

Service Inspection Report

March 2006



# **Environment - Public Realm Services**

**London Borough of Harrow**

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## Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*.

Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater co-ordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's web site at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

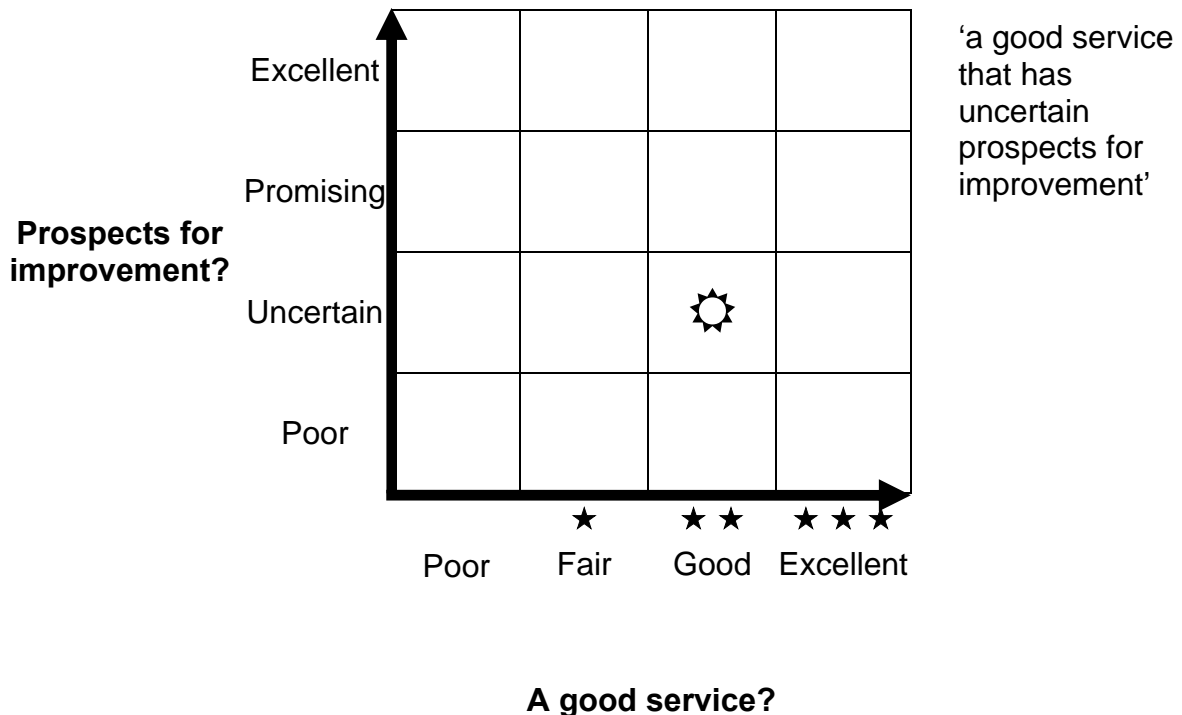
## Summary

- 1** London Borough of Harrow is an outer London borough situated in the North West of the city. The borough has 16 town centres with the largest being Harrow town centre. It is the twelfth largest London borough and has a population of over 206,800 of which 41 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. Harrow has below the national average level of recorded deprivation, as measured by the government's Index of Multiple Deprivation - the borough is ranked 232nd out of 354 authorities, with one being the most deprived. Just two of Harrow's 137 super output areas (SOAs) are in England's most deprived 20 per cent.
- 2** There is no party with overall political control but the Labour group leads a minority administration with 30 seats. The Conservative group has 28 seats, Liberal Democrat 3 seats and Independent councillors 2 seats. The Council operates with a leader and cabinet. There is an overview and scrutiny committee and five sub-committees.
- 3** The council employs approximately 5,000 staff across all services.
- 4** Area Services is the part of Urban Living Directorate which deals with public realm maintenance and infrastructure services, waste management, community safety, traffic and engineering.

## Scoring the service

- 5 We have assessed London Borough of Harrow as providing a ‘good’, two-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Table 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>:**



Source: Audit Commission

- 6 The service is a good, two-star service due to the following reasons.
- Service users are actively engaged in developing priorities for improvement for public realm and waste management services.
  - Clear arrangements exist for engaging and consulting service users.
  - Staff demonstrate a strong focus on customer service.
  - The service is accessible and responsive with highly visible staff providing public reassurance for local people who may have concerns about crime.

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- Recycling performance is high at 27 per cent currently and well above minimum standards, and a wide range of materials are collected including kitchen and organic waste.
- The move to area working has integrated public realm and enviro-crime services, and graffiti and flytipping is dealt with effectively.
- Public satisfaction with the standard of cleanliness of the streets and with refuse collection has significantly improved.
- Service standards are clear and comprehensive and service users have been involved in their development.
- Education programmes have delivered a sense of social responsibility and encouraged implementation of sustainable improvements to local areas.
- The service engages effectively with residents and local partners to develop solutions to complex local issues.

7 However:

- waste minimisation, and in particular reuse schemes, do not feature strongly in the Council's service;
- the service is focussed on education and awareness raising to improve understanding and participation rates but these activities are not yet supported by a proportionate and integrated approach to enforcement;
- access to recycling services is limited for 20 per cent of the population, mainly households living in flats and on estates;
- the approach to securing equality of access is not yet systematic and informed by a comprehensive assessment of needs; and
- improvements in value for money within the service have been fairly small scale to date and the Council cannot clearly demonstrate that it has secured value for money from its considerable investment in these services.

8 The service has uncertain prospects for improvement due to:

- the lack of a track record in terms of delivering value for money;
- the need to strengthen and embed the service's performance management systems;
- the absence of an up-to-date workforce development strategy and associated plan;
- the ongoing staff capacity issues;
- the lack of outcomes from key capacity building projects and initiatives; and
- the absence of detailed project plans for key service projects and ineffective planning.

9 However, we also found some strengths:

- a good track record in many of the performance indicators during this period of investment;

## 8 Environment - Public Realm Services | Scoring the service

- the increase in resident satisfaction;
- a significant and ongoing programme of investment;
- the improvements being made to the service planning process; and
- the innovative enforcement capacity building work undertaken in conjunction with the Police.

## Recommendations

- 10 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the council. In addition we identify the approximate costs<sup>1</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the council should do the following.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Establish a more robust approach to value for money and efficiency improvements.*

- *Develop clear and robust efficiency targets based upon detailed financial and performance information to identify areas where savings might be made.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- The establishment of robust and achievable efficiency targets will ensure that future budget provision is based upon an accurate understanding of the future resource requirements necessary to support service commitments and improvement initiatives.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2006.

### **Recommendation**

*R2 Identify and address barriers to access.*

- *Identify areas of low or non-participation with recycling schemes and address any barriers hindering participation.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- The potential to improve recycling rates, address equality issues and reduce the potential financial liabilities facing the Council in terms of the costs associated with sending waste to landfill.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2006.

<sup>1</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 percent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

***Recommendation***

*R3 Strengthen the service's performance management arrangements:*

- *clarify the data management flows;*
- *ensure compliance with these arrangements;*
- *ensure that the performance management system is readily available to staff; and*
- *ensure reports are accessible and produced in a timely and efficient fashion.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- The establishment of a robustness performance management system that will provide staff with accurate data which managers confident of when making decisions.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2006.

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 11 The London Borough of Harrow is an outer London borough situated in the North West of the city 12 miles from central London. The borough has 16 town centres with the largest being Harrow town centre. Harrow is the 12th largest London borough and has a population of over 206,800 of which 41 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. The Asian population is particularly well established in the south of Harrow and the majority are of Indian origin, making up 22 per cent of the overall population.
- 12 Harrow has below the national average level of recorded deprivation, as measured by the government's Index of Multiple Deprivation - the borough is ranked 232nd out of 354 authorities, with one being the most deprived. Just two of Harrow's 137 super output areas (SOAs) are in England's most deprived 20 per cent.
- 13 The local economy has a relatively high dependence on small business activity and there are approximately 5,000 businesses within the borough. In March 2005, unemployment stood at 2.3 per cent compared with the national average of 3.3 per cent. The level of recorded crime in Harrow is low. Street crime is only half the rate of the rest of London and for auto crime and criminal damage it is only two-thirds of the London rate.
- 14 Harrow's band D council tax for 2005/06 was £1,296, which was an increase of 1.6 per cent on the previous year.

