	4.39	8.71	7.34

Council BVPI 12 - 2007/08 to 2010/11



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
07/08 Council	9.33	8.05	8.69	8.90
08/09 Council	8.52	7.72	8.63	8.73
09/10 Council	7.58	7.38	7.75	7.91
10/11 Council	7.57	7.01	7.71	7.34
07/08 Median	9	9	9	9
07/08 Top Quartile	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3

8.15 We believe that the Council must be mindful of the need to maintain capacity for analysing data; as services are transformed and re-structured directorates must ensure that they value the role of their analysts and use them effectively:

> “Giving decision makers the information they need does not necessarily involve spending more money. Leadership from the top and ensuring that analytical resources are focused on identifying and highlighting the most salient facts are pivotal. Decision makers need to become more demanding, and analysts more expert and valued.”[28]

8.16 The review group concludes that in developing its performance management approach the organisation should expect relevant, high quality, well presented information. There is no one-size-fits-all solution that can be applied to all circumstances and there is a need for Members and officers to engage to develop the best solution for each situation. It is also important that Members and officers review and reconsidering requirements on a regular basis – what is relevant today is not always what is relevant tomorrow.

Understanding performance: formal measures of performance versus resident perception

8.17 As part of this review we decided to look at a specific performance indicator in order to examine the benefits of formal measures of performance versus measures of perception.

8.18 We chose NI 195, an indicator that was designed to measure local environmental quality (LEQ), covering litter, detritus, graffiti and fly-posting. The survey is based on a representative sample of the area, across all types of land in the local authority area. The survey for the authority is based on three samples of 300 transects, each sample taken over a four-month period. Cleanliness is graded from A (none present) to D (heavily affected). NI 195 uses the percentage of sites falling below a grade B, because this is the way that the public appear to perceive cleanliness. They react to sites which they

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[28] Audit Commission (July 2009) *Is there something I should know? Making the most of your information to improve services.* p. 36.

regard as unacceptable – and which they may well complain about – rather than when conditions are acceptable.[29]

8.19 We chose this indicator because Harrow's performance for cleanliness is in the top quartile for this indicator. However resident perception does not always appear to reflect this,[30] possibly because resident perception could be a lagging indicator or residents may not be able to compare what they see in Harrow with the level of cleanliness elsewhere.

8.20 In discussing this indicator with officers, we were advised that this is an important indicator for the service, enabling both benchmarking and quality assurance. We allude to this in the next section, which looks at the transformation project for the public realm service.

8.21 We believe that there are opportunities for services to bring together both formal measures with measures of perception. This surely brings the fullest and richest picture of performance. For example, could NI 195 be reported graphically? Could NI 195 be married with information from Access Harrow (such as complaints) on local environmental quality? We do not wish to be prescriptive about what individual services should do, but clearly using performance information and data creatively is the start of the process.

Service transformation

8.22 As part of this review we decided to consider two areas that are undergoing service transformation to explore how performance management is being considered as part of the process. These were the libraries transformation and the public realm services (PRS) transformation.

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[29] Defra, *Cleanliness National Indicator (manual).* Available at: http://cleanliness-indicator.defra.gov.uk/manual.aspx

[30] For example, in the 2009/10 Interim Place Survey, 'clean streets' were the second most important thing in making somewhere a good place to live, and fourth when asked what was most in need of improvement.

Case study: Libraries transformation

The scope of the libraries transformation project is:

- To modernise the library service through the introduction of RFID self service technology
- To restructure the libraries staffing in line with other London Boroughs
- To equip library staff with the latest library customer service technology and support new ways of delivering library services in a customer orientated "culture"
- To improve the online experience of library users – this includes the development of an online customer portal as well as the introduction of chip and pin, thereby enabling users to pay fines online.
- To improve operational processes
- To improve stock management through process and technology change

Libraries service performance data

Background

In terms of the now abolished National Indicator Set, the Council was required to report on NI 9, the percentage of the adult population in a local area who say they have used a public library service at least once in the last 12 months. This indicator was felt to be of limited benefit and was difficult to compare with elsewhere.

