



HARLOW

**BUILDING
HARLOW'S
FUTURE.**

**OUR
TRANSFORMATION
FRAMEWORK.**

Vision and Purpose

Our vision for Building Harlow's Future

We want to transform Harlow Council into the most efficient and effective local authority it can be to deliver better services and a brighter future for the residents of Harlow.

What is transformation?

Transformation is about change for the better. For Harlow Council, this means proactive structural and cultural changes that shape how the fastest growing town in the UK will look, and be looked after, as it enters a new chapter. We want to be a council on the front foot, constantly striving for improvement in the delivery of services for our residents and local businesses. We want to be a council that isn't afraid to challenge how or why it currently does things the way it does, because what we care about most is delivering for our residents. We are here to serve the people of Harlow, not the other way round.

The alternative is unthinkable – a council that rests on its laurels and sees progress stagnate to preserve the status quo, would be a step backwards. The spirit of invention and discovery is part of our DNA, inherited from our New Town pioneers who founded the community of Harlow as we know it. That spirit will continue to be at the centre of all we do.

Our transformation will restore pride in our town and our neighbourhoods, whilst attracting investment and opportunities to benefit everyone. This is both about the next chapter for our town, and the next chapter for the Council as it adapts to support Harlow's future.

Harlow Council is in a sound financial position; these changes are not driven by any arbitrary savings targets. We just want to be better than yesterday and even better tomorrow. This might mean that we do more with the same money or save money in some areas to invest more in others. We will be investing in our services, our workforce, our assets and our infrastructure. That being said, we want to ensure the best value for money for taxpayers in everything we do. We have a responsibility to spend residents' money wisely and conservatively whilst seeking to deliver the best possible services and environment for our residents.

Any changes we will make will be driven by a relentless ambition to achieve more for our town and our residents than we have done previously. We will seek to free up capacity within the Council, by improving outdated processes, updating systems and removing unnecessary bureaucracy. We will support and liberate the people who work for and with Harlow the Council to have more impact in their daily work, making it easier and more efficient to deliver what we want and need to for Harlow.

The Case for Change

What's wrong with where we are now?

The council invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) review in February 2023. By bringing together leaders and senior managers from other local authorities as member and officer peers, we had a robust, strategic and credible check and challenge. We also sought their encouragement to think beyond traditional boundaries and partnerships to achieve better outcomes for our communities.

The CPC found that there was a lack of identified evidence base behind the Council's strategies, policies and decisions. More crucially, that the voice of the resident was not heard as much as it should be within the Council. The review also found that it was more challenging and bureaucratic than it needs to be to get things done within the council.

Whilst the Council is in a strong financial position, we need to move to a more sustainable, longer-term financial position. We want to ensure that council tax is kept low by generating more revenue to fund our priorities as well as spending taxpayers' money even more efficiently.

We know that there is so much more to do to ensure that every resident and business is proud of our town again and we will work, day and night, until we have delivered that.

Our Priorities

What are we trying to achieve?

We set out six missions for the next four years that set our priorities for *Building Harlow's Future*.

- 1. Transform Harlow's Housing**
- 2. Renew Our Neighbourhoods**
- 3. Rebuild Our Town**
- 4. Secure Investment for Harlow's Future**
- 5. Protect Our Communities**
- 6. Deliver High-Performing Council Services**

We want to see every Harlow family living in a decent home, where they are proud of the neighbourhood they live in, and excited about our new and thriving town centre. We want every Harlow resident to have the opportunity to get a fantastic job or apprenticeship and to be able to access improved leisure, retail and recreational facilities thanks to businesses investing more into our town. We want people to feel safe at any time of day in Harlow and to know that their children will live a healthier and more prosperous life, underpinned by a council that delivers better performing services to drive Harlow forward.

To deliver on these missions, we will carry out a programme of projects that invest in people, processes, technology and our physical assets, where doing so will result in better outcomes for residents.

