
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2007

Chairman:	* Councillor Stanley Sheinwald	
Councillors:	* Mrs Margaret Davine	* Dinesh Solanki
	* B E Gate	* Bill Stephenson (1)
	* Mitzi Green	* Yogesh Teli
	* Ashok Kulkarni (2)	* Mark Versallion
	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Jeremy Zeid (6)
	* Anthony Seymour	
Voting	(Voluntary Aided)	(Parent Governors)
Co-opted:		
	† Mrs J Rammelt	* Mr R Chauhan
	† Reverend P Reece	* Mrs D Speel

* Denotes Member present
 (1), (2) and (6) Denote category of Reserve Members
 † Denotes apologies received

[Note: Councillor David Ashton, having been invited to the meeting in his capacity as the Deputy Leader of the Council, also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 247 below].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES

241. **Membership of Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**
 The Chairman advised the Committee of the change in the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the supplemental front sheet circulated at the meeting. He stated that Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani had been appointed as an Ordinary Member of the Committee and as the Policy Lead Member for Adult Health and Social Care.
242. **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 Jeremy Zeid |
| Councillor Jerry Miles | Councillor Bill Stephenson |
| Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani | Councillor Ashok Kulkarni |
243. **Declarations of Interest:**
- RESOLVED:** To note that the following interests were declared:
- Agenda Item 6(a) – Year Ahead Statement 2008/09
- (i) Section 2 – Redevelop the Town Centre
- Councillor Anthony Seymour declared a personal interest in that, as Chairman of the Call-in Sub-Committee, he had chaired a meeting on 29 November 2007 where the Call-in had related to the Town Centre. Councillors Stanley Sheinwald and Jeremy Zeid declared a personal interest as they had served as Members on that body. Councillor Bill Stephenson declared a personal interest as he had been one of the signatories to the Call-in. Councillor David Ashton declared a personal interest on the basis that he had appeared at the Call-In Sub-Committee to give evidence.
- Councillor Dinesh Solanki declared a personal interest in that he lived in Harrow Weald.
- They would all remain in the room to ask questions, respond to questions and listen to the responses given.

During the course of the meeting, Councillor Mrs Kinnear, who was not a Member of the Committee, declared a personal interest in that she lived and owned a property in the Town Centre. She would remain in the room to listen to responses given.

During the course of the meeting, Councillor Susan Hall, who was not a Member of the Committee, left the room during the discussion relating to the Wealdstone Town Centre.

- (ii) Sections 3/4 – Improve the well-being of adults and children and the care of those who need our help most/ Extend community use of schools while making education in Harrow even better

Councillor Mitzi Green declared a personal interest in that her son received care from the Council.

Councillor Mrs Margaret Davine declared a personal interest in that her mother received social care from the Council.

The majority of Members of the Committee and Councillor Mrs Kinnear, who was not a Member of the Committee, declared personal interests in that they were governors of various schools in Harrow.

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest in that his sister taught at a school in Harrow. During the course of the meeting, he also declared a personal interest in that he was employed by London Councils Limited and stated that this had been registered in the Members Register of Interest Forms held by the Council.

They would all remain in the room to ask questions and listen to the responses given.

244. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

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

245. **Minutes:**

- (a) Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2007

RESOLVED: That (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2007 be taken as read and the Chairman be authorised to sign them as a correct record when published in the Council Bound Minute Volume;

- (b) Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2007

RESOLVED: That (1) subject to (i) below, the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2007 be taken as read and the Chairman be authorised to sign them as a correct record when published in the Council Bound Minute Volume:

- (i) Minute 237 – Strategic Approach to School Organisation – to replace the first sentence of paragraph 3 of the preamble with the following:- “In response to the concerns expressed by a co-opted member that the amalgamation policy had been approved without consultation with stakeholders, the Director mentioned that the matter had been agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children’s Development. She added that the Council’s Amalgamation Policy was amended in light of legislative changes in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and to give greater clarity to the process to support the change of age of transfer.”