### The council

- 15 There is no party with overall political control in Harrow, but the Labour group leads a minority administration with 30 seats. The Conservative group has 28 seats, Liberal Democrat 3 seats and Independent councillors 2 seats. The Council operates with a leader and cabinet. There is an overview and scrutiny committee and five sub-committees.
- 16 The Council's net revenue budget for 2005/06 is £253.5 million, an increase of 4.5 per cent on 2004/05. The capital programme for 2005/06 is £61 million.
- 17 The Council's overall Comprehensive Performance (CPA) rating for 2005 is two stars. In 2003 and 2004 it was 'Fair'. The environment service block score is 2 out of 4, which has remained unchanged since 2002.

## The council's Public Realm service

- 18 To support changes introduced by the New Harrow Project the Council has restructured the organisation into four directorates: Business Development, Corporate, People First and Urban Living. Within Urban Living there is a group of services which come under Area Services and these are:
- public realm services and waste management;
  - public realm infrastructure;
  - community safety; and
  - support services and area management.
- 19 Harrow Council is a waste collection authority and the West London Waste Authority, (WLWA) has statutory responsibility for waste disposal for Harrow and five other local authorities. These are Brent, Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Richmond.
- 20 The scope of this inspection covers the waste management functions including refuse collection, recycling, street cleansing, the civic amenity site, maintenance of land on or abutting the highway, and associated education and enforcement as well as wider aspects of the street scene including highways maintenance and street furniture. The inspection also covered the work of the service in relation to community safety, but excluded traffic management, road safety, parking enforcement and other enforcement functions.
- 21 Public realm services, with the exception of waste management, are organised and delivered on an area basis covering the West, East and Central parts of the borough. The service is responsible for the Civic Amenity site at Forward Drive in Harrow.
- 22 The work is delivered mostly in house with the main exceptions being the provision and maintenance of the vehicle fleet and highways maintenance and improvements which are contracted out. The gross revenue budget for area services in 2005/06 is £64.6 million, including £13.8 million for waste management, £14 million for public realm services and £22 million for public realm infrastructure. The public realm capital programme for 2005/06 is £15.7 million. The council directly employs 411 staff in public realm services and 102 in public realm infrastructure services.

## Inspection context

- 23 In 2001, the Audit Commission carried out an inspection of refuse collection and recycling services provided by Harrow and a further inspection of waste management was undertaken in September 2004. Both inspections judged the services to be 'fair' but with 'uncertain prospects for improvement'. This latest inspection was undertaken using the revised service inspection methodology introduced in late 2005. The revised methodology places greater emphasis on user focus, diversity and value for money.

- 24 Inspectors returned to Harrow in January 2006 to carry out an inspection of public realm services including waste management services and wider aspects of the street scene. The inspection assessed the Council's progress in meeting previous recommendations and the Council's own aims for public realm area working under the New Harrow Project.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 25** Harrow is a diverse area with below average levels of deprivation but with some small pockets of relative deprivation. Black and minority ethnic communities make up 41 per cent of the population and 15 per cent of all households are headed up by pensioners. Almost a quarter of the population is under 18 years of age. Sustaining strong community cohesion is therefore one of the key challenges facing the Council and is a key priority.
- 26** Approximately 90 per cent of the total housing stock of 85,000 properties is owner occupied and just 7.1 per cent is council owned. However, a high proportion, 20 per cent, is flats which present particular a challenge for recycling services. The service is responsible for maintaining 567 hectares of parks, open spaces and countryside. The waste management service collects approximately 100,000 tonnes of waste every year (14,000 tonnes is recycled and 13,000 tonnes composted). It collects trade waste and recyclables from around 1,500 of the 5,000 businesses in the borough.
- 27** Harrow is an important transport hub with road, rail, bus and underground links, providing access to all parts of the country and across London. Harrow and Wealdstone station serves the West Coast Main line and connects to Euston. There are ten underground stations within the borough and it is surrounded by high capacity trunk roads. Harrow Town Centre is one of London's ten largest retail centres and is a busy commercial centre. The network of rail/transport interchanges are a focus for anti-social behaviour as well as presenting challenges for waste management and street cleansing services.
- 28** The Council has a clear understanding of the local and regional context in which it is operating and wider challenges and opportunities. Working with the PCT and the Police it has brought together a broad range of key information about Harrow, its people and their needs. This was published in July 2004 in the Harrow Vitality Profiles, which shows geographical variations down to super output area in an accessible format. This enables the Council, with its partners in the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP), to develop policy, target resources in areas of greatest need, and help it to achieve its ambition of joined up working.
- 29** In November 2002, the Council launched the New Harrow Project, as a vehicle for delivering whole-scale organisational improvement and its vision. Its objectives are:
- building the organisation's capacity;
  - achievement of financial stability;
  - aid the planning and delivery of services;
  - improving performance management;
  - the area assessment and delivery of services; and
  - new ICT strategy and partnership arrangements.

- 30 The Council has developed area-based services to address public concerns about the standard of cleanliness of the streets and the quality of the local environment. 'Single pass working' has been introduced into public realm maintenance services. This involves crews equipped to deal with a wide range of street scene issues including street cleaning, graffiti and fly tip removal, and grounds maintenance, dealing with these issues in a single sweep as they move across each area. The roll out of area working across all urban areas was completed in October 2005.
- 31 Area working aims to deliver the same standard of service for cleanliness and grounds maintenance across the entire public realm, including Council housing estates and school grounds. It also provides a vehicle for integrating the work on enviro-crimes, anti-social behaviour and waste management enforcement.
- 32 In May 2004, the local strategic partnership (Harrow Strategic Partnership) published its first community strategy. This includes a number of focus areas each with a mission statement and set of objectives. These are:
- empowering local communities;
  - children and young people;
  - greener Harrow;
  - healthy Harrow;
  - learning for all;
  - making ICT work for Harrow;
  - regenerating Harrow; and
  - safer Harrow.
- 33 The community strategy defines the Greener Harrow Mission as:
- 'To create a cleaner, greener, sustainable and more attractive Harrow in which to live, work and visit.'*
- 34 This is supported by a number of environmental objectives:
- making open spaces more attractive and protecting biodiversity;
  - developing a clean, well maintained and attractive street scene;
  - reducing, reusing and recycling waste; and
  - encourage more sustainable development in Harrow.
- 35 The Council's corporate plan which was adopted in April 2005 sets out the Council's vision and five corporate priorities:
- 'A borough that is safe, clean, healthy and prosperous, with equal life opportunities for all - a friendly and vibrant place to be'.*
- Corporate priorities:
- strengthening Harrow's communities;
  - putting Harrow on the map;

- valuing Harrow's customers;
  - impact through Harrow's partnerships; and
  - Harrow – a true learning community.
- 36 These corporate priorities are in turn reflected in the directorate and service plans for each of the areas under Area Services, and service aims are defined for each of these. For example, under valuing Harrow's customers there is an aim to 'ensure the environment around Council housing is maintained to the same standards as in the public realm'.
- 37 The Council does not have its own waste management strategy but is part of a joint West London wide strategy along with five other London boroughs. A draft of the strategy is currently out to consultation and the final version is scheduled for approval in March 2006. Harrow's statutory targets for the combined level of recycling and composting were 16 per cent by 2003/04 and 25.2 per cent by 2005/06.
- 38 In March 2003, the council entered into a three-year Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) with the Government. This included a number of local and national objectives under which the council would receive additional funding in return for improved performance against agreed targets by March 2006. These included:
- improvements to the street scene in South Harrow;
  - 85 per cent of abandoned vehicles to be removed with eight days;
  - 30 per cent of streets to be rated at a high level of cleanliness under BVPI90;
  - the percentage of household and commercial waste recycled/composted at the civic amenity site to exceed 24.2 per cent; and
  - improving the cost effectiveness of the council.

### **Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?**

#### **Access, customer care and user and/or community focus**

- 39 The New Harrow Project and implementation of area working into public realm and waste management services has provided a strong focus on meeting the needs and expectations of the community and users. The service plays a key role in delivering the Council's ambition for a cleaner, greener, sustainable and more attractive borough, and the service places user needs at the heart of design and delivery of the service. Staff also demonstrate a clear user focus in their work and treat people with dignity and respect.

