

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

30 MAY 2012

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Sue Anderson * Nana Asante (1) * Kam Chana * Ann Gate	* Krishna James * Barry Macleod-Cullinane * Paul Osborn * Stephen Wright
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) † Mrs A Khan
In attendance: (Councillors)	David Perry Victoria Silver	Minute 269 Minute 270

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

265. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Zarina Khalid

Reserve Member

Councillor Nana Asante

266. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 7 – Reference from Cabinet on 4 April 2012 – Petition from Shopmobility

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a personal interest in that she was a member of the Grants Advisory Panel. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Nana Asante declared a personal interest in that she was the Chair of the Grants Advisory Panel. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon but would not participate as discussion on the item had commenced prior to her attendance as a Reserve Member.

Councillor Krishna James declared a personal interest in that she was a member of the Grants Advisory Panel. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Agenda Item 8 – Redefining Youth Engagement – Report from the Scrutiny Review Group

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a personal interest in that her husband was the Chair of Governors at Kingsley High School. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Ann Gate declared personal interests in that her husband was the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families and that she was the Director of a youth charity, Soul Survivor. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Brian Gate, who was not a member of the Committee, declared personal interests in that he was the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families and that he was married to the Director of a youth charity, Soul Survivor. He 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 was a teacher at Hatch End High School and was a sports co-ordinator. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Victoria Silver, who was not a member of the Committee, declared a personal interest due to the consultancy work she was currently doing with Futuerversity. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon unless the interest became prejudicial and she would then leave the room.

Agenda Item – 10 – Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a prejudicial interest in that he was a member of Cabinet when SmartWater had been introduced. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon unless SmartWater was discussed and he would then leave the room.

Councillor Paul Osborn declared a prejudicial interest in that he was a member of Cabinet when SmartWater had been introduced. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon unless SmartWater was discussed and he would then leave the room.

267. Minutes

The Committee agreed to consider the minutes of the Special meeting held on 24 May 2012 as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2012 and of the Special meeting held on 24 May 2012, be taken as read and signed as correct records.

268. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions, petitions or deputations had been received under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 17, 15 and 16 (Part 4B of the Constitution).

RESOLVED ITEMS

269. References from Council/Cabinet - Reference from Cabinet on 4 April 2012 - Shop Mobility - Petition urging Harrow Council to continue funding for Harrow Shop mobility to provide its service to the disabled people of Harrow

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services and representatives of Shopmobility, Mrs Eileen Kinnear and Mrs Gaye Branch, to the meeting.

The Committee received the reference from Cabinet on 4 April 2012 in relation to the petition seeking continued funding for Harrow Shopmobility. The petition had been referred in accordance with the Council's petition scheme and the Chair explained that, whilst the organisation had been unsuccessful in their application for grant funding, they had subsequently been successful on appeal.

The Chair then invited the Portfolio Holder and officer to make a brief introduction. He advised those present that the questions submitted by Shopmobility in accordance with the petition scheme had been tabled and that this document also included the answers. The questions and answers are attached at Appendix I to these minutes.

Four Members expressed concern that 3 of the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee present were also members of the Grants Advisory Panel and stated that it was difficult to separate these roles and that they should not be involved in scrutinising the decision referred to in the petition. Whilst the four Members accepted that the Grants Advisory Panel did not make the

decision on grant applications they expressed the view that the Members concerned should leave the meeting. The Chair stated that petition related to process and that it was up to individual Members to determine whether they needed to leave the meeting.

