

East Herts Improvement Plan

This improvement plan has been developed to pull together the key areas of improvement to support the council in its delivery of its Corporate Strategic Plan. The actions have been developed following on from the feedback the council received after the Peer Challenge that took place in December 2012 and the Executive Awayday that took place in February 2013.

Theme	Area for Improvement	Action	Link to Council Priority	Completion Date	Lead Officer(s)	Progress up to 31 March 2014
Community Leadership	<i>The council needs to develop its own definition of community leadership and decide how far along the spectrum of community leadership it wishes to go.</i>	1. Hold an Executive Awayday to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a clear vision of what Community Leadership means to East Herts Council. Decide how far on the community leadership spectrum we will go. 	PEOPLE	February 2013	CMT	Achieved. Awayday session held and improvement plan developed to take forward 'community leadership' and 'here to help' vision.
		2. Leader to give a presentation on the 'Future Councillor' setting out his vision for the shape of local government in the future and outline the key role that ward councillors have to play in that future.	PEOPLE	14 March 2013	Leader of the Council	Achieved. Presentation took place on 13 March 2013. 30% of serving councillors have already had a briefing and all members have been notified of the new publication from NLGN called 'The Road Not Taken'. Newly elected members in May 2013 will be given this information and this presentation, as part of their induction briefing.
		3. Leader to attend staff briefings to share views on the shape of local government and the key priorities for the council.	PEOPLE	April 2013 July 2013 October 2013	Leader of the Council invited Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved. Leader attended the April 2013 staff briefings on the future role of councils and ward councillor roles. Follow up staff briefings have also received presentations from The Chairman of the Council and the Portfolio holder for Community and Partnership Liaison.

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Community Leadership	<i>The council needs to develop its own definition of community leadership and decide how far along the spectrum of community leadership it wishes to go.</i>	4. Develop a Communication Plan to promote the council's community leadership role.	PEOPLE	June 2013	Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved. This has been incorporated within the corporate communications strategy and monitoring process.
	<i>Clarifying the process for handling local issues that come back into the organisation from members, aligning council resources to support the role and providing supporting officer capacity.</i>	5. Joint briefing held with the Executive and SMG to discuss the Community Leadership vision and the operational support required.	PEOPLE	30 April 2013	Executive SMG	Achieved. A joint meeting was held with the Executive and SMG on 30 April 2013 to take forward 'community leadership'. The discussion helped to define 'community leadership' for East Herts and identified a number of training and development suggestions. The outcomes from this session feed into actions 4, 6 and 8.
	<i>The council will need to more effectively support members in embracing their community leadership role.</i>	6. Facilitate action learning sets (ALS) to support members in responding to community based issues and understanding their community leadership role.	PEOPLE	1 set held in 2012/13 2 sets held in 2013/14	Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved (but on going as part of service day to day activity). The ALSs are progressing well and the third cohort has been set up. There is also a joint session planned every six months to bring in all 3 cohort members to debate and discuss common issues/challenges to all or most of them.
		7. Relaunch the Community Engagement checklist to support members in developing their own profile of their ward.	PEOPLE	May 2013	Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved. Checklist has been circulated electronically to all members.
		8. Review member training in light of the councillors' changing role to include "communication and consultation" skills and techniques needed to engage with their local communities are provided.	PEOPLE	Ongoing - Quarterly through the Member Development Charter Group	Head of Legal and Democratic Services	Achieved. Members training & development plan for 2014/15 approved. Plan will be monitored by the Charter Group. Work has commenced on preparing the member induction programme for 2015.

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Community Leadership	<i>The council will need to more effectively support members in embracing their community leadership role. (continued)</i>	9. In partnership with the Member Development Charter Group review role descriptions in light of the changing role of councillors.	PEOPLE	May 2013	Head of Legal and Democratic Services	Achieved. A review was undertaken by the Charter Group of ward member role to better promote the community leadership strands. An amended role description was considered and agreed by Council on 16 October 2013.
		10. Include case studies of good examples of community leadership using a range of member communication channels to support members in their role.	PEOPLE	Regular articles circulated.	Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved (but on going as part of service day to day activity). Case studies developed with members have been captured and written up and are to be available on the councils web site. A small number of members agreed to video record their case studies. These have been shared with staff at the October round of staff briefings and were well received.

