OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

11 OCTOBER 2010

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Sue Anderson	* Paul Osborn
	* Kam Chana	* Bill Phillips
	* Ann Gate	* Sachin Shah
	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Stephen Wright
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided)	(Parent Governors)
	† Mrs J Rammelt	Mrs D Speel
	Reverend P Reece	
In attendance: (Councillors)	Councillor Graham Henson	Minute item 46

* Denotes Member present
† Denotes apologies received

41. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

42. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 8 – Council Visions and Priorities

Councillor Paul Osborn and Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared personal interests in that they had previously been a Member of Cabinet and had been involved in many of the policies detailed in the Year Ahead Statement. As the document was forward looking the Members did not consider the issue prejudicial. They would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Bill Phillips declared a personal interest in that he had been appointed as an assistant to the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Agenda Item 9 – Performance Management in Harrow

Councillor Paul Osborn and Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest in that they had previously been a Member of Cabinet and had been involved in the implementation of the Council's performance framework. They would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

43. Minutes

A Member stated that he did not feel that the comments the Committee had made in relation to the IT Service Delivery proposals at the previous meeting had been taken onboard by Council at its meeting on 7 October 2010. A Member added that, in the future, the Committee would need to ensure that its comments were taken into account and properly considered.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- Minute item 35, second to last paragraph, the third sentence be modified to read: "The proposed transfer would help remedy this situation and ensure that all aspects of IT service delivery were brought under control";

- Minute item 36, first paragraph, the first sentence be modified to read: "the issues relating to the closure of the Pinner Village Surgery had demonstrated the importance of holding the Primary Care Trust to account".

44. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting.

45. References from Council/Cabinet

There were none.

RESOLVED ITEMS

46. Council Vision and Priorities

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which set out the Council's draft vision and priorities which were currently being consulted on. The report also set out a pilot programme of community involvement activity which would be used to test the draft vision and priorities with Harrow residents.

The Assistant Chief Executive stated that in order to decide upon the proposed vision and priorities, the Council had taken into account survey data, previous consultation results and general policy trends. The consultation period was due to end in December 2010 and the resulting vision and priorities would feed into the development of the Corporate Plan and the budget setting process.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services clarified the following points:

- the draft vision and priorities differed from those that had been consulted on in previous years. The changes reflected a different political and economic climate;

- survey data indicated that traffic congestion and pavement repairs were amongst the top concerns of residents. This was encapsulated in the draft corporate priority, "clean, green and safe";

- any modifications to a service would be subject to the development of a business case and full consultation with relevant stakeholders;

- the Council would be looking to ensure that services operated on the lowest possible cost base;

- aside from likely reductions in funding from Central Government, local authorities were facing additional financial pressure in the form of increased demand for adult and children's services, increased waste disposal costs and pressure to revalue the pension fund;

- a review would be undertaken to consider the administration of concessionary travel, including the introduction of a single mobility assessment for customers. The purpose of the review was to consider the administrative processes involved, not the eligibility criteria;

- the Council and its partners were facing many financial challenges and Corporate Directors were meeting with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to discuss specific service proposals. Since 2006 the Council had made £45 million of efficiency savings, mostly through imposing uniform budget cuts on all services and asking senior managers to make the necessary savings. However, it was

acknowledged that any future savings would require a more strategic approach and this was the purpose of the Better Deal for Residents Programme;

- with the abolishment of the Audit Commission and the Comprehensive Area Assessment, it would become increasingly difficult for local authorities to benchmark their performance against others;

- parking provision in Harrow was currently under review. No additional information was available at present;

- the Council remained committed to fulfilling its ambition to ensure that all Council contracts adhered with the principles of the London Minimum Wage;

- the Council intended to redesign its reputation tracker in order to give the system a different focus. The Council was also exploring ways to increase civic engagement amongst residents;

- the draft vision and priorities had been drawn up prior to the Government's announcement that benefits would be capped. Further analysis of the proposals was required before the Council could determine the potential impact at a local level;

- as part of the Business Transformation Programme the Council was exploring the use of mobile working in order to save on accommodation costs. An admin review was also currently being carried out, with the aim to implement a more efficient hub and spoke model;

- many of the proposed changes required a modern and reliable IT infrastructure which would be provided under the contract with Capita;

- it was acknowledged that only 1 of 9 looked after children taking GCSEs in 2009 achieved five A to C grades, including English and Maths. The Narrowing the Gap project was concerned with improving outcomes for vulnerable children and those who were most at risk, with a view to reducing the differences in outcomes between these groups and children and young people as a whole;

- following consultation, the agreed vision and priorities would be used to develop the Council's Corporate Plan. The corporate plan would consist of a number of areas of work against which progress could be measured.

A Member stated that the consultation paper alone did not contain enough information to allow the Committee to properly scrutinise the proposals.

An officer informed the Committee that the Leader's report presented to Cabinet on 7 October 2010 had requested that Scrutiny seek responses from partners, residents and community groups on the draft vision and priorities. The officer stated that scrutiny was re-launching its pool of advisers on

21 October 2010 and that this event would present a good opportunity to consider the draft vision and priorities with stakeholders.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the draft vision and priorities be noted;

(2) the re-launch of the Scrutiny pool of advisers on 21 October 2010 be used to consult relevant stakeholders on the draft vision and priorities, with feedback provided to the Executive;

(3) the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee be provided with an update on the work of the Narrowing the Gap project.

47. Performance Management In Harrow

The Committee received a presentation from the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which detailed the Council's approach to performance management. During the course of the presentation, the Committee was informed of the following key points:

- the Council had seen sustained improvement in terms of performance. In particular, Harrow had become a three star Council under the Comprehensive Area Assessment criteria and had previously been shortlisted for the Municipal Journal Best Achieving Council Award 2009 and the Local Government Chronicle Most Improved Council Award 2010;

- the Comprehensive Area Assessment had been abolished in June 2010, with the Audit Commission being disbanded and the roles of Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission likely to be reduced. There was also a strong indication that the National Indicator Set would be significantly scaled back;

- the Place Survey and STATUS survey had been abolished and local authorities were being given discretion whether to continue gathering the data. The future of Local Area Agreements remained uncertain;

- Challenge Panels between Portfolio Holders and Corporate Directors were used to review and approve the budget and delivery proposals for each directorate. Once budgets and high level delivery expectations had been approved, a service delivery plan was drawn up which set out in more detail what would be delivered within the approved resources for the year;

- Improvement Boards were used to review and challenge performance on a quarterly basis to ensure that the Council was on track against its Corporate Plan commitments. The Improvement Boards were attended by the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Portfolio Holders. Performance was assessed across a range of areas including performance indicators, complaints, flagship actions, financial

performance and workforce performance. Any issues were reported to the Corporate Strategic Board;

- Cabinet received details of Council performance through the Strategic Performance Report. In addition, the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee reviewed corporate scorecard performance on a regular basis;

- changes to the performance monitoring framework presented both challenges and opportunities. Whilst the loss of a set of indicators with historic data would make it harder for local authorities to benchmark against each other, there was an opportunity to create more local indicators that reflected what was important to the local area.

Following questions, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance clarified the following points:

- it was acknowledged that there needed to be a balance between providing good customer service and spending money carefully;

- whilst data indicated that Harrow performed very well in comparison to other local authorities, the Borough remained one of the lowest spending Councils in London;

- targets were set on a yearly basis in consultation with Corporate Directors and Portfolio Holders. Targets were always realistic and took into account the current economic environment;

- benchmark data was often only available many months after it had been obtained and, due to the rapid political and economic changes currently taking place, thorough analysis was required in order to make meaningful comparisons;

- if the National Indicator Set was reduced as expected, Councils would no longer have to collect certain data. However, for some authorities, continuing to collect the data might be beneficial;

- with the abolishment of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and a move away from centrally imposed targets, some officer time would be freed up. The exact amount of additional officer time available would vary from department to department and this would be reflected when directorates developed service plans and budgets. However, the Council was not looking to scale back performance management.

A Member of the Committee stated that the loss of centrally imposed data requirements should be seen as positive and would allow local authorities to focus on issues relevant to the local area. He added that there had previously been an over reliance on benchmarking. The Member stated that moving forwards the Council should aim to involve more ward councillors in performance management, with all councillors provided with quarterly reports. In addition, he suggested that Scrutiny Lead Members should become more

involved in performance monitoring and that regular briefings should be provided. Officers agreed that increasing the involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee would be beneficial.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

48. Scrutiny Work Programme Update

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which detailed progress on the delivery of the Scrutiny work programme.

RESOLVED: That

(1) progress towards the delivery of the Scrutiny work programme be noted and the second phase of the scrutiny work programme agreed;

(2) Councillor Bill Phillips be removed from the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services Challenge Panel on the grounds that he had since been made a Trustee;

(3) Councillor Sachin Shah be removed from the Better Deal for Residents standing review;

(4) consideration be given to the number and scheduling of meetings of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee to ensure that they were synchronised with Corporate Improvement Board meetings;

(5) a scrutiny project to consider the opportunities offered by the abolition of the National Indicator Set and Comprehensive Area Assessment be established.

49. Report from the Scrutiny Lead Members

The Committee received a report which set out the issues and recommendations from the Scrutiny Lead Member briefings.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the discussions and actions proposed in the report be noted and agreed;

(2) the Lead Members for Children and Adult Health and Social Care consider the potential changes to special need transport;

(3) the outcome from the Adult Services consultation to be considered by the Scrutiny Health Sub-Committee.

50. Report of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee Chair

The Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee stated that, in addition to her report, she wanted to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that the funding gap for 2011/12 was increasing and that the Committee would be monitoring the situation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

51. Minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 20 September 2010

RESOLVED: That the actions arising from the minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 19 July 2010 be noted and, insofar as necessary, agreed.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.18 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman