
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 22 APRIL 2008

Chairman:	* Councillor Stanley Sheinwald	
Councillors:	* Robert Benson (1) * Mrs Margaret Davine * B E Gate * Mitzi Green * Ashok Kulkarni (2) * Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Jerry Miles * Anthony Seymour * Dinesh Solanki * Yogesh Teli * Mark Versallion
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) * Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) * Mr R Chauhan † Mrs D Speel

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (2) Denote category of Reserve Members
† Denotes apologies received

[Note: Councillor Paul Osborn also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minutes 308 and 309 below. Councillor Rekha Shah also attended this meeting to speak on the various items on the agenda].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES
298. 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 Manji Kara Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani	Councillor Ashok Kulkarni Councillor Robert Benson

299. Declarations of Interest:

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
16. Maternity Services at Northwick Park Hospital	Councillor B E Gate	Personal Interest due to employment of family members by General Practices in Harrow and Pinner.

300. 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>
12. Town centre Development – In-Depth Review - Scope	The Review was underway and any changes to the Scope needed to be incorporated in the Project Plan.

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

301. Minutes:

Arising from Minute 296 a Member advised that she had received a response from the Leader which she read out and requested be circulated to all Members of the Committee. She suggested that consideration be given in future to consultation with

the relevant Members prior to any decision to overturn a resolution of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

With reference to Minute 295 it was noted that this minute should be attached as an appendix to the relevant Cabinet report to enable full consideration of this Committee's views by Cabinet.

A Member noted that with respect to Minute 292 the information requested remained outstanding and asked that officers ensure this was made available in the near future.

A Member advised that the two questions she had submitted directly to the Head of Scrutiny were not contained within the minutes and it was noted that these had been passed to the relevant Department for response. The questions related to the Council's social care criteria and social care policy and decision-making/judicial review.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2008, be taken as read and signed as a correct record when published in the Bound Minute Volume.

302. **Public Questions:**

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

303. **Petitions:**

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

304. **Deputations:**

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

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

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

306. **Report from Lead Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no reports from Scrutiny Lead Members.

307. **Maternity Services at Northwick Park Hospital:**

The Chairman welcomed Liz Robb, Director of Nursing Northwick Park Hospital and John Oater, Harrow PCT to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance to respond to the recent tragic occurrences at Northwick Park Hospital.

Liz Robb gave a brief overview of the history of the Hospital, including the circumstances that placed it in "special measures", the Action Plan that had been drawn up and implemented and noted that the Hospital had now been out of special measures for 18 months. She referred to the three recent maternity related deaths at the hospital, stating that all were subject to investigation as to "cause and circumstances" and that this was being combined with an overarching review of all the Hospital's services to ensure that the Action Plan implemented meant all services remained "fit for purpose" and exceeded acceptable clinical practice. The Review Panel would include five external experts including experts within the medical field and an independent non-professional person, all of whom were independent of Northwick Park Hospital to ensure fairness and transparency of the proceedings.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Ms Robb advised that following the Hospital's emergence from "special measures" the Hospital remained subject to external scrutiny by Harrow PCT and other health bodies until September 2007 and additional practices such as monthly performance reports to the Trust Board had been put in place. She further advised that, since the completion of the Action Plan aims, external assessment had improved the hospital's standing from a Level 1 to a Level 2 status. Further the Hospital had been involved in the recent overall review of all maternal services country-wide and had achieved a rating of "fair", one of only eight London hospitals to achieve this level.

A Member queried whether the hospital held comparative data with regard to how its service was performing on average, particularly in view of ten deaths within a three year period. Ms Robb responded that the national average remained six deaths in

100,000. She further noted that the incidences at Northwick Park had all arisen due to rare but recognised childbirth complications.

A Member requested further information concerning what structure was in place to improve the maternity unit and referred to the opening of the Brent Birthing Centre, suggesting that the cost of removing Northwick Park Hospital from “special measures” together with opening a further Unit in the near vicinity indicated a lack of management overview in the provision of service to the community. Ms Robb responded that a significant amount of the expenditure undertaken with regard to Northwick Park Hospital had been utilised for improving the physical environment as this had been identified in the investigation of the original maternal deaths as an area that was not fit for purpose. The other main area of spending had been in relation to staffing with an additional 40 midwives being employed and agreement in place for a further 20 positions. She noted that the maternity service’s vacancy rate at 11% was amongst the lowest in London.

Referring to the Brent Birthing Centre, Ms Robb explained that this had been opened as part of an overall redefinition of services, in line with the recognition of change of associated risk factors affecting patients and reflecting the local population. She advised that a 2004 Risk Analysis Survey had indicated a 50% high risk category for the mix of population within Harrow and Brent, which referred to potential general underlying contributive conditions, for example, diabetes.