- 40 The priorities for the service reflect the views of the community expressed through mechanisms such as the Council's open budget consultation process for 2006/07, best value consultation surveys and local surveys of residents. These include delivering significant improvement in the quality of the local environment, cleaner streets and improvements to roads and pavements. Consultation with residents has shown that the priorities for service improvement are largely consistent across different ethnic minority groups.
- 41 The Council and its key partners collect, share and use data to ensure they have a good understanding of the communities they serve and to inform service delivery. 'Vitality Profiles', compiled from census, health statistics and crime data give an in-depth portrait of each area, and these are used to determine service priorities. Community profiles, multiple deprivation indicators of need and sample Local Environment Quality Surveys (LEQS) are used to determine where enhanced public realm maintenance services are needed most.
- 42 Residents, councillors, and the police are actively engaged in improving the quality of the local environment. During launches of area working public meetings were held in schools and other community venues to determine local people's concerns and priorities for improvement and area newsletters were used to keep the public informed of progress.
- 43 Consultation with local residents also informs the design of improvements to the public realm. The Maryatt Avenue Home Zone area in Rayners Lane was subject to extensive consultation with residents which informed the final layout of traffic calming measures and environmental improvements. To support further improvements to the public realm the Council is developing a Streetscene Design Guide. The project plan for production of the guide includes consultation with residents to help shape the framework that will guide future developments in local areas.
- 44 The involvement of local people has led to sustainable improvements to the boroughs public realm including open spaces. In partnership with local residents, Warden Housing Association, local schools and Roxbourne safer neighbourhood team, the Newton Farm Ecology Park has been cleaned up, fences repaired and the pond cleared. A friends group has subsequently been set up to help oversee future developments.
- 45 As well as helping to deliver improvements to their locality, children and young people are also encouraged to become active citizens and to behave responsibly. This is achieved through educational activities, principally in schools. For example, in Northolt Road, a school gum project involved work with schools giving demonstrations of the cleaning equipment for removal of chewing gum. This has helped to raise awareness of the consequences of anti-social behaviour and discourage irresponsible behaviour. Similar demonstrations have been held with graffiti removal equipment and recycling vehicles in schools and these have been followed up with schools to evaluate their impact.
- 46 Having completed the roll out of area working, which provided the initial drive for work with schools, the service is now formalising its education programme to ensure it is more targeted and co-ordinated and effectively evaluated.

### **Accessible, responsive, based on need**

- 47 The service is improving access for users but there is scope for further improvement. Local people have good access to the public realm maintenance service. The customer care centre is open from 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday for callers and visitors and operational hours for the public realm service are 6am to 10pm, 364 days a year providing a visible presence in local areas. Residents are able to contact the service by phone, text, fax, email or letter to ask for information and advice, make complaints or report problems.
- 48 Area working staff wear high visibility jackets with Harrow Council logos and are readily accessible to local residents. There is a high degree of commitment to doing a good job which is encouraged through teams having responsibility for particular areas of the borough. The public feel reassured by the visible presence of council staff on the streets and in the parks and have noted the improvements made to the standards of cleanliness and the local environment. Staff are also encouraged to answer any queries that local residents have. If they receive questions they cannot answer they have a postcard detailing contact numbers for other Council services that they routinely hand out.
- 49 The service is not currently meeting all its customer response targets for the third quarter of 2005/06. For example, it just missed its target (by 0.5 per cent) of resolving 70 per cent of calls on first contact; it answered 73.8 per cent of calls within 15 seconds compared to a target of 80 per cent and responded to 93 per cent of letters/emails/faxes within ten working days against a target of 100 per cent. A small scale mystery shopping exercise undertaken by the Council in December 2005 also identified instances of telephone callers having to wait for an extended period of time (up to 17 minutes) before their call was answered.
- 50 Accessibility to recycling facilities is an area which has improved but some sections of the community are less well served. The Council's waste, reuse and recycling centre is open seven days a week and residents are happy with the support provided by recycling staff at the centre. A refurbishment and renewal programme for bring sites has recently been completed with less popular bring sites removed and the brown bin scheme for compostable waste has been rolled out to 65,000 of the 85,000 households. However, currently the majority of flats in the borough do not have access to kerb-side or nearby collection of recyclables. The roll out of recycling for flats is a key priority for the service in 2006/07.
- 51 The Council has considered its fees and charging policy and has made amendments in the light of its findings to address equality issues. Charges for collection of individual bulky items are being lowered to encourage greater use of the service. Current charges act as a disincentive to users and are unpopular with many residents. Recyclable items will still be collected at a discount to encourage recycling. The service is also formalising its concessions policy so that people in receipt of pension credit, income support, or those who would qualify for an assisted collection, qualify for a price reduction of 50 per cent. At present concessions are granted by call centre staff which is unsatisfactory in terms of equality of access to services.

## **Service standards**

- 52 There are clear and comprehensive service standards for public realm and waste management services. These were established as part of the South Harrow area working pilot in 2002 and staff are familiar with them. Residents have had the opportunity to give their views on the standards at subsequent area launches and events across the borough and the Council intends to review the standards again in summer 2006 when the service anticipates all areas will be achieving a consistent level of service. Service standards have been publicised in a variety of ways, including in area newsletters, in Harrow People, on the website and on posters around the borough, and within Council buildings.
- 53 Managers and front-line staff are familiar with and committed to the service standards. They are set out in a collective agreement with waste management staff and performance against standards is monitored. Guidance manuals for staff are being developed which have photographs to clearly demonstrate the standards expected of them.
- 54 There are also specified service standards with other Council services provided with grounds maintenance and other area services. These include service level agreements with schools and housing management setting out the standards of service they can expect.

## **Arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating users and non-users**

- 55 Information about public realm maintenance services is made widely available and residents generally know how to get hold of the service. There are named contacts for each local area and email addresses for reporting problems in each strategic area. Service information booklets are regularly delivered to homes, additional information is provided via bin hangers and contamination cards, and there are regular features and advertisements in Harrow People magazine and the local paper. The web site includes service standards, information about recycling and refuse collections (with an easy-to-use street calendar showing collection days), and service requests can be submitted on-line.
- 56 The Council's 'Slash Trash' education campaign to encourage waste minimisation and recycling provides a sound vehicle for raising awareness. The campaign was launched in August 2005 with advertising in public places around Harrow and a specific Slash Trash area posted on the Council's website. A telephone survey of 1,000 residents in December 2005 found that 84.3 per cent of respondents said that they recycled. The research also revealed that messages about recycling, how to recycle and collection dates are reaching residents. Proposals for future waste minimisation and educational initiatives are included in a publicity plan for 2006 which is supported by £60,000 of funding.

- 57 The Council is making use of innovative methods to disseminate messages about its cleaner, greener and safer priority and promotion of responsible behaviour. In conjunction with the police, it has a network of ten community plasma screens, launched in December 2005, which are based throughout the borough in schools and public areas, funded by the crime and disorder reduction partnership. The screens are used to communicate messages about waste minimisation, recycling and anti-social behaviour.
- 58 Arrangements for engaging and communicating with non-users could be developed further. For example, during the roll out of area working, the extensive consultation with local residents focused principally on the well established groups, such as residents associations. Greater use could be made of information held by other council services about local minority or interest groups, in the community and voluntary sector, to ensure that consultation is fully reflective of all local needs.
- 59 The service uses a variety of methods to consult and engage local people but these have not always been sufficiently robust or representative to inform management decisions. Methods include postal surveys, questionnaires in newsletters delivered to all households in an area and handed out during events and shows and a recent very limited mystery shopper survey. The service is taking appropriate steps to address this by, for example, using 'booster' questionnaires in wards with a greater proportion of black and minority ethnic residents to access a greater number of respondents from such groups who tend to be under-represented in self-selecting surveys.
- 60 Engagement with businesses is an area requiring greater attention. The service has involved businesses in the clearance of accumulated rubbish in service roads and provision of gates to prevent further problems. Environmental health staff undertake duty of care assessments of businesses arrangements for the storage and disposal of waste, during their routine food and health and safety inspections. However, the service has not tracked businesses experience of, and satisfaction with, the service they receive, and used this to inform improvements. A tidy business standard scheme also fell into abeyance due to staff capacity issues. A recent consultation exercise with businesses on recycling was completed in December 2005, but the results were not available at the time of the inspection.

### **Diversity and equalities**

- 61 The service has made specific provision for particular interest groups but needs a more systematic approach to ensure all users and potential users have fair and equal access. For example, provision has been made for additional refuse collections from a Temple following large community celebrations. However, the service does not having a comprehensive assessment of needs for example of other faith groups, and maybe missing an opportunity to provide more culturally sensitive service developments.

- 62 The service makes some provision for people who do not have English as a first language, but does not have a comprehensive approach. A number of staff have community language skills which the service makes use and the main service literature includes information about the availability of translation services in 11 languages. The Council has also targeted Eastern European tenants in the Edgware area who didn't understand the refuse collection cycle. Meetings were held with tenants to explain their responsibilities with pictures and symbols used to overcome language barriers. However, there has been no overall assessment of the needs of people with English as a second language, or evaluation of interpretation and translation provision.
- 63 The service performs well in most equality indicators relating to the public realm. There is comparatively good performance on facilities for people with disabilities. Accessibility of footpaths and crossings is in the best quartile for similar authorities. The service also supports vulnerable groups via an assisted refuse and recyclables collections scheme.
- 64 Monitoring of service users is often limited to the number participating and does not extend to their equalities profile. The Council has therefore missed an opportunity to assess how successful it has been in increasing participation in recycling among different groups, and using this information to inform target setting and education programmes. It could also use this information to identify any barriers that exists for particular groups in accessing services.
- 65 The service actively solicits and monitors service complaints and has changed service delivery in the light of learning from complaints but sharing of learning is not always systematic. For example, following a complaint from a visually impaired customer the service now purchases bins with Braille panels to provide equality of access to recycling facilities. The service has not however identified existing service users who might benefit from such bins.
- 66 There are weaknesses in the handling of complaints. The service is not consistently capturing the equalities profile of its complainants to check whether all members of the community have equal access to the service. Of the sample of 226 complaints extracted from the Council's corporate complaints system covering the period from March 2003 to November 2005 relating to the Urban Living Directorate, only 16 have the ethnicity of the complainant recorded.

