
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 27 MARCH 2007

Chairman: * Councillor Jean Lammiman

Councillors:	* B E Gate	* Anthony Seymour
	* Julia Merison (2)	* Navin Shah (4)
	* Mrs Myra Michael	* Mrs Rekha Shah
	* Jerry Miles	* Stanley Sheinwald
	* Christopher Noyce	* Jeremy Zeid (5)

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

[Note: Councillor Paul Osborn, Portfolio Holder for Legal Services and Issues Facing Young People, in his capacity as Support Member for Access Harrow, also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 107 below].

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

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Salim Miah
Councillor Mark Versallion
Councillor Mitzi Green

Reserve Member

Councillor Jeremy Zeid
Councillor Julia Merison
Councillor Navin Shah

99. Declarations of Interest:

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

- (i) Agenda Item 10 - Business Transformation Partnership
During consideration of this item, Councillor B E Gate declared a personal interest due to his professional interest in Call Centres. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.
- (ii) Agenda Item 19 – Standing Scrutiny Review of National Health Service (NHS) Finances – Interim Report
Councillor Julia Merison declared a personal interest in that her husband was receiving treatment at Northwick Park Hospital and that her son, who suffered from a handicap, received support from the Council and treatment by the NHS. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor B E Gate declared a personal interest in that his sister had received treatment at Northwick Park Hospital and, during consideration of this item, he further declared that his wife worked for the NHS.

100. Arrangement of Agenda:

The Chairman reported that item 17 – Strategic Performance Report: Quarter 3 – would be considered after item 12 – Corporate Assessment.

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

Agenda Item
Special Circumstances / Grounds for Urgency

- | | |
|---|--|
| 9. Changes in Membership of Scrutiny Sub-Committees and Appointment of Chairman of Sustainable Development and Enterprise | This report was being consulted on at the time of the dispatch of the agenda and was not received in its final form in time to be included on the original agenda. Members were requested to consider this item as a matter of |
|---|--|

Scrutiny Sub-Committee

urgency, so that the changes in the membership could be implemented with immediate effect.

(2) that all items be considered with the press and public present.

101. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2007 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

102. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following public questions had been received:

1.

Questioner: Mrs Ann Freeman

Asked of: Councillor Jean Lammiman, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Question: "What is Scrutiny's response to the concerns raised by The Independent Steering Group with the submitted paper 'Questions for Scrutiny to consider'?"

2.

Questioner: Mrs Joan Penrose

Asked of: Councillor Jean Lammiman, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Question: "An international survey of research into the best ways of returning disabled people to work, entitled 'What works with Tackling Worklessness' concludes with the following statement:

"... it is important to ensure that training is properly designed with a work focus, including where possible an element of 'on the job' training ..."

Why has the Council contravened the Cabinet decision of 18 January 2007 by instructing Wiseworks staff to cease trading, thus denying users of 'on the job' training recommended by all relevant research?"

3.

Questioner: Mrs G Wright

Asked of: Councillor Jean Lammiman, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Question: "It appears extraordinary that the day following an agreement by the Cabinet that Wiseworks continue operating as normal, they were told to stop trading. Does the word of the Cabinet stand for nothing?"

[Notes: (1) Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.7 was suspended to allow Mr Patrick Stoupe to ask questions 2 and 3 on behalf of the questioners who were not present at the meeting;

(2) an oral answer was provided to all questions. Under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.4, each of the questioners asked a supplementary question. The Chairman answered the supplementary question by questioner 1. Supplementary questions to 2 and 3 were referred to the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Care Services and Issues Facing People with Special Needs to answer at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

(3) the Chairman undertook to look into providing a written response to questioner 1].

103. **Petitions:**

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

104. **Deputations:**

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

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

RESOLVED: To note that no reports were received.

106. **Changes in Membership of Scrutiny Sub-Committees and Appointment of Chairman of Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Sub-Committee:**

Councillor Stanley Sheinwald was welcomed to his first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members thanked the outgoing Chairman of Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Sub-Committee for his valuable contribution to its work programme. They wished him well for the future.