The Member continued his questions suggesting that the Hospital should be able to assess the likelihood of an underlying condition and thereby orient its systems to respond to these appropriately. Ms Robb agreed this could be undertaken to a certain extent however, it was not conclusive and this was one of the factors considered when agreeing an overarching review to reconsider all systems and service provision.

A Member referred to the attitudes of staff within the Hospital and the perception of a lack of sensitivity to the local community and Ms Robb agreed that this had been a key feature of the initial review undertaken, as the Hospital recognised that it had not previously done enough to support the needs of the local populations. As part of the outcomes she advised that the Hospital had established close links with diverse members of the community to strengthen this area and had introduced new practices such as interpreters; culturally specific care; diversity training; advocacy and customer care courses for all staff.

The Member stated that, in her opinion, complaints concerning the attitude of staff to patients remained a significant problem and asked how the organisation was responding to drive improvements in this area. Ms Robb agreed that staff attitudes remained one of the top three issues of concern within surveys. However, the Hospital was adopting a “no tolerance” position on the issue and was seeking to address this area of performance in a variety of ways including mandatory customer care courses for all staff. She noted that the overarching review underway was about to focus on the area of first point of contact to measure how this was performing.

In response to a query concerning the Hospital’s Teaching Licence while under “special measures”, Ms Robb advised that this had not been suspended as a result of the recent deaths. The Midwifery Council had agreed that it would not accept any new entry trainee’s while under special measures but, the training programme had been reinstated once the Hospital was moved out of that status.

John Oater, Harrow PCT, then spoke briefly advising that the PCT expected, when a small number of deaths occurred, to see procedures put in place by the hospital concerned to examine all its services and systems. He felt Northwick Park Hospital had responded to the issue and implemented the review very quickly. He advised that Harrow PCT was further reassured by the presence of five independent external representatives within the Review Group and that its focus on an overall and overarching review was the correct one.

A Member queried whether there was any resemblance or common factors between the recent deaths and previous group of ten deaths which led to special measures. Mr Oater responded that it was a key purpose of the Review Group to examine this possibility and advised that currently the Group was being established with its Terms of Reference being clearly defined. It was anticipated the Group would undertake an investigation lasting for four weeks and consider its deliberations during May with a Conclusions Report being produced by early June. He further emphasised that the Group would consider, as part of its investigations, “established best practice models” from other organisations together with the opportunity for learning as part of these. Ms Robb noted that Northwick Park Hospital’s use of a scorecard system for service

provision was an example of such a national best practice model that was now utilised in other hospitals.

A Member asked about the relationship and communication between midwifery and obstetrics services and Ms Robb confirmed that communication between different service teams had previously been an issue of concern. This had now improved as a result of the initial Action Plan. Replying to a question on how the Hospital gained feedback from users, Ms Robb stated that a variety of methods were utilised including the complaints process; patient care feedback sessions; suggestions box; feedback cards; and speaking to the midwives directly. She stated that with regard to complex labour cases a further service was offered to allow clients to talk through the difficulties of the case. Within the feedback gained it was noted that a principal concern was the use of antiseptic hand gel and clients wishing to see this increased which she commented was not unanticipated for a maternity care service.

In discussing the likely areas of the Review, Ms Robb agreed that “hospital acquired infections” was one of the themes that would be considered

A Member referred to the perceived policy to send home new mothers within a short timeframe and Ms Robb advised that this varied from case to case, noting that many new mothers wished to return home as soon as possible. However, she felt that the hospital would not send a new mother home before she was ready to go, whilst recognising that this was a high-demand service-led area. Mr Oater also commented that short hospital stays were positively linked to maternal safety, which was a contributory factor to why new mothers were now sent home as early as safely possible.

A Member queried whether Northwick Park hospital had guidelines in place with respect to its practices and procedures, particularly around staff training and equipment maintenance. Ms Robb confirmed that this was the case and also noted that the hospital benchmarked its services to ensure they remained fit for purpose, agreeing that staff training and equipment were key elements of the services provision. She emphasised that these particular areas had been identified within the initial Action Plan which had been fully implemented.

A Member spoke on the expert staff members brought in when the Hospital was in “special measures” to help resolve the concerns and questioned whether these remained with the Hospital. Ms Robb noted that a leading Obstetrician brought in had put in place strong practices and procedures which were utilised by the Hospital. He had then become President of the Royal College of Midwifery but continued his personal interest in the progress of the Hospital.

During the discussion on the recent deaths at the Hospital Members expressed their sympathy to the families affected by the tragedies and at the conclusion of the debate the Committee sat for a moment’s reflection in memory of those who had died and their families.

RESOLVED: That the proposed Review be welcomed and the conclusions of its investigations be received at a future meeting.