### **Service outcomes for users and the community**

- 67 The service's performance against relevant audited national indicators in 2004/05 as set out in the table below is fairly mixed. The Council's performance is compared to the CPA 2005 environment service assessment threshold<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 service assessment framework involves use of thresholds to compare performance. There are two pre-determined thresholds for each item, a lower threshold, below which minimum standards are not being met and above which minimum standards are met; and an upper threshold above which represents performance well above minimum standards. Thresholds were set based on 2003/04 data

However, these have to be balanced against the high levels of satisfaction identified by the May 2005 local surveys, resident feedback about improvement to the local environment, our own reality checks which found the streets maintained to a high level of cleanliness, and the continued improvement in recycling and composting rates.

**Table 2 Harrow Public Realm Performance Indicators 2004/05**

| <b>BVPI</b> | <b>Description</b>   | <b>2004/05</b> | <b>All England threshold</b>   |
|-------------|--|----------------|--|
| 82a & b     | Percentage of household waste recycled & composted                           | 19%            | Well above minimum standards (meeting local statutory target & 17 per cent Defra target)   |
| 84          | Number of Kilograms of household waste collected per head                    | 501kg          | Below minimum standards for collection authorities (exceeding 455 kg per head)   |
| 91a         | Percentage of residents served by kerbside recycling                         | 88%            | Meeting minimum standards (exceeding 80 per cent)  |
| 199a        | Local street and environmental cleanliness                                   | 19%            | Well above minimum standards (more than half of land classes surveyed with scores less than 20 per cent and none worse than 30 per cent) |
| 97a         | Condition of non-principal classified roads                                  | 17.49%         | Meeting minimum standards (two-year average is less than or equal to 25 per cent)  |
| 97b         | Condition of non-principal unclassified roads                                | 24.84%         | Meeting minimum standards (two-year average is less than or equal to 25 per cent)  |
| 165         | Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people       | 100%           | Well above minimum standards (exceeding 98 per cent of crossings with facilities)  |
| Police data | Progress against road accident casualty figures – killed & seriously injured | -26%           | Well above minimum standards (less than 58 per cent of baseline)   |

## Delivering what it promised to

- 68** The Council has delivered on its 2005/06 statutory recycling target achieving 27 per cent at the time of the inspection. This has principally been achieved through the roll-out of the brown bin scheme which was expanded to include kerbside collection of garden waste, kitchen waste and cardboard from households. This has supplemented the existing green box scheme for collection of cans, glass and paper. There are also free collections for paper and glass for businesses and the service is consulting on the feasibility of offering collections of cardboard or food waste. The collection of plastic bottles from households is being introduced during 2006 to further reduce the volume of residual waste sent to landfill.
- 69** The Council is also on track to deliver its LPSA targets to secure reward grant for further service improvements. It is currently exceeding its LPSA target for recycling trade and domestic waste at the civic amenity site. Its performance stands at 40 per cent compared to a target of 24.2 per cent. The service is also on target to meet all its other LPSA targets for street scene improvement in the South Harrow area. These include removal of abandoned vehicles within eight days, illegal advertising boards within four days and the proportion of streets rated as high for standards of cleanliness.
- 70** The service has an aim to review all current bring sites in 2005/06 to address complaints that they were not well maintained. This has been completed with the number of sites reduced to 26, following the roll out of kerbside collections and all bell bins have been replaced with 1,280 litre bottle bins. A number of new roadside facilities have also been provided and existing facilities refurbished.
- 71** The most visible improvement that the service has delivered on is the standard of cleanliness of the streets. In 2004/05, just 19 per cent of streets were below standard and there is a widespread view among residents, partners and business that this is an area where the Council has achieved what it promised to.
- 72** The Council works effectively with partners and the local community to develop solutions to complex local problems. In response to complaints of rodents and a foul odour during summer months around the Wealdstone Brook, a culverted stream running through Wealdstone High Street, the Council worked with Thames Water and the local Church to identify and resolve the problem. A programme of baiting in public areas using bait boxes and specially adapted litter bins; rectification of 240 misconnections to the surface water drainage system; removal of overgrown and redundant flowerbeds and improved frequency of street cleaning to remove food debris and other food sources have resulted in no further complaints being received about rats and odours.

## Meeting local, regional and national

- 73** Area working has effectively integrated activities to deal with fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles, graffiti and increasingly other forms of anti-social behaviour and crime. The service shares information and data with partners to identify problems and hotspot areas and plan solutions.

Police and council officers meet weekly to share information and intelligence, and a multi-agency anti social behaviour problem solving group meets regularly to consider individual cases and agree responses to these. This has involved use of CCTV and monitoring of tags in schools to catch graffiti vandals. A tri-signs initiative on lamp posts is used to highlight specific problems such as burglary or car crime in different localities.

- 74 The service is delivering outcomes in conjunction with its partners which have integrated economic, environmental and social issues in a consistent way. Public realm services are now responsible for grounds maintenance of parks and clearance of overgrown shrubs and for repair of fences abutting the highway has made them more visible from the street and more welcoming. This has helped to reduce fear of crime and encourage residents to use open spaces more. In Roxeth ward the police and the Council held a public meeting to hear residents concerns about Alexandra Park. This resulted in the police modifying patrols to provide better coverage of the parks and a new facility being provided by the Council for joint surgeries between the Council and the police.
- 75 Public realm services have been involved in Council initiatives to improve community cohesion. In Bransgrove Road, there were extreme problems with anti-social behaviour which impacted on staff and families of the Woodlands Special Educational Needs School. Following a number of public meetings the Council has worked with the police to address residents' concerns. A recycling vehicle visited the school and did a graffiti removal demonstration involving children and educating them about the associated costs.
- 76 The Council's approach to enforcement of waste and public realm has yet to be fully developed. The roll out of area working has been supported by education and promotion and the Council has a comprehensive guide for staff on enforcement options for dealing with different enviro-crimes including waste on land, litter, flytipping, fly posting, graffiti, and dog fouling and abandoned cars. Appropriate training is all also being provided including to NVQ level 5. However, currently the service has yet to develop a targeted formal enforcement programme.
- 77 Area working is helping to deliver closer working with the planning service to achieve better outcomes for residents. There are examples of new developments provided with suitable waste storage facilities such as the Honeypot Lane development but this is not consistently the case. A new Code of Practice for storage of waste in new developments has been produced and area managers receive lists of planning applications for comment, but there is currently no supplementary planning guidance to advice developers about the Council's requirements.
- 78 The service has sought to reduce its use of resources and minimise the environmental impact of its own activities. The engineering services unit within the Public Realm Infrastructure group has an environmental management system accredited to ISO 14001 and is currently extending the scope of the system to include other units. The service estimates that recycling of waste material from highways operations has delivered estimated costs savings (reduction in disposal costs) of £748,700 from 2002/03 to 2004/05 based on a 2001/02 baseline.

- 79 The Council has recently introduced a scheme to recycle paper and other office waste in council buildings which is encouraging staff to recycle. However, the Council does not actively promote to the public what it is doing to minimise waste and recycle, for example via the website. Leading by example would help the Council to demonstrate its own commitment when encouraging residents to do the same.
- 80 The Council maintains a good level of road safety. Harrow has a consistently low rate of road accident casualties compared to the average for London. It is also on schedule to meet its LPSA stretch target for this year in this priority area.
- 81 The condition of roads, footways and street lighting is an area for further improvement but some progress is being made on reducing maintenance backlogs. However, levels of satisfaction with the condition of roads and footways is low and the majority of the street lighting in the borough does not meet modern requirements. Although the capital programme includes a three-year commitment for replacement lighting, the Council estimates that it would need nine years with the same level of investment to bring all lights up to standard.