The Committee also sent their best wishes to the Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That (1) the revised memberships of the Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees - Children and Young People, Safer and Stronger Communities, Sustainable Development and Enterprise, Call-In Sub-Committee and Call-In Sub-Committee (Education) - as set out in the report attached to the supplemental agenda be approved for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2006/07;

(2) Councillor Stanley Sheinwald be appointed Chairman of the Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2006/07.

107. **Business Transformation Partnership:**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Legal Services and Issues Facing Young People to the meeting. The Portfolio Holder, speaking in his capacity as Support Member on Access Harrow, together with the relevant Directors, addressed the meeting on a number of issues relating to Access Harrow.

Web-Refresh Project

The Portfolio Holder briefed Members on the Web Refresh Project and outlined the proposed improvements. A copy of the proposed pages for the website was circulated to Members. The Portfolio Holder stated that the existing website was sub-optimal and that improvements were overdue. It was intended to raise awareness of the Council's website and make it accessible, thereby increasing its usage, which would result in efficiency savings for the Council. The 'Home' Page had been redesigned and a new 'Search' facility would be incorporated, which would make navigation easier and the website more user friendly.

The Portfolio Holder responded to various questions from Members on the technical elements of the website and assured them that:

- focus groups had been used for research purposes;
- visibility testing would be carried out;
- the new website would allow service areas to update their pages so that up-to-date information was available;
- income generation had been built into the software;
- a facility for local firms to advertise on the Council's website would be available;
- alternative methods of payments would be investigated in due course;
- the hardware would be refreshed thereby making the website faster;

- residents would be able to access details relevant to their postcode area, such as details of their GPs, current planning applications and receive updates by emails;
- the Council was committed to the project and would continue to 'champion' it;
- the Council would engage with the Youth on this matter.

In response to additional questions, the Portfolio Holder stated that the capital cost of the Web-Refresh Project was £400,000 and that officers would report back on the revenue costs. He reiterated that the Web-Refresh would result in long term savings for the Council and identified how savings would be achieved. He undertook to investigate various suggestions from Members which would give Harrow prominence on the website and make it interactive.

The Portfolio Holder thanked officers for their participation in the Project to transform the Council's website.

Access Harrow

The Director of Business Transformation briefed Members on the difficulties associated with the decline in performance and expanded on the reasons, which were set out in her report.

The Director identified solutions to these problems and reported on the improved budget position for the financial year 2007/08. She stressed that there was a need to balance the needs of staff and customers and assured Members that this was reviewed on a regular basis.

The Director responded to questions from Members about their individual experiences on the length of time taken to answer their telephone calls. She stated that resources would be increased during the peak hours and agreed that the standards of answering telephone calls in the telephony service needed improving. Members were briefed on the types of training provided to staff working in Access Harrow and the protocols for dealing with telephone calls from residents whose first language was not English.

In response to questions about the number of staff employed, the Director stated that up to 88 staff would be required to achieve a 'gold' standard of service. Currently, up to 35 FTE staff were employed and that analysis had shown that Access Harrow was understaffed when compared with the volume of telephone calls that it received. The Portfolio Holder for Legal Services and Issues Facing Young People stated that an integrated approach was required and assured Members that the introduction of the new improved website would reduce the volume of calls received. Work was being done on how to engage with people who did not have access to the internet.

Management Information System (MIS)

The Director of People, Performance and Policy responded to the Chairman's question on the progress made to enable Members to use the data on the MIS. He stated that workshops for Members would commence in the next financial year.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder and the Directors for their reports and welcomed the assurances that the Committee's suggestions would be investigated.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Director of Business Transformation supply a copy of the protocols referred to in the preamble above to the Leader of the Labour Group;

(2) details of negative experiences in relation to Access Harrow be sent to the Director of Business Transformation;

(3) it be noted that the revised structure of Access Harrow was available from the Director of Business Transformation on request;

(4) details of revenue costs be provided to the Committee;

(5) staff in Access Harrow be thanked for their work, which was often done in difficult circumstances.

