

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

## 1 NOVEMBER 2011

**Chairman:** \* Councillor Jerry Miles

**Councillors:**

* Sue Anderson	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane
* Kam Chana	* Sachin Shah
* Tony Ferrari (2)	* Victoria Silver
* Ann Gate	* Stephen Wright

**Voting Co-opted:** (Voluntary Aided) (Parent Governors)

* Mrs J Rammelt	* Mrs A Khan
Reverend P Reece	

\* Denotes Member present  
(2) Denotes category of Reserve Members

### 191. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Paul Osborn

Reserve Member

Councillor Tony Ferrari

### 192. Declarations of Interest

A Member stated that the Vice-Chair had raised the issue of dispensations for those Members of the Committee that were school governors in order to

facilitate their participation in the discussion on certain education matters with Legal & Governance. Members discussed issues around interests in relation to item 8, School Place Planning (including Admissions Policy).

An officer advised that there was currently no update on the position regarding dispensations but that she would follow this up. The Chair stated that as the report related to primary schools it was, in his view, unnecessary for those Members who were governors of high schools to leave the room during the discussion on item 8.

**RESOLVED:** To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 8 – School Place Planning (including Admissions Policy)

Councillor Kam Chana declared a personal interest in that although he was a governor of a primary school, it was not one of those included in the report. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Tony Ferrari declared a prejudicial interest in that he was a governor of a primary school accepting a bulge class. He would leave the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Ann Gate declared a personal interest in that she was married to the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Colleges. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Mrs Khan declared a personal interest in that she was a governor of a high school. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest in that his sister taught in a Harrow School. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon, unless the interest became prejudicial and he would then leave.

Mrs Rammelt declared a personal interest in that she was a governor of a sixth form. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon

Councillor Sachin Shah declared a personal interest in that he was a governor of Rooks Heath High School. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Stephen Wright declared a personal interest in that he was a governor of a high school and his wife was a teacher in a high school. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Agenda Item 9 – Neighbourhood Champions

Councillor Susan Anderson declared a personal interest in that she was a neighbourhood champion. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Kam Chana declared a personal interest in that he was a neighbourhood champion. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest in that he had been a member of the Cabinet that had approved the Neighbourhood Champions scheme. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Stephen Wright declared a personal interest in that he was a neighbourhood champion. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

### **193. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2011, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

### **194. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 17, 15 and 16 (Part 4B of the Constitution) respectively.

### **195. References from Council/Cabinet**

There were none.

## **RESOLVED ITEMS**

### **196. School Place Planning (including Admissions Policy)**

The Committee received the report which provided information on the Council's primary school expansion programme and related school organisation issues. These included proposals for the secondary school strategy, up-dates on free schools and academies, and school admissions.

An officer outlined the content of the report and advised that the consultation on a set of proposals affecting schools across Harrow would close on 11 November 2011. The consultation documents were included at Annex A to the report.

Members made comments and asked a number of questions as follows:

- A Member stated that a number of primary schools had previously had smaller class sizes in order to accommodate equipment as they had children with physical disabilities and she questioned whether such schools, for example, Elmgrove, were going to be expanded or have their status changed. She questioned how these schools could know that they no longer required additional equipment, and therefore space, for those children. The officer advised that it was a calculated risk by

the school but they had agreed to take on additional pupils either because they felt they could cope or did not foresee any issues.

- A Member questioned the cost of the proposals in terms of revenue and capital and was advised that the revenue budget was cost neutral as it was funded from the government's Direct Schools Grant (DSG). In terms of capital, the officer advised that London Councils were putting together a case to Government regarding the lack of sufficient funding.
- Referring to page 4 of the consultation document, a Member questioned how the list of proposed schools for extra permanent places had been prepared. The officer advised that the criteria had been agreed by a group of officers and a representative group of primary school head teachers. Another officer advised a range of factors, including accommodation and site size, had been considered. The group had needed to be sure that there was potential to expand a school, had considered the popularity of a school, demand across the borough and the school ranking in terms of the primary school planning area.
- A Member stated that the report did not provide an analysis of how well forecasts of school roll projections had been done in the past and how changes in the number of pupils would affect the criteria. The officer, referred to the table on page 22 of the consultation document, which presented the accuracy analysis.
- Given the current economic climate, a Member questioned the additional pressures given that parents may no longer be able to afford to send their children to independent schools. An officer reported that this issue had been more prevalent in other boroughs, such as Richmond and Kingston, and that to date there had not been significant change in Harrow.
- A Member requested the details on applications to the government's Priority Schools Building Programme for the 11 schools referred to on page 17 of the report and which schools they were. An officer advised that the applications were as follows:

Aylward Primary School  
Cedars Manor School  
Elmgrove Primary School and Nursery  
Kenmore Park Infant and Nursery School and Kenmore Park Junior School  
Longfield Primary School  
Marlborough Primary School  
Priestmead Primary School and Nursery  
Vaughan Primary School  
Weald Infant and Nursery School and Weald Junior School  
Salvatorian College  
Hatch End High School (academy)

An application for a new secondary school was also included anticipating the impact of the increasing number of pupils in the primary school sector that would transfer to the secondary school sector in future.

- Responding to a question on the primary projections, the officer advised that a 5% planning margin had been included which allowed for peaks in demand and some flexibility and choice which would be managed by permanent expansion and the use of bulge classes as required. Given the Member's question on the number of bulge classes and number of permanent classes, he would look at the presentation of the data to see if it could be improved.
- A Member, referring to the predicted peak in 2019, questioned how officers from Children's Services were working with other departments to address this growth pressure. The officer advised that there were discussions with planners and performance officers in terms of developments and expected number of young people.
- A Member stated that the environmental impact paragraph of the report required more detail and the officer took her comments on board.
- A Member questioned the likely impact of primary school academies. The officer responded that currently no primary school had formally applied for academy status but if every primary school did apply, a nationwide programme would need to be devised. This matter was now included on the corporate risk register.
- Responding to a Member's question as to the cost of the primary expansion programme and whether the assumption was £7 million, an officer confirmed this figure was an assumed estimate of the future funding from the Department for Education and that the programme would be phased over several years. The Member was advised that, in terms of deprivation, the local authority received funding. As part of a feasibility study, consideration would be given to the impact of additional pupils on school sites in terms of a range of issues including dining.
- A Member stated that Harrow had changing needs due to its demographics and questioned whether the Council was receiving adequate grant per pupil. The officer advised that the government allocated funding to local authorities for schools and that the Schools Forum decided on the formula to allocate this funding to schools. The argument in terms of Harrow's transient population and deprivation may now be redundant as the Government's proposed new national funding formula reduced the impact of these considerations.
- The officer confirmed that the bulge classes would be for one year only.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance and responses.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **197. Neighbourhood Champions**

The Committee received a report which set out the progress on the Neighbourhood Champions initiative, summarised the points raised at the Neighbourhood Champions Conference and described changes in principle to the scheme agreed by Cabinet. The report advised that officers would be developing plans to implement the changes and seek the views of the Committee on the scheme.

The Corporate Director of Community and Environment outlined the content of the report and stated that the view emerging from the conference was that the anonymity of the neighbourhood champions could be a barrier. There had been mixed views on this but it was clear that the champions were willing to take on more responsibility.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- A Member questioned, in terms of anonymity, how much information was published. The Corporate Director advised that there was a centrally held database within public realm that had limited access. With permission, it was appropriate to share neighbourhood champion information with other champions within a ward or the ward councillor. There was also a neighbourhood champion facebook page. The issue would be discussed further at the next conference.
- In response to a Member's question as to the target number of neighbourhood champions, the Corporate Director advised that the aim was to have one on each postcode section of a street, 2000 in total.
- A Member requested transcripts of what was said at the conference and the Corporate Director undertook to see if this information could be provided. Whilst being supportive of the role, the Member expressed concern at the possible overloading of the champions and she indicated that she would like to see the scheme being shared with other departments to enable them to identify suitable champions. She also suggested that other schemes, such as Sutton's book lending service, be considered and that the Communications team needed to report what had been achieved. The Corporate Director advised that the scheme was approached in a 'one Council' way and agreed that it could be developed for use in Children's Services. It was about reporting anything that did not seem right for professional assessment.
- A Member questioned the number of champions trained this year and was advised that, due to the re-structure in public realm, there had been a period of 4 months when no training had taken place. There was no issue in terms of funding this work area and training material was currently being revised.