246. **Deputations:**

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

247. **Question and Answer Session with the Leader, Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive:**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman welcomed the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive to the meeting. It was noted that the Leader was unwell and had sent his apologies to Members. He would be happy to attend a future meeting of the Committee. Members wished him a speedy recovery.

The Chairman also welcomed the co-opted members to their first question and answer session with the Deputy Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

The meeting and questions had been based around the Year Ahead Statement 2008/09 and arranged under the following themes:-

Deliver better environmental services and keep crime low, Redevelop the town centre, Improve the well-being of adults and children and the care of those who most need our help, Extend community use of schools while making education in Harrow even better, Improve the way we work for our residents, Develop communities where people from different backgrounds get on well together and Central government grant/Local lottery.

Before receiving questions, the Deputy Leader thanked Members for the invitation to discuss the Year Ahead Statement 2008/09, a first element of the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Deputy Leader referred to the Council's Vision of being "recognised as one of the best London Councils by 2012 in a borough that was cosmopolitan, confident and cohesive"; a vision which was intended to coincide with the 2012 Olympic games in London. The vision had been driven partly by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) review, which had indicated that the Council needed to strengthen its vision and priorities. The Council had accepted that its performance needed improving, and had tasked itself to be the best London Council by 2012. He referred to the new and reduced set of vision statements and the focused set of corporate priorities, details of which were set out in the Chief Executive's report.

The Committee was informed that the vision statements could only be delivered with the commitment of staff and the Council's partners, notably those that formed the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP). The Deputy Leader stated that each of the 6 corporate priorities would link to new flagship actions, each of which would be tangible and measurable, details of which would be submitted to Cabinet at its meeting in January 2008 and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the New Year. The Council's Year Ahead Statement would then be amplified by the flagship actions supported by Service Plans from each of the Directorates and linked to the Council's Corporate Plan and the Budget. Any comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be incorporated.

The Chief Executive outlined the non-political issues and obstacles facing the Council, and referred to the following 9 steps that had been put in place to help the Council achieve its vision:-

Vision and Priorities, Structures to reflect the needs and priorities of the organisation, Finance, Investment in staff/Members, Work Life balance, Performance management, Cultural change and Improved communications.

He stated that whilst good progress had been made, a great deal of work needed to be done for the Council to be able to achieve its vision.

Members were invited to put their questions to the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive under the various themes set out below. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also asked supplemental questions, which were duly answered.

Section 1 - Deliver better environmental services and keep crime low

In response to questions about landfill costs, dedicated policing in the Town Centre, traffic congestion, the MORI survey results and street cleansing, the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive stated that:-

- Issues around landfill costs had been raised through the West London Waste Authority (WLWA), as there was a risk of various Councils, including Harrow, picking up additional tax of those boroughs that had less efficient recycling rates. The current situation appeared to penalise efficient boroughs. This issue could have a detrimental effect on existing good relationships between boroughs.
- The Borough Commander for Harrow had put forward a concept of a dedicated Town Centre policing unit, which would cost of £250,000. With the Council's challenging financial situation, the concept was not feasible. It would also imply that the Council Tax payers would be paying twice for the local police services given that policing was funded from the Greater London Authority (GLA) precept. The Deputy Leader undertook to respond in writing to all Members of the Committee on the plans by the Police to move from South Harrow to Central Harrow.

