

Building Harlow's Future - Delivery Update



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	10 July 2025
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Dan Swords, Leader of the Council
Lead Officer:	James Gardner, Managing Director
Contributing Officers:	Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer Rebecca Farrant, Director – Corporate and Community
Key Decision:	No
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan number I018660
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Missions:	All
Wards Affected:	None specifically

Executive Summary

- A** The Building Harlow's Future plan states that the council will *"introduce a clear, data-driven performance framework"*. In line with that stated outcome, this report sets out our operational and financial performance in order to *"improve accountability, track progress in real time, and support better decision-making and customer service"*.
- B** On 15 May 2025, Full Council approved the new corporate policy framework for the year ahead: Building Harlow's Future. The plan sets out the council's six missions and associated outcomes that the council will deliver; this sets out the progress being made to deliver the plan.

Recommended that Cabinet notes:

- A** The progress of projects that are delivering the Building Harlow's Future plan.

- B** The performance of key performance indicators for each Mission for May 2025 which demonstrate strong performance on majority of indicators.
- C** The financial position as of May (period 2) of 2025/26 financial year.
- D** Notes the position of the strategic risk register to align with Building Harlow's Future.

Reason for decision

- A** The Building Harlow's Future plan states that the council will "*introduce a clear, data-driven performance framework*". In line with that stated outcome, this report sets out our operational and financial performance to "*improve accountability, track progress in real time, and support better decision-making and customer service*".
- B** To ensure the Cabinet is fully informed of performance against its budget position for General Fund, Housing Revenue Fund and Capital programmes and therefore, can make fully informed decisions.
- C** To ensure the Cabinet manages the strategic risks that affect the organisation, and control measures in place to mitigate these and therefore, can make fully informed decisions.

Other Options

- A** No other options were considered; the consideration of performance, finance and risk supports the Cabinet's role to review the use and allocation of assets and resources as contained within its terms of reference.

Background

1. Harlow Council has embarked on a bold and transformative journey to become the most impactful local authority in the UK. Over the past year, much has been achieved to commence the transformation of the council and improve service delivery.
2. The Building Harlow's Future plan was approved by Full Council on 15 May 2025. It outlines a comprehensive, mission-driven approach to revitalising the town, improving services, and delivering meaningful outcomes for residents. This is not a traditional council plan - it is a movement grounded in ambition, innovation, and delivery.
3. The plan is structured around six core missions; each designed to address key challenges and unlock Harlow's full potential:

- i) **Transform our council:** Modernising operations, embedding innovation, and delivering value for money through a comprehensive transformation programme.
 - ii) **Rebuild our town:** Delivering a once-in-a-generation regeneration of the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods, creating a vibrant, inclusive, and economically thriving community.
 - iii) **Invest in our housing:** Committing over £136 million to improve housing quality, compliance, and services, ensuring every resident has a safe, decent home.
 - iv) **Renew our neighbourhoods:** Restoring pride in public spaces through targeted investment in cleanliness, infrastructure, and community-led initiatives.
 - v) **Secure our future:** Driving sustainable growth through strategic investment, innovation, and partnerships, positioning Harlow as a national leader in inclusive prosperity.
 - vi) **Protect our communities:** Enhancing safety and resilience through coordinated enforcement, expanded CCTV, and stronger partnerships with police and community organisations
4. This report brings together performance, finance and risk monitoring with an overview of project delivery aligned with Building Harlow's Future. This new reporting format allows Cabinet to review all activity that contributes towards its priority outcomes for 2025/26 and provide assurances that resources meet ambition for delivery and maintaining of high performing services.

Performance - Building Harlow's Future

- 5. Effective delivery does not occur by chance and instead requires deliberate planning, disciplined execution, and a culture of clear communication and agility.
- 6. To ensure the successful implementation of our strategic priorities, we must embed a delivery-focused mindset across the organisation.
- 7. Support and coordination will be critical. Our people must be engaged, empowered, and aligned with a shared commitment to delivering measurable outcomes. This will require an unapologetic focus on impact, value, and results.
- 8. To achieve this, we will strengthen our approach to programme delivery through enhanced governance and assurance. This includes:
 - **Improved oversight** of major programmes to ensure accountability and transparency;
 - **Refined delivery processes** that promote efficiency and responsiveness;

- **Robust assurance mechanisms** to monitor progress, manage risk, and drive continuous improvement.

9. A key deliverable for this system-wide approach is the establishment of a '*Project Management Office (PMO) to track and support the seamless delivery of our six missions*'.
10. The PMO will have strategic oversight for all the projects that contribute towards the outcomes of each mission and will track issues and risks in relation to these.
11. A dedicated PMO team has now been recruited, and these officers will start in post from the week commencing 7 July 2025.
12. Further to this physical resource is the adoption of a powerful programme management software named 'Monday' as part of the commitment to '*Evolve our systems and processes to drive efficiency, accuracy, and responsiveness across all areas of the council*'.
13. Monday is a fully customisable solution that allows for real-time tracking of deliverables and milestones, which allows multiple layers of assurance data and automated task management.
14. Monday also allows for a holistic view of the Building Harlow's Future programme, allowing activity prioritisation, capacity management and cross-functional tasks such as legal, financial and human resource based corporate services.
15. Individual projects to achieve the outcomes of each mission have been identified, with milestones for timed progress assigned and resources allocated.
16. The PMO will now upload this data to Monday and build bespoke dashboards that will provide updates to future Cabinet meetings and report project exceptions, with any changes to timescales described and actions taken to re-programme and adapt as necessary.
17. The Building Harlow's Future Plan delivery programme is being supported by a robust monitoring systems called the Mission Assurance Panels (MAPs), which are taking place on a weekly basis.
18. These MAPs are composed of the Leader of the Council, the three Statutory Officers, the communications team and PMO.
19. These assurance sessions are focusing on the delivery of the requisite projects and to ensure all appropriate governance processes are fulfilled.

