

Harrow Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillors Amir Moshenson (Chair) and Dean Gilligan (Vice-Chair)

Our Role

As always, our vision for scrutiny in Harrow has been cross-party investigation of issues and decisions that are important to residents. This guides the development of our work programme and ensures a balance between holding the council administration and health partners to account, as well as investigating and influencing the Council and partners' approaches to issues of concern to residents.

The Council's scrutiny function is driven forward by the Scrutiny Leadership Group, made up of the chairs and vice-chairs of the committees and the scrutiny leads, whose work and achievements are highlighted in this report. The Scrutiny Leadership Group provides strategic direction to the scrutiny function and helps to ensure that we maintain an effective focus for our work, acting as a critical friend to the Council and influencing key decisions. Meetings are held bimonthly, and they bring together the feedback from scrutiny leads on progress in their different service areas.

Highlights

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are happy to have inducted a new team of councillors in their respective scrutiny roles. For many new councillors, this is their first introduction to scrutiny and the O&S Committee has focused on ensuring that scrutiny members develop into their roles and equip them with the understanding to successfully deliver their respective work plans.

The new scrutiny team has been looking very closely at customer experience and what that means for Harrow residents. The team prioritises and continues to focus on key challenges impacting Harrow's residents. It also ensures that thorough research is conducted in exploring these important areas so that residents have access to the best possible service from the council and partners. The O&S committee is very focused on resident experience and raises many questions that are focused on the everyday experience of residents in the borough.

"The new team in scrutiny has been looking at critical areas with the most impact on residents with fresh eyes." – Councillor Amir Moshenson.

The Focus of Work over the Past Year

Our focus this year has been on the new corporate priorities and what this means for the council and its residents. These priorities will form a substantial part of the work the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be doing the current work period. We will also be looking at the priorities in conjunction to the Harrow Strategic Development Partnership Work Plan.

Another key area for the O&S Committee is the council's dedication to improving customer experience. This will be constantly reviewed, and all members of the committee will have this principle at the forefront of every decision made. When discussing service delivery and financial prudence, it is paramount that customer experience is addressed and prioritised.

Over the past year, the O&S Committee has met a total of eight times where we have discussed:

- Budget – The approved budget for this year has implications for a range of service changes and savings. We have continued to monitor how this will impact service provision within the work force and how this impacts residents. We have looked at mitigating circumstances to ensure that the council can continue to produce services of a good and reasonable standard
- Scrutiny work programme – We have finalised the Scrutiny work programme of 2022-26 and we will continue to monitor its effectiveness.
- Regeneration – Given the formal closing of the Civic Centre this year, a large amount of our work is understanding what this means for the workforce and the future of front facing services for the residents of Harrow.
- The Corporate Plan – With the new administration coming into the council, we have been working with senior management to ensure that the plan aligns with the key priorities of the council representatives. We look forward to working with the Corporate Leadership Team throughout the work programme.
- Customer Experience – A key priority for the council is the way it delivers on improving customer experience. We have been constantly looking at how the council engages with its residents and how to do this in a more efficient way. As stated, we will have this key priority at the forefront of our decision making.
- Community Safety Strategy – We are proud to say that Harrow is one of the safest boroughs in London and we aim to maintain this. We have looked at key areas that of community safety which will help us to maintain this and improve community safety in general. We look forward to seeing the effects of its implementation

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee appreciates and recognises the Leader of the Council's engagement with the committee. He has engaged scrutiny on the development of the corporate priorities by attending the Scrutiny Leadership Group in December and making it a focus of the January Q&A alongside budget, as we recognise delivering priorities and flagship actions goes hand in hand with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). We look forward to continued work with him.

Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Councillors Yogesh Teli (Chair) and Graham Henson (Vice-Chair)

Our Role

As members of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee, it is our role to challenge and scrutinise the council and its partners' performance against priorities in terms of finance, operational delivery, and service provision. It is imperative that the scrutiny is performed in a constructive manner that is apolitical, is focused on improving the council's performance and most importantly, ensures the provision of efficient services that are considered value-for-money for the taxpayer.