Guiding Principles

Putting residents at the heart of everything we do

We will use data analytics, existing evidence and communication with residents and businesses to inform our decisions and service design. We will listen to what residents and businesses tell us and focus on the challenges and opportunities they identify.

Supporting and empowering our workforce

We can only deliver improved services if we have a dedicated and empowered workforce. We want the people working for Harlow Council to feel supported with opportunities to further develop their skills so that they stay with us. We will introduce better training and development, with more staff involvement in how our services are provided. Our people know our services best and we want them to feel part of everything we do.

Making sure we are ready for the future

We will maximise the use of technology, where it is appropriate to do so, to streamline and speed up our back-office processes, making us more efficient and allowing staff to spend more quality time with the residents and businesses that want or need personal interaction with us. We will make the best use of new technologies to enhance our services and increase accessibility so that services can be offered to residents wherever and whenever they need them.

Improving services

We want the services we provide to residents and businesses to be the best they can be. We will develop a culture of continuous improvement - constantly challenging ourselves through transparent performance information and benchmarking with those who are acknowledged as 'best in class'. We will always prioritise the needs of our residents as we seek to enhance our services and maintain high performing service delivery.

Delivering sustainable finances

We will take a commercially minded approach to service delivery so that we can maximise value for taxpayers at every level while benefiting our town and its residents and businesses. We will value financial return as well as social return on our investment in services to ensure value for money in everything we do. And we will take a long-term view of our finances to avoid making short-sighted decisions from year to year to make ends meet. This will ensure we keep council tax low and spend taxpayers' money even more efficiently.

Working in partnership and collaboration

In our commitment to deliver excellence, we will collaborate on strategic and operational partnerships that provide improvements to services and outcomes for residents. We will create a cohesive and adaptive environment that is responsive to the emerging challenges and opportunities that working with existing and new partners can provide.

What does this mean for our residents and businesses?

Building a future for our residents and businesses will mean access to services in the way that suits them best that is designed around what they want and need, with one eye on what they will want tomorrow as well as today. We will listen to people's concerns and priorities and build trust with everyone who calls Harlow their home.

A council that grows with the town will provide services through a variety of channels, maximising the use of digital platforms, while also recognising and supporting those who can't or are yet to use them. Ensuring we leave no-one behind.

We will tailor services to customer feedback, understanding the needs of our residents, businesses and staff. Reducing instances where residents or businesses need to follow up for responses or clarification. Residents should expect streamlined route into our services, free from the frustration of complex processes that place the burden on them.

The future for residents and businesses is one in which we'll be clear about our actions and why it's important for our future, making Harlow a better place to live, work, raise a family, and start a business.

What does this mean for our people?

Building a future for our people will mean a forward thinking, exciting, modern place to work, rooted in our organisational values of:

Community - We are committed to delivering services in a way that makes residents feel valued, connected and empowered.

Compassion - We listen to our residents and colleagues with empathy and understanding, making sure their voices are heard, and their needs are met.

Excellence - We strive for the highest standards, committing to quality, continuous improvement, and exceptional performance in delivering services for Harlow.

Ambition - We strive for continual improvement, driven by innovation and creativity to achieve meaningful change.

Unity - We are committed to building a cohesive workplace, collectively delivering on Harlow's missions.

The change to achieve this future will be centred around workforce development. Investing and caring about the people that work for the council and attracting and retaining like-minded workforce of the future. This will be coupled with a programme of culture change.

What does this mean for our finances?

Sustainable finances for the future will mean having a very clear path of how we're able to fund and deliver lasting change for years to come. This will include getting the most out of the money we're investing to deliver better services.

The council's flexible use of capital receipts strategy ensures funding is available to develop and deliver the council's future plans. We will use all of our resources, including our assets to support service delivery. Income from our investments and commercial holdings will be considered to ensure that they are providing maximum income which in turn will strengthen financial support for areas of service delivery.

We will strengthen our procurement arrangements so that we are attractive to work with, accessible to the local economy and will build positive relationships with our supply chain. Our approach to procurement and contract management will ensure every pound is well spent.

What will we deliver?

Current Programme Mapping

Innovation and future thinking exist already within the organisation; we will go to where this is already taking place to map out existing work that is underway or at initiation stage to ensure it aligns with our principles for Building Harlow's Future.

The council is already undertaking a feasibility exercise in relation to a corporate project management office; this will define appropriate project management standards for use across the organisation which will integrate into successful delivery of Building Harlow's Future

Programme mapping will look across the areas of people, processes, technology and our physical assets looking across our internal culture, training and development of staff, partnerships with private, public and voluntary sectors, processes behind how we buy, deliver and evaluate services, how we use technology to communicate, collaborate and enhance services, and our investments in physical assets.

Project opportunities and assessment

We want there to be a common approach across all the improvement work that the Council is undertaking. We will use data from resident surveys, customer relations systems, performance data, consultations and member feedback to further identify opportunities for improvement. These will be assessed against the guiding principles and where matched worked up as more detailed proposals and matched against programme design principles which will set out how the organisation wants to deliver services for the future. Assessment against these principles will ensure that everything we do to build the future will be working towards delivering our priorities.

A benefit/cost estimate will also be reviewed as part of this assessment so that we have confidence that financial resources are being allocated where they will have the greatest positive impact, projects are prioritised to give preference to those which best meet our missions, and all projects have measurable outcomes.

Governance and programme structure

Overview

In line with best practice, a governance structure will be established to oversee the design and implementation of *Building Harlow's Future*. Governance of the programme – the rules by which it will run and our oversight of them – will allow projects to be delivered efficiently but with an appropriate level of control to spot obstacles and resolve them when they occur. The rules will encourage positive change, rather than prevent ideas from progressing. The governance structure will assess possible projects that can help us to *Build Harlow's Future*, and track and control those we take forward to ensure they deliver their identified outcomes.

Programme Roles

A Senior Responsible Officer working with a Sponsoring Group and a Programme Board will allow for efficient communication and effective decision making. A Programme Director will work with both the Programme Board and Project Boards effective execution of these decisions through management of Project Teams and wider programme control.

Senior Responsible Officer

The Senior Responsible Officer will be the Managing Director of the Council.

Sponsoring Group

The Sponsoring Group will be the Cabinet of Harlow Council. The Sponsoring Group will receive regular updates on Programme activities and will provide strategic direction and oversight for all projects, and approve expenditure as required.

Programme Board

The Programme Board will be chaired by the Leader of the Council who is ultimately accountable for the success of the programme. They will be supported by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Transformation who will be vice-chair. It may also include, but not be limited to, members of the Executive Management Team such as the Managing Director, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, Executive Directors and the Programme Director. The Programme Board will be the tactical decision-making body, informed by the strategic input of the Sponsoring Group.

Programme Director

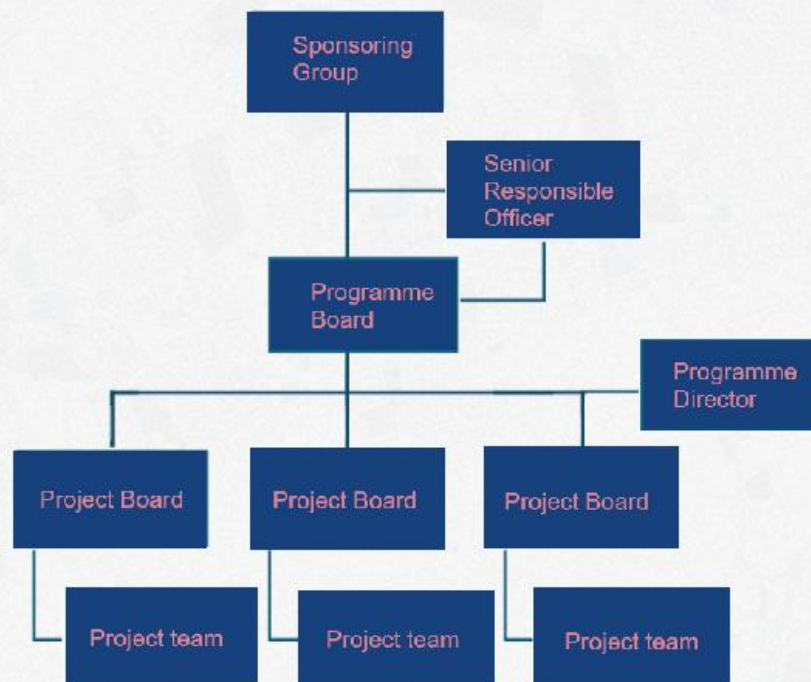
The Programme Director will be the Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Improvement. They will manage the setting up of the programme through to its successful delivery.