308. **Question and Answer Session with the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support on Strategy for People, Cultural Change within the Organisation and Results of the Staff Survey:**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support, Interim Divisional Director of Human Resources and Development and Interim Divisional Director of Strategy and Improvement to the meeting.

The session and questions were based around the Strategy for People, Cultural Change within the Organisation and Results of the Staff Survey. Members were invited to put their questions to the Portfolio Holder and Officers relating the areas under discussion. Members also asked supplemental questions, which were duly answered.

Communications Section Performance

In response to questions about the service, the Portfolio Holder advised as follows:-

- the service had experienced a marked improvement from a service which was overspending in all areas and in all performance measures was regarded as a lower quartile service. The service was now on target to achieve a “good performer” in the IDeA ratings and, as an example, had achieved
 - 127 articles in the local papers

- 2 BBC / ITV coverage articles
 - 8 National newspapers articles
 - 32 Website articles.
- the service continued to significantly exceed all the targets set for it.
 - it was recognised that challenges continued with regard to internal communication however, these were being proactively addressed.
 - it was agreed that the cost relating to the provision of the service, operated by Westminster Council, be circulated to all Committee Members.

Use of Agency Staff

- The Portfolio Holder stated that since 2006 the budget in relation to agency staff costs had been reduced over a two year period from £14.5million to £7.45 million. He considered this had been achieved by reaching an understanding of the role of such staff within the organisation and an awareness of the service provision needed.
- It was advised that the main departmental users of agency staff remained the Community and Environment and Social Care Services departments however, aspects of this use were driven by the need to retain service provision at a certain staffing level to maintain service delivery to clients.
- The Portfolio Holder noted that officers continued to seek efficiencies in respect of agency staff costs. However, it was also recognised that there was a minimum level of use that was required to be maintained and he considered that usage had almost reached this point.

Culture Change

In response to questions, the Portfolio Holder briefed Members on the initiative of the Chief Executive stating that the key areas were:

Performance Management – he advised that Performance Boards met regularly and this area was also reported upon to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee. A quarterly report submitted to Cabinet which embedded ownership and understanding of the budgetary culture the authority was operating within.

Consistency Across the Organisation – noted that this area was still subject to further examination as there remained pockets of good and bad practice within the authority that needed to be addressed.

Customer Focus – advised that a recent Cabinet item recognised that Harrow was not fully focussed on the needs of its customers and sought to address this by the new Customer Services department identified as part of the Senior Management Restructure.

In response to a question concerning the decision not to pursue Investors In People across the whole organisation, the Portfolio Holder responded that this decision was made to enable concentration on key areas and ensure these were undertaken to a higher quality. This decision had arisen over a concern regarding capacity to deliver an overarching Award.

Replying to the impacts of the change upon staff morale and whether this was evidenced by improvements as yet, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Staff Survey would be completed at the end of June 2008 and it was anticipated some measures would be identified through this. It was noted that the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee would be considering the outcomes of the Survey at a future meeting.

Answering a question on the level of staff absences, the Portfolio Holder noted that more robust systems had been introduced to give full transparency to the reporting of absences as an inconsistency in reporting practices had been identified. This had initially resulted in a slight rise in the level of absences but, several significant projects around staff “wellbeing” were currently underway which it was hoped would lead to an overall improvement in the trend. In comparison to neighbouring authorities, Harrow was below the London average. However, it was anticipated that with the new systems in place target setting for improvements and trend analysis of sickness period and types could be undertaken.

The Portfolio Holder spoke of the focus on increasing website usage and that there had been a specific aim of enabling more transactions to be undertaken online. He noted that the website had been geared to its customers and to aid them in finding the particular service they wished to utilise. There had also been a move towards channel migration of residents/customer interaction via the website in the first instance. He noted this had resulted in a significant increase in website usage and correspondingly had led to a reduction in overall costs as web transactions were inherently cheaper than alternative options.

With regard to the challenges facing the Council in the provision of care, the probable impact of new legislation and the risks of new costs, it was intended to use the available grants received flexibly, as the Comprehensive Spending review (CSR) settlement was unlikely to meet these costs. A Member referred to the previously stated intention to roll out the Children's Services model for Agency Staff usage to the Adults Services area and ensure the continuity of the management of care. Members were advised that a report concerning the transitional programme was due to be submitted to Cabinet and aimed to build on existing practices. It was noted that a long term solution was still being worked towards.

A Member referred to a recent press release giving inaccurate information and it was agreed that this had been unfortunate and was withdrawn as soon as possible. However, it was important that the proactive stance of the Communications Department was retained but, to assist in the future, a Protocol with respect to Overview and Scrutiny communications had now been drawn up.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

309.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment:

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support and the Interim Divisional Director of Strategy and Improvement gave a detailed presentation on the outcome of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2007, prospects for 2008 and outlined the implications of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The report set out the Council's result for 2007 and how this was achieved through the Corporate Assessment, Service Block Assessments and Use of Resources areas.