The Chair invited the representatives to put their questions to the officer present. The representatives stated that the purpose of their questions was to get some clarity for other organisations. The Committee agreed to take the written answers provided as read. In addition, Members asked additional questions of the officer and Portfolio Holder and made comments as follows:

- Members accepted that it could be difficult to fully answer some of the questions on the Grants application form.
- The form received by Shopmobility was the same as that received by 77 other organisations.
- It was clarified that some support had been provided to assist with the completion of the form.
- Members noted the petitioners comment that there was no option to include supplementary information on the form.
- The Portfolio Holder advised that the form and guidance notes had been reviewed in light of the comments made the previous year.
- In response to a Member's question, the officer advised that the marks were conveyed to each organisation and that Shopmobility had scored 24 on their initial application. On appeal, Shopmobility had scored 28. The Member expressed concern at the checks and balances in place and commented that the scoring appeared to be arbitrary. The officer advised that the appeals process involved taking a second look at the form and interpretation may vary on review.
- Members were reminded that the Grants Advisory Panel was cross party and also included representatives from the voluntary sector.
- The Portfolio Holder advised that the Grants team could not complete applications for organisations, it was their role to manage the Grants process.
- In response to a Member's concern at the differing opinions on the scoring of the Shopmobility application, the Portfolio Holder advised that it was not just their score that had been amended.
- A Member indicated that he did not necessarily agree with the views expressed by Shopmobility in question 4. He stated that the Council should ensure that it supported those organisations it wanted in its community as opposed to those who used grant funding as an additional resource.

- Commenting on question 5, a Member indicated that he did not think that the process was best practice but that he hoped that commissioning would assist. The Portfolio Holder added that it was a developing area and that there would be consultation on the way forward.
- A Member expressed concern at the length of time it took for organisations to receive a decision. In response to a question from another Member, a representative from Shopmobility advised that the notice period required for individuals working in voluntary organisations was 3 months. The Member stated that this would mean giving notice at the end of December which was before the outcome of the funding application was known. The officer advised that the funding ran until 31 March and therefore organisations received funding until that date. The process would be reviewed next year and the Portfolio Holder undertook to take the comments on board.
- In terms of question 7, a Member stated that scrutiny would scrutinise and that it was not appropriate to comment on the Grants Advisory Panel as there should be a separation of decision making.

A Member requested that the notes and scoring of the original meeting determining the grant application from Shopmobility be provided to Members as well as the notes and scoring from the appeal meeting. The representatives of Shopmobility made a similar request and thanked the Committee for listening to their questions and comments and also thanked the Council for the funding now agreed.

The Chair thanked the representatives from Shopmobility, the Portfolio Holder and the officer for their attendance and for responding to comments and questions.

RESOLVED: That the petition be noted.

270. Redefining Youth Engagement - Report from Scrutiny Review Group

The Chair welcomed Councillor Victoria Silver, Chair of the Scrutiny Review Group, Hannah Nathanson, Chair of Harrow Youth Parliament, Ladan Dirie, Harrow's Member of UK Youth Parliament, and David Howes, Harrow Mencap, to the meeting.

The Chair of the Review Group introduced the report which set out the findings and recommendations from the scrutiny review. The review had explored ways in which the Council could most effectively communicate with young people in decision making and community activity. She emphasised that the report was the young peoples and that they wanted to have an input into policy, have their opinions valued and that they wanted to be leaders. She added that the Council could learn from young people who were questioning whether the right policies and politicians were in place.

The Committee then received a presentation from Hannah Nathanson and Ladan Dirie which set out the background to the review, the process and results and finally, their recommendations. The recommendations related to the Youth Summit, commissioning decisions, Harrow Youth website and the Summer Uni. The recommendations are set out in detail in the presentation which is attached at Appendix 2 to these minutes.

David Howes advised that Harrow Youth Parliament and Harrow Mencap provided a wider view as to the needs of all young people. Young people with learning difficulties had been having a more difficult time than many other young people as they had a higher support need. He stated that report could make a significant difference to the young people of Harrow.

All Members of the Committee congratulated the young people on their report and the presentation. Members then made comments and asked questions of the young people and the Chair of the Review Group which were responded to as follows:

- In response to a question as to the role of parents, schools and clubs in the review, the Chair of the Review Group advised that it was one of the key challenges in gathering evidence. It was a difficult time in Harrow due to many schools converting to academy status and it was hard to establish an integrated view.
- A Member stated that it was important for young people to be aware of what the Council did. He suggested that work experience was invaluable and assisted the development of business acumen.
- The consensus was that young people could be defined as within the 16-25 age range.
- The recommendations on engagement could be taken more generally rather than just specifically youth and a the Member suggested that Cabinet might wish to consider applying them across the Council.
- Referring to recommendation 1, a Member stated that it needed to be clear as to which Councillor was taking the lead.
- Responding to a comment in relation to recommendation 10 on Cabinet meeting with young people, a representative of the young people stated that such a meeting would be more productive it was on the young people's terms.
- A Member agreed that the Harrow Youth website required work and suggested that it needed a clear focus and mission statement. In terms of social media he had yet to see any good examples of Councils using this effectively. A representative of the young people responded that whilst it would be good to get young people involved in design of, for example, the Facebook page, they also needed face to face contact. The Chair of the Review Group added that young people had sated that whilst they used social media they would not necessarily

trust the Council. In terms of the website, the student room had conversation and the Council needed to improve its conversations with young people so that they had more influence.

- A Member questioned how their could be an improvement to the press about young people and a representative of the young people stated that, in her view, bad press was due to young people having nowhere to go. Work needed to be done in order to open up community centres to young people.
- In terms of advertising the positives of young people, Members were advised that Harrow Youth Parliament had a page in the Harrow People and a monthly column in the Harrow Observer. Young people were viewed negatively due to a minority and it was therefore necessary to address the issues facing the minority.
- School assemblies were a good way of reaching young people and could be used to provide information as to the work of the Council. Councillors could also visit schools. This initial engagement may then ensure continued engagement with the Council. For those young people not at school the Youth Summit, if well advertised, could be a good way of reaching those individuals. The representative of Harrow Mencap added that if Councillors were to attend their forum it would encourage young people to attend.
- It was important that the Council made itself appear interesting in order to encourage youth engagement. It was important to gain the respect of young people.
- A Member suggested that as a follow up to the review work could be done to look at the costs of the proposals and to identify any opportunity costs/benefits. The Chair of the Review responded that the review had tried to explore this area but could not get the necessary information although there was other external evidence. She added that awards for young people could generate a step change in the way they were viewed. A representative of the young people stated that they understood that there were cost constraints but that the balance was that young people were part of the community and if a recommendation was scrapped based on cost alone it could have implications in the future.
- A Member suggested that the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations approved by Cabinet could meet in a community centre in order to engage with young people.

The Chair thanked the young people and the Chair of the review group for their attendance, presentation and responses. He explained that whilst Cabinet would receive the reference from the Committee on 20 June it would not be responded to until their meeting on 19 July 2012.

The Committee, having agreed some additions to the recommendations

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Scrutiny team involve young people in their projects and investigations;
- (2) the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee be requested to give consideration as to how young people could be involved in the follow up work on this review;
- (3) the report of the review group be agreed and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration with a request that consideration also be given to officer time and resources, such as meeting rooms, being made available to enable implementation of the recommendations.

271. Customer Care Scrutiny Review - Scope

The Chair of the Review Group introduced the report which set out the scope for the Customer Care Scrutiny Review. He reminded the Committee that they had discussed the draft scope at their meeting on 3 April and had requested that it be re-presented at this meeting incorporating any subsequent comments from Members.

The Chair of the Review Group expressed his disappointment at the poor attendance by Members at the two review group meetings and suggested that scheduling required consideration. He acknowledged that scrutiny members might be trying to do too much and that a discussion at their Leadership Group might be helpful.

In response to a question in relation to the definition of customer care, the Chair of the Review Group advised that customer satisfaction was measured by the engagement tracker.

RESOLVED: That the scope for the Customer Care Scrutiny Review be approved.

272. Scrutiny Lead Member Report

The Committee received the reports from Scrutiny leads. Members made the following comments:

- It was acknowledged that whilst Members interests had to be considered it was also important to have a meaningful discussion.
- Although a Member had received the SmartWater kit no other anti burglary devices had been received.
- The Borough Commander stated on his blog that burglary had gone down but this was not reflected by the report.