Project Boards

Individual Project Boards will concentrate on the delivery of specific projects. The membership of these boards will be determined by the disciplines and skills required to deliver the specific projects and they will report via the Programme Director to the Programme Board. Some projects may be grouped together where appropriate.

Project Teams

Project teams will be made up of the Project Manager, and relevant officers and third-party professionals that will manage and fulfil the day-to-day deliverables for each project.



Communication and engagement

We want all our communications to be coordinated, targeted and based on insight, so that all our communication activity is delivered at the right time, in the right way to the right audience.

We will take pride in the projects identified under the *Building Harlow's Future* programme. In addition to the quarterly updates to Cabinet, we will develop a communication campaign to keep residents and businesses updated on the changes we make.

Communication and engagement itself will be subject to transformational change, learning from best practice from our external communications output and applying this to all engagement with residents and businesses.

Monitoring, evaluation and assurance

What does success look like?

Building Harlow's Future is not just a strapline. Measurable outcomes will be set for everything the programme seeks to achieve. Success will include having better informed residents, more empowered staff, better and more efficient services shared across and between other local councils, implementing technologically enhanced processes, cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy and a town wide investment programme in our infrastructure. Our achievements will be tangible, measurable and evaluated so that we can learn from them and continue to improve. This will not be a one-off programme of work, but a new way of operating for the Council and our town.

Assurance and reporting frequencies

Building Harlow's Future will be supported by the LGA and external experts to ensure best practice is followed and proper assurance is in place. Progress of implementation will be reported to Cabinet in the regular Finance, Performance and Risk reports on a quarterly basis, and an annual update on the programme will be reported to Full Council as part of the annual Corporate Plan report.

Through using external assurance, we will protect ourselves from complacency and bias. We will have regular check-ins to ensure our programme continues to make good progress. The use of independent experts will both challenge and provide confidence in the work we are doing, and allow us to both learn from others' mistakes, as well as successes.

Risk Aware rather than Risk Averse

The Council's attitude to risk is to operate in a culture of creativity and innovation, in which key risks are identified, understood and managed, rather than avoided. We will not be afraid of some risk but will manage it to meet future challenges and make the most of future opportunities in a systematic, consistent and effective way.

Using the approach set out in the Council's risk management strategy, each project within the programme will identify, analyse and evaluate risks, weigh them up against the outcomes we seek to achieve, and determine appropriate action. Risks will be monitored and reviewed regularly. Any changes to risks will be reported via the programme's governance structure and escalated where necessary.

We will take the same approach dealing with blockages, delays or resourcing gaps as we do when dealing with potential risks. As and when they occur at project level, they will be escalated quickly so that changes can be made accordingly, and delays minimised. Any changes to

project milestones will be reviewed by the programme's governance structure for complete visibility, and so that lessons can be learnt between projects.

Conclusion

The council is going to change significantly. This programme will drive that change to ensure that Harlow is a forward-thinking, modern, agile, impactful local authority that spends taxpayers' money exceedingly well whilst delivering high-performing services.

The programme has full governance and assurance to ensure that it is a success and does not fail, as a number of programmes often do because they are solely driven by financial targets – our programme is not.