The Portfolio Holder outlined the prospects for 2008 which again anticipated an overall achievement of a two-star rating and explained that no obvious improvements would be forthcoming due to the backward looking nature of the assessment. He then outlined the nine step programme the Chief Executive had put in place with the aim of the Council becoming an excellent authority and addressed each of the priority areas. A recent IDeA Peer Review undertaken in December 2007 gave considerable recognition to the progress the Council had made during the past year, noting there was a clear sense of momentum in the organisation and greater stability than before.

The Portfolio Holder then briefly went through the requirements of the Comprehensive Area Assessment which would replace the CPA with effect from 2009 and was intended to focus on geographical areas rather than Councils and was aimed to provide annually:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a joint inspectorate Risk Assessment for each area | <p>A forward-looking assessment of the likelihood of local and national priority outcomes being achieved</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Use of Resources judgement for each council (and separately for some partners) | <p>An expanded version of the Use of Resources block within CPA</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Direction of Travel judgement for each council | <p>Similar to current practice under CPA</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an assessment of the area's performance against the new National Indicator Set | <p>With effect from 1 April 2008, this indicator set was intended to replace BVPIs and PAF indicators</p> |

The Council was already working on its preparations for CAA and detailed plans were in place for measuring the new national indicator set from 1 April 2008.

A Member expressed her dissatisfaction that the presentation had not been formally notified to the Committee and that there was no opportunity to ask questions regarding its content. The Chairman agreed that a Question & Answer session should be held at a future Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

310. **Review of Town Centre Redevelopment - Revised Scope:**

The Committee received a report proposing minor amendments to the agreed Scope for the Review of the Town Centre. The proposed amendments were aimed to reflect the fact that the Review Group would be taking the long term view rather than concentrating on current developments, although it was accepted that some consideration of current issues would need to be included to allow an effective judgement on the long term vision.

A Member queried whether peripheral issues such as attendance at a recent Development Conference would form part of the considerations and it was advised that this matter would be subject to consideration by the appropriate Portfolio Holder rather than the Review Group. The Chairman of the Review Group emphasised that its focus would be upon the Town Centre, with issues relating to planning remaining with the relevant Planning Committees.

RESOLVED: That the amended Scope for the Review of the Town Centre, as submitted, be agreed.

311. **Future of Schools In-Depth Review:**

The Committee were informed that the Review had commenced. However, it had been advised that the timetable concerning schooling and lobbying for funding for the future had been revised and that bids would actually be lodged during May 2008, earlier than originally anticipated. This had resulted in a proposed change of focus to undertake a light touch review during the autumn, which would look at the extended schools service where it was considered the scrutiny review could add value.

RESOLVED: That a change to the rationale of the Future of Schools In-Depth Review be agreed as detailed above.

312. **Byron Leisure Centre - Scope for Challenge Panel:**

The Scrutiny Manager introduced a report setting out proposals in relation to a Challenge Panel to consider the Byron Centre proposals and identified three options for consideration. She noted the Strategic Planning Committee would be considering the proposals on 7 May 2008 and suggested that this did not permit sufficient opportunity to allow a Challenge Panel to be effective. She also informed Members that advice received indicated that any Challenge Panel held during the period of "political purdah" might be considered inappropriate. It was therefore her recommendation that the Challenge Panel be postponed at this time and appropriate Lead Scrutiny Members be requested to continue monitoring the situation. A return to the Challenge Panel option could then be undertaken in the future if further issues arose that made it appropriate for scrutiny.

A Member noted that the available timescale did not appear to permit any other course of action other than that suggested by the Scrutiny Manager and expressed regret that the opportunity for User Groups of the Centre to feed into a Scrutiny Review would be unavailable at this time. Several Members of the Committee expressed the view that the Council did need to give further consideration to how committees approached Council's own development and noted that there were associated work areas that scrutiny could undertake in relation to issues such as the level of sporting provision in the borough. A Member reminded the Committee that the public had received opportunity on two separate occasions to date to feed into consultation arrangements regarding the Byron Leisure Centre proposals.

RESOLVED: That, in view of the further consultation undertaken as part of the planning process, a Challenge Panel concerning the Byron Leisure Centre proposals be postponed and the Lead Scrutiny Members for Sustainable Development and Enterprise be requested to monitor the situation and return to the option of a more detailed investigation if further issues arose in the future.

313. **Any Other Business:**

The Chairman noted that this was the final meeting of the current municipal year and thanked his colleagues for their work over that period. He also expressed his good wishes to those Members who would be serving on other Committees in the coming year.

314. **Extension and Termination of Meeting:**
In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4B of the Constitution) it was

RESOLVED: At 9.59 pm to continue until 10.30 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.30 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman