
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2007

Chairman: * Councillor Jean Lammiman

Councillors: * Ms Nana Asante (1) * Jerry Miles
 * B E Gate * Christopher Noyce
 * Mitzi Green Richard Romain
 * Salim Miah * Anthony Seymour
 * Mrs Myra Michael * Mark Versallion

* Denotes Member present

(1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

[Note: Councillor David Ashton, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters, attended this meeting to speak on the items indicated at Minutes 90, 93 and 94 below. Councillor Anjana Patel, Portfolio Holder for Community Development, attended this meeting to speak on the items indicated at Minutes 91 and 92 below. Councillor Christine Bednell, Portfolio Holder for Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services and Issues facing Older People attended this meeting to speak on the items indicated at Minutes 95 and 96 below].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES
84. Attendance by Reserve Members:

RESOLVED: To note that the following duly appointed Reserve Member would be attending this meeting:-

Ordinary Member
Reserve Member

Councillor Mrs Rekha Shah

Councillor Ms Nana Asante

[Note: Councillor Ms Nana Asante arrived after the commencement of the meeting and during the discussion on item 10a on the agenda, Strategy for People, and the related item 10b, Level 4 – Equality Standard for Local Government. Accordingly, she did not take part in the discussion and decisions relating to these matters].

85. Declarations of Interest:

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

- (i) Agenda Item 11 - Harrow Arts Centre and Museum
 Councillor Jean Lammiman declared a personal interest in that she had been a Council-appointed observer of Arts Culture Harrow (ACH). She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.
- (ii) Agenda Item 9 – Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2007/08
 Councillor Jean Lammiman declared a personal interest in that she was a Council appointed member of Harrow Young Musicians Board and its patron. Councillor B E Gate declared a personal interest in that he was a patron of Harrow Young Musicians. Councillor Christine Bednell, who was not a Member of this Committee, declared a personal interest in that she was a patron of Harrow Young Musicians. They would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

86. Arrangement of Agenda:

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

[Note: The order of business on the agenda was varied. The minutes, except for the formal items on the agenda, are recorded in the order items on the agenda were considered].

87. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That (1) the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 10 October 2006 be taken as read and signed as a correct record;

(2) the minutes of the Special meeting held on 14 November, the ordinary meeting on 21 November and the Special meeting on 11 December 2006 be agreed as correct records and the Chairman be authorised to sign them when printed in the Council Bound Minute Volume.

88. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules 8, 9 and 10 (Part 4E of the Constitution) respectively.

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

RESOLVED: To note that no references were received.

90. **Strategy for People:**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters to the meeting for this item.

The Director of People, Performance and Policy drew Members' attention to the report circulated with the agenda and made a presentation on the Strategy for People 2006/09, which built on and replaced the Strategy for 2004/08, incorporating the new priorities and cultural values of the new administration. The revised Strategy had been developed in consultation with the Council's Partners.

The Director, in his presentation on the Strategy for People 2006/09 and in response to questions from Members, made the following key points:-

- the aim of the revised Strategy was to ensure that the Council's workforce was 'fit for purpose' with the capacity and the capability to deliver high quality services;
- the lessons learnt from the Middle Management Review (MMR) process would underpin future reviews;
- the revised Strategy addressed a number of equalities issues and that organisational reviews/selection processes would ensure that equalities issues were taken into consideration. Employment packages offered to staff, some of which had cost implications, would be reviewed over time and when the Council's financial position was less challenging. The intention was to introduce and promote flexible benefits packages.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters also responded to questions from Members as follows:-

- the Chief Executive designate had been briefed on the proposed reviews;
- the top structure review would be completed in a timely fashion;
- Individual Performance Appraisal and Development (IPAD) ought to apply across the Council, including Councillors. Group Leaders had been through the process;
- organisational reviews were necessary, reviews would be expedited and conducted harmoniously.

RESOLVED: That (1) the presentation and the revised Strategy for People 2006/09 be received and noted;

(2) a report on the outcomes of the organisational reviews be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2007;

(3) the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters be invited to attend the July 2007 meeting.

(See also Minute 84).

91. **Level 4 - Equality Standard for Local Government:**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Development to the meeting for this item.

The Director of People, Performance and Policy introduced the report, which set out the progress made in mainstreaming equalities into service delivery and employment. He identified the five levels of measure and reported that Harrow had achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard and was committed to achieving Level 4 by the end of 2006/07. It was intended to achieve Level 5 by the end of 2008.

The Director stated that Harrow's performance on achieving the various levels was good when compared with other London boroughs. He identified the requirements to achieve Level 4, which required each borough to assess itself. External verification was not required at Level 4.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Development and the Director of People, Performance and Policy suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Level 4 self-assessment. They acknowledged that in light of the demography of Harrow, it was important and essential that Level 5 was achieved quickly. Harrow would share best practice with Newham which was one of the three London boroughs that had achieved Level 5. Tower Hamlets and Lewisham had also achieved Level 5. It was noted that the Portfolio Holder for Community Development was a Lead Equalities Member on the London Councils.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Council's process for assessment against Level 4 of the Equality Standard be noted;

(2) a progress report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2007 and the Portfolio Holder for Community Development be invited to the meeting.

