

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE****13 FEBRUARY 2007**

Chairman:	* Councillor Mark Versallion	
Councillors:	* G Chowdhury * B E Gate * Julia Merison * Mrs Myra Michael (3) * Narinder Singh Mudhar	* David Perry * Dinesh Solanki * Mrs Sasi Suresh (3) * Yogesh Teli * Jeremy Zeid
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) * Mrs J Rammelt † Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) * Mr R Chauhan * Mrs D Speel

* Denotes Member present
(3) Denotes category of Reserve Members
† Denotes apologies received

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**41. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Jean Lammiman Councillor Mitzi Green	Councillor Mrs Myra Michael Councillor Mrs Sasi Suresh

42. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
Councillor Julia Merison	The Member declared a personal interest in that she had a nephew with Special Educational Needs. Accordingly the Member would remain in the room and take part in the decision-making on all items of the agenda.
Councillor Jeremy Zeid	The Member declared a personal interest in that he had been appointed to the governing body of Priestmead School. Accordingly the Member would remain in the room and take part in the decision-making on all items of the agenda.
Mrs D Speel	The Member declared a personal interest in that a member of her family was on the SEN list. Accordingly the Member would remain in the room and take part in the decision-making on all items of the agenda.

43. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That (1) in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following item be admitted late on 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>
18. Harrow Parent Partnership Service – amendment to report	The amendments contained in this report had not been made at the time the agenda was printed and circulated due to unforeseen urgent work, which was required. Members were requested to consider this item, as it related to

the information report which the Sub-Committee had requested to receive at this meeting.

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

44. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2006 be taken as read and signed as a correct record;

(2) the minutes of the Special meeting held on 9 January 2007 be deferred until printed in the Council Bound Minute Volume.

45. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8 (Part 4F of the Council's Constitution).

46. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9 (Part 4F of the Council's Constitution).

47. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10 (Part 4F of the Council's Constitution).

48. **People First Budget:**

Members considered a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy, which set out the draft revenue medium term budget strategy (MTBS) for 2007-08 to 2009-10.

Members were advised that there had been a net overspend of £3m in 2005/06, that reserves were at £1.8m at March 2006, which was significantly below the minimum level set by the Council, and that in 2006/07 £19m of savings would be made. It was reported that in 2007/08 the government grant increase would be 2.7%. This would not match the additional pressures from inflation, demand for social care, actions of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and changes in government policy. There was a proposed Council Tax increase of 4.9% in 2007/08, 3% in 2008/09 and zero in 2009/10. The funding gaps in 2008/09 and 2009/10 would be closed by the fundamental service reviews.

Officers provided information on the People First – Children's budget, which would affect children and young people. In particular, Members were advised that in 2007/08 there was an expected 6.8% increase in the dedicated schools grant. In 2007/08 schools would continue to receive the Minimum Funding Guarantee at a rate of 3.7% per pupil or all schools.

Members and officers entered into detailed discussion on the report and queried whether the vision for Harrow and the Council's Corporate Priorities, as outlined in the officer report, could be met, considering the current financial difficulties. Officers explained that the verbal feedback from the Joint Area Review (JAR) was that Children's Services was good but there was a need for the service to increase capacity in line with demand and increase choice. Although efficiency savings would be made, the settlement would put significant pressure on Children's Services.

The Chairman queried whether the Council's partners had received significant increases in grants from the government. An officer stated none had but that one of the strengths outlined in the JAR was partnership working. It was added that examples of this were the Neighbourhood Resource Centres, Children's Centres and Extended Schools, which were engaging the community and providing localised services. The Borough Commander, safer neighbourhood teams and local organisations were also supporting children and young people's events such as the Kickz programme, which was specifically targeted at vulnerable young people.

The Sub-Committee agreed that, due to financial difficulties of Harrow Council and the continuing poor settlements from central government, it would be necessary to work

with partners and stakeholders in the community to close the gap between resources available and services provided.