### **User experience and satisfaction with service quality**

- 82 Local surveys show the Council is achieving significantly improved performance in terms of resident satisfaction rates with public realm and waste management services. The Council commissioned an independent residents' survey in April/May 2005 found 70 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the cleanliness of the streets and 81 per cent were satisfied with refuse collection. Satisfaction with recycling was also strong (78 per cent) with the most dissatisfaction recorded by people without home recycling, such as those living in flats. The main areas with lower levels of satisfaction were maintenance of pavements (42 per cent satisfied) and roads (51 per cent satisfied). The extent to which people feel safe on the streets is also an area where satisfaction is comparatively low (49 per cent satisfied).
- 83 Improvements in street cleaning and the standard of repair and maintenance of the highway have been recognised by local residents. There has been a reduction in the percentage of residents stating that street cleaning needs improving (from 51 per cent in 2003 to 36 per cent in 2005) and the proportion of residents stating that road and pavement repairs need improving has also reduced (from 47 per cent in 2003 to 40 per cent in 2005). Overall resident satisfaction according to the local Quality of Life survey in 2005 was 54 per cent compared to the outer London average for 2004 of 50 per cent.

- 84 Our reality checks support the view that the borough is generally kept clean and free of fly-posting and fly tipping. Street cleaning takes place at least once a day in shopping areas and fortnightly in residential areas. Most areas we observed were grade A or B<sup>1</sup>, with the streets largely free of litter except for a number of small items in isolated areas, for example around transport hubs. Known problem areas are identified and action taken to prevent or discourage future problems. The main areas for development are ensuring a consistent standard is achieved across the borough which has not been effectively tracked and greater attention to the removal of detritus.
- 85 The Council has improved its responsiveness to complaints of graffiti. Residents and partners have noted that graffiti is removed far more quickly than previously, improving the overall appearance of the area and the general feeling of wellbeing.
- 86 Street cleansing and waste collection are not fully integrated. However, refuse collection crews are provided with equipment to clear up spillages and are encouraged to do so. The refuse and recycling collection patterns are being altered to match area working, to allow for increased recycling collections in 2006, and to allow street cleaning to take place after rubbish collections.

### **Is the service delivering value for money?**

- 87 The Council is developing its approach to value for money but the pace of implementation has been slow. Although value for money issues have been raised by Overview and Scrutiny in previous scrutiny reviews of the New Harrow Project and waste management services over the past three years, evaluation of the arrangements is only scheduled for the coming 2006/07 financial year. The Business Transformation Project will also seek to provide accurate information on unit costs and services but this will not be made available until September 2006.
- 88 The Council's resources have clearly been allocated in accordance with policy decisions in public realm and waste management services. The roll out of area working, with enhanced street cleaning and improvement to the public realm across the borough has required a three-year investment programme to deliver this aspect of the New Harrow Project. The South Harrow pilot amounted to an investment of £1.4 million in 2002/03, with each of the other eight areas costing approximately £0.9 million over the following three years. This higher spending has resulted in highly visible improvement in services and the quality of the local environment.

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<sup>1</sup> A grading system is used to assess litter which is set out in the Code Of Practice On Litter And Refuse, issued under Part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Grades are: A - no litter or refuse; B - predominantly free of litter and refuse except for some small items; C - widespread distribution of litter and refuse, with minor accumulations; D - heavily littered, with significant accumulations. Detritus, which comprises dust, mud, soil, grit, gravel, stones, rotted leaf and vegetable residues, and fragments of twigs, glass, plastic and other finely divided materials, is graded in a similar manner.

- 89 The other major area of investment reflecting policy decisions has been on recycling and this has delivered significant improvement in the level of waste recycled. Between 2003 and 2005, Harrow invested heavily in systems to divert waste from landfill, including the introduction of the brown bin collections for organic waste, in addition to the green box service. This led to the recycling and composting rate increasing from 9.4 per cent in 2002/03 to 27 per cent in the first half of 2005/06.
- 90 Comparative costs for environmental services and waste collection are high. Harrow's overall spending on environmental services is just below the upper quartile for outer London boroughs, which reflects the investment in priorities of waste management and street cleaning. However, the Council's waste collection costs per household in 2004/05 (BVPI 86), excluding costs of the civic amenity site and of trade waste disposal, are around the average of outer London boroughs.
- 91 Similarly spending on street cleaning and litter removal was well above the upper quartile, reflecting the level of investment in 2004/05 required to deliver enhanced public realm services. In 2003/04, the level of significant/heavy littering on relevant land was fourth highest and satisfaction with street cleaning was sixth lowest. Since that time, both the standard of cleanliness of streets (as measured by BVPI 199) and resident satisfaction (as measured by the surveys of residents) have shown significant improvement, which suggest that the investment the Council has made is having the desired impact.
- 92 Spending on roads and bridges construction, structural and routine maintenance are just above the average, with the condition of principal roads, non-principal classified roads and footways all below average. The Council has continued to invest in road and footways, which are a key area for improvement identified by residents. The April/May 2005 residents' survey suggests that the increased spending in this area has led to improvement in road conditions. Compared to the 2003/04 survey, fewer respondents said that road and pavement repairs had got worse over the previous three years or so, indicating an improved perception.
- 93 The introduction of the single pass working into public realm maintenance services means that multi-skilled crews are now able to deal with a range of issues previously undertaken by different services. These include street cleaning, graffiti, fly tipping and ground maintenance. Clearly this presents opportunities for more efficient ways of working, but the service has not had a robust mechanism to monitor the impact on costs and performance to evaluate value for money.
- 94 Closer working between area services and public realm infrastructure teams is helping to ensure that work programmes are more effectively linked. As well as reducing the disruption experienced by residents from separate works being undertaken, the service has identified scope for securing greater efficiencies on areas of work where there is currently some duplication of effort. For example, responsibilities for reactive repairs to the highway are currently split between area services and public realm infrastructure services.

- 95 The Council has recently strengthened its programme management to improve the proportion of projects delivered on time and to budget and this is beginning to have an effect. Historically, capital spending decisions have not always taken account of longer term financial impacts and the approach has been focused on keeping unit costs down rather than looking to the long term. Arrangements are now in place for the tracking of the top 200 council projects which includes 150 capital projects to a value of over £70 million, and 50 revenue projects. A 60 per cent spend at the end of the third quarter of 2005/06 is a considerable improvement on previous years. Councillors now monitor progress on a quarterly basis, in addition to more regular tracking by managers.
- 96 At a service level there have been some tangible improvements in value for money outcomes through partnership working, particularly with the police. There are shared budgets for anti-social behaviour and crime prevention and there is sharing of facilities, buildings, equipment and vehicles.
- 97 Public realm services have benefited from a number of Council-wide procurement projects which have produced efficiency savings. These cover the provision of temporary staff, office supplies and print services with budgets. However, there is no breakdown of the actual efficiency gains these contracts have provided for public realm and waste management services.
- 98 There are examples of waste management and public realm services securing greater value for money through procurement. For example, in 2004 the Council let a three-year contract for the acquisition of 36,000 bins with a saving of £40,000 on a total cost of £495,000. The Council also obtained a higher specification for this lower price with bins made from 80 per cent recycled polymer and fitted with air vents and also micro-chips to track participation.
- 99 Joint procurement on a broader scale has been subject to less consideration. While there are some joint initiatives such as Harrow's provision of salt for highways for Brent Council and also consideration of a joint abandoned vehicle removal contract, there could be potentially far greater opportunities from a shared approach to procurement, for example with all partners across West Waste. Currently, this does not feature strongly in the draft joint waste management strategy.
- 100 The scope for improving cost-effectiveness of services is kept under review, but in an opportunistic rather than a systematic manner. The number and siting of bring banks has been reviewed to prepare for the introduction of recycling from flats and the Council intends to use the same vehicles for collection of recyclables from flats and bring banks. The service has been procuring a number of vehicles through hire contract in anticipation of this change.
- 101 The Council is adopting a new approach to assessing value for money for the 2006/07 budget setting process, but this requires further development. The new approach examines how performance is improving in the light of resources being invested, to deliver a proxy for 'return on investment'. A first draft of the analysis has now been developed for all Council services – covering 81 per cent of the Council's spend. However, the analysis does not enable the service to track the impact of its investment and whether it is delivering value for money or not.

- 102** The process for setting efficiency targets and action planning to ensure delivery has been inconsistent. Corporate policies and processes for reviewing and improving value for money are just being put in place as part of the budget preparation for the 2006/07 financial year.
- 103** Service management arrangements have also had insufficient focus on value for money and systems have not been able to monitor progress and review impact. The introduction of area working has delivered wider benefits than cleaner streets and better performance in emptying of bins, for example, in terms of a community safety and environmental quality, but it has not had clear information about service costs and quality to assess value for money.