(See also Minute 84).

92. **Community Engagement:**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Development to the meeting for this item.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Development reported that engagement with the community was important and essential in order to allow the Council to respond to the needs and requirements of Harrow's diverse community. She stated that the Council had set up a Community Cohesion Management Group, led by the Director of Lifelong Learning and Community Development, under the auspices of the Harrow Strategic Partnership. In addition, the Council also engaged with various community groups scattered around the Borough.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder for Community Development and officers stated that:-

- Various initiatives – such as the extended schools/cluster programme, Black History Month, Under One Sky, celebration of various festivals - had been established in order to bring Harrow's communities together;
- Some targets, such as increasing the number of people in surveys which the government had negotiated upwards, were difficult to meet but the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) had been positive;
- Whilst monocultural communities did not affect the survey results, various initiatives, such as the Citizen's Panel, had been established to ensure involvement of a broader distribution of people;
- Work was being done to engage with 'hard to reach' groups;
- The needs of economic migrants, mainly from eastern Europe, would be addressed by ensuring that they had full access to services rather than through measures to ensure integration;
- Much of the Council's approach to these issues would be encapsulated in the Community Development Strategy, which was currently being developed.

Some Members commented on the beacons of excellence, such as the Rayners Lane Estate, where communities had integrated harmoniously. They acknowledged that the

needs of economic migrants were distinct to those communities that had settled in Harrow. Members highlighted the need to integrate the Somali and Tamil communities.

RESOLVED: That (1) the discussion, as set out in the preamble above, be noted;

(2) officers follow up on the need to integrate and establish some of the communities which had settled in Harrow.

[Note: The title of this item was amended at the meeting].

93.

Fair Trade:

Members considered a report of the Executive Director (Urban Living), which set out the progress made on Fair Trade since the matter was last reported to the Committee, following a cross-party motion to Council.

In response to questions from Members, the officer outlined the events that had been held with a view to encouraging staff to purchase Fair Trade products. The Fair Trade Steering Group was looking at ways in which to incentivise staff, hair dressing salons and cafeterias to buy fair trade products. Fair Trade products were expensive and in view of the Council's challenging financial situation, some initiatives had to be curtailed.

A Member asked if, given the Council's challenging financial situation, Fair Trade would be promoted as a concept. In response, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters stated that the Council could act as a conduit to its Members, officers and local residents in this regard. He could not support its promotion in financial terms. The Director of Financial and Business Strategy added that the Council would need to develop a coherent strategy to provide encouragement to its partners to buy Fair Trade products. Another Member commented that some of the aims set out in the officer report would not require expenditure and that the Council should promote the concept through its website. Some communities had expressed disappointment at the lack of leadership shown by the Council on this matter.

The Committee was informed that members of the Fair Trade Steering Group had been tasked with various initiatives with a view to encouraging participation. Sponsorship money might be available from some of the major retail firms to promote the concept and the Steering Group would explore this further.

Members felt that the Steering Group appeared to have lost momentum and it was

RESOLVED: That (1) the Chairman of the Fair Trade Steering Group be invited to the next meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 27 March 2007, to respond to the concerns expressed by Members on the lack of progress since the motion to Council was passed;

(2) a report outlining a strategic approach to the delivery of the motion on Fair Trade be submitted to the Committee;

(3) the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters provide leadership on the concept.

94.

Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2007/08:

The Chairman welcomed the attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters for this item.

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Financial and Business Strategy on the Council's budget proposals for 2007/08 to 2009/10. The Director circulated details of her presentation and corrected a typographical error. She summarised the activities taking place in the budget process, which would culminate in a report to the Cabinet meeting scheduled to be held on 15 February 2007 and the Council meeting on 22 February 2007, which would set the Council Tax for 2007/08.

The Committee also received a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy, which set out the report of the scrutiny Budget Challenge Panel held on 18 December 2006. The Chairman of the Budget Challenge Panel introduced the findings of the Panel and thanked all those involved, including the Portfolio Holders, for their participation in the process. He asked officers to ensure that the scopes for future Challenge Panels were circulated to all parties involved in the process.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Matters welcomed the recommendations of the Budget Challenge Panel. He could not support some of the comments made in the findings of the Budget Challenge Panel in relation to Council

Tax and stated that the administration would not deviate from its Medium Term Budget Strategy (MTBS).

