

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

15 MARCH 2012

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	† Sue Anderson Kam Chana * Ann Gate * Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Chris Mote (1) * Sachin Shah * Victoria Silver * Stephen Wright
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) * Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) † Mrs A Khan
In attendance: (Councillors)	Graham Henson	Minute 247

- * Denotes Member present
- (1) Denotes category of Reserve Member
- † Denotes apologies received

241. 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 Chris Mote

242. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 8 – Primary School Expansion Programme

Councillor Chris Mote declared a personal interest as his wife was a teacher. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest as his sister was a teacher and he had also assisted in the London Councils' lobbying in relation to School Funding. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

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

Councillor Sachin Shah declared a personal interest as a serving school governor. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

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

243. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2012, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

244. 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 respectively.

245. References from Council/Cabinet

There were none.

RESOLVED ITEMS

246. Primary School Expansion Programme

The Committee received a comprehensive presentation from officers outlining the current position with respect to the Council's strategy and planning on school place planning issues and detailed information in relation to the

outcomes of the statutory consultations undertaken to date, applications for reception places in September 2012 and capital funding for schools.

Officers emphasised that the council's statutory responsibility concerning the provision of school place planning remained insitu and that they were working collaboratively with primary schools to respond to the ever increasing demand on school places. Officers noted that Harrow's previous history in establishing its school place planning objectives had been successful and that the authority had always met its duty to ensure sufficient places. Officers were confident in the strategies and methodology going forward and that this would again result in an accurately planned and balanced approach to the process.

Officers were focussing their efforts on the area of primary school allocation as the statistical feedback identified this as the area of greatest pressure arising from a significant increase in population demographic which wished to take up such places. Officers were currently planning for an additional 10-15 reception classes by the year 2015, then anticipated a plateauing of demand and that this would decrease thereafter. Officers further advised that the Schools Forum had agreed the funding formula to respond to the recent changes in legislation. The funding was expected to be provided via government grants through three different streams of activity.

With respect to the permanent expansion of schools, officers advised that a statutory consultation had been launched during the autumn 2011 and subject to the decision of Cabinet it was anticipated that the relevant statutory notices would be published in respect of seven schools. Officers noted that a further two potential permanent expansions were expected and that the emergence of Free Schools was also expected to have an impact on the changing landscape of school placement planning.

The issue of Special School placements was also a priority as again it was recognised that this was a fast growing area of need. Officers were currently considering the levels of provision and anticipated bringing forward strategies to future meetings of the Cabinet.

High Schools were currently well managed in terms of school place planning but, again officers noted that a growth curve in this area of need was expected within a few years.

With respect to the paperwork before Members, officers advised that the role projections were due to be updated. They also spoke briefly on the meetings held to date with the Department for Education concerning the Council's Grants settlement which officers considered, in terms of the formula utilised, to have severely disadvantaged Harrow and its children.

Members thanked officers for their presentation and raised several questions which officers responded to as follows:

- Noted that the report circulated with the supplemental agenda was a slightly older version than that which had gone to another Panel by comparison to the report submitted to this Committee;

- With regard to the Funding Bid submitted by Harrow this was felt to have been right and proper in terms of content. However, the outcome in terms of the funding formula used had disadvantaged Harrow. Officers were in regular liaison with the DfE concerning the methodology and had been part of a small group of authorities invited to a series of seminars to inform the next stage Funding Bid considerations.
- The potential effect on the Council with regard to a poor Funding Bid settlement was anticipated to be a 5-year cost of £26 million. This assumed a grant of £13.6 million and capital programme funding of £10 million.
- The Council had not considered purchasing places at this time through linking with independent partnerships processes.
- The Council's Place Planning Strategy aimed to respond to the rising Special Education Needs (SEN) issue and it was anticipated that in the future a free school/s should be part of that solution.
- Officers had been advised by the DfE that the places for reception level classes were high enough to justify the Free School proposal and advertising. These remained a below expected numbers level in respect of high school requirements and it was not anticipated this would be achieved for the upcoming school year. However, officers recognised that a potential issue might emerge where parents had been offered more than one school place.
- It was emphasised that no loss of amenity areas would be experienced through the permanent expansion of schools. However, it was advised that schools had not been built for the numbers of pupils that now needed to be absorbed and that each school would face individual and different challenges to meet its responsibilities.
- Officers confirmed that the need for strong travel plans as part of any permanent expansions was part of the plan for each affected school. Cross departmental working was already underway as part of this and it was anticipated would result in a multi-faceted solution.
- Officers considered the greatest risk factor to be in relation to the provision of high quality school places. There were other risks which included that the Council could not determine its numbers in terms of requirement. Voluntary Protocols were in place with Academies with regard to this but there was no agreement in place with the Free School.
- With respect to the issue of the longer term risk concerning information sharing, officers felt the Council was in a good position currently and their expectation was that this would only be negatively driven if a collaborative arrangement was not achieved with the Free School provision.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the above comments submitted to the Cabinet as part of its considerations.

247. Corporate Equality Objectives

The Committee welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Services and Customer Services to its meeting. An Officer then gave a brief presentation of the report outlining the inherent elements of the Single Equality Scheme and that this would be brought to a close at the completion of the report stage. He then set out the Council's Equal Opportunity Policy and proposals concerning Corporate Equality Objectives which were a requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty, arising from the Equalities Act 2010. It was advised that the timeline for the approval of the objectives was very constrained as all Councils had a statutory responsibility to publish these by the 8 April 2012.

Speaking on the proposed draft Equality Objectives, the officer advised that these had been subject to a consultation process utilising the Council's Residents Panel. Of the 1,152 members of the Panel, 652 returns had been received and all proposed objectives had met a majority support threshold. It was anticipated that the full details of the response outcomes would be included in the Cabinet report to consider the adoption of the Equality Objectives.

In response to questions it was advised that:

- The Council was legally obliged to put in place Equality Objectives and that Harrow had worked to ensure its objectives were synchronous with the overall corporate objectives to better promote the mainstreaming of equalities.
- It was agreed that the Council's longer term aim should be that equalities was a fundamental aspect of the Council but, also recognised that the authority had some issues to resolve and that the proposed objectives would invigorate a sharper focus on this area.
- The reflection of the Objectives with regard to the councillor and senior officer leadership of the authority remained a challenge. However, the Council was proactive in its efforts to promote applications from under-represented groups whilst also remaining legally obliged to appoint the best candidate for a role.
- Concerning the SES Action Plan, officers agreed that the outcomes read as statements and that this was the reason for discontinuing this approach. The Council now wished to move to a position of much more tightly controlled and measureable Equality Objectives. Officers were in discussion with departments concerning the setting of percentage measure targets to ensure that clear objectives and outcomes were put in place.

- The Residents' Panel was a Group of residents who had volunteered to respond to written communications approximately 3-4 times per year. There was no incentivisation provided as part of this membership.
- With regard to the view that the report should be resubmitted to the Committee in a more complete format containing all responses information, it was advised that due to the legal timeline placed on the publication of Equality Objectives this was not achievable. However, the targets being put in place were anticipated to be for a one year period and there would be opportunity to continue to feed into the objectives / performance management going forward.
- A pattern within the responses had indicated less support for "protected groups" with regard to budget cuts impacts.
- Officers agreed to revisit the comment concerning working in partnership with Trade Unions as its intention was to reflect that when the Council was developing a policy it would work to ensure Unions and staff were aware of the proposal and appropriately communicated with.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the above comments submitted to the Cabinet as part of its considerations.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.03 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman