

## **Future Shape of the Council - Executive Summary**

### **Summary**

The Future Shape programme was set up last year to look at how Barnet could tackle the challenges of meeting higher expectations from our residents with less money. The interim report on the programme is being submitted to Cabinet on 6 July. The programme is about how we do things differently in future to help make sure Barnet's citizens can lead successful and comfortable lives and fulfil their potential. It concludes that we need to focus in particular on three areas:

- a different relationship with citizens
- a one public sector approach – working with our partners across the borough
- a relentless drive for efficiency.

The programme has looked at delivering these objectives through seven strands. Three strands are reporting through this interim report. These are:

Property – recommending that we better manage our property portfolio (including our schools) through the creation of one central management unit to reduce costs;

'Transact' – bringing services together in clusters, improving their efficiency and focusing on what the public wants. In some cases we will, in time, consider who in the public and private sector we should involve in this;

Support – bringing together corporate support services from across the council to create a better, more efficient service and looking, over the longer term, at the potential for working with a partner to deliver these services (and potentially to use this partnership to deliver services to others).

The remaining four strands will report to Cabinet in the autumn.

The report recommends that we start work on the first three strands straight away.

### **Background**

Barnet recognised last year that we faced some big challenges:

- customers are more and more used to services which are available to them when they want them in the way they want them – for instance home deliveries from supermarkets that can be booked online in one hour time slots. They increasingly expect us to be able to provide them with better, more flexible services
- we have had to deal with ever less money being available to provide services
- at the same time, it's becoming more expensive to provide services – for instance as people are living longer with long-term health problems
- and there are some really difficult problems to solve – such as how we persuade residents to reduce the amount of waste they produce.

We launched the Future Shape programme to look at how we address these challenges and enable our citizens to live the lives they want in future. The recent credit crunch means the programme has become even more important. We know that this will mean that there will be

further reductions in the money we, and probably our partners in the borough, receive in future as a result. So we need to find ways of doing more with less.

If we don't start to address these challenges now, we will find ourselves in a much more difficult position in a year or two. And if we leave it until then to address the issues, we won't be able to do so in a strategic way and are likely to have to take even tougher decisions about services and jobs.

The Future Shape programme is a way of addressing the challenges Barnet faces in a sustainable way. It is not about outsourcing all council services. Nor is it about one big-bang change to everything we do. It's about thinking and acting in a different way, of spending less but working together with partner organisation (such as the police and local NHS) and residents to achieve more. It's about making sure that our citizens can lead the lives they want and can achieve their potential when there is less public funding available.

In February 2009, seven groups were set up to look at different areas of council work. Council staff were invited to sit on the groups and our local partners were also asked to join in to see where there were opportunities for us to work together to save money and provide better services. The seven groups looked at the following areas:

Group	Focus
<b>Barnet Strategy</b>	To understand what our residents want and need and how we can work with other public, voluntary and community services in Barnet (such as the police, local NHS and Barnet College) to help meet these needs
<b>The Vehicle</b>	To look at how we can adopt a different approach to tackling difficult and costly issues in Barnet such as disadvantage, waste and poor health
<b>Barnet Support</b>	To see what potential there is for improvements and savings in our support services such as HR, ICT, Legal and Finance
<b>Barnet Property</b>	To look at how we can make the most of the buildings the council owns and occupies such as schools, libraries, offices and commercial premises
<b>Barnet Access</b>	To look at how residents currently access public services in Barnet and how we can simplify this and encourage people to help one another to get hold of the support and information they need
<b>Barnet Transact</b>	To see what potential there is for improvements and savings across all council services that are provided to residents. Also, to consider whether some services could be better provided through partnerships with others in the public, private or voluntary and community sectors
<b>Barnet Assessment</b>	To look at how we can improve the way we assess whether residents are entitled to certain services such as council housing, social care etc.

Three of these groups – support, property and transact – have now finished their work and their findings are being reported to the council's Cabinet on 6 July.

## **Findings**

Cabinet has been asked to endorse three objectives to underpin the work that the council does in the future and all decisions it makes. These are:

- **a new relationship with citizens** where we enable residents to help one another to access the information and support they need, where we provide residents with

personalised services and support them to change damaging behaviours such as smoking or drug use. To do this we need to develop a better understanding about what our citizens need to succeed

- **a one public sector approach** working together in a more linked up way with our public sector partners across the borough to deliver better services and the new relationship with our citizens described above
- **a relentless drive for efficiency** so we spend more on prevention and less on resolving problems later. For example, if we could get our residents to recycle more, this would prevent us having to spend so much on landfill; if we can help people to lead healthier lives, this will mean less people will have to use services provided by the NHS and social services. This is also about working with our partners in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to reduce costs through getting rid of duplication and streamlining services. We will also consider charges where people would pay more for a higher level of service.

To make sure that we can achieve these objectives it is suggested that the Future Shape programme is carried out over a number of phases. The first phase will be to deliver identified savings in the short-term. To do this we may need to reorganise some teams, reduce duplication and improve the way we currently do things. We will also need to make sure that we have a better understanding of what our residents need to improve their lives so we know what services are required and who should provide these in the future.

### **Feedback from the groups**

Cabinet will hear feedback from the three groups when it meets on 6 July. Below is a list of the groups' main findings, as well as the recommendations that Cabinet are being asked to agree.

#### **PROPERTY**

The property group found that the council currently owns a property portfolio in excess of £500m. This includes offices, schools, libraries, community buildings etc. However the way that we plan and manage our property could be improved to save the council money.

**Recommendation:** the group is suggesting that one central property unit for managing buildings, capital projects (e.g. managing the build of new schools) and facilities management (e.g. managing repairs, cleaning etc) is set up, rather than having lots of different units in different services as we currently have. We also need to improve the information we hold on property the council owns.

Longer term, the group thinks the council should work together with a private sector organisation to help the council manage its property better and get more out of it.

#### **TRANSACT**

The transact group looked at how all council services were delivered and looked for opportunities to:

- deliver better services and reduce costs by working together with other organisations delivering similar services
- raise performance through working with the private sector
- free up the council to focus on its strategic role
- generate additional income by making the most of current fee earning services and by identifying services that other organisations could buy from us.

**Recommendation:**

The group found a number of services such as catering, transport, housing and street scene services (street cleaning, parking etc) could be delivered in future in a different way to reduce costs and deliver improvements. The group is suggesting that these opportunities are explored further. To start with, the group is suggesting that there are improvements that can be made in-house to the way services are delivered to give customers better services and better value for money.

**SUPPORT**

The support group recognised that some progress had been made in recent years to bring support services such as HR and IT together by creating Resources and Corporate Governance directorates. However, it also found that more could be done to bring support services into one unit and continue to improve them. It also found that there are opportunities to make money and/or reduce costs by providing support services to other organisations.

**Recommendation:**

The group is suggesting that support services operating across the council are brought together into one team. Over the longer term, we should look at different ways of providing support services to the council. This may mean asking a private sector organisation to help us to deliver them.

**What's next?**

We know that it is a big job for the council to make the savings and improvements suggested by the groups. We need to make sure that staff are able to use their talent, creativity, energy and commitment to serve the public and improve services. So to help us do this, an organisational development programme will be put in place over the coming months.

We are suggesting to Cabinet that the next phase of work on the first three areas – support, property and transact - should start immediately.

The remaining four groups will report back to Cabinet in October 2009. We will be consulting with staff on the proposals identified above and will continue to communicate with staff and partner organisations about what is going on and how the council is changing.