In response to Members' questions about providing play facilities for children, an officer reported that all the Children's Centres had well maintained and lit play areas, a draft Play Strategy was being produced by the Director of Learning and Community Development, and that, as well as the Kickz programme, a cricket academy had been run at Canons School and School Sports' Co-ordinators were also delivering coaching in schools.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the above comments be forwarded to Cabinet and then Council for consideration.

49. **Social Care Complaints Annual Report:**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Director of Children's Services, which provided Members with the 13th Annual Report on complaints procedures for social service's responsibilities for April 2005 to March 2006.

It was reported that new government regulations had come into force, which included the right to request a Stage 2 investigation if no response was received within the Stage 1 timescale, no Members being allowed to sit on Stage 3 panels and 'freezing' any decision to change existing care whilst the complaint was being investigated. There had also been system changes within the Council's Complaints Department. All complaints were being logged centrally on a new database, there was mandatory training for managers, training for Members, response letters were being checked by the Complaints Department and mediation was proving successful and preventing cases from requiring a review panel, each of which cost approximately £3000.

In response to questions from Members, an officer reported that if the complainant were at risk by 'freezing' the decision, the decision would be 'unfrozen'. The child's views would be central to the complaint.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

50. **Looked After Children - Response to Scrutiny Review and Council's Response to Green Paper:**

Members received a verbal report from the Director of Children's Services. The Director stated that the scrutiny review of Children Looked After (CLA) was published in September 2006. As the green paper was not published until October 2006, scrutiny was unable to consider the issues raised. Therefore it had been agreed that the scrutiny review and green paper be linked via consultation forums with CLA, young people, Councillors and multi-agency group. Consequently the green paper response was drawn up and Cabinet supported the scrutiny report and green paper response.

It was stated that work on LAC, taking on board scrutiny's comments, would be undertaken between February and April 2007 following the Joint Area Review (JAR) being received on 23 February 2007. It was reported that an action plan regarding CLA would be part of the response to the JAR report and set in context of the Children and Young People Plan, Council restructure and available resources. It was anticipated that this would be written and signed off by the start of 2007/08, after which time the Sub-Committee could be updated.

RESOLVED: That (1) the verbal report be noted;

(2) the Sub-Committee receive an update at its meeting on 26 June 2007.

51. **Adoption Inspection:**

The Sub-Committee received a verbal report of the Director of Children's Services who reported that the last formal inspection was in September 2005. The action plan for that inspection was submitted and accepted by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in November 2005. The key issues remaining were the need to improve the speed of assessments and matching of child and adopter and the need to recruit experienced and high quality staff. There were difficulties in recruiting these staff due to a national shortage and applicants being attracted to the best organisations. As Harrow Council's performance was in the bottom quarter in England, it was not one of the best organisations. Therefore, the UK's leading voluntary adoption agency was commissioned, with support of the CSCI. It was reported that since the commissioning, Harrow's performance was in the top quarter in England.

Members congratulated the Director on taking this approach. In response to a Member's question about why competitive tendering had not taken place, the Director explained that Harrow wanted to commission one of the top five organisations, needed an organisation that was easily accessible from Harrow and an organisation that was willing to act on Harrow's behalf. There was only one organisation that met these criteria and was therefore commissioned.

A Member expressed concern that their accountability would be lost. The Director responded that he was still legally accountable and that management would oversee the quality of work. He added that the Adoption Panel consisted of a Member, local paediatrician, adopters and those that had been adopted. The Member on the Panel had been consulted on the commissioning.

In response to Members' questions relating to support following adoption, the Director explained that post-adoption support was provided.

RESOLVED: That (1) the verbal report be noted;

(2) the Sub-Committee receive an annual update.

52. **Children's Services Performance:**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Director of Children's Services, which provided Members with the most recent key performance indicators for Children's Services. It was reported that Harrow was one of only three local authorities in England where pupils had achieved above the expected level of progress in all schools. Performance was above the national average at all key stages.

In response to questions from Members, officers stated that the percentage of 14 year old pupils in schools maintained by the Local Authority achieving Level 5 or above in Key Stage 3 in Information Communication Technology (ICT) assessment had decreased. This was in line with a national decrease caused by the move to having online tests and the process being unfamiliar. Members were also advised that there was a student advisory panel, that three student surveys had taken place and that the curriculum had been changed in response to comments received.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the Sub-Committee receive an annual update at each January meeting.

53. **School Food Improvement Strategy:**

Members received a report of the Director of Strategic Services, People First, which advised of the progress made to date in relation to the new food-based standards, with special reference to the provision of drinking water in schools.

The Sub-Committee was advised that a follow-up survey had been circulated to High Schools in order to identify specific issues and challenges in relation to the new water standard. Nine schools had responded to date and copies of the responses were circulated to Members.

In response to questions from Members, an officer stated that as the government grant was only transitional, it was preferable that schools spent the money on making mains water available, rather than using water coolers which would be more expensive in the long term.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the Sub-Committee receive an annual update.

54. **Governing Body Recruitment and Retention:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Children's Services, which informed Members of the progress made against the recommendations made by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee at its meeting on 20 January 2004 and its updates on 12 January 2005 and to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting on 4 April 2006.

It was reported that governing body vacancies had decreased to 17.6% from 27% in April 2006, which had been due to a major recruitment drive using a consultant who worked across London and was able to apply best practice.

In reference to Recommendation 6 of the scrutiny review, a Member suggested that there had been an expectation that in addition to long service being recognised through a reception held by the Mayor, shorter service would also be recognised, to help retain

governors. An officer reported that at the time the recommendation was made, long service was to be rewarded first, due to the large number of governors. Not all long-serving governors had yet been invited to attend a reception.

It was reported that the governor service was a small funded service and that Harrow's vacancies were in line with those of other boroughs. As there was a limit to resources it was possible that the vacancy figures would not be reduced significantly.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

55. **The Distribution of Special Needs Statements in Harrow's Mainstream Schools:**
Members received a report of the Director of Children's Services, which provided information on the distribution of Special Educational Needs (SEN) statements in Harrow's mainstream schools.

Members were advised that there were approximately 1000 children with SEN statements, with 600 in mainstream schools. It was reported that whilst the distribution of SEN statements across mainstream schools was not even, the spread was not unreasonable and variations were, in the main, accounted for by the additional resourcing for meeting specialist needs in particular schools.

In response to questions from Members, the Sub-Committee was informed that the overall numbers of children with SEN statements was similar to that five years ago, that figures were comparable with other boroughs and that the £45,000 reduction in educational psychologist provision in the budget would be covered by the Schools' Forum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56. **Update on Harrow Sixth Form Collegiate:**
The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Director of Children's Services, which updated Members on the progress of the Harrow Sixth Form Collegiate. It was reported that Harrow's bid to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 16-19 Capital Fund had been considered, unanimously supported and endorsed by the London West Skills Council (LSC). The bid also had the support of local MPs and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The National Capital Committee would make a decision on the bid on 27 February 2007.

It was reported that a Collegiate Partnership Board had been established and was meeting regularly, 440 students had enrolled and that the bid included 5 vocational pathways for students between the ages of 14 and 19 to follow.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

57. **Harrow Parent Partnership Service:**
The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Strategic Services which provided Members with information regarding the Harrow Parent Partnership Service (HPPS).

It was reported that verbal feedback from the Joint Area Review had been favourable regarding the HPPS.

Members queried the percentages in the benchmarking table of the report and an officer reported that she would confirm the correct figures.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

58. **Scope for Review of Obesity:**
Members considered a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy which introduced the scope for the scrutiny review of obesity, agreed as part of the Children and Young People work programme for 2006-2010.

The Chairman explained that the membership for the in-depth review needed to be finalised. Three Members had volunteered and more Members were required.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the Chairman be notified of any further Members who wished to take part in the in-depth review.

59. **Group Manager (People First, Finance):**
The Director of Children's Services informed the Sub-Committee that Paula Foulds was leaving the Council. He, and Members of the Sub-Committee, thanked the officer for her work on the budget.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.55 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MARK VERSALLION
Chairman