- Referring to paragraph 9 of the report, a Member stated that burglary and security activities should also be included. The Corporate Director acknowledged that the Safer Neighbourhood Teams provided regular newsletters and thanked the Police for their active involvement with the scheme.
- Members questioned whether there was any cost associated with inactive champions and what was being done to capture information on those individuals ceasing to be champions. The Corporate Director undertook to look into this, although if there was clearly inactivity it would be investigated.
- Responding to a Member's question, the Corporate Director advised that approximately 60-70 reports were received from neighbourhood champions each month. The Member stated that there had been input from the Primary Care Trust and public health at the training for champions and the Corporate Director indicated that he would be happy to consider well being issues too. Another Member stated that it was necessary to engage with colleagues in public health. The Corporate Director undertook to discuss these issues further with the Director of Public Health.
- A Member stated that, despite the report stating that there were no financial implications, there clearly were as there was a budget in public realm. The benefits of the scheme did, however, justify the funding. The Corporate Director responded that there was no increase in costs.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director for his attendance and responses.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **198. Corporate Complaints - Annual Report**

The Committee received a report which provided information on complaints received by Harrow Council and how they were handled. The officer reported that the number of complaints recorded on CRM had risen to over 1,500 and this could be viewed as positive. If complaints were understood, they could be rectified and responded to and common themes could be addressed. 85% of complaints had been responded to within timescales set.

The officer reported that it was necessary to do more promotion to advise residents of the complaints procedure. Currently, only 4% of complaints were received through the web and officers would like to increase the usage of this channel. In terms of the next steps, officers would be looking at the possibility of sharing complaints data with neighbouring authorities.

Having considered the report and the figures contained therein, Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- A Member stated that it would have been helpful if the officer had spoken to the officer that had attended the last meeting of the Committee to present the reports on Adults and Children's Services' complaints in order to address the issues raised at that meeting in the report currently before Members.
- In terms of communications, a Member advised that Aberdeen Council were doing well in this area and she questioned how Harrow was performing. The officer responded that a considerable amount of data was collected via Access Harrow and that the complaints database was operated through a CRM system. Work would continue with the Communications team in order to convey the message in terms of complaints reporting.
- A Member challenged the officer, questioning the aim of the report and what it sought to report. The Member stated that the report contained 2 sets of unrelated data and that there was no basis for comparison. It appeared that the complaints process was isolated from the operation of the Council and he questioned what residents actually complained about as the report did not provide that information. The officer advised that the report detailed the 2011/12 figures compared with previous year's, highlighted issues and provided information on Local Government Ombudsman complaints. The officer reported that there was a mismatch of data as in previous years as not all departments had used CRM. This would be improved in future years as the quality of data improved. There were regular meetings of the complaints co-ordinators and information was shared at the quarterly improvement boards. In order to try to address some of the Member's concerns, the officer undertook to try to make the report clearer in the future.
- Responding to a Member's question, the officer advised that the increase in the number of complaints recorded was due to the CRM system and that previously there had not been a holistic approach. He advised that the complaint's co-ordinators were authorised to respond to stage one complaints in their service area. The Member reiterated the view that he had expressed at the Committee's previous meeting in that the Chief Executive should see all stage 3 complaints prior to submission to the Local Government Ombudsman. In terms of the number of complaints seen by the Ombudsman, the officer advised that of the 147 considered, approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  had bypassed Harrow's complaints process. Once the Ombudsman's annual report was received, it would be possible to identify which complaints had progressed to stage 3.
- A Member questioned the reasons for late responses from Housing and was advised that sometimes the Council let itself down by not keeping the customer informed of any on going investigation. There was a need to manage customer expectations.
- A Member stated that he could not tell from the report whether complaints was properly resourced. The officer advised that, in terms



of benchmarking, information had been requested from other boroughs.

