APPENDIX 1

Measuring up: Harrow Council's Use of Performance Information

Draft response to final Scrutiny review report

Overall principles recommended for adoption by Cabinet

- **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 data 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.

Response

The abolition of the National Indicator Set has not resulted in the scale of reduction in central government requirements for data that was originally anticipated. However, the opportunity has been taken to revise performance measures across the Council to focus more on local priorities and this objective will continue. The recommended principles are accepted and officers will work with Executive and Scrutiny members to put them into effect in the ongoing development of the Council's performance framework and the implementation of the recommendations below. Release of more data is of course subject to any legal considerations.

Specific recommendations

Recommendation	Response
BEST PRACTICE **For Cabinet:** A) We recommend that steps be taken to improve the timeliness of the performance reporting processes. By this we mean:	
i. 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.	Recommendation accepted in principle. There are a wide range of contributions to the management information which is presented to Improvement Boards, some of which take longer to produce than others. For Quarter 1 2011/12, the pace was forced to allow earlier meetings but some information was partial, for instance sickness absence data was missing and financial data was for two months of the quarter. The possibilities for enabling earlier meetings will be assessed in conjunction with recommendation R). This will include the potential for increased use of IT, although there could be a cost and some of the causes of delay would not be addressed by IT: for example, complex indicators that require additional processing or validation, those that rely on external sources such as partners. The aim will be a balance between speed and accuracy.
ii. 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.	Performance and Scrutiny staff will discuss and provide options for consideration by Executive and Scrutiny members by end January 2012.
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	The Strategic Performance Report is published on the web in its own right as well as in the Cabinet agenda and, over the last couple of years, the aim has been to make the Report

Recommendation	Response
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/K.	more accessible to a general readership. However, a review will be carried out of how performance information is published, taking into account the issues raised by the focus groups and referred to under K) below. This will feed into quarter 1 reporting for 2012/13.
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.	Options for enabling this input will be examined in conjunction with Executive and Scrutiny members as per Recommendation A ii.
D) We recommend that the Council's Corporate Leadership Group[1] be renamed and charged with a stronger remit for addressing cross-departmental operational issues.	This recommendation will be addressed in the response to the proposals for the Senior Management Restructure, reported at December Cabinet.
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.	Agreed in principle and a proposal will be developed by performance and finance staff and discussed with Scrutiny lead members by end January 2012.
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	*[The recommendations for Overview and Scrutiny were accepted by the Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2011. The scrutiny team will work with the Scrutiny Leadership Group to implement the recommendations. Progress against implementation will be monitored by the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee when it seeks an update report on all recommendations.]*

[1] 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.

Recommendation	Response
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.	Agreed. An initial meeting has been held between performance and communications staff and has identified a number of possibilities. Further discussions are required with Access Harrow management to ensure alignment of customer contact strategies. A developed proposal will be made to Scrutiny leads by March 2012.
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.	Approach agreed and opportunities will be explored in conjunction with Recommendation I) above.
K) We recommend that the following general principles, arising from the focus group, should be reflected in the Council's	Agreed in principle and, in association with B) above and L), M) and N) below, the options in terms of content and method

Recommendation	Response
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	of publication will be explored to the set timetables and progress will be reported back to Scrutiny leads by January 2012.

Recommendation	Response
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.	Agreed in principle and to be taken forward with Directorates, initially through the High Performing Harrow group, and progress to be reviewed by Improvement Boards as from Q1 2012/13.
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.	To be considered in conjunction with K) and related issues, above.
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.	Agreed and will be taken forward as part of the development of the Local Information System strategy. Ward profiles will be developed by June 2012.
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[2] in order to increase the profile of Harrow's information.	Agreed - Officers are in contact with London Datastore to take this forward.

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

Recommendation	Response
P) In keeping with the new *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency,*[3] we recommend that the Council adopt the following three key principles when publishing data:	Recommended that Cabinet adopt the principles listed, subject to the limitations of resources. The full implications of the Code of Recommended Practice are still being assessed. Meanwhile current practice aligns to these principles as below:
• responding to public demand;	The Council's Publication Scheme is maintained to provide access to classes of information. Individual information requests are handled using dedicated software, which has the potential to add the results to the website, effectively expanding on the Publication Scheme. This facility is under development.
• releasing data in open formats available for re-use;	Data published under transparency expectations is now provided as CSV[4] files as well as PDF[5]. As more data is made available this convention will be maintained.
• releasing data in a timely way.	The Council aims always to comply with Freedom of Information timescales. With other data, the Council will aim to release it as soon as practical and appropriate.
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.	We will investigate with colleagues in Access Harrow and update leads on progress by January 2012.
R) We recommend that Members and officers also need to be	Supported. Presentation, especially for Improvement Boards,

[3] CLG (September 2011), *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency*. Available at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/transparencycode
[4] Comma Separated Variable or Comma Separated Value – a file format that is not dependent on particular software to read it, and such that the data can be imported into spreadsheet or database programs for analysis
[5] Portable Document Format – a type of file that is not machine-dependant and for which free readers are readily available, to view or print the contents. Does not lend itself easily, however, to further analysis of data contained in the file.

Recommendation	Response
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.	has been improved over a period of time. An overhaul of documentation for Improvement Boards was carried out at quarter 1, 2010/11 and a further review will be conducted for quarter 1, 2012/13, i.e. with the benefit of two years' experience.
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.	Linked to recommendation L). We will explore how the Business Case process could incorporate this objective. And report back to Scrutiny leads by January 2012.
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 the different emphasis of the phase 2 project plan we did not undertake this exercise.	*[See comments under Best Practice above]*
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.	