
REPORT OF CABINET

(SPECIAL) MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2008

Chairman: * Councillor Chris Mote

Councillors: * David Ashton * Janet Mote
 * Marilyn Ashton * Paul Osborn
 * Mrs Camilla Bath * Mrs Anjana Patel
 * Miss Christine Bednell * Eric Silver
 * Susan Hall

* Denotes Member present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

387. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members present in relation to the business transacted at the meeting.

388. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 13 March 2008 be deferred until the next Ordinary meeting of Cabinet.

389. **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>
5. Senior Management Structure	The report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated as it was being consulted on. Members were asked to note the information report, which was being submitted to this meeting in order to give them early sight of the proposals.

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

390. **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter:**

The Leader of the Council welcomed the Council's Relationship Manager from the Audit Commission and the Council's External Auditor from Deloitte to the meeting.

The Relationship Manager introduced the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, prepared jointly with the Council's External Auditor, and highlighted some key aspects. She stated that the Direction of Travel judgement was that the Council was improving adequately and that Harrow was a 2-star authority under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The Relationship Manager briefed Cabinet on the improvements that had been delivered in some priority areas, notably housing benefits and children and young people's services. She referred to 'other' service inspections and the positive outcomes in relation to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Joint Area review (JAR). However, in some of the key areas, such as adult services and street cleaning, the pace of improvement needed enhancing.

The Council's External Auditor referred to paragraphs 22-30 of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and highlighted key aspects set out therein. He spoke about the Use of Resources where arrangements were adequate. However, the Council needed to ensure that its spending matched its available resources. The External Auditor stressed that the Use of Resources had a greater influence on the overall CPA score. He was aware that the Council had put in place action plans to address this issue, and was positive about the Best Value Performance Plan.

The Council's External Auditor noted that the Council's Use of Resources self-assessment pointed to a higher level of performance than that set out in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. However, any new processes and improvements had to be seen to have been bedded in. He acknowledged that, during 2006/07, the Council had faced a challenging year with a huge savings programme in place.

The Chief Executive referred to the key messages in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the improvements made since then. The Letter acknowledged that the Council had clarified its vision and priorities and that a comprehensive improvement plan had been put in place in order to improve the Council's standing. There was an improving self-awareness within the Council and a greater openness and these sentiments, together with an improved momentum within the Council, had been reflected in the IDeA Peer Review report carried out in December 2007. The Chief Executive added that the Council had set itself an ambitious programme, which some areas had already benefited from but accepted that it had some way to go before the benefits would reach fruition in other key areas.

The Corporate Directors of Finance and Strategy and Business Support, whilst recognising that the Council had some way to go, highlighted the processes that had been put into place to ensure improvements. These were as follows:-

- performance management had been embedded within the Council and Member involvement in the process had been enhanced. They would hold officers to account through Improvement Boards, which had now been in place for 18 months;
- scrutiny was, through the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee, challenging and reviewing areas of under performance;
- resource planning and budget planning were operating in tandem for the first time;
- progress had been made on the Use of Resources issue and the Council was confident that a score of 3 out of 4 would be achieved in 2008;
- residents would be kept informed of the key achievements of the Council and provided with a summary of the finances.

Individual Portfolio Holders commented on the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, which was largely retrospective. They focused on the improvements that had been put in place and the significant progress made in service areas, particularly in the following areas:-

- figures relating to the number of adoptions had markedly improved and the Council had been innovative in addressing previous poor performance in this area;
- initial assessments of Children in Need showed a marked improvement;
- time taken to determine planning applications against targets had moved from a lower to upper threshold;
- Harrow was now one of the top five of the recycling boroughs in London rather than in the bottom five, a notable key improvement. It had reduced the amount of contaminated green waste going to landfill by 50% in two months;
- significant regeneration was planned for the Town Centre. As part of the Nottingham Declaration, which Harrow had signed up to, a number of initiatives to tackle climate change had been put in place;
- increased resources would help improve street cleaning performance, which was a key priority for the Council;
- strong support, corporate ownership and new leadership, together with a sustained programme of investment in skills, finance and technology over the next three years, would improve adult services;
- notable achievements in housing services, such as void turnaround time and rent collection levels, would deliver improvements for tenants;

- planned year on year increases in the Council's reserves would assist and allow flexibility in the budget;
- whilst the settlement from the government was poor, it had been set for three years and the Council would have to work within the confines of the settlement;
- the 2008/09 budget was robust and prudent and would deliver services that the administration saw as critical.

In summing up, the Leader of the Council stated that the authority had been through a challenging period. The Council was realistic of its current position and had clarified its vision. Some improvements had been delivered at the expense of others. The Council was looking at radical approaches to service delivery and would continue to do so, including working jointly with other local authorities/West London Alliance in order to reap mutual benefits. The support of scrutiny in challenging and reviewing existing policies continued to benefit the Council. The production of the Council's Corporate Plan and the Budget as a single entity for the first time would ensure that resources supported the priorities. He considered the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter as a fair assessment of the Council as at March 2007 but was positive about the future.

Having thanked the Council's Relationship Manager and the External Auditor for their help and support and having wished them well in their future careers as they were moving to other areas of work, it was

RESOLVED: That the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the Council's response be noted.

Reason for Decision: To respond to the issues raised in the Annual Audit and Inspection letter.

391. **Urgent item - Senior Management Structure:**

The Chief Executive introduced the information report, which set out proposals for a revised senior management structure for the Council to better enable it to achieve its strategic objective to be recognised as one of the best London Councils by 2012. These proposals were currently the subject of consultation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Reason for Decision: To note the proposals.

(See also Minute 390)

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 4.45 pm, closed at 5.17 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR CHRIS MOTE
Chairman