



CABINET

16 October 2013

Subject Heading:

Open Government Member Project

Cabinet Member:

Cllr Paul Rochford

CMT Lead:

Andrew Blake-Herbert (was Ian Burns)

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Policy context:

To provide information to residents, partners and businesses about Havering and how the borough is performing in an open and transparent way, using technology to allow them to benefit from the value locked away in our data.

Financial summary:

This project was delivered within existing resources.

Is this a Key Decision?

No

When should this matter be reviewed?

N/A

Reviewing OSC:

Value

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Championing education and learning for all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

At the beginning of this term, ten Strategic Administration Projects were established to help deliver services more effectively and in new ways. The Projects were each to be driven by a Member of the Cabinet, working with a select team of officers, representing a diverse variety of disciplines within the Council.

The projects were:

**Council Effectiveness
Think Family
Open Government
Community Action
Harold Hill Ambitions**

**Neighbourhood Responsibility
Civic Pride
Future Financing
Rainham Compass
Romford Regeneration**

In the last year of this Administration, each Project will be reporting back to Cabinet, to note the achievements attained and the progress made.

The **Open Government** project has now been completed.

The project:

- Set out our ambition to be an 'Open Council'
- Defined which datasets could be freely published via the website.
- Ensured that we were meeting statutory obligations to publish data, while looking for opportunities to go further
- Publicised our information and opened ourselves to public scrutiny in order to improve engagement with local people through more transparent government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet note the outcomes delivered by the Open Government project.

REPORT DETAIL

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The ‘Open Government’ project was formally initiated in July 2011 and was substantially completed in 2012.
- 1.2. Although the project was initiated in July 2011, it crystallised senior level discussions on publishing data, which had been taking place since December 2010.
- 1.3. The project looked at what data we could publish, what we were required to publish and how we could best present that to residents in a manner that was both useful and demonstrated our commitment to transparency.
- 1.4. It set the presence of open government data for the Havering.gov.uk website and also used other projects such as the Havering Data Hub to support its objectives.

2. OUTCOMES FROM THE PROJECT

2.1 Identify data that would be useful for residents, businesses and partners

2.1.1. We identified a number of key datasets that were held by the Council in various formats and decided what would be the most appropriate mechanism for making the information public – generally by making them available for download from the havering.gov.uk website, adding them to the Havering data hub or making them part of the website’s mapping function to show users where they can access services on a map of Havering.

2.1.2. The key areas were:

- Democratic Services
- Financial transactions, including transactions over £500 and senior officers pay
- Geo-coded data and mapping based information

2.1.3. As part of the research into open government, we considered good practice from elsewhere - what data they included and how they presented it. This research was used to inform the progress of the open government project.

2.1.4. The principles we have used in opening up information to residents will continue to be used as the Government expands efforts to further localism, by enriching the relationship between citizens and central and local government through unfettered access to data. These principles will also shape our developing relationship with the Borough's businesses, in tandem with other opportunities to engage as set out in the Havering Business Growth Strategy.

2.2. Identify tools for publishing data

2.2.1. As this project was to be delivered at no additional cost to local tax payers, we had to identify existing means of publishing the data.

2.2.2. The Havering.gov.uk website was the natural place for this information to reside. Research was carried out on good practice from other local authorities and organisations and this fed into the development of the 'Open Council' web pages.

2.2.3. During the project Havering launched its new website with a considerably improved design and structure – improving both access to and presentation of information.

2.2.4. Alongside the new website, the other major repository for publicly-available information about the Council and the Borough was the Havering Data Intelligence Hub. This was developed in partnership with the London Borough of Newham.

2.2.4.1. The Havering Data Intelligence Hub (www.haveringdata.net) provides data, information and research about the London Borough of Havering. By hosting resources including data, analysis, surveys and reports the Data Hub aims to benefit the local authority, its partners and the public in understanding key information about the borough.

2.2.4.2. The data hub is a mechanism for publishing corporate and borough wide data sets, which would be of interest to residents, businesses and partners of Havering.

2.2.4.3. It allows residents to build a picture of what is going on in their area by entering their postcode and gaining access to Local Area Reports based on ward. This provides a comparison with their ward data and the rest of Havering.

2.2.4.4. The hub includes information from partner organisations, such as the health service and police, as well as national bodies such as the Home Office and Office for National Statistics.

2.2.4.5. The datasets published on this include information on:

- Education
- Health

- Crime
- Equalities
- Housing
- Economy
- Environment
- Population

2.3. Enhancing Democratic Engagement

2.3.1. Consideration was also given to how democratic engagement could be enhanced by using technology to increase the transparency of the decision-making process.

Modern.gov

2.3.2. A new web-based system to improve the administration of council committees was implemented. Called modern.gov, it has an easy to use web front end linked to the back office operation. This allowed Democratic Services to ensure that information on Councillors and committee membership was always up to date.

2.3.3. Modern.gov ensures that everything, including key decisions is available to residents, businesses in an easy to use, searchable online format.

2.3.4. Modern.gov also enabled the deployment of information on minutes and agendas to mobile devices such as iPads. This enabled savings on printing and transport of documentation.

Havering.gov.uk

2.3.5. The website had an area created called An Open Council, this was used to publish download files, such as the “spend over £500”, as well as the Havering Data Hub and also the My Place mapping solution with added “Find my nearest” functionality.

2.3.6. The publishing of all items of non-exempt expenditure over £500 was an important step in enabling transparency to council tax payers as to how their money was being spent. It was a requirement of all councils to publish this information, but Havering decided to bring this information together with a raft of other spending details. These include the job roles and pay for all senior council officers of Head of Service level and above and details of Councillor remuneration and expenses.

2.3.7. The website has continued to support the web-casting of Council and Cabinet meetings – as well as the Havering Community Questions events – through a front-page link. This has allowed citizens to engage in the democratic process in a way they were unable to before. It has also meant that people who had difficulties in attending council meetings can now view in their own home.

- 2.3.8. An e-petitioning tool was launched in December 2010. While this was prior to the formal establishment of this project, it was carried out under the category of open government and democratic engagement.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1.1. The Open Government project looked at using the website and other supporting sites. It was supported by a number of other projects including the Customer Services Transformation Programme and The Havering Data Hub.
- 3.1.2. It ensured that key data sets were made available through those projects.
- 3.1.3. It has built a framework which allows the Council to publish data in a way that ensures residents, partners and businesses can have easy access.
- 3.1.4. Any future work required on open government will be delivered by services in line with the principles established through this project, to provide more data to residents and other interested parties, for their scrutiny and to help them go about their lives and their business.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

This report is being brought to cabinet to provide Members with an overview of the Council Effectiveness Member project.

Other options considered:

N/A

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

This project was delivered using existing resources.

Legal implications and risks:

There are no legal implications or risks arising from this report.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no HR implications arising from this report.

Equalities implications and risks:

There have been concerns in the past about the “digital divide” where putting information onto websites, prevents access by people without the internet etc. However, the number of people without internet access of some kind – be it home PC or mobile technology - is low and falling, while the Council makes public access available through its suite of library PCs.

There have also been concerns about people with visual impairments etc. being able to properly use websites, known as accessibility. The Havering website has been built with accessibility in mind to mitigate these risks.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None