Key Highlights of Municipal Year

This year, the sub-committee has focused on scrutinising council documentation and reports detailing the finances of the borough. We are pleased with the provision of information at the set time parameters which allows us to scrutinise more effectively, and we welcome this to continue at the same pace. We were pleased with the quarterly finance reports as they were

well prepared and highlighted the financial pressure the council is under and the mitigation that has been put into place.

We have also focussed on pre-consultation meetings to ensure that the chair and co-chair is informed about contents and issues.

Another highlight is the adoption of the budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Focus of Work Over the Past Year

This past year we have focussed on the monitoring of the 2022/23 budget. We are pleased that it came within the expected parameters and was presented well. We look forward to receiving more budgets like this in the future.

In addition to the financial performance of the council we look to develop key performance indicators to measure against to ensure the progress in the management of council finances.

Impact & Value of Scrutiny

This period of scrutiny has allowed us to develop a proper budget for this year and the following year. A budget that we will continue to maintain and monitor to ensure value for money for Harrow residents. The budget and the corporate plan have provided the council the direction of travel and a better understanding of the council's position. The monitoring of the budget allowed us to see the pressure points within the borough. This allowed us to see how the council was mitigating these pressure points and key steps being taken by the council ensure financial stability.

The scrutiny function as a result has been beneficial to the way the council has used its financial resources. We aim to continue to work in this manner to ensure more economic prosperity for the council and its residents.

Work Priorities for Next Year

We will continue to monitor this year's work plan to make sure it aligns with council functions and necessities. We aim to follow through with the various aspects of the Scrutiny program and develop others which benefits all parts of the council's workforce. Another possible key area next year is the changes to the regeneration programme.

Scrutiny will be invaluable in delving deeper into the impacts of the service changes. We are looking forward to scrutiny procedures which will allow us to gain a better understanding of council priorities. A key part of this is the reintroduction of performance boards which will provide a robust performance reporting regime following the pandemic pause, it will be critical to scrutiny's role that involves Performance & Finance. The chair and vice-chair will continuously analyse these so that they can analyse performance areas and escalate to committee as necessary.

This method and dedication to tracking performance will allow Scrutiny to make positive and necessary inflections so that residents can continue to be served efficiently.

Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee – Councillors Chetna Halai (Chair), Rekha Shah (Vice-Chair) & Dr Antonio Weiss

Our Role

As members of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny sub-committee, it is our role to be the key driver of the scrutiny function's health and social care scrutiny programme and maintain relationships with health and social care colleagues and partners in relation to shared stated priorities, in consultation with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

We have specific responsibility for scrutiny of the following functions:

- Health and social care infrastructure and service
- NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Public Health
- Other policy proposals which may have an impact on health, public health, social care and wellbeing
- Collaborative working with health agencies
- Commissioning and contracting health services

Key Highlights of Municipal Year

Over the past year the Health and Social Care Subcommittee has maintained its dedication in improving and maintaining high standards of health for Harrow residents. One achievement is our very close scrutiny of the relocation of St Marks Orthopaedic surgery to Central Middlesex Hospital to ensure the move benefits Harrow residents.

In addition to this our work so far has involved reviews of:

- Childhood immunisations in Harrow,
- System winter plans & pressures,
- Health and social care system pressures,
- Key issues affecting Northwest London (NWL) via the Northwest London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Focus of Work over the Past Year

Throughout 2022/23, the impact of COVID-19 has been under constant supervision by the Health and Social Care committee. As the borough transitions into the post-pandemic period, we will continue to monitor the effects of COVID-19 on residents and how to mitigate any public health concerns.

We are focussing on raising the standards of healthcare affecting Harrow residents and neighbouring boroughs. This is a continuous key priority of our agenda, and we continue to meet with relevant stakeholders to ensure that this is reflected in our services.

In addition to this our other areas of focus have been maternity services in the borough and how to improve them, key issues around nursing, and we will continue to review childhood immunisations to ensure Harrow's children have the best outcome.

Due to the high number of children receiving vaccinations throughout the UK over the last 50 years, many serious childhood infectious diseases have disappeared altogether, like diphtheria, polio or tetanus, or have been dramatically reduced, such as measles and whooping cough. Unless a high level of vaccine uptake remains, many of these serious infectious diseases will return. The Covid pandemic and ensuing vaccine programme highlighted the inequalities in vaccine uptake within the marginalised or more deprived communities.

The committee is exploring how childhood immunisations are commissioned and provided through the NHS and will investigate issues which compromise vaccine uptake locally. As Harrow is showing a decline in some childhood immunisations. We are keen to dig into the factors affecting this locally and regionally. While Public Health focuses on promoting childhood vaccinations, the delivery is via Health partners, so we will examine the issue via all fronts, including:

- Responsibilities for oversight, commissioning, and provision
- Local uptake figures
- Local demographic and other factors determining uptake
- Roles and current activity to promote uptake
- Key issues and challenges

Impact and Value of Scrutiny

Scrutiny allows us to provide and ensure better health services for Harrow Residents. The apolitical nature of scrutiny gives us the function of being able to address challenges using multiple voices and rationale. The various key areas within healthcare that have been covered this year and brought back to committee is key for continuous improvements in healthcare provision around the borough and North West London.

For the Health and Social Care committee, the value of scrutiny is carefully questioning what is already within current health care provisions and key personnel answerable to Harrow Residents. This allows us to cover key areas within healthcare and review them appropriately for continuous improvements.

Work Priorities for Next Year

Looking ahead, the current work programme will continue to be observed and any future recommendations made will be based on the outcomes and emerging issues within this current work period. A potential area to look at in next year's programme is striking a balance between strategic and operational mechanisms of the services that we scrutinise. We want to ensure that services are being provided according to needs of Harrow Residents and as important as the scrutiny function is we want to be able to provide a working comparison between this and our services.

The focuses of next year's work programme will be:

- Ongoing reviews of elective orthopaedic operations at Middlesex Hospital
- Improvements at Maternity at Northwick Park Hospital as inspected by the Care Quality Commission
- Raising standards for nursing recruitment and focus on retainment of staff
- Improve childhood immunisations
- Clearing Covid backlogs

- Improving GP appointments accessibility for patients

“I have enjoyed exploring a wide range of healthcare matters affecting the residents of Harrow and wider. I have enjoyed leading this Committee and working with members to make a tangible impact on health outcomes in the borough.” – Councillor Chetna Halai.

People Scrutiny Leads– Cllr Jerry Miles & Cllr Govind Bharadia

Our Role

As scrutiny lead members for the People Directorate, our role is to be a critical friend to the organisation and to help residents of Harrow of all ages – from birth to old age.

Key Highlights of Municipal Year

The People’s committee would like to pay tribute to Paul Hewitt, the previous Corporate Director of Peoples Services, who retired in September. It was a pleasure to have worked with him over the years and his dedication to Harrow Residents and the council will be missed. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the new Corporate Director, Senel Arkut and the Director of Children Services, Peter Tolley.

The key highlight of our work over the past year has involved examining the Council’s change in administration and navigating this to ensure that we continue to serve the residents of Harrow with our continuous diligence. Another key highlight has been looking at the closure of the civic centre and the relocation to Gayton Road as a new structural base where Housing and Social care services can work together.

The Focus of Work over the Past Year

A large part of our work in the previous cycle was determining the effects of COVID-19 on all residents in the borough, this remains a part of our work and we are focussing on looking at the effects of COVID-19 post-pandemic.

Another work area is examining the budget for social care in the medium term. In our examination it was found that teams were being consolidated and resources better managed, ensuring continuous value for money in service provision and at the same time making sure that the services are delivered to a high standard.

In addition, we looked at the impact of the ongoing Regeneration Programme in Wealdstone on community cohesion in the area as well as the council’s efforts to augment this. We also monitored the recovery of the Northwick Park Maternity Unit, and the Adult Social Care Reforms and what impact they have on Harrow’s residents and local services.

Impact and Value of Scrutiny

Scrutiny continues to be a positive force in service provision in Harrow. The collaboration between all council members makes scrutiny a rewarding process and the impact and value continues in this cycle. It is a function that has facility to hold the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, and Portfolio Holders to account in special meetings or by invitation and this ensures viewpoints are reflected in the Cabinet. In our area, we will be ensuring that services are maintained and improved amidst a challenging time for resources in the budget agreed by the Council.

Work Priorities for Next Year

Looking ahead, the effects of COVID-19 still need to be researched and analysed as it is an issue which, despite the advances in medication and healthcare has had widespread impact on not only health but a pressures range of social provisions across London, including Harrow.

As a result, we will pay particular attention to children's services that were affected greatly during the pandemic. Schools and education were greatly impacted, and it is necessary to keep this as a priority.

We also want to prioritise children's mental health wellbeing and have recommended working with the children's charity Barnardo's. We are proud to say that children's mental health and wellbeing is at the forefront of our priorities, and we worked with partners to conduct the 'How Are You?' survey to understand more about children's needs. We appreciate that children are often placed in difficult situations especially due to the pressures of social media. We will ensure that there a range of activities and services available to the children of Harrow and scrutinise their standards of delivery.

We will also continue to monitor adult's social care as part of the current work programme. The impact of budgets cuts and constraints on delivering services like social care, which makes up significant proportion of council expenditure, will be monitored to ensure services are still being delivered to a good standard. Therefore, the council is redesigning its services to integrate the concept of family hubs and scrutiny will follow developments with interest.

"Scrutiny should be a critical friend of the Council, and it should work closely with the Council and its stakeholders to ensure that the services provided to residents are efficient, effective and meet the needs of the local community" – Councillors Jerry Miles and Govind Bharadia.

Community Scrutiny Leads – Councillors June Baxter and Dan Anderson

Our Role

In Community, we look at a wide range of issues; from the environment, libraries, and homelessness, to cleanliness, personal safety, and roadworks - things that affect residents directly. The focus over the past year has been on Harrow residents and ensuring that the needs of the community are considered when decisions are taken that impact their lives.

Key Highlights of Municipal Year

A key part of our work for this year was looking at the Harrow Strategic Development Partnership. Scrutiny reviewed and analysed the HSDP and recommended actions.

In this review we discussed:

- Public Parking on the site of the new town hall
- The use of property in phase three of the Grange Farm business plan
- Time scales of service delivery
- Property prioritisation of Harrow Residents

The Focus of Work Over the Past Year

The Community Safety Strategy is a legal requirement, it is important that this remains current and reflects changes in the borough. This updated strategy has allowed the new Administration to set out its priorities for community safety in Harrow.

The Safer Harrow Partnership is responsible for this strategy through a multi-agency approach and are accountable for its effective implementation. To ensure that the priorities in this strategy are implemented, several workstreams will be established which will report back to the main group. All progress under each workstream will be monitored through quarterly reporting at Safer Harrow to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The strategy outlines six community safety priorities for Harrow, and how each of these priorities will be measured, and progress monitored. These priorities were identified through the analysis of Harrow-specific data and trends and were proposed by statutory and non-statutory partners at consultation workshops.

Scrutiny will be invaluable in making sure that the Community Safety Plan aligns with the flagship action of a borough that is clean and safe. We have worked with our statutory and VCS partners as well as residents, communities, local businesses. All our stakeholders will be instrumental in keeping the people of Harrow safe from crime and repeat victimisation and help us achieve our outcomes. Scrutiny will continue to monitor the strategy and its delivery alongside the work with various VCS partners and stakeholders to ensure the Community Safety Plan is suited to the needs of the borough and its residents. We are dedicated to ensuring that Harrow remains one of the safest boroughs in London.

Impact and Value of Scrutiny

The Scrutiny function allows us to hold members of the Cabinet to account. In our work this was beneficial as it allowed us to look directly and initiatives that affect residents and provided us with the functions to improve on said initiatives.

Work Priorities for Next Year

We will continue to monitor the current work programme and make changes if and when necessary. At this point we are focussing on the Community Safety Programme and the Harrow Strategic Development Partnership. We are paying particular attention to how these schemes will work in practice and look forward to analysing results in the future.

Resources Scrutiny leads – Councillors Phillip O'Dell and Samir Sumaria

Our Role

We are involved in shaping the Scrutiny Work Programme as part of the Scrutiny Leadership Group. Our focus is to ensure that services and programmes within the Resources directorate are reflected in scrutiny's work. We work with the Corporate Director of Resources to review and understand the improvements made by the directorate as part of the Modernisation Programme.

Key Highlights of Municipal Year

Over the past year, a great amount of the directorate's capacity has involved the post-pandemic implications for the workforce following the return to in-person working for large

numbers. We continue to look at what this means for service provision within the council. We have been happy to meet with the interim corporate director to discuss this in more detail in a series of meetings and look forward to a continuous positive working relationship with the Corporate Leadership Team.

We have also looked at how council performance boards will look like in its new form going forward due to their reinstatement post Covid. We anticipate that this would be a positive and functional way of making sure the council hits its targets and works more efficiently.

Another highlight for us was the creation of the work programme for the year. We look forward to working with members to ensure there is proper scrutiny of the council's services to provide our residents with the best possible services locally.

The Focus of Work Over the Past Year:

Over the past year our focus has been on customer experience and what this means for Harrow residents. We are continuously working on exploring how to best deliver for residents and want our work to encompass this. We continue to deliberate with stakeholders regarding the best course of action to ensure that residents' customer experience is optimised, and they can access and use council resources effectively.

Impact and Value of Scrutiny:

We believe that scrutiny is an important function for the council. Scrutiny ensures that the Cabinet and officers are held accountable for decisions that will impact our residents and it is an effective mechanism in ensuring the right decisions are made. The value of scrutiny this year for our committee is introducing the aims, objectives and methodology of the work programme and our customer experience priorities.

As we continue, the work on the current work programme we believe there will be more impact for scrutiny as the year goes on.

Work Priorities for Next Year:

We believe that as the work programme was formally agreed this year, there needs to be a suitable period to measure the success of the programme.

However, we believe that the main challenges for the year ahead evolve around the council providing value for money to residents, given the increase in council tax and ensuring that customer service benefits the residents in an optimal way. There needs to be more resident engagement that benefits the local community to ensure we are putting residents first. We aim to study this in our Customer Experience Review.

The review sets out to investigate how we might use the Council's policies and strategies to help improve the customer experience through monitoring the progress of the customer experience action plan agreed at Cabinet and considering future customer needs, modern customer service delivery models and technology and the best outcomes for the Borough.

The main objectives of the review are:

- To monitor the progress on more intuitive digital access for residents e.g., refined search options on webpage
- To better understand digital exclusion and those affected by it
- Review how services are delivered (such as the front door to Adult Social care and Council Tax) and key customer journeys (such as subscribing to Garden Waste, reporting bin issues and ordering a parking permit)

- To ensure an improvement in the council's complaints process and interaction with elected members
- To ensure an improvement in the customer journey using the webpage and phone lines

We look forward to developing this work to ensure that services are built around the customer and identifying key problems. This will be a large part of our work this period.