20. The sessions are also serving as a point of tactical coordination to ensure streamlined facilitation of exception management where required and referral to Cabinet for strategic decision making.
21. Projects across the programme are now progressing well, with a large number already in delivery and implementation phases, whilst others are subject to design and augmentation and full dashboards will be provided in the next update.

Performance – key performance indicators

22. Performance indicators for key deliverables under each mission show good performance overall. Indicators relating to the number of empty homes held by the council and time taken to re-let these continue to be performing at a level lower than is targeted, due to a higher number of properties and the scale of work required. We continue to work to redefine our internal processes to enhance performance and improve the condition of properties being returned in a poorer than expected state, through pre-vacation inspections. The council has made *“ensuring our council homes are re-let without delay”* one of its priority outcomes for the year.
23. The number of complaints at stage 1 and 2 responded to within the target timeframes did not reach the expected levels during May; the council is committed to *“reimagining our approach to communication with residents”* and this includes our complaints process. The council has a dedicated complaints lead on both officer and Member side and is working with HTS to introduce a combined complaints service that will centralise responses.

Finance

24. The council set the 2025/26 budget in February 2025, aligned to the council’s six missions, with service specific expenditure which makes up the General Fund Account totalling of £15.075 million. (For transparency the budgeted homelessness grant has been moved into service specific Housing Operations.)
25. On 22 April 2025 the National Employers (NJC) for local government services who negotiates the pay, terms, and conditions of staff in local authorities including Harlow Council staff made a one year full and final pay offer to the unions for the 2025/26 financial year, offering a 3.2% pay rise. This offer includes a 3.2% increase on all pay points, as well as a 3.2% increase on all allowances. Additionally, the offer proposes the deletion of pay point 2 from the NJC pay spine on April 1, 2026.
26. The council was notified on the 30 June 2025 from Local Government Association that following the three NJC consultations, *All three unions recommended that their members vote to reject the offer*. There is no further information currently regarding the next steps.

27. The MTFP currently includes modelling of a 3.5% pay award increase for 2025/26. It was previously reported that if the NJC offer was accepted the council could see a reduced requirement of approximately £54k. Officers will continue to monitor the position and update members accordingly.
28. The below table shows a complete breakdown of the service specific expenditure aligned with the Executive Management Team. At this early stage of the budget cycle in period 2 there are no significant variances to report, which is expected at this point in time.
29. Finance officers and budget managers have continued to allocate their time and resources in prioritising the final year end position for 2024/25, which has been reported separately to Cabinet.
30. As part of Building Harlow's Future plan, officers are currently building innovative financial dashboards to report the councils' finances, to give more coherent, transparent and useful data for members to review. It is expected to report these dashboards at the next cabinet meeting.

GENERAL FUND			
	2025/26 Current Budget £'000	2025/26 Forecast Outturn £'000	2024/25 Variance £'000
Corporate Services & Improvement	1,868	1,868	0
Culture & Community	2,707	2,707	0
Environmental	6,160	6,160	0
Executive Office	2,370	2,370	0
Facilities & Assets	(5,492)	(5,492)	0
Finance	1,901	1,901	0
Housing Operations (People) GF	1,525	1,525	0
HR & Organisational Development	463	463	0
Legal & Democratic Services	745	745	0
Planning & Garden Town	776	776	0
Public Protection	1,498	1,498	0
Regeneration	554	554	0
Total Service Specific Expenditure	15,075	15,075	0
Non Service Specific & Funding	252	252	0
Funding	(15,327)	(15,327)	0
General Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	0	0	0

Strategic Risk Management

31. On 19 June 2025, EMT took part in a strategic risk workshop facilitated by Zurich municipal and our insurance and risk manager. The workshop was designed to align our strategic risk register to Building Harlow's Future plan.
32. Our strategic risks and controls are now being developed, as further dialogue takes place with EMT and Zurich. The full strategic risk register will be reported at the next cabinet meeting.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

There are no direct implications flowing from the adoption of the plan, however through its delivery of all the missions it will ensure each milestone delivery will be set with full regard to public sector equality duty.

Finance

The 2025/26 Budget fully funds our six corporate missions. Any virements required will be made in line with the financial regulations in the constitution. Strict financial control and assurance of financial performance is crucial for Buildings Harlow's Future to be successful. This will be achieved through monthly monitoring with Executive Management Team and reporting Performance, Finance and Risk report at every cabinet meeting.

Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

Governance

Plans are only effective if they are fully resourced and there is an appropriate governance structure around them to monitor and report on delivery against targets and course correct as required.

Author: Daniel Dickinson, Director – Legal and Governance (Interim) and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Performance data dashboard

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

MAP – Mission Assurance Panel

PMO – Project Management Office