## Summary

- 104** We have concluded that the Service is 'good' overall due to the following reasons.
- Service users are actively engaged in developing priorities for improvement for public realm and waste management services.
  - Clear arrangements exist for engaging and consulting service users.
  - Staff demonstrate a strong focus on customer service.
  - The service is accessible and responsive with highly visible staff providing public reassurance for local people who may have concerns about crime.
  - Recycling performance is high at 27 per cent currently and well above minimum standards, and a wide range of materials are collected including kitchen and organic waste.
  - The move to area working has integrated public realm and enviro-crime services, and graffiti and flytipping is dealt with effectively.
  - Public satisfaction with the standard of cleanliness of the streets and with refuse collection has significantly improved.
  - Service standards are clear and comprehensive and service users have been involved in their development.
  - Education programmes have delivered a sense of social responsibility and encouraged implementation of sustainable improvements to local areas.
  - The service engages effectively with residents and local partners to develop solutions to complex local issues.
- 105** However:
- waste minimisation, and in particular reuse schemes, do not feature strongly in the Council's service;
  - the service is focussed on education and awareness raising to improve understanding and participation rates but these activities are not yet supported by a proportionate and integrated approach to enforcement;

### **30 Environment - Public Realm Services | How good is the service?**

- access to recycling services is limited for 20 per cent of the population, mainly households living in flats and on estates;
- the approach to securing equality of access is not yet systematic and informed by a comprehensive assessment of needs; and
- improvements in value for money within the service have been fairly small scale to date and the Council cannot clearly demonstrate that it has secured value for money from its considerable investment in these services.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 106** To assist in making this judgement the service's track record against the following criteria has been reviewed.
- The service's track record in terms of its ability to demonstrate improving value for money over time.
  - Its ability to achieve significant improvements in outcomes that would be experienced by users.
  - The general direction of performance indicators relating to the service area.
  - Its record in terms of implementing previous inspection report recommendations.
- 107** The Council cannot demonstrate a clear track record of having achieved value for money. The Council's Annual Efficiency Statement - Backward Look, submitted to central government in June 2005, did not include any efficiency savings from Environmental Services (central government's term for the services delivered by the Urban Living Directorate). The Council has set out efficiency gain targets for the service, both cashable and non-cashable, which appear challenging, but these are not supported by robust arrangements to ensure delivery. The Annual Efficiency Statement - Forward Look for 2005/06, includes the expectation that Environmental Services will make annual efficiency gains of £900,000, of which £490,000 is to be cashable. The actions detailed to achieve these efficiencies included rolling out the enhanced public realm services to the three remaining operational areas (Pinner, Harrow Weald, Stanmore) so that all nine areas in the borough receive enhanced public realm standards, and review all contracts to identify savings. At the half year point savings of £225,000 cashable and non-cashable have been achieved. The service's explanation for the variance is that the 'public realm' cashable efficiency gains totalling £490,000 are proving difficult to identify as the bulk of the gains are linked to an 'invest to save' programme. The performance information needed to gauge whether or not the expected savings will be achieved will also not be available until the end of the financial year. The lack of adequate arrangements to ensure efficiency targets are achieved means that future budget provision may not be accurate and this could impact on service delivery and improvement initiatives.
- 108** The service can demonstrate that it has made some improvements in terms of achieving value for money but it does not have clear and robust proposals for meeting efficiency targets and improving value for money. The service has benefited from corporately negotiated contracts, for example the appointment of a sole supplier of the Council's requirement for manual temporary staff agreed in 2004.

## **32 Environment - Public Realm Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?**

The Council estimates that savings based on the current spend over the three years of the contract as a whole to be in the region of £300,000. The service has also achieved some savings through procurement of brown bins. During 2005/06 it expects to achieve savings of over £40,000 as well as a higher specification.

- 109** We are informed that fundamental reviews are to be undertaken in 2006 to evaluate the service's performance in terms of value for money by both officers and councillors. We strongly support the Council in its undertaking of this work.
- 110** The services' track record in terms of delivering its capital programme is acknowledged by managers as an area for improvement. In 2004/05, corporately, 75 per cent of the capital programme was delivered. The performance at the time of our inspection, three quarters of the way through the year, was also not ideal and is an area where improved performance is required; as at November 2005 the programme by area was showing the following levels of completion:
- street trees – 34 per cent;
  - street lighting – 49 per cent;
  - planned highway – 68 per cent;
  - Transport for London principal roads renewal – 85 per cent; and
  - New Harrow Project Public Realm works – 74 per cent.
- 111** The service's track record over the last three years against key performance indicators is generally positive, although there are a couple of areas, namely kerbside collection, the overall reduction in waste collected, the condition of the Council's non-principal classified and non-principal unclassified roads don't follow this trend. Over the last two years the percentage of households served by kerbside collections has remained fairly static at 88 per cent.
- 112** The service has a mixed record in terms of minimising the amount of waste sent to landfill. In the five years from 2000/01 to 2004/05, the municipal solid waste arisings (MSWA) figure increased by just over 9 per cent. However, the Council's data for 2005/06 to date shows a reduction in the tonnage of total waste arisings and the total sent to landfill. There has been an annual growth in tonnages collected by the green box scheme of over 11 per cent over the last three years indicating that participation levels are improving.
- 113** The Service does not have a robust track record in terms of improving the condition of its roads. The two highway best value indicators valid for 2004/05 comparisons describe the condition of the Council's non-principal classified and non-principal unclassified roads. Both classified and unclassified non-principal roads show a mixed picture in terms of performance over the last three years, with a dip in performance from 2002/03 to 2003/04 but improvements being made from 2003/04 to 2004/05. The Council's data shows that the condition of non-principal unclassified roads has improved further during 2005/06.

- 114** The Service has a good track record in terms of the percentage of household waste that is recycled or composted which has improved year on year. Rising from 9 per cent in 2002/03, to 13 per cent in 2003/04 and 19 per cent in 2004/05. At the time of our inspection the service was on target to meet its Government set target for 2005/06.
- 115** The key cleanliness of streets indicator shows the percentage of the Council's streets that have significant deposits of waste on them: the lower the score the cleaner the streets. This indicator was only introduced in 2003 and consequently only two years' worth of data is available. In 2003/04, 41 per cent of Harrow's streets were deemed to have significant deposits of waste on them, a year later this was true of only 19 per cent, a reduction of 22 per cent.
- 116** Over the last three years the service has not always been able to achieve the standards and outcomes that it had envisaged at the outset. The original environmental quality standards which the service had hoped could be replicated across the borough were found to be too optimistic and 15 of the 22 targets have been revised.
- 117** The service is improving the cleanliness of its streets and has done so over the last three years. The service's performance as measured by means of the LEQS methodology is improving overall but there has been a reduction between 2004 and 2005 in terms of the percentage of streets deemed to be of the highest quality standards. The LEQ survey has been undertaken on three occasions, in 2003, 2004 and 2005. The survey requires an assessment to be made of a random sample of streets against 22 standards relating to issues such as the prevalence of weeds, fly-posting and fly-tipping. For each of the 22 categories the street is assessed as either being of; 'a high standard', 'an acceptable standard', 'below standard' or 'an unacceptable standard'. The 2005 survey results, when measured against the 2004 revised targets for the South Harrow area, show that for all but two of the categories weed growth and channel obstruction, the percentage of streets that are deemed to be either of a high standard or acceptable standard has increased over the three years. However, the 2005 survey shows that since 2004 the percentage of streets meeting the highest standard has fallen in 15 of the 22 performance categories.
- 118** The Council commissioned an independent research company to undertake a quality of life survey in 2005. The survey highlighted that, in general, residents have noted that many of the key aspects of quality of life locally have improved. Satisfaction with public realm maintenance services have shown improvement over the last three years and are particularly strong in those areas where area working has been in operation for the longest.
- 119** The service can demonstrate a predominately positive picture in terms of its ability to make service changes that have lead to improvements that would be experienced by the user. Public Realm services are now nearing the end of a major investment programme. Over the last three years the area working programme has been rolled out to all of the nine areas, the last of these, Pinner, Harrow Weald, and Stanmore were rolled out in October 2005.

### **34 Environment - Public Realm Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?**

The rationale for the roll-out programme was based on analysis of deprivation indicators, information on workloads and aimed to ensure that the most disadvantaged areas were targeted first.