The Council also uses CIPFA's Public Library Users Survey (PLUS) of children's and adults' library use. This takes the form of an annual return. It offers a plethora of information but is two years out of date by the time it is published. In the increasingly changing world of local government this severely limits its usefulness; however it does enable national comparison. With regard to qualitative information, an annual mystery shopping exercise is undertaken across West London. It covers speed, politeness and accuracy.

Service performance data

There are three key sources of data – the Library Management System (LMS), the RFID reporting system, and people counters.

The measures include number of visits (weekly), number of issues (weekly), issues by hour (monthly), cost per visit (6 monthly), cost per issue (6 monthly), income per Library (including breakdown – fines) (monthly) and online usage. It also includes RFID Self Service Usage (weekly) – the initial aim for was for 70% usage; this has been exceeded, reaching an average of 95% across all libraries with some reaching 100%. This was achieved through initial intensive staff support.

In the longer term there are plans to compare *issues by hour* with *visits by hour* as well as the *cost per visit* and *cost per issue* by library.

In the future, the service will be exploring how Experian data and data from the Library Management System (LMS) can be used to encourage greater Library usage among the local community. Usage information could also be overlaid with library location. Other targets for libraries will include income generation and reducing energy usage.

Performance reporting

At library level and directorate level

Performance data collected will enable a regular picture of performance to be developed library by library. In keeping with customer service excellence, performance information about each library could be displayed locally.

The library-level data has been helpful for library staff as they had no previous experience of this and it has acted as a motivator. It will enable under-performing libraries to be noticed and early action taken to make improvements and learn from other libraries. It will also help support the proper targeting of marketing and events, which will be especially important in the context of diminishing resources.

At corporate level

With regard to reporting to Improvement Boards, there is an opportunity to make better use of information going forward, making the service an active rather than passive user of performance information. Information to be reported could include PLUS survey feedback, quarterly data on visits/issues/income and feedback from mystery shopping.

Rather than focus on micro-managing performance at the individual library, the Improvement Board should focus on a more strategic focus and information supporting that discussion – e.g. library location, access, hours. It would also be useful in the budget setting process to understand what drives visits and loans.

With regard to benchmarking, the service should consider making library data public in an open format. This would help by encouraging other councils to release data and leading the way in data sharing.

Case study: Public realm services transformation

The scope of the public realm services (PRS) transformation project is:

- To modernise the streets and grounds maintenance service through the introduction of mobile working technology and new back office systems.
- To quantify and spatially map the 'Harrow estate'.
- To restructure Public Realm Services (streets, grounds and waste) staffing to allow greater focus on quality assurance and performance management.
- To provide greater information and transparency to customers via all contact channels (web, phone, face to face, customer portal).
- To continue the PRS journey to move from a largely reactive to a predominantly proactive service.

Service performance data

Ensuring the service had operational performance data was a key objective of the project. The following has been undertaken:

- The complete Harrow 'estate' has been measured e.g. the length of every pavement and grass verge, number and location of park bins, and even long jump pits! This was achieved by a fly-over of the borough, supplemented by visits to areas covered by trees. To keep the spatial map up to date crews on the ground will be charged with notifying changes, also other teams such as planning could notify changes.
- Identification of Standard Minute Values (SMVs) to define how long a single job

should take e.g. how long it should take to cut 1m of grass verge.

- Single jobs (and therefore SMVs) have been aggregated up to create schedules. The service, therefore, knows how long each schedule should take.
- The user front end has simple front end showing progress of schedules and work complete.
- In addition, mobile devices have GPS functionality so that crews can be located at any given time.