(See also Minute 99).

108. **Procurement Update:**

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy introduced the report, which provided an update on various aspects of procurement, details of which were set out in the report. She outlined the various initiatives which would deliver savings for the Council, as purchasing was being carried out more effectively than in previous years. In addition, the Council was making a considerable saving having become a full member of London Insurance Mutual to procure its insurance services without the need to reduce levels of service provided.

In response to questions from Members, the Director stated that:-

- Capita were expected to deliver savings of £3.3m by end of financial year 2007/08;
- the Council had to incur initial expenditure in order to accrue/achieve necessary savings over the lifetime of the contract;
- she would discuss the issue of recycling IT equipment and its impact on maintenance agreements with relevant officer(s), and respond to the query relating to the tender for the meals on wheels service.

The Director explained that there would be instances where the services of a specialist company would be required because of the technical elements or nature of the contract, such as the Street Lighting Private Finance Initiative (PFI) where the Council had engaged the services of Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). However, in most cases, guidelines were in place to decide whether the service procurement projects would be supported by Council staff or Capita.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the Director of Financial and Business Strategy respond on the query relating to the procurement of the meals on wheels service, as set out on page 15 of the agenda.

109. **Corporate Assessment:**

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of People, Performance and Policy in this regard. He circulated an Executive Summary to Members for information and stated that the full document was available on request.

The Director reported that the Council's Corporate Assessment (CA) rating of 2-star for 2006, branded "the Harder Test", had been maintained under a challenging financial situation. He identified the strengths and areas where improvements were necessary.

Members commented on the process applied by the Inspection Team for the CA and stated that, when compared with that for the JAR (Joint Area Review), it had not been as positive or constructive. They felt that the inspection team had had a preconceived notion of the Council's performance.

In summing up, the Chairman stated that the preparatory work done by the Council had been helpful, but she had been disappointed with the structure of interviews which, in her opinion, had been poor.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received and noted.

110. **Strategic Performance Report - Quarter 3:**

The Director of People, Performance and Policy introduced the report, which identified key improvers and challenges for the Council. The Council had received a 2-star rating and a label of improving adequately for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). However, the assessment was branded "the Harder Test" and the rating had been maintained under a challenging financial situation.

The Director referred to the national satisfaction survey which, since the last survey in 2003/04, showed that the customer satisfaction had dropped. He identified services that had improved their individual score, and the challenges for the Council in light of the rating and the survey results.

The Director responded to Members' questions and, following further discussion, it was

RESOLVED: That (1) the Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Sub-Committee invite the Portfolio Holder for Housing to discuss the indicators relating to housing and homelessness;

(2) the Director of People, Performance and Policy note that the traffic light system needed to make clear where small changes in figures make significant performance changes, such as the position on homelessness/Children Looked After, and that the 'true' position be reflected in future reports so that the trends were easier to understand;

(3) the performance report and the actions being taken be noted.

111. **Quality of Life Survey:**

The Director of People, Performance and Policy introduced the report, which outlined the outcome of the negotiations with MORI following suggestions made by the Committee at its November 2006 meeting. Members noted the positive outcomes.

The Director responded to Members' questions and acknowledged that, as part of the Web-Refresh project, an opportunity existed for online surveys. He reported that the MORI Quality of Life survey was carried out annually in May in order to compare 'like for like', and that consideration was being given to how best the results could be utilised fully.

RESOLVED: That (1) the views of MORI on ideas to amend both the questions and survey methods used for the annual Quality of Life Survey be received and welcomed;

(2) the Director of People, Performance and Policy report back on the proposals for the Business Warehouse System.

112. **Standing Scrutiny Review of NHS Finances – Interim Report:**

In opening this report for Members' comments, the Chairman of the Committee thanked the Scrutiny officers for work on this project.

The Chairman of the Standing Scrutiny Review of NHS Finances also congratulated Scrutiny officers on this project, which had been delivered during competing priorities. She thanked the Council's partners for their co-operation.