- Following questions from a Member as to the accuracy of recording complaints, the officer advised that the issue was determining whether a matter was a complaint or service request and that a stage 1 complaint was an issue that could not be resolved on the spot. In terms of a complaint that had not been resolved within the specified service standard, he advised that he would expect the matter to be escalated. In terms of the procedure in place, he advised that he chaired the customer service group and that a regular report was submitted to the Corporate Strategy Board, which was also shared with the service lead. The Councillor enquiry email address was monitored by Access Harrow and he was looking to see if councillor requests could be captured through CRM on their dedicated enquiry line.
- A Member commented that it would be beneficial for the Chief Executive to see the whole process and added that, in the re-structure, complaints did not appear to be cross cutting. The officer advised that a regular report was considered by the Improvement Boards, that all directorates were represented at the quarterly complaints meetings and that a number of complaints were initially directed to the Chief Executive's office and he was therefore aware of the process.
- In terms of equalities, the officer would be discussing this issue with the Council's Equalities officer in 3-4 weeks. He would like to see an increase in the use of the web form to capture equalities information.
- A Member questioned the use of mystery shoppers and was advised that whilst such exercises had been carried out annually, from January 2012 they would be monthly.

The officer advised that both his Director and the Assistant Chief Executive participated in a back to the floor exercise on a monthly basis in order to better understand customer demand. Corporate and Divisional Directors were also encouraged to take part. He invited any Member that was interested to contact him if they wished to work in Access Harrow to see how it operated.

The Chair thanked the officer for his report and responses.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **199. Project Report - Measuring up: Harrow Council's Use of Performance Information (Phase 2)**

The Committee received the report which outlined the findings and recommendations from the recent scrutiny review which had examined the Council's use of performance information. The purpose of the review had been to consider the principles that should underpin Harrow's local performance management framework going forward.

The Chair stated it was an extremely useful and well researched report and thanked all those involved in the review and with the production of the report. He advised there had been three work streams to the report (Best practice, Customer engagement, and Technology and Data presentation) which had contributed to the recommendations arising and that he and the Vice-Chair (the Chair of the Review) had discussed the report with the Chief Executive and a meeting with the relevant Portfolio Holder would be arranged.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report of the review group be agreed and be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

**200. Scrutiny Lead Member Report**

The Committee received a number of reports of Scrutiny Lead Members. An officer apologised for the delay in the Safer and Stronger Communities report.

In terms of the carbon reduction commitment, following a comment that there should be caution, the scrutiny lead advised that there was clear evidence that climate change existed.

**RESOLVED:** That the reports be noted and the actions proposed be agreed.

**201. Any Other Business**

**RESOLVED:** In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following items, which were not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated, were admitted to the agenda in order to enable the work to be progressed as soon as possible:

14. Standing Scrutiny Better Deal for Residents – Phase Two Scope
15. Standing Scrutiny Review of the Budget Scope

**202. Standing Scrutiny Better Deal for Residents - Phase Two Scope**

The Committee considered the scope for the second phase of the Standing Scrutiny Review of the Better Deal for Residents.

**RESOLVED:** That the scope for the project be approved.

**203. Standing Scrutiny Review of the Budget Scope**

The Committee considered the scope for the Standing Scrutiny Review of the Budget. The Chair of the Review reported that Place Shaping had suggested that spending on capital be considered but that, in his view, a challenge panel may be required for this topic given the Area Action Plan.

**RESOLVED: That the scope for the project be approved.**

**204. Termination of Meeting**

In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4B of the Constitution) it was

**RESOLVED:** At 9.59pm to continue until 10.15pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 10.10 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES  
Chairman