

---

**REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**


---

**MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2005**


---

Chair: Councillor Jean Lammiman

Councillors: \* Blann \* Pinkus  
 \* Bluston \* Seymour  
 \* Mrs Champagne (2) \* Mrs R Shah (1)  
 \* Mitzi Green (in the Chair) \* Toms (5)  
 \* Lavingia (4) \* Versallion  
 \* John Nickolay (4)

\* Denotes Member present  
 (1), (2), (4) and (5) Denote category of Reserve Members

[Note: Councillor Marie-Louise Nolan also attended this meeting to speak on the items indicated at Minutes 333, 334 and 335 below].

**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**
**PART II - MINUTES**

322. **Election of Chair for the Meeting:**  
 In the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair, Councillor Mitzi Green was nominated and duly seconded to Chair this meeting. Upon being put to a vote, it was

**RESOLVED (unanimously):** That Councillor Mitzi Green be elected as Chair for this meeting.

323. **Councillor Jean Lammiman:**  
 It was noted that Councillor Lammiman was unwell. All Members of the Committee joined in wishing her a speedy recovery.

324. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

**RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Gate  
 Councillor Mark Ingram  
 Councillor Jean Lammiman  
 Councillor Osborn  
 Councillor Thammaiah

Reserve Member

Councillor Mrs R Shah  
 Councillor Toms  
 Councillor John Nickolay  
 Councillor Mrs Champagne  
 Councillor Lavingia

325. **Declarations of Interest:**  
 Councillor Bluston declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 10, "Annual Report of the Human Resources Portfolio Holder for 2004/05", by virtue of the fact that the report made reference to the percentage of employees retiring and that he was the Chair of the Early Retirement Sub-Committee. During consideration of the same item, Councillor Bluston declared a further personal interest by virtue of the fact that he was also the Chair of the Pension Fund Investments Panel.

**RESOLVED:** To note the interests declared by Councillor Bluston in relation to agenda item 10, and that the Member participated in the discussions and decisions on that item.

326. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

**RESOLVED:** That (1) in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following item be admitted late to the agenda by virtue of the special circumstances and grounds for urgency detailed below:-

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Special Circumstances/Grounds for Urgency</u>
17. Harrow IT Services Update Report	The report had not been available for circulation when the original agenda was despatched due to the considerable amount of effort that was required to conclude the contract negotiations for the Business Transformation Project (BTP).

(2) all items be considered in the order set out in the agenda and with the press and public present.

327. **Minutes:**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2005, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

328. **Public Questions:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.

329. **Petitions:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9.

330. **Deputations:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10.

331. **Appointment of Members to Sub-Committees for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2005/06:**

**RESOLVED:** To confirm the following changes to the membership of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2005/06:

- (1) Councillor Gate to replace Councillor Groves as a Member of the Health and Social Care Sub-Committee.
- (2) Councillor Ann Groves to replace Councillor Gate as a Member of the Strengthening Communities Sub-Committee.

332. **References from Council/Cabinet:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no references from Council or Cabinet.

333. **Annual Report of the Human Resources Portfolio Holder:**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Business Development) which outlined the key Human Resources and Organisational Development activities in 2004/05.

The report was presented to the Committee by the Acting Director of Human Resources as Councillor Marie-Louise Nolan, Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources, had only recently assumed that Portfolio.

The Acting Director of Human Resources outlined some of the key changes and achievements of personnel services in 2004/05. These included:

- an organisational review which had established a new service area
- the departure of the Director during 2004/05
- the restructuring of the personnel service into three new units
- the provision of a comprehensive human resources service to the Council.

The Acting Director of Human Resources reported that Human Resources was responsible for monitoring and reporting on the Council's performance against a range of performance indicators. He highlighted a number of performance indicators where the Council had significantly exceeded its target and those where the trend showed a movement downwards. Recent figures obtained for the first quarter of 2005/2006 did however show marked improvements on those performance indicators.

The Acting Director of Human Resources also reported on other key areas of work which included:

- negotiations on the Council's Single Status Agreement
- a lead role on the Middle Management Review process
- the development of the Absence Management Project which had shown some success in reducing absence
- the development and roll-out of the Individual Performance and Development (IPAD) process which was the subject of a separate report on the agenda.

The Acting Director of Human Resources added that during 2004/05, the Council had also gone through a challenging period in its working relationship with UNISON at a local level. However, he added that since then the relationship had improved markedly.

Finally, he outlined the key priorities set out in the 2004-2008 Action Plan titled "Strategy for Managing and Developing People", as set out in the appendix to the report.

In response to a number of questions, the Acting Director of Human Resources and the Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources:

- stated that the target for BV11b (the percentage of top-paid 5% of local authority staff who were from an ethnic minority community) was 40% and that the target had been set to reflect the community of Harrow. It was appreciated that this target could alter and that it was dependent on the demographic changes;
- stated that BV14 (the percentage of employees retiring early) and BV15 (the percentage of employees retiring on grounds of ill-health) could not be considered as targets, and that the Council had minimal control over these;
- stated that the workforce had increased because of the increase in staff employed in the Public Realm Service area such as the grounds maintenance and street cleaning areas;
- acknowledged that BV14 (the percentage of employees retiring early) was significantly higher but that this had been as a result of the Change Management programme. The Acting Director of Human Resources added that the figure might increase further when the Middle Management Review was completed. He was of the view that the Council needed to consider whether offering early retirement was in its interest and explained that a Business Case for each case was prepared and presented to Members before a decision was taken;
- pointed out that the Council was taking active measures in relation to BV17a (the percentage of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) employees of the total workforce) which included measures such as Positive Action initiatives to improve career development opportunities for those staff. The Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources advised that these measures were offered to all BME staff;
- mentioned that the Council was working with Harrow Association of Disabled People to improve the proportion of employees with a disability. The Acting Director of Human Resources outlined the benefits of the partnership approach and stated that he was pleased to report that since May 2005, seven new staff with disabilities had joined the Council;
- acknowledged that the trend in the number of working days lost due to sickness absence was affected by the number of employees who were sick long term. The figures were also affected by an ageing workforce;
- recognised the need to keep staff up to date with developments in relation to the reviews. The Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources stated that there was an ongoing dialogue with staff, including face to face meetings, and that further work was being done in this area.

A Member, who was also the Chair of the Pension Fund Investments Panel, thanked officers for the proactive approach in relation to Pensions which had led to a rise in the membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme in Harrow. He commended

the work done in educating employees and was of the view that the seminar programme ought to continue.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources, for her report and it was

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources be noted.

(See also Minute 325).

334. **Report of Asian Applicants Review Group:**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Business Development) which provided a summary of the work commissioned and undertaken by the Asian Applicants Review Group (AARG) and the progress made on its findings.

The Acting Director of Human Resources stated that the AARG had been established in September 2003 with the remit to investigate the disproportionate adverse impact between BME and white job applicants and ways of improving the success of Asian applicants. He outlined the work undertaken by this multi-agency group, the methodologies used and its findings. He reported on the Action Plan developed by the Group and highlighted the main improvements recommended.

The Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources added that consultations were underway with UNISON, the Black Workers Group and the Disability Awareness and Information Support Group thereby giving those Groups an opportunity to raise other related issues.

The Acting Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that the Council was still seen as an 'Employer of Choice' by Asian applicants. He referred to the action being taken by the Council to address the findings of the Group.

In response to a question from a Member, the Acting Director of Human Resources clarified that Asian applicants had felt that the Panel was biased in favour of internal applicants and that there was no suggestion that the bias was on racial grounds. He added that English as a second language was potentially a barrier and that it might be hindering expression of views. He mentioned that the Council was examining how this issue could be addressed.

It was agreed that this report be submitted to the Community Consultative Forum.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

335. **Individual Performance Appraisal and Development:**

The Committee received a revised report of the Executive Director (Business Development), circulated with the second supplemental agenda, which set out how Individual Performance Appraisal Development (IPAD) had been introduced in Harrow. The report also provided information on the progress made in implementing the scheme and plans for the future.

Members were informed of the benefits of the scheme and the progress made on the different phases, details of which were set out in the report. Members were also advised of the training that was being provided to staff and the consultations undertaken so far.

In response to questions from Members, the officer stated that:

- training needs would be identified jointly by the appraiser and the appraisee;
- quality checks would be carried out which would give an opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of managers;
- all work so far had been managed internally but the Council would be working with Unipart and the Harrow Corporate University (HCU);
- the resources allocated in the Council's Medium Term Budget Strategy (MTBS) would be spent on a number of projects and not only on IPAD;
- all staff would be appraised;
- the current IPAD scheme in Harrow was not linked to pay but that the Council was committed, as part of the HR Strategy, to investigate this option;

- IPAD was intended to provide individuals with a clear direction for their career with the Council. In addition, staff would be provided with opportunities for secondment and shadowing.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the report be noted; and

(2) the Executive Director (Business Development) be requested to submit a progress report to the March 2006 meeting of the Committee.