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Scrutiny	<i>Scrutiny members now need to set their own agenda for work programmes more assertively.</i>	11. Joint meeting to take place with Chief Executive and Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny, to discuss work programme development.	PEOPLE	23 May 2013	Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services (DCCS) Head of Legal and Democratic Services	Achieved. Regular meetings of scrutiny chair and vice chairs taking place. Work programme discussion has now been moved to the start of the meeting each month to facilitate work programme discussion. The importance of developing the scrutiny agenda has a significantly raised profile and is receiving greater attention
Organisational Culture	<i>A reappraisal of strategic HR policy and practice is needed to reflect the future challenges in particular how the council will adapt its corporate communication systems and staff support arrangements in the light of new ways of working such as homeworking.</i>	12. Review the council's People Strategy to reflect the council's future challenges and update policies accordingly.	PEOPLE	March 2014	Head of People and Property Services	Revised Completion Date from March 2014 to March 2015. This action has been put on hold to ensure outcomes from the 'Here to Help' programme are reflected in the council's People Strategy. This action will now be completed in 2014/15.
	<i>Address some problems that have arisen relating to workforce corporate communications and support in the light of these recent changes.</i>	13. Implement the changes highlighted from the review of internal communications.	PEOPLE	July 2013	Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved. A review of internal communications was approved by CMT in July 2013.

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Organisational Culture	<i>There needs to be a greater focus on behaviours which will underpin the council in the future, including; building trust, flexibility, adaptability, enabling/empowering and innovation.</i>	14. Develop a behaviour framework, in partnership with staff, consistent with 'Here to Help' and the Council's Community Leadership role.	PEOPLE	April 2013 start	Chief Executive and DCCS Head of People and Property Services	<p>On target. The ideas and values to underpin the philosophy of here to Help have been developed with staff through a range of media including staff briefings.</p> <p>Managers' workshops were held in February to March to allow managers to contribute to the development of the Council's values and behaviours and to give managers the skills and support to run the staff workshops in April 2014. The outcomes of the workshops will be the development of action plans that will imbed 'Here to Help' across the Council.</p>

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Finance	<i>The overall approach to financial monitoring including the monitoring of savings needs to be improved to ensure budgets and savings delivery are on track in year.</i>	15. In line with the external audit recommendation efficiency savings for 2013/14 will be RAG (Red, Amber and Green) assessed through the Corporate Healthcheck process.	PROSPERITY	Quarterly	Heads of Service	Achieved. RAG monitoring was piloted in the last quarter against all 2012/13 efficiency savings. Formal quarterly reporting has been rolled out in 2013/14.
		16. Review the overall approach to finance and consider changes to the financial regulations. (Links to action 27)	PROSPERITY	December 2013	Director of Finance and Support Services	Revised completion date from December 2013 to July 2014. Significantly upgraded financial system which includes changes to the way procurement is undertaken at an operational level was completed in October 2013. Following this, a review of the way finance is managed and subsequent financial regulations need to be considered to take account of changes at a national funding level. Project being initiated to undertake this.
	<i>In reviewing future priorities and budgets it will be important to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to test resource allocations against your priority outcomes consider pump priming new methods of early intervention to change demand for services in future ensure value for money through on-going effective contract monitoring of major contracted services like waste collection explore future opportunities for asset rationalisation, customer service channel shift and greater agile working 	17. Test resource allocations against priority outcomes through the budget setting process for 2014/15 (Follows on from action 16)	PROSPERITY	March 2014	Director of Finance and Support Services	Achieved. Integrated service planning undertaken and this year a new "Budget Challenge" process was set up to inform the budget for 2014/15 this was set.
		18. Consider new methods of pump priming to change demand in services as new methods and opportunities arise.	PROSPERITY	Ongoing	Director of Finance and Support Services	Achieved (but on going as part of service day to day activity). Opportunities will be examined as they arise. Mechanism for identifying areas is available as part of the council's integrated service and financial planning framework.
		19. Continue to produce the monthly Corporate Healthcheck to ensure ongoing effective monitoring of all revenue and capital budgets, including major contracted services.	PROSPERITY	Monthly	Director of Finance and Support Services	Achieved. The Corporate Healthcheck was reported monthly for the Corporate Management Team and the Executive, containing analysis on revenue and capital expenditure during 2013/14. The process will continue during 2014/15.
		20. Future opportunities regarding service delivery addressed annually through the Executive awayday and rolled out through the Council's Corporate Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy.	PROSPERITY	Annual (next one due March 2014 in preparation for 2015/16)	CMT	On Target. Executive Awayday scheduled for 7 April 2014.

