

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

21 JANUARY 2009

Chairman: * Councillor Mark Versallion

Councillors: Ms Nana Asante * Christopher Noyce
 * Mrs Margaret Davine (2) * Anthony Seymour
 * B E Gate * Mrs Rekha Shah
 * Ashok Kulkarni * Dinesh Solanki
 * Janet Mote * Yogesh Teli

* Denotes Member present

(2) Denotes category of Reserve Member

[Note: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 111 below].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**105. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

Ordinary MemberReserve Member

Councillor Phillip O'Dell

Councillor Mrs Margaret Davine

106. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared

Agenda Item 9 - Housing Overview

Councillor Yogesh Teli declared a prejudicial interest in this item by virtue of his role as Cabinet Support Member to the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing. He left the room and took no part in the discussion and decision relating to this item.

Agenda Item 10 - Scrutiny Review of Obesity – Six Month Update

Councillor B E Gate declared a personal interest as his wife worked in a General Practice and his daughter occasionally worked in another. He would remain in the room to take part in the discussion and decision relating to this item.

Councillor Yogesh Teli declared a personal interest as he was a diabetic. He would remain in the room to take part in the discussion and decision relating to this item.

107. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2008 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

108. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions, petitions or deputations were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 8, 9 and 10 (Part 4B of the Constitution) respectively.

109. **References from Council and Other Committees/Panels:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references from Councillors or other Committees.

110. **Chairman's Report:**

The Chairman introduced the report, which set out issues considered by him since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee. The Vice-Chairman commented that there needed to be an element within Performance Issues table that indicated at which point issues were no longer being monitored. This would help the expectation that issues might be added to the agenda in the future.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be endorsed;

(2) the following issues be investigated by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee:

- Updates on Decent Homes and Housing Repairs – to continue to be considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.
- Bed-Blocking - to be considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

(3) the Chairman submit a summary of Harrow-wide performance issues, as identified through the Chairman's meetings and the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee to the next available meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

111. **Housing Overview:**

The Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing introduced the report, which provided information on:

- (1) progress made on the delivery of Decent Homes to meeting government targets by 2010;
- (2) action being taken to minimise the potential budgetary overspend in delivering the response maintenance service in 2008/09;
- (3) financial overview of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Portfolio Holder reported that:

- All non-urgent housing repairs had been suspended until the next financial year. Upon analysis of the repair's budget in the first two quarters of the current financial year it was projected that an overspend might undermine the HRA.
- Harrow's stock condition data had not been refreshed since 2002. A company of independent national surveyors would be undertaking a new stock condition survey during January and February 2009. A report analysing the condition of the stock would be submitted to the Council by the end of February 2009. This would provide the Council with the data needed to provide reliable information on the number of homes not meeting the Decent Homes standards. A programme of work would then be put in place to ensure the completion on remaining work before the government's Decent Homes deadline of 31 December 2010.
- There had been an increase in the number of void properties being occupied, with a 43% reduction in the cost of turnaround..
- Waiting lists were lower, with no tenants being housed in Bed and Breakfast.

In response to questions from Members, the Corporate Director of Adults and Housing responded as follows:

- All non-urgent repairs would be fed into the work-stream for 2009/10, with the work being carried out on an on-going basis. If work was essential it would be timetabled in as soon as possible. It was noted that tenants also had a responsibility not to damage property.
- The Housing Service was hoping for a three star rating for Comprehensive Performance Assessment purposes as at 31 March 2008.
- There were complexities in bringing together the four component parts of Housing Services: Housing Management, Access Harrow, Property Services and Kier Group contractors. The Chief Executive had asked for all components to be drawn together in a more effective manner.

In response to questions from Members regarding Decent Homes, it was confirmed that:

- When repairs were completed on a property by Kier Group the work would be inspected by Harrow Council and then signed off by the tenants. A satisfaction survey would be conducted by Kier Group at a later date.

- Snagging lists would be compiled on completion of work. If there were failures in any areas, action would be taken to rectify the situation swiftly.
- The British Planned Statistical Appendix (BPSA) was the Government's detailed analysis of housing stock, its condition, works proposed, and expected costs. The Government collected global information to assess potential investment to improve, and also inform, the national picture of affordable housing.
- Adaptations for disabled tenants could not be carried out at the same time as making homes Decent due to the complexities of delivering the specific adaptations. If an adapted home became vacant an offer would be extended to tenants whose requirements matched the adaptations.

In response to questions from Members regarding the Response Maintenance Service, it was confirmed that:

- Harrow tenants and leaseholders had benefited from a high level of spend on responsive repairs in recent years.
- The Council would be working closely with Kier Group to discuss how much money would be needed to deliver future services in an effort to avoid the same situation in the current financial year.
- Housing Management would conduct home visits to enforce tenant agreements in a bid to tackle problems with tenants' DIY work, unauthorised modifications to properties, property damage through misuse and abuse, and rubbish clearance.
- Making homes Decent had led to an increase in the number of telephone calls from tenants. It was estimated that the Local Authority received up to 23,000 calls. Many calls did not relate directly to a repair issue and were merely enquiries regarding the time-tabling of proposed work. Some calls were duplicated if the urgency of the repair was escalated.
- Maintenance and repairs were ongoing. It was felt that if the fabrication was maintained periodically then there would be less wear and tear.

The Divisional Director of Housing reported that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was stretched, with 25% going to repaying debt and a further quarter being spent on response maintenance. Harrow Council also paid £6,837,600 in negative subsidy in the current financial year (approximately 32% of the net rental income). A re-drawing of the HRA business account would take place within the second quarter of the financial year 2009/10. It would be difficult to predict how the account might look until the Government had reviewed the subsidy calculations. Until that time it would be hard to foresee what might be the best options for delivering value for money.

In response to questions from Members regarding the Housing Revenue Account, it was reported that:

- Authorities that pay negative subsidy outweighed authorities that receive payments into their HRA.
- A successful business could be run in social housing, and could perform particularly within the current financial year's budget. It would be a very important time to review contracts, as many other West-London authorities were doing the same.
- The option of either transferring the management of housing stock and/or transferring the housing stock out of the authority was considered. The decision to keep the stock in-house was made by Cabinet in 2005.

The Chairman and the Vice-Chairman requested that a further report on the HRA situation be made available for the upcoming Chairman's Briefing.

RESOLVED: That a report on the numbers of homes that remained non-decent after the stock condition surveys had been analysed be submitted to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

112. **Obesity Review - PCT Implementation of Recommendations:**

The Director of Public Health, an appointment jointly made by the Council and Harrow Primary Trust, introduced the report and gave a summary of progress made on the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny review of Obesity.

In particular it was noted that:

- There were two main points of focus: obesity in children and diabetes. There was also a larger agenda for the borough-wide obesity strategy which would be developed to encompass elements from prevention through to surgery, such as encouraging breast feeding and physical activities amongst adults.
- The strategy was not yet complete due to its complexity. A reconfiguration of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership would be looked at, one which would involve more than just the Local Authority and Harrow PCT.
- Implementation of expert patient programmes for type one and two diabetes would be initiated.
- Implementation of Large Vascular screening for the over forty would be implemented. This would include an assessment of height, weight and cholesterol levels. Glucose tolerance tests would be performed should the patient show possible signs of diabetes.
- There had been an investment in the GP referral prescription schemes.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Public Health confirmed that:

- Staff were based in children's centres to advise on physical activities for children and the importance of physical education in the curriculum.
- There would be a 'call and re-call' system implemented for the vascular screening for the over forty. The patient would receive a letter inviting them to the screening, usually sent from their GP. The screening could take place at doctors' surgeries or pharmacies. Invitations would be sent out every five years.
- Pupils' height and weight were measured at Reception and Year 6. Steps were being taken to avoid stigmatising some children by feeding the information back to parents. The emphasis would be on targeting schools rather than certain 'at risk' children.
- GPs were paid on the number of patients who were referred to dieticians.
- Anyone diagnosed with diabetes would be referred to a nurse for a tailored programme. Although patients were not given an exhaustive list of what treatment and support was to be expected from local healthcare professionals, all the information was readily available and in the public realm.
- As dieticians were often over-qualified and very specialist, not every diabetic patient would be referred to one. The introduction of Community Trainers would be the best method of providing lower levels of support, alongside the Diabetes and Pregnancy Helpline Network.
- The borough-wide diabetic strategy was monitored by performance targets regarding prevention of diabetes and the numbers of new patients diagnosed. Harrow compared well across London and nationally.
- More effort would be made concerning social marketing to raise awareness of obesity and diabetes. More adverts would appear on buses and trains regarding health care themes. There would be a reduction in the 'shock-horror' campaigns.
- About 2% of the population were at risk of diabetes and approximately 50% of men were presently overweight. The number of overweight children was expected to rise to 20%. Although obesity and diabetes was present across all classes, those people in the deprived areas and lower socio-economic classes were more at risk.

- There were national challenges to overcome regarding the amount of salt, refined sugars and fat in people's diets. The approach would be taken step-by-step.
- The PCT wished to include more information in the borough-wide obesity strategy before it could be finalised. The draft was expected to be completed by April 2009.
- The long-term recommendations would be picked up in the borough-wide obesity strategy, but needed to be mapped across. Some of the long-term recommendations had been achieved.

The Chairman commented that the progress of the recommendations would be looked at every six months, with the PCT and the Corporate Directors being invited back to report on the implementation plans of borough-wide Obesity Strategy.

RESOLVED: That (1) the progress made by the PCT in implementing the recommendations set out in the obesity review be noted;

(2) the PCT and Corporate Directors be requested to update the Sub-Committee on progress made in implementing the recommendations set out in the obesity review in six months' time.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 9.41 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MARK VERSALLION
Chairman