336. **Update on Current Reviews:**

The Committee received a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy (Business Development) which set out the progress made on the following reviews:

- the Middle Management Review (MMR)
- the "Hear/Say" Review (formerly known as Community Engagement).

Members were informed of the scope of the reviews and the methodologies used.

MMR Review

Members noted that in order to expedite the evidence-gathering phase of the MMR review, a series of round table discussions, which would involve senior officers from other authorities/organisations and focus groups would take place, as set out in the report.

"Hear/Say" Review

Members were informed that arrangements would be made to visit beacon local authorities which were at the forefront on community engagement. It was noted that a visit to Ealing Council had been arranged and that arrangements to visit Brent Council would be made soon.

Members were informed that both reviews would be completed in December 2005.

**RESOLVED:** (1) To note the progress made to date on the reviews currently underway;

(2) that a progress report be submitted to either the January or March 2006 meeting of the Committee.

337. **Principles of Scrutiny:**

Members considered a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy (Business Development) which outlined the changing environment within which the scrutiny function operated and the opportunities this offered to Members to contribute to service improvement in Harrow.

The Director of People, Performance and Policy's representative outlined the areas in which scrutiny should play a vital role. She referred to the recently published paper on 'Vibrant Local Leadership' which presented a significant opportunity for scrutiny to help deliver effective formally structured local challenges to the performance of all the delivery agencies in a locality, including the Council. In addition, there was scope for the scrutiny function to play a central role in supporting the delivery of improved services and thus an improved Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) rating. She added that longer term proposals for the development of CPA suggested a shift away from external inspections and more emphasis on meeting performance targets. Scrutiny would also have a role to play in measuring the performance of partners. She stressed the need to grasp the opportunities and highlighted the importance of scrutinising the important areas in the work programme, given the limited resources available. She also highlighted the need to examine various ways of working and the importance of communicating the role and understanding of scrutiny throughout the Council.

The Director of People, Performance and Policy's representative highlighted the impact of elections in the context within which the scrutiny function operated. She stressed the need for scrutiny to continue operating as a politically neutral, challenging and critical friend both within and outside the Council. She stressed the need to safeguard the excellent reputation scrutiny had achieved in the run up to the 2006 local government elections. She made a number of suggestions which would help ensure that this reputation was secured.

Finally, she thanked Members for their support and work in ensuring the highest standards.

Members welcomed the report and made the following comments:

- that scrutiny was better resourced compared to previous years
- that it was important to liaise with other local authorities
- the need to promote the work carried out by scrutiny at a local level
- the need to communicate, within the Council, the essence of the democratic process in which Members were responsible for policy making and officers were responsible for implementing those policies.

They emphasised that it was imperative that scrutiny was Member led.

Following a short discussion on the recommendations set out in the report, it was

**RESOLVED:** (1) To note the extended opportunities offered to Scrutiny in the changing local government context;

(2) that the Service Manager Scrutiny ensure that this report be discussed by management teams throughout the Council in order to inform and advise them of the role of scrutiny;

(3) that the practical issues relating to the development of the work programme and the new review processes be agreed;

(4) that a final report on improved communications be submitted to the Committee;

(5) that the proposals recommended to safeguard the impartiality of scrutiny during election campaigning be agreed.

338. **Strategic Performance Report - Quarter 1 2005/06:**

The Director of People, Performance and Policy (Business Development) introduced the report which provided information on the Council's performance.

He informed Members that the Council was meeting the majority of its targets and was also seen as the lead authority on Performance Management. He thanked Members for driving the process forward.

The Director of People, Performance and Policy (Business Development) expressed the view that the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for 2005 would remain unchanged from the previous year in which the Council had received a 'Fair' rating. He reported on the notable achievements made by the Council in the first quarter of 2005/06, particularly in the planning area. He also highlighted the challenges facing the Council in the following areas:

- equalities, where Level 3 of the Equality Standard Assessment had yet to be achieved;
- the MMR process which had suffered from delays and the impact of the delay in carrying out job evaluations;
- the work relating to the Licensing Act 2003.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of People, Performance and Policy (Business Development) stated that to achieve a better rating, the Council would need to ensure:

- value for money was provided
- customer satisfaction
- better partnership working.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report and the action being taken.