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Finance	<p><i>Decreasing reliance on Whitehall funding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Explore opportunities for investing council capital in properties which will generate income greater than is currently being achieved from investments in the money market.</i> 	21. Write a brief for a property investment advisor to explore opportunities.	PROSPERITY	31 March 2013 - Brief completed	Chief Executive and DCCS	Achieved. Outline brief completed and expressions of interest are being sought from appropriate independent advisors.
				November 2013 (previously was September 2013)		Partially Completed November 2013. Additional actions require a revised completion date to July 2014. The Investment Strategy paper was agreed at Executive in November 2013 which identified both medium and longer-term approaches to property investment and investment funds. Consequences of investment have been included within the MTFP that was refreshed in January 2014. Actions to allow investment in property funds are underway and it is anticipated that investments could be made into funds during July 2014. The monitoring of investments is mainstreamed into the day to day to treasury management functions. Direct investment in property is under consideration and proposals will come forward only at a time when suitable opportunities are identified. This activity is ongoing.
'Here to Help'	<p><i>There is a need to define the concept of 'Here to Help' more sharply. This includes outlining the stages by which it will be implemented.</i></p>	22. Hold an Executive Awayday to establish a clear definition of what this means to East Herts Council.	PEOPLE	February 2013	CMT	Achieved. Awayday session held and improvement plan developed to take forward 'community leadership' and 'here to help' vision.
		23. Develop a programme to explore different facets of 'Here to Help' as they apply to each area/section. The Programme will need to embed the value, beliefs and behaviours which underpin this. (Links to Action 14)	PEOPLE	April 2013 start - 1 year rolling programme	Chief Executive and DCCS Head of People and Property Services	Revised completion date from March 2014 to March 2015. Please refer to action 14.
		24. Develop a Communication Plan to promote the council's 'Here to help' concept.	PEOPLE	June 2013	Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services	Achieved. The concept will be communicated in line with the approved communications strategy and internal communication review – in a timely way as the process of staff development progresses.

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IT	<i>There is a need to develop a clear IT strategy which would include, how IT will be used to shift service channels, support the back office, co-ordinate information in a joined up way across the organisation, enable different services and sites to work together seamlessly.</i>	25. Produce an IT Strategy and action plan improving resilience, response times & IT is fit for purpose.	PEOPLE PROSPERITY	December 2013 (previously was Autumn 2013)	Head of shared ICT, Business Improvement and Print and Design Services Director of Finance and Support Services	Revised Completion Date from December 2013 to May and June 2014. Investment in ICT and increased resilience (completion May 2014.) Both East Herts and Stevenage councils agreed to share ICT, Print and Design and Business Improvement from August 2013. Since then, the resilience and performance of the service has improved. Roll-out of new infrastructure commenced early 2014 and is due to finish in May 2014. ICT Strategy (completion June 2014). The ICT strategy has been delayed for a number of reasons, including an issue in relation to Public Services Network (PSN) compliance. The Strategy could not move on until this was resolved. Now that East Herts is PSN compliance, the strategy can now move forward in conjunction with related/ complement strategies including the Customer Service Strategy.

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Economic wellbeing	<i>The council will need to more effectively support members in embracing their knowledge and understanding of the planning process.</i>	26. Hold an Open Day in the Planning department to raise members' awareness of the planning process.	PLACE	May / June 2013	Head of Planning and Building Control	Achieved. Despite the Planning Open Day event being cancelled due to limited interest. During 2013/14 eleven events have been held on planning issues to support members in widening their knowledge and understanding. The events ranged from briefings on the Council's district plan and supporting policies, to a tour of the district and seminars on topics such as designing the Highway - planning the public realm, pre-determination on planning and Compulsory Purchase Orders.
Governance	<i>Continue to ensure that the council's constitution reflects the council's priorities and structure to facilitate the smooth running of the organisation.</i>	27. Set up a member and officer working group to discuss changes to the council's constitution/financial regulations.	PROSPERITY	Annually (May each year)	Director of Neighbourhood Services and Monitoring Officer Director of Finance and Support Services	Achieved. The first meeting was held on 25 September 2013. Regular meetings have been held and a report will go to Council on 15 May 2014 with the Group's recommendations.