An officer introduced the report, which identified emerging issues and outlined the programme of work for the future. She briefed Members on work done by the Review Group and highlighted the products of joint working, communication and co-operation. She stated that the adverse impact of NHS funding crossed borough boundaries and that the evidence/findings of the Review Group could contribute positively to the pan-London representations regarding NHS funding.

Members supported the working of the Review Group and Scrutiny's role in leading the benefits of openness, transparency and accountability. At the request of some Members, the Chairman of the Review Group undertook to broaden its membership by involving medical practitioners. She stated that the Review Group had agreed to involve GPs.

An officer informed Members that there was a statutory responsibility for the Chief Executives of Health Authorities to be accountable to Scrutiny and that such powers would be extended to the Police Authorities as well.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the Trust for welcoming Members on their visit to Northwick Park Hospital and looked forward to continuing working with them on this important Standing Scrutiny Review.

RESOLVED: To (1) note the progress that had been achieved by the standing review;

(2) note the emerging issues;

(3) agree the future programme of work, as set out below:

(a) to continue to monitor the turnaround plans of local NHS trusts with regard to their impact on local people;

(b) to continue to monitor the impact of the turnaround plans on Council budgets;

(c) to facilitate round table discussions between the Council and NHS trusts to identify collective responses to financial difficulties;

- (d) to develop the body of evidence of the impact of financial difficulties locally for submission as part of regional/national evidence as appropriate. In particular to undertake work with local carers and GPs.

(See also Minute 99).

113. **New Ways of Working:**

The Committee received a report from the Director of People, Performance and Policy, which evaluated the scrutiny methodologies adopted and proposed how these could be further improved. An officer highlighted emerging issues and drew attention to the observations of Executive Members and the Corporate Management Team, as set out in the report. It was important that financial costings were provided when recommending proposals.

The Chairman stated that scrutiny had been innovative in its working. She commended the new ways of working developed by scrutiny as an effective means of optimising the resources available and achieving its objectives.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the new methodologies be endorsed as useful additions for scrutiny, subject to the need to improve the processes as per the findings of the pilot;

(3) the need for the scrutiny work programme to be driven by the principles agreed in the Scrutiny Principles and Protocols document be re-stated;

(4) the criteria for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme be augmented to include achievement of the targets of the Local Area Agreement and delivery of the improvement plans resulting from the Corporate Assessment and Joint Area Review;

(5) the scrutiny work programme be refreshed on an annual basis to ensure it remained focused on highest priority issues;

(6) the programme of fundamental service reviews be considered as a part of the work programme refresh in order to determine what role, if any, scrutiny would like to take in delivering the programme;

(7) in the interest of improved co-ordination, synergy and to reduce duplication, the agreed work programme be offered to the Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) for information along with proposed project scopes;

(8) the revised reporting process be agreed, to include the production of a response report incorporating indicative potential costs.

114. **Performance Management:**

Members received a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy, which set out proposals for a new method for scrutiny to monitor its own performance. An officer stated that the most efficient way of monitoring performance on a regular basis was through a 'balanced scorecard' approach with results and outcomes assessed according to measured targets. It was intended to include the scorecard on the Management Information System (MIS).

Members were informed that the framework and methodology would be tested in the form of a 'back-test' and a snapshot would be available to Scrutiny Members. It was important for scrutiny to monitor its own performance and inspectors, when assessing the overall performance of the Council, would look at it favourably.

In supporting the proposals, the Chairman suggested that scrutiny consult stakeholders, Directors and Members and the information be analysed and included in the performance report.

RESOLVED: That the establishment of a performance management system for the scrutiny function, as set out in the scrutiny scorecard and attached as appendix 1 to the report, be agreed.

115. **Extension and Termination of the Meeting:**
In accordance with the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 6.7(ii)(b), it was

RESOLVED: (1) At 10.00 pm to continue until 10.30 pm;

(2) at 10.30 pm to continue until 10.45 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.39 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JEAN LAMMIMAN
Chairman