- 120** The recycling provision has been enhanced, through the investment made to the bring sites and expanded significantly through the roll-out of the brown bins for the collection of organic waste. Residents spoke very positively about this service enhancement.
- 121** At a local level the service can demonstrate that it has responded and made alterations that have addressed local concerns. Examples include the provision of bollards, the clearing of service roads and the felling trees in parks. Residents have noted improvements made to parks and open spaces, for example to Alexandra and Roxeth Park, and open areas abutting the streets and they are now more comfortable about using them as they feel safer.
- 122** The service has a positive track record in terms of addressing the issues raised in previous inspection reports. Waste management and recycling services were inspected in 2001 and again in 2004. The inspectors in 2004 noted that the service had implemented the majority of the previous inspection's recommendations. The two recommendations that were outstanding were to resolve the level of permanent staffing including measures to reduce vacancies, especially in respect of drivers, and to reduce absences and over time payments, which had been partially achieved; and to consult residents further concerning possible effective recycling measures in order to increase take-up and therefore the achievement of national recycling targets.
- 123** In the intervening 14 months since the 2004 inspection progress is being made with the 11 recommendations. For example, there is now more explicit alignment between corporate, directorate and individual staff members' plans; the capacity of the civic amenity site has been increased and the rationalisation and investment programme of bring sites has been completed. Recommendations that remain outstanding include the need to embed and strengthen performance and financial monitoring; both of these issues are covered in more detail below, and the need to identify low and non-participating residents and traders in the recycling programmes.

#### **How well does the service manage performance?**

- 124** Harrow does not have a clear overall long term vision for the public realm. The Council's future plans for waste management are highlighted in West London Waste Authority's draft joint waste management strategy. The draft group service plans for 2006-2009 translate the mission for Urban Living into challenging three-year targets for BVPIs and operational response times. Through the New Harrow project, the strategy for the public realm has been to replicate the approach to the South Harrow pilot across the whole borough, providing a consistent level of service. However, there is no clear long term (five to ten-year) strategy for the public realm following the completion of the roll out of area working. This would make it clear what the organisation wants to achieve for users in terms of the public realm in the future.

- 125** The service has developed its approach based on a sound knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced within the service. This includes ensuring there are arrangements in place to capture the views and needs of users now and in the future, as demonstrated by the consultation planned to engage residents in the development of the services street scene design guide. The service has plans for addressing national and corporate priorities. As part of the Council's service planning process each Directorate is tasked with producing a High Level Service Plan (HLSP) to help ensure that performance targets and service planning drive the development of the Medium Term Budget Strategy (MTBS). Services are required to identify the key drivers, both local and national, that will have an impact on the service, its performance commitments, and the resulting financial commitment that will be required to meet performance and environmental and legislative changes which drive the development of the MTBS. Draft service plans are then populated with this information.
- 126** The Public Realm Services Group draft Service Plan 2006 to 2009 details the performance commitments over the next three years and identifies the key drivers, identified through the production of the HLSP. These include legislative changes, for example, the possible repeal in 2006 of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act which could result in the transfer of the Civic Amenity Site to WLWA or Greater London Authority control and the advent of the WLWA Joint Waste Management Strategy and local developments within the service areas such as the project to provide re-cycling provision to flats, and the impact of the Business Transformation Project.
- 127** The draft service plan clearly shows the contribution the service can make corporately. Milestones within the plans are monitored and reported upon via the Council's corporate performance management system. The draft service plan gives timescales and details responsibilities for completion of tasks in a clear fashion. The high level plans also show the financial requirements needed for each budget or service area project.
- 128** Service standards are clear and understood by operational managers and staff. Staff are less clear about how their work fits into the wider Council objectives. The 2005 staff survey summary report shows that the only indicator to have dropped significantly since 2003 is the extent to which people can see how their work fits into the wider council objectives. Staff are informed how their work contributes to overall aims as corporate priorities are explicitly detailed and targets linked back to them within staff appraisal, Individual Performance Appraisal and Development (IPAD), documentation.
- 129** There is a lack of detailed planning to address some key service weaknesses. Plans for implementing major schemes are at an early stage of development. Among the projects that the waste management service is to deliver include: changing the frequency of collections, introducing recycling for flats and changing the collection rounds. At the time of the inspection the service had yet to produce robust project plans for these schemes and so their delivery within the timescales set could be at risk.

## **36 Environment - Public Realm Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?**

In April 2005, Cabinet approved the introduction of flats recycling from September 2005 in three phases, but the bins and frames and vehicles will not be available until April and consultation with residents is not planned to take place until March.

- 130** Planning arrangements for projects are not consistently robust. The Council monitors projects and provides information on their progress via the corporate performance arrangements using a traffic light approach. The November 2005 strategic performance report to cabinet shows the 'proportion of projects closed on schedule' as red, reflecting the number of projects where planning has not been effective. To address this weakness a series of project health checks are being introduced, focusing on those with a 'red' status. The Council does not have a clear asset management plan in place for the public realm infrastructure. The work to draft this document is scheduled to be completed by September 2006. In the meantime the service lacks a clear long term approach to maintenance, refurbishment and renewal of the public realm. Without effective planning the service will not set achievable targets, nor will a full appreciation of the resources needed to achieve targets within timescales be gained.
- 131** The Council has taken some initial strategic steps to focus attention on value for money but this has yet to translate to the service level. An efficiency section has been added to the corporate balance score card and the challenge element of the service planning process includes a review of effectiveness using a similar approach used in the Local Public Service Agreement efficiency target. In future years this will be incorporated into the High Level Service Planning challenge exercises. This is also supported by service planning guidance, although the focus on value for money is less well developed in terms of day to day management and review arrangements but it is too early to assess the impact of these developments.
- 132** The service is supported by active and visible management and leadership this is recognised by staff at all levels. The Council's vision, aims and priorities are communicated to managers, partners and senior councillors. Management conferences and lunchtime seminars are used to improve understanding of priorities and latest developments such as the business transformation programme. Managers and councillors are willing and have taken and stuck to difficult decisions seeing them through to resolve issues. For example, the review of middle management. It is, however, too early to determine if the review of middle management will deliver all of the benefits envisaged at this point in time.
- 133** Overview and Scrutiny have maintained a focus on this service area. For example, a review of the South Harrow pilot was undertaken which included an examination of the overall concept of the New Harrow Project supported by case studies reviewing the public realm maintenance work roll out to areas 2 and 3. A further review by scrutiny has informed improvement priorities for the waste management service.

- 134** Cabinet now meets on a quarterly basis in Performance Board 'mode' to monitor performance through the balanced scorecard system. A full year of quarterly Strategic Performance Reports have now been produced. These reports provide a summary of the scorecards used throughout the Council and are reported on every quarter showing performance in relation to over 100 targets by means of a traffic light approach.
- 135** The balance scorecard approach is not sufficiently embedded across the directorate. The balance scorecard approach does not yet comprehensively cover each of the service areas within Urban Living, and performance information produced by the system at the service and group level is not timely enough to facilitate robust performance management. At the time of the inspection, 14 balance scorecards at service and group level were available but quarter 2 and quarter 3 performance data was not available for the majority of service areas, the exceptions being services within the public realm infrastructure group. The arrangements are not sufficiently robust and as a result deteriorations in performance may not be identified in a timely fashion enabling swift and effective remedial action to be taken.
- 136** A separate system is used at the operational level that feeds some information into the balance scorecard framework, but this does not provide accurate data and is not sufficiently accessible. Performance roles, responsibilities and procedures are also not fully understood. Operational performance is monitored primarily against 22 (soon to be 23 when absence management is included) key performance indicators. This system tracks performance on a monthly and area basis which should allow trends to be identified and priorities adjusted. However, there is a lack of clarity with regard to the trafficking of inputs, requests for work to be logged on to the system for example and there are insufficient arrangements in place to ensure all jobs are logged and actioned via the system. For example, fly-tips have not always been logged. Access to the system is also a problem with some staff unable to access the system for several days at a time. During these occasions, and to rectify other errors, a manual system is needed to support the capture of the data, namely an excel spreadsheet to amend performance figures against targets and provided a more sophisticated red, amber, green categorisation of performance.
- 137** The absence of an efficient and accurate performance management system means that decision makers are not adequately supported and staff have to spend additional time producing statistics that should be produced in a far more efficient fashion.
- 138** The service's approach to target setting is not always challenging, as the 2004 inspection report highlights. For example the LEQ survey indicator number 9 deals with paved area obstruction. The Council's target was to achieve the following performance profile, 65 per cent of roads being deemed to be of a high standard, 35 per cent acceptable, and none below or at an unacceptable standard. The actual performance detailed within the 2004 survey shows the following profile as being achieved: high - 93.8 per cent; acceptable - 5.7 per cent, below standard - 0.5 per cent and unacceptable - 0.0 per cent.

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This did not trigger a review of the possibility of raising the target thresholds particularly for the highest category. Without the setting of challenging targets the service is not achieving its ambition to strive for continuous service improvement.