Using performance data

Operational performance management

Team performance can now be managed against the SMVs. This can help identify local trends, skills gaps and poor performance. The GPS mobile devices can allow for quicker deployment of resources for reactive job (e.g. if a crew are in a certain geographical area doing scheduled work, they can be deployed to a reactive job in the vicinity such as a large fly tip). It will also enable customer enquiries to be dealt with responsively, in that the business unit is now able to identify where teams are and their progress against their schedule.

The service is also directly linked to Access Harrow (as per waste management) meaning that call handlers are equipped to inform residents of schedules.

There are also plans to improve the updating of the website; a team member within the business support unit is now specifically tasked to do this. The unit will also support the sharing of data, both within the authority and with stakeholders such as user groups and Neighbourhood Champions.

Strategic performance management

In the longer term, the information available will help to inform service planning. For example decisions such as changes to street cleansing frequency can be accurately assessed to understand impact on resources.

NI 195

As part of the National Indicator Set, street cleanliness was reported against NI 195

Improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly posting). The service has retained the indicator; going forward information from the indicator can be compared against own quality assurance regime where 5-10% of work is assessed. The indicator provides useful intelligence for the service; two years ago it showed a problem with the level of detritus in residential streets which was then addressed.

Further development

The project is at an early stage; Harrow's own standard minute values will emerge over a six month period or so as team complete schedules of work and actual data is collected on time taken to complete schedules. The service needs this to be embedded in order to compare actuals and the SMVs before these can be used to inform scheduling. Also there may be a seasonal impact, or severe weather impact which can then be factored into the scheduling.

The major change is that the service can now be measured and performance tracked. For example this means that there are opportunities for:

- Target marketing – a recycling campaign has been delivered to target worst areas for recycling.
- Improved scheduling – for example residential streets currently have the same cleaning schedule but further intelligence will mean that schedules could be varied to better reflect local circumstances.

8.23 We have been impressed with the work undertaken through these projects. While the library service was already data-rich, it is encouraging to see the way in which the information can be put to greater use, thereby giving managers and Members a strengthened insight into the service. The public realm service project is at an earlier stage, but the changes that have been made will enable the service to adopt a more scientific approach to planning its work, both at an operational and strategic level.

Summary – technology and data presentation

We are supportive of the development of the Local Information System which will support Members, officers and residents in making better use of data. This approach was supported by the residents' focus group, viewing online presentation of data as cost effective and proportionate

There is a richness of customer relationship management *information* available in Access Harrow; steps are being taken to include in improvement board process but there is room for development in terms of how this is analysed and exploited.

We have been impressed by the service transformation projects we have considered as part of this review, and we hope that future projects will also consider how services can be made more data-rich and how that information can then better inform decision-making.

Recommendations – technology and data presentation

For Cabinet

O) We recommend that the Harrow Local Information System (LIS) be linked into other sources – for example the London datastore[31] in order to increase the profile of Harrow's information.

P) In keeping with the new *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency,*[32] we recommend that the Council adopt the following three key principles when publishing data:

- responding to public demand;
- releasing data in open formats available for re-use;
- releasing data in a timely way.

Q) We recommend that there needs to be greater ownership of the role that good information plays in ensuring good customer service. For example, that a standard approach be set up to allow Access Harrow to report areas where the

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[31] http://data.london.gov.uk/

[32] CLG (September 2011), *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency*. Available at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/transparencycode

website is in need of updating.

R) We recommend that Members and officers also need to be more demanding consumers of data, asking, and if necessary insisting, that data is presented in a way that gives them as complete a picture as possible, making interpretation as straightforward as possible. Information in reports and at Improvement Boards should be relevant, of high quality and presented well.

S) We recommend that all service transformation projects consider how services can become more data-rich and how this intelligence can be used to improve services and performance reporting.

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

T) We recommend that the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee review the Corporate Finance scorecard with the Director of Finance. This was a recommendation for the review group in our phase 1 report but given the different emphasis of the phase 2 project plan we did not undertake this exercise.

U) We recommend that the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee receive a report at its February 2012 meeting on customer contact information in order to explore how this information might help to inform scrutiny activity.