The Portfolio Holder commented on the methodology and the processes as follows:-

- Scrutiny should subsume the role of the Budget Review Working Group;
- In order to add value to the budget process, scrutiny should get involved in the challenging process in September; otherwise it would merely provide a 'health' check in the budget;
- Scrutiny should not play an adversarial role and that both scrutiny and the Executive should work together with scrutiny acting as a 'check and balance' on the Executive;
- There was a noticeable lack of matters being referred to scrutiny from the Executive;
- The outcome of the negotiations between North West London Chief Executives on Shared Services would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- The cost of redundancies as a result of organisational review(s) had been built in the budget;
- He did not anticipate industrial action;
- The budget would not contain any unallocated savings.

The Portfolio Holder identified additional pressures on the budget and stated that the report to the February 2007 meeting of the Cabinet would set out the changes since the Cabinet last considered the matter in December 2006.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Financial and Business Strategy and the Portfolio Holder for their contributions. She stated that scrutiny would explore its relationship with the Executive.

RESOLVED: That (1) the presentation be received and noted;

(2) the report of the Budget Challenge Panel be noted and its findings and recommendations be agreed;

(3) the report be referred to the 15 February 2006 meeting of the Cabinet for consideration, as part of the budget meeting process;

(4) the budget process be included in the Scrutiny Work Programme for July 2007 and subsequent years.

(See also Minute 85 (ii)).

95.

Harrow Arts Centre and Museum:

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Lifelong Learning, Cultural Services and Issues Facing Older People for this item.

The Portfolio Holder for Lifelong Learning, Cultural Services and Issues Facing Older People commended the Director of Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services and his staff for the work undertaken since the closure of Arts Culture Harrow (ACH). She summarised the events that led to the closure of ACH, as outlined in the officer report circulated with the agenda. The Portfolio Holder stated that:-

- The Council was unlikely to receive back the sum of £103k paid to ACH;
- The Council had had no management responsibility of ACH but the premises previously occupied by ACH were owned by the Council and had been secured;
- It was important to ensure that the Council did not inherit any of the liabilities of ACH;
- Arts provision was vital to Harrow and the Museum and the Arts Centre would be reopened initially for a period of three months;

- It was intended to run the premises effectively on a reduced budget and staffing levels and that it was crucial that the Council brought some stability to their operation.

The Portfolio Holder thanked volunteers who had assisted in this matter.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder and the Director of Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services stated that:-

- The Council would operate the premises in its current form until a plan was developed on its future;
- The Council had leased the buildings to ACH;
- The majority of London boroughs managed their own arts provision;
- The Council had negotiated the purchase of ACH's assets from the Director's budget, at less than half the asking price.

Following a discussion on the merits of a Challenge Panel to investigate ACH's operation and the monitoring role of the Council, including the calibre of the information that would be available to the Challenge Panel, it was

RESOLVED: That (1) a Challenge Panel be set up to:-

- (i) ascertain the effectiveness of the Service Level Agreement between the Council and ACH;
- (ii) look at the perception of local residents who held the view that ACH was run by the Council;
- (iii) ensure accountability and look at the relationship between the Council and the voluntary sector;

(2) the Challenge Panel be chaired by Councillor Ms Nana Asante and that the following Members serve on the Panel: Councillors Salim Miah, Jerry Miles, Christopher Noyce, Paul Scott, Anthony Seymour and Mark Versallion;

(3) the Director of Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services and the Portfolio Holder for Lifelong Learning, Cultural Services and Issues Facing Older People be invited to the meeting(s) of the Challenge Panel;

(4) the Director of Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services ascertain if ACH's liquidators would place a disclaimer on the lease;

(5) the Director of Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services, his staff and volunteers be congratulated on the work undertaken to ensure that the Museum and Arts Centre were reopened within a short time.

(See also Minute 85 (i)).

96. **Harrow Teachers' Centre:**

The Director of Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services introduced the report, which described the current budget position of Harrow Teachers' Centre and the plans to realign its management and budgets by April 2007.

The Director stated that:-

- The predicted overspend of £115k in 2006/07 would be contained within his department, thereby putting no additional pressure on the Council's overall budget;
- Discussions were taking place with a view to transferring the management of the Teachers' Centre to the Children's Services Department. He reported on the rationale behind this proposal and identified the conditions placed by the recipient department with regard to the limited transfer of existing staff and budget deficits;
- As part of the Council's inclusion strategy, new provision for young people at risk of school exclusion would be developed at the Teachers' Centre;

- The Teachers' Centre was obliged to charge all users for the hire of its rooms and was at a considerable disadvantage as rooms at the Civic Centre could be booked free of charge for internal users.

RESOLVED: That (1) the actions proposed to improve the financial position of Harrow Teachers' Centre be noted;

(2) in the event that Harrow Teachers' Centre was transferred to the Children's Services Department, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee be the body responsible for overseeing its future;

(3) the proposed changes to the access arrangements and the proposals to rationalise the accommodation at Harrow Teachers' Centre be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

97.

Extension and Termination of the Meeting:

In accordance with the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 6.6(ii)(b), it was

RESOLVED: At 9.55 pm to continue until 10.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.11 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JEAN LAMMIMAN
Chairman