- 139** The Council applies learning from its own experiences. The pilot of area working in the South Harrow area was established to ensure that it represented many of the common features and challenges of other areas, including a diverse mix of residents, and this shaped the service's future approach. The positive comments received from residents about the high visibility of staff helping to provide reassurance in terms of fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, led to this being a key feature of subsequent roll outs.
- 140** The service participates in a number of benchmarking clubs to identify how it compares to other providers. It also uses appropriate tools such as the business excellence model. However, there is limited formal evaluation of changes being made in the light of these learning opportunities.
- 141** The service makes use of a good range of techniques to capture learning from users and staff. The Council has captured issues arising as complaints and made changes to service delivery arrangements in the light of this learning. The service has also recently established a schedule for undertaking, albeit on a small scale, mystery shopping exercises as well as drawing from staff expertise via continuous improvement workshops, which to date have been run for assistant managers and team leaders, but are to be rolled out to all staff. The capture of issues in this formal and systematic fashion allows the service to learn from its mistakes and user feedback in a timely and efficient fashion.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 142** The Council's basic ICT infrastructure is in need of improvement. To address this issue a large upgrade programme is underway and will in part be facilitated by the business transformation partnership (BTP) the Council has entered. The Council signed the contract with its strategic partner in December 2005 and at this point it is too early to expect any tangible benefits to be demonstrable. However, the potential for efficiencies to be realised is significant and the successful bidder has been strongly incentivised to assist in delivering them.
- 143** With sound and robust ICT and the adoption of modern tools the Council should be able to achieve service improvements. However, to date it is too early to evaluate whether or not the benefits envisaged will be achieved.
- 144** Existing staff capacity is not being fully utilised. Through the provision of inductions and ongoing staff appraisals staff capacity can be more fully utilised as staff are provided with the knowledge, support and assessment required in a framework that can ensure effort is more effectively applied. Over one fifth of staff members below assistant manager have not had a Council induction session or a specific NHP/area working induction session according to training sheets. The 2005 staff survey also found that less than half of respondents said that they had had a performance appraisal in the last 12 months, although around a fifth said that one was in the pipeline. As such staff are not currently receiving the instruction and support felt appropriate by the Council.

- 145** The adoption of area working practices has been shown to motivate staff. Multi-skilling of staff allows task rotation, helping to alleviate the monotony of some of the tasks and to more fully utilise staff capacity.
- 146** Training and development work within the service and corporately shows good potential to enhance the service's capacity. The service is developing the skills of its staff to deliver further improvements in conjunction with its partners. It has worked with Stanmore College to deliver tailored training plans for front line staff and has commissioned bespoke training for staff on enforcement issues to NVQ level 5 and is enhancing the service's enforcement capability. The Urban Living Directorate as a whole was assessed in December 2004 against the Investors in People (IIP) standard. The directorate did not meet all of the requirements of the IIP standard at that time but a project team is now in place working towards achieving accreditation.
- 147** The Council's management development programme and Team challenge approach are still being developed and as such it is too early to determine if they will be effective.
- 148** Harrow's enforcement capacity is being further enhanced through a unique scheme set up in partnership by the Council and the Metropolitan Police Force. Entitled 'Borough Beat' the scheme will enable Council staff to be paid by the Council whilst one day a fortnight they will be patrolling the borough as Special Constables. The Council believes that the comprehensive training the Borough Beat officers will receive will give them skills that will be beneficial in their normal jobs, while residents will benefit from more police officers on the streets.
- 149** Staff capacity could be more effectively utilised through staff being kept informed of developments. The 2005 staff survey identified a gap in the flow of communication within Harrow; namely that there is blockage between senior managers to middle managers, and then again from middle managers to the rest of the organisation. Although 65 per cent of respondents say that they find out what is going on in Harrow through team briefings/meetings, only 41 per cent say they are regularly attend such a meeting. The incidence is particularly low in the central depot and in Urban Living generally.
- 150** The Council needs to improve the effectiveness of its internal communications arrangements. This is particular true at the outset of the major business transformation programme as the staff survey highlighted that staff have '...fairly poor views of the change process in Harrow, with few staff saying that Harrow is effective at managing change and just over a third of respondents saying that the changes will make Harrow more effective as an organisation.' Unless staff are engaged and supportive of planned changes the likelihood of realising the benefits change can offer is diminished.
- 151** In recognition of the need to enhance internal communication arrangements the service has introduced a range of measures to bridge the gap. These include the introduction of internal staff newsletters to support front-line staff who don't have ready access to a computer, and therefore don't receive the electronic newsletter, 'Update'; a fortnightly managers' briefing newsletter, and compulsory workshops for all managers with a specific workshop on information and communication.

- 152 The service suffers from an ongoing capacity shortage in several professional and technical areas. These pressures have not been successfully addressed despite repeated attempts at recruitment. The service acknowledges that the demand for these skills is likely to become more acute as construction projects associated with the Olympic Games start to come on stream. This is not particular to Harrow, but reflects the national shortage of experienced, qualified professional staff. As a result, a significant number of posts are currently vacant or filled by temporary agency staff that require increased induction and supervision. This ongoing pressure is one of the drivers for the service to initiate a project to enter into a strategic partnership with contractors, consultants and service providers to assist with the extensive programme of works required to improve the public realm. The contract is due to be signed in July 2006 if the project proceeds as planned. At this stage it is not possible to determine if this approach will address these issues effectively.
- 153 The service does not benefit from the guidance and support a fully developed workforce development strategy and plan would provide. A project has been established to undertake a review of the current Strategy for People and is tasked with producing a workforce development plan, which will illustrate key and overarching workforce development priorities for the Council.

## Finance

- 154 The Council is making considerable capital investment in key priority areas. An agreed capital investment programme covering the next three years that will see continued investment in the service. This investment is supplemented by attracting external funding. For example, given the nature of the borough the service has a good track record of successfully securing funding from Transport for London for improvements to the public realm.
- 155 Resource allocations reflect corporate priorities. For example, £2 million has been made available to enable the roll out of the 'Clean & Green' programme of improved public realm maintenance to the last three of the nine areas in the borough during 2005/06 and an additional £0.2 million has been provided to increase recycling across the borough and enable the Council to meet government targets.
- 156 The Council has made a commitment of £6.5 million over three years to address the backlog in street lighting maintenance. Now in its second year, the funding is being used to replace old and dangerous concrete columns, and to begin a lighting renewal programme to meet prescribed standards. The Council has also pursued additional funding to accelerate improvements, but without success to date. An unsuccessful bid for PFI (Private Finance Initiative) funding in 2003 was followed by discussions with two other London councils about a possible joint bid. These discussions did not result in a joint bid and subsequently the Council is submitting a new bid. Should the bid be successful, the estimated contract start date would be mid 2008.

- 157** The Council has adequate arrangements in terms of financial management, financial standing and internal control arrangements. This was the finding of the Audit Commission's use of resources assessment in October 2005. Included in this work were reviews of two of the high spending directorates, of which Urban Living was one. Arrangements with regard to the allocation of budgets to budget holders and the guidance provided at the budget holder level were highlighted as needing strengthening in both directorates. Recommendations to address this and the other related issues have been made and fed back to the Council by their external auditors.
- 158** The Council does not have a robust procurement strategy. The service assessed the corporate arrangements in early 2005 and concluded that the Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations stifled creative procurement strategies instead of providing a practical framework to develop these ideas. The Council acknowledges that this is an area in need of improvement and a review of its procurement arrangements is to be undertaken.
- 159** The service shows that it is willing to make use of modern methods of procurement and is embarking on establishing a strategic partnership for its public realm infrastructure works and professional services. There are potential financial and non-financial benefits of moving to a long-term single sourcing partnership for the works services currently provided through 12 separate contracts and the professional services contract through some 4 providers. The contract is due to be start in July 2006 and as such no outcomes in terms of achieved outcomes can be demonstrated.
- 160** The Council is working well with partners to effectively utilise their combined capacity. For example, the Council is sharing assets with the police to provide a visible local presence in parks and other public areas and provide public reassurance. Safer neighbourhood teams (comprising police constables and police and community safety officers) are being rolled out to all wards by the end of 2006.
- 161** Given the lack of a demonstrable track record in terms of delivering value for money, and the weaknesses in the services' performance management and budget management arrangements, the ongoing staffing capacity issues and the lack of key detailed project plans for several service areas we have judged the services' prospects to be uncertain.

## Summary

- 162** Overall we found the service to have 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. Key weaknesses evident at the time of the inspection include:
- the lack of a track record in terms of delivering value for money;
  - the need to strengthen and embedded the service's performance management systems;
  - the absence of an up-to-date workforce development strategy and associated plan;

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- the ongoing staff capacity issues;
- the lack of outcomes from key capacity building projects and initiatives; and
- the absence of detailed project plans for key service projects and ineffective planning.

**163** However, we also found some strengths:

- a good track record in many of the performance indicators during this period of investment;
- the increase in resident satisfaction;
- a significant and ongoing programme of investment;
- the improvements being made to the service planning process; and
- the innovative enforcement capacity building work undertaken in conjunction with the police.