- It was perceived that traffic congestion in Harrow was getting worse in comparison with other boroughs. Statistics produced by Transport for London (TfL) suggested that Harrow had the fourth lowest level of traffic congestion in London. Various traffic measures were in the pipeline to improve the situation, such as the Petts Hill Bridge project. Quarterly meetings were held with the relevant authorities to discuss this issue. The situation was influenced largely by factors outside the control of the Council. It was intended to improve traffic congestion in Wealdstone by opening the High Street. The government's parking policy, the Mayor of London's requirement to build extra 4,000 homes in Harrow, various planning proposals, some of which had been refused by the Council but approved by the Planning Inspector on appeal, and the Mayor's London Plan would all contribute to increased traffic congestion in Harrow. The Deputy Leader agreed to respond, in writing, to the question on how the Council was promoting the removal of aspects at junctions. He agreed with a Member that the 24hr CCTV, which helped cut down crime in Harrow, ought also to be used to enforce bus lanes and other traffic infringements. Revenue raised could however only be directed to traffic initiatives.
- The Chief Executive was of the view that traffic congestion was an issue for all individuals to consider, including their contribution to it. It was important for the Council to lead by example with its Partners.
- In terms of policing arrangements in the Town Centre, and the comment from a Member that he supported the use of public funds to address the challenge of increased crime in the Town Centre, the Deputy Leader stated that he welcomed the introduction of a police cabin in the Town Centre that would be staffed by local police officers and the British Transport Police. The Deputy Leader undertook to respond to the query on whether the Fire Service had been consulted on proposed developments in Harrow Town Centre, as it had not been able to meet their targets in terms of attending the problems in there.
- Harrow had the lowest customer satisfaction level in London and measures had been put in place to address the issue. Better communication would help improve perception together with improvements to Access Harrow and the One Stop Shop. Improvements to the public realm maintenance had been included in the draft Budget for 2008/09. The Deputy Leader was of the view that the budget for street cleaning had been reduced to an unacceptable level but that this was driven by the challenging financial position faced by the authority. He stated that the Council would be investigating why its costs for street cleaning were considerably higher than those of its neighbours.
- Only time would tell of the return received on the proposed regeneration of Wealdstone town centre by opening Wealdstone High Street to traffic. The opening may attract new shops but it was impossible to put a value on the return.

Section 2 - Redevelop the Town Centre

In response to questions about the proposed redevelopment of the Town Centre, existing business space there and business flight, and parking charges, the Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader stated that:-

- The redevelopment of the Town Centre, which was looking 'tired', was a key ingredient in Harrow achieving its vision, particularly when neighbouring shopping centres were adding to their existing investments. The vision for the Town Centre would need to be articulated by the Council, its residents and businesses. The Chief Executive added that it was important that the Council talked to its residents on their aspirations for the Town Centre and what would make them shop and spend time there. Mixed-use development would be the ideal option and he cited the example of Walton Town Centre in Surrey, which he had previously spearheaded, where an inclusive approach to the development had been a success.
- The issue of business flight from Harrow was not considered to be acute when compared with other boroughs. The issue could be addressed and a successful Town Centre that had a mixture of uses – business/retail/residential – would help resolve the problem.
- In addition, the Town Centre should be seen as a safe and clean area and investments in these areas were also important along with its design. The

administration was meeting with local businesses with a view to working together and defining expectations.

- Income from parking had reduced but it was unclear whether a reduction in parking charges would result in an increase in income. The administration was looking at the different rates of parking charges that currently existed in Harrow.
- Only time would tell of the return received on the proposed regeneration of Wealdstone town centre by opening Wealdstone High Street to traffic. The opening would provide greater buying power and may attract new shops but it was impossible to put a value on the return.

Sections 3/4 - Improve the well-being of adults and children and the care of those who most need our help/Extend community use of schools while making education in Harrow even better

In response to questions, the Deputy Leader briefed Members on the challenges facing the Council in the provision of care and the probable impact of new legislation and the risks of new costs. It was intended to use the grants received flexibly as the Comprehensive Spending review (CSR) settlement was unlikely to meet these costs.

With regard to benchmarking costs against other authorities, he urged caution on this issue. In some cases costs were driven by local factors such as the level of need. With regard to home care, some of the existing contracts had been renegotiated to drive down costs. Procurement was challenging because of TUPE requirements affecting some former Council staff, as old providers were not required to provide information on costs until fairly late in the process.

The Chief Executive outlined the actions being taken in regard to value for money and performance and that officers were being asked to prepare actions plans to mitigate the problems ahead. The Council would also work with the West London Alliance with a view to cutting down costs.

In response to a suggestion from a Member about new ways of providing services such as the patient transport service currently provided by London Ambulance, the Deputy Leader stated that the Council was working closely with the Harrow PCT on such issues. He was also looking into why Harrow had the highest infant mortality rate in London.

Responding to a question from another Member about how the Council would reduce the gap in the confidence of those who used its services, the Deputy Leader stated that this issue was related to the outcome of the judicial review on Fair Access to Care Services (FACS). He expressed concern about self-directive care and the need to support vulnerable service users in taking advantage of these new approaches. He spoke highly of Telecare, and urged Members to visit the Milman's Centre for a demonstration on its use.

The Deputy Leader also clarified that cost was not the sole concern when contracts were negotiated.

Section 5 - Improve the way we work for our residents

The Chief Executive responded to questions from Members in this regard and the request that training, particularly for Middle Managers, ought to be brought forward to allow the Council to achieve a cultural change in the organisation and a 'can do' culture. He outlined the 'traditional' and hierarchal nature of the organisation, which needed changing whereby it would release capacity and move away from the blame culture. He acknowledged that the culture of the organisation would be difficult to change as the organisation appeared to have been 'bruised'. He outlined his ambitions for the Council and how he intended to build on the foundations laid down.

Both the Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader spoke about the need to change behaviour, culture and system support. They referred to the recent meetings with staff, which had shown the frustrations of some junior staff who felt that their ideas/suggestions were being blocked. The Chief Executive re-iterated his 9-point plan, which he hoped would help release potential that existed in the organisation.

In terms of whether the Council had the capacity, time and resources to make inroads, the Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader informed Members that the limited project management ability within the organisation had been recognised and costs of engaging

experts had been built-in for new projects. Training in basic project management skills would be provided. The Council would ensure that resources were used in the most effective way and that employees were aware of the organisation's direction. Effective use of existing resources and providing staff with essential tools would help increase capacity within the organisation. New staff would be inducted in the organisation's vision. It was important that all staff felt that they were involved, developed and that their contributions acknowledged. Succession planning was important. The experience, expertise and potential of Middle Managers needed nurturing. It was essential that the relationship between officers and Members was one of mutual respect.

Additionally, Members would also be provided with a development programme to support them in dealing with the new challenges of managing a complex organisation. The programme would be practical, reflective, enhancing and would be supplemented by development work.

Section 6 - Develop communities where people from different backgrounds get on well together

In response to cross-party concern that the Local Area Agreement (LAA) indicator of people from different backgrounds reporting that they got on well together was moving away from the target and whether the MORI survey was the correct way to measure the volunteering aspects, the Deputy Leader acknowledged that the result was a surprise bearing in mind that Harrow did not suffer from community tensions that other boroughs faced. It was noted that officers were looking at ways of improving the performance against this target, perhaps by face-to-face interviewing. The definition of volunteers was somewhat odd. All these issues had to be taken into the context of targets driven government.

Other Issues - Central Government Grant and Local Lottery

The Deputy Leader responded to questions on central government grant and confirmed that the cross-party campaign highlighting the poor settlement received by Harrow would continue and that support had been received from one of the two local MPs. He informed Members that the legal advice was that the Council could set up its own local lottery but that it could be used for capital projects only, such as heritage. A Member indicated his support for such an initiative.

Conclusion

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive for their attendance and responses. The Deputy Leader thanked Members for their fair questions.

248. **Healthcare for London - Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC):**

RESOLVED: That the query relating to the legal basis of the decision taken by Council in relation to the pan-London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, referred to in the 'Note' relating to Minute 209, be actioned prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

249. **Children's Services Complaints Annual Report:**

RESOLVED: That the officer respond to Members about the nature of the complaints about policy and procedural requirements not being met and whether they related to any systematic issues, as referred to in paragraph 3 of the preamble to Minute 234 of the minutes of 20 November 2007 meeting of the Committee.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.34 pm, closed at 9.57 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman