

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

19 JANUARY 2010

Chairman: * Councillor Mark Versallion

Councillors: * Ms Nana Asante † Phillip O'Dell
* B E Gate * Mrs Rekha Shah
* Manji Kara (2) * Dinesh Solanki
* Janet Mote * Yogesh Teli
* Christopher Noyce * Jeremy Zeid (3)

In attendance: Paul Osborn Minute 151 and 152
(Councillors)

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

145. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Ashok Kulkarni
Councillor Anthony Seymour

Reserve Member

Councillor Jeremy Zeid
Councillor Manji Kara

146. Declarations of Interest

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

147. Minutes

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2009 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

148. 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 4F of the Constitution) respectively.

149. References from Council and Other Committees/Panels

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references.

RESOLVED ITEMS

150. Chairman's Report

The Chairman informed Members that, since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee, he had been briefed, together with the Vice-Chairman, on the Comprehensive Area Assessment and Staff Survey.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

151. Outcome of the Comprehensive Area Assessment

Members received a report setting out Harrow's results for the first Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which was published on 9 December 2009 by the Audit Commission.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services outlined the headline CAA results, the improvement since the CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment), and the contribution to improvement in the delivery against corporate priorities and the Council Improvement Programme.

The Portfolio Holder explained that there were two elements to the CAA judgement:

- the Area Assessment which was not scored and was a commentary on strengths and weaknesses (Green and Red flags);
- the Organisational Assessment which was scored.

Harrow had achieved a 3* in the assessment of the Council for the first time. It was the Council's ambition to achieve:

- a use of resources assessment score of 3;

- moving the three 'adequate' scores for Adult Services to 'performing well';
- to consider how to achieve a score of 4 in the Ofsted assessment of children's services.

Work was ongoing to explore how these ambitions could be achieved.

In response to questions, Members were advised that:

- the current emphasis was to ascertain what constituted 4 star. Those authorities which had achieved this accolade were being contacted to see what could be learnt and ascertain what additional resources would be required;
- an understanding of the observed correlation between 4 star authorities and green flags was being explored;
- for the first CAA the Audit Commission had provided a broad definition of how green flags would be judged. As they were based upon partnership working, officers would be ensuring that the Council developed a set of potential green flag areas for the next CAA;
- no red flags had been identified for the Council. Challenges had been identified through CAA, such as narrowing the gap on educational disadvantage, carbon emissions, and aspects of health inequalities. Plans were in place to address these;
- the reputation tracker in December 2009 showed a doubling in net satisfaction. Research evidence suggested that if residents were well informed then they were twice as likely to be satisfied with services;
- a reduction in sickness leave by staff had been achieved from 10.3 days to 8.7%, days in the last two years, resulting in over 10,000 extra work days a year;
- the KLOEs (key lines of enquiry) for the 2009 Use of Resources assessment were completely different to the old system under CPA and measured different things. The assessment of workforce was new in 2010 so the nature of the audit process was as yet unknown;
- the Council was currently undergoing an ethnical governance review by the Audit Commission at its request;
- the financial situation was understood to be a risk to the Council's continued improvement, especially given the national picture on public sector debt. The transformation project was being developed as a direct response to the Council's future funding environment with an ambition to continue the improvement of front line services;

- the biggest issues concerning health were: smoking, although Harrow has one of the lowest smoking rates in London; high levels of TB, although the response to this rise was recognised as good, and that the Borough had some of the lowest levels of adults taking physical exercise;
- the Council was aware of the challenges ahead.

Members expressed appreciation for the work undertaken.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the outcome of Harrow's first Comprehensive Area Assessment be noted;
- (2) the actions to learn from the Council's own experience in round one of the CAA and from other authorities' best practice be endorsed.

152. Staff Survey - Report of Findings and Key Headlines

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from the Work Foundation on the findings and key headlines of the Staff Survey. It was noted that the surveys normally took place in alternative years but had been brought forward to ensure that identified actions could be included in the Strategy for People for 2010-12. The Sub-Committee was informed that the 57% response (representing 1599 staff), compared with 50% for the previous survey, was a very good response rate (typically around 40% for a local authority). The 80% identified as engaged or enrolled compared favourably with the 63% global result.

It was noted that staff perceptions had improved in 84% of the indicators and 31% significantly.

It was noted that the survey report was focused around how engaged employees were with the Council and what drove them to become engaged. The Work Foundation had carried out the full staff survey in Spring 2008 and therefore it could be gauged whether significant differences had occurred over time and where action was required to improve employee perception and their engagement. Members expressed the view that staff appeared to have increased ownership and felt more greatly valued compared to previous surveys.

In response to questions, the Sub-Committee was advised that:

- the Council had requested further detailed reports to enable individual action plans to be devised for each department;
- the Chief Executive statistics included those relating to Access Harrow;
- the Adult and Housing Directorate response had increased to from 31% in 2008 to 46%;

- the survey included all staff who wished to participate: 86% permanent, 11% agency or temporary, 3% not stated;
- the support given to staff experiencing change and the perceptions of the Chief Executive and his Staff Fora were still very high in comparison with other organisations. The score for change management, which in some areas had seen a low base, was now broadly in line with the public sector and the Council was looking at how to improve further;
- the consistent level of improvement was good, as was improvement during a period of change;
- the next staff survey would take place towards the end of 2011;
- the Workforce Strategy Group had brought together common themes;
- the aim for 2006 had been to stabilise and get the foundation right. In 2008 stabilisation had been achieved and this was now being built on;
- the plan was to move forward on an operational as well as strategic level.

The Sub-Committee was informed that each Corporate Director had received a report indicating green or red results which would be considered at either the Equality Task or Workforce Strategy Groups. The draft actions on which consultation was taking place were:

- continue to improve performance in change management and support to staff through change;
- continual development of senior and middle managers and for staff generally;
- actions to increase awareness of what happened in staff's own department;
- work on the two indicators that had gone down: setting individual objectives for the year and for some staff not following through the development that managers had agreed with them.

Whilst two thirds of respondents said that Harrow demonstrated that it was committed to being an equal opportunities, against some of the questions asked in the survey the responses indicated that the perceptions varied by the social identity of staff. A sub-group of the Corporate Equality Group was being formed to look at this issue and other equalities issues more generally.

The Sub-Committee thanked The Workforce Foundation and officers for their input.

RESOLVED: That the staff survey results be noted and the proposed actions endorsed.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.43 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MARK VERSALLION
Chairman