339. **HSE Audit Feedback:**

The Executive Director's (Business Development) representative reported on the outcome of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Audit and the action plan developed to address the issues raised. He added that the next audit exercise

would examine the ways in which the Council measured and monitored its performance.

A Member stated that he was pleased to see the significant steps taken by the Council and the work undertaken by officers. The Chair echoed this view and suggested that a report be submitted to the Committee after the next review had been carried out.

Another Member highlighted the need to place greater emphasis on Fire and Safety within Civic 1. She was informed that this matter came under the remit of the Council's Facilities Manager.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the findings of the HSE Management Audit and the action plan be noted;

(2) that a further report be submitted to the Committee after the next review scheduled to be held in March 2006.

340. **Harrow IT Services (HITS) Update Report:**

The Director of Business Transformation's representative introduced the report and outlined the current status of the programme of works being implemented as part of the Council's ICT Strategy. He also tabled colour copies of the appendices circulated with the report.

The officer highlighted the key achievements and the problems being experienced with new technology. He also explained how IT systems had played a major role in improvements to the planning systems and that the Council was now considered to have the third best planning service in the country. He added that the investment made in IT had allowed officers to implement a resilient and robust network and that the projects which had been implemented as part of the government's initiatives had also been successful. In addition, the achievements made could also help the Council improve its 2006 CPA rating.

The Director of Business Transformation's representative informed Members that HITS would be restructured shortly and that a draft report on the proposals would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. He added that the customer focus programme was ongoing with the HITS tours proving a great success. In addition, HITS had played a key role in ensuring that office moves were smooth and efficient.

Members were also informed that:

- HITS had continually improved on its Performance Indicators (PIs) and that a review on the applicability of the PIs would be conducted shortly;
- a great deal of progress had been made towards achieving e-government targets;
- between £150k - £1m of the total money allocated for IT projects/improvements would remain unspent, and that this money would be returned to the People First budget.

Members requested that officers encourage all Members to attend the HITS tours.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

341. **Update on Business Continuity Planning:**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy on the current position of Business Continuity Planning (BCP) across the Council.

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy's representative informed Members of the problems associated with the recruitment to the new post of Business Continuity Officer. As a result, work on BCP had not progressed as quickly as had been anticipated. However, he was confident that the post would be filled soon.

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy's representative stressed that the Council was prepared for adverse incidents. He explained the role of the training consultants who had been engaged to 'kick-start' the formal planning process across the Council. In response to a question from a Member, he stated that the Council would apply BCP to all buildings, including schools.

**RESOLVED:** That the current position on Business Continuity Planning across the Council be noted and that a further report be submitted to the Committee in six months time.

342. **Medium Term Budget Strategy (MTBS):**

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy's representative introduced the report on the reprinted MTBS for 2006-2007. She explained that this was a technical exercise and did not reflect any policy decisions. She informed Members that the report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 6 October 2005.

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy's representative highlighted the impact of the key factors on the MTBS – the Schools' Funding Transfer and the review being conducted by the Government on how the Rate Support Grant (RSG) was to be distributed. She outlined a number of areas in which the Government was proposing changes and that these changes could have an adverse impact on Harrow. She also acknowledged that the grant allocation process was complicated, but stated that the Government was looking to simplify the Formula Grant.

Members were informed that all local authorities would be notified of their settlements in November or December 2005.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

343. **Update on the Open Budget Process:**

It was noted that the report which the Director of Financial and Business Strategy had intended to table at the meeting was not available. It was also noted that Councillor Lent, who had been invited to give evidence to the meeting on the Open Budget Process, had submitted his apologies.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

344. **Any Other Business:**

**Information Item on Scrutiny Annual Work Programme 2005/06**

Members were informed that should they wish to raise matters relating to the work programme, they should make a request to the Chair for the matter to be included on the agenda.

**Councillor Mitzi Green**

Members of the Committee thanked Councillor Mitzi Green for chairing the meeting that evening.

345. **Extension and Termination of the Meeting:**

In accordance with the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 6.7(ii)(b), it was

**RESOLVED:** At 10.00 pm to continue until 10.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN  
Chair for the Meeting