RESOLVED: That the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members be noted and the actions proposed therein agreed.

273. Any Other Business - "Shaping a Healthier Future for North West London" - Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee agreed to consider the appointments to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

A Member reported that it was currently proposed that the Member from Harrow Chair the JOSC and that there was funding available for administrative support. The Committee expressed the view that Harrow should welcome the opportunity to chair the JOSC.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Krishna James be appointed as Member of the JOSC and Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani as the Reserve Member.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 9.58 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman

Responses to Harrow Shopmobility questions to Overview and ScrutinyQuestion 1

Have members of the Committee themselves examined the Grant Application Forms? Do they realise how difficult it can be to fully answer some of the questions posed especially those that require answers to be restricted to a certain number of letters?

Response

The Grants Advisory Panel (GAP) have examined the Grant Application Form and made recommendations on the form to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services. Forms were reviewed by GAP at their meetings on 13 September 2011 and 9 November 2011. As part of this discussion GAP were aware of the character limit applied to responses on the form. The number of characters was increased this year in light of feedback received last year. To ensure applicants were aware of the character limit this was stated against each question. This format is standard practice on electronic forms issued by funding bodies.

Feedback on the form was also received from voluntary sector representatives in June 2011. These representatives did not identify any negative impact for groups applying for grants. 78 applications were received this year with all organisations able to complete the form as required.

Question 2

Although the grant application form refers to 'Guidance Notes' these are not comprehensive and it is difficult to understand precisely what information some of the questions actually require and in what format it should be provided. Can the Council ensure that in future such forms are written in plain English and not in Council phraseology. Will the Council also issue a glossary of terms used as headings to assist in defining what actually is required?

Response

In addition to the Guidance Notes there were notes against each question in the form to help applicants understand what information was required. To assist applicants in understanding unfamiliar terms there were hyper-links inserted in to the electronic form that provided information on areas such as The Equalities Act 2010.

To guide applicants through the application form, information sessions were provided during the application period. These information sessions outlined what information was required and offered applicants the opportunity to raise any questions they had about the form or the process. Applicants were also able to access one to one support from Harrow's interim CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) service. This support included the offer of an individual review of applications before they were submitted. As a result of this support there appears to have been an overall improvement in the quality of applications submitted this year.

Question 3

The marking system used provides for scores of 1,2, or 3 (only) the more marks the better. It is difficult for us to comprehend how the marks are allocated given such stringent format where there seems to be no middle ground. Will the Council please clarify how this system of marking works and publish that information for consideration. The marking system this year meant that applicants with more than three 'less than perfect' answers did not get a grant unless the appealed.

Response

This years assessment system used a scoring scheme of;

0 – not met

1 – barely met

2 – partially met

3 – fully met

This scoring scheme was introduced as a result of reviewing the system used last year and does allow for a middle ground (which was not available last year). The panel assessment process means that applications are assessed by more than one officer and it is through careful consideration and discussion that scores are awarded. To ensure that panels operate consistently Panel Chairs are provided with guidance notes and meet before the beginning of the process to agree the approach to be used. Consistency is also monitored by the moderation and verification of a sample of assessments by officers not involved in the initial assessment. This year panels were also observed by members of the voluntary and community sector and their feedback on the process was positive.

As can be seen from this years list of final grant awards, successful applicants do not have to achieve a score of 3 against each criteria in order to be awarded grant. The final list of grant awards shows that only two applicants achieved an assessment score of 100%.

Question 4

The application forms are the same for all. It seems that volunteer run and staff many of the smaller organisations. They may be helped by possibly only one administrator, whilst the larger ones may employ more trained personnel, some of which may have specialised in fundraising and will have more expertise when completing forms than smaller organisations.

Are members convinced that this 'one size fits all' approach is fair and equitable to all or should some 'weighting' be given for organisations which comprise almost entirely of volunteers to allow for the difficulties they have in comprehending and completing the forms?

Response

It is recognised that both small and large organisations are competing for funding whether this is through the Council's Main Grants programme or any other funding body. All funding bodies however operate a single application process and do not offer a differentiated process for smaller organisations. This year's application form was designed to be clear and accessible for all organisations with support (as described in response to question two above) available for all applicants.

Many smaller organisations apply for small grants. To assist these organisations in being successful 15% of the budget was ring-fenced to ensure that some of the funding was distributed as small grants. The scoring threshold for awarding grants was lower than that applied to large grants and assessment panels used a proportionate approach to assessing applications in this category. This resulted in 22 grants being awarded to smaller organisations.

Question 5

The service we provide to our users runs on a continuing basis, it is not a 'one-year project'. So we require some continuity in funding. The application form seems to make no distinction between on-going services and single projects. Are Members aware of this: do they consider it is best practice? This is especially important to organisations whose services are equipment based, as without the security of knowing that they have continuing funding scheduled, replacing older and less efficient equipment is almost impossible without this knowledge. Consideration should be given by Council to organisations providing such services and provide appropriate designed forms for these organisations.

Response

The Main Grants Programme is publicised as an annual, open and competitive process. The programme is open to all eligible Third Sector organisations and does not take in to account any previous funding awarded by the Council. Organisations are able to apply for both ongoing activities and one-off projects. This is a discretionary fund and there is no guarantee that funding will be awarded to particular organisations or activity.

The Council does however recognise the need to provide longer-term funding to deliver some services and has therefore approved the Third Sector Investment Plan. This sets out a framework for the delivery of a new commissioning process for 2013/14 to deliver funding over a longer-term than a year for services aligned to Council priorities.

Question 6

Are members aware that where an application is refused and an appeal is lodged the organisation is still required to sign a Service Level Agreement dating from (this year) 1 April 2012 – even though the funding was not agreed until some weeks after that date and the money will be paid until much later. This has greatest impact on smaller organisations providing single services where the monitoring period covers the period prior to the grant being dispersed. Should this system not be tightened up?

Response

Organisations are required to sign an SLA dated 1 April 2012 as the grant funding period is fixed and runs parallel to the Council's financial year (1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013). The guidance notes to applicants advises organisations that projects or activities must be completed in the same financial year for which the application is made and all money must be spent by 31 March 2013.

It is recognised however that final grant awards are less than the amounts applied for and grant notifications are issued after the start of the financial year. Organisations are therefore invited to amend their delivery plans before the SLA

is prepared and agreed. Organisations can amend delivery plans if they feel that the late notification of a grant award is going to have an impact on the planned project or service.

The monitoring of grant awards takes place half-way through the funding period and at the end of the financial year. The monitoring process takes in to account the fact that less funding may have been awarded, or that funding was received later than anticipated. The monitoring process is designed to be a supportive, two-way dialogue between the organisation and the Council. The organisation can use this opportunity to explain and agree variances in their delivery plans or spending profile. The mid-year monitoring system was introduced two years ago and feedback on the process has been invited. Last year seven organisations responded to requests for feedback and this will be used to develop the process next year. Any feedback on ways in which the process can be improved are welcome.

It is also recognised that organisations would benefit from an earlier confirmation of funding, therefore a revised timetable will be proposed for 2013/14.

Question 7

It is intended that a commissioning system should apply in future, discussions about which are in progress at present. Do Members believe this will function more smoothly than the present process? What input will this Committee have in to the process to ensure that this does happen?

The development of the commissioning process has been based on feedback from both Members and voluntary sector representatives. Members of GAP provided their input in to the development of the process at a number of meetings during 2011. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also provided comments on the development of the Third Sector Investment Plan at their meeting in December 2011. Officers have also reviewed practices in other boroughs and are working closely with officers in other Directorates to develop this process. It is recognised that the introduction of a new system may be difficult for some organisations however there will be support available to assist voluntary groups in participating in the new process.

Redefining Youth Engagement

Overview

- A range of government grants have been terminated
- More than £1m removed from Harrow's Young People's Services budget to meet savings targets
- This scrutiny review looks at how the council can most effectively communicate and engage with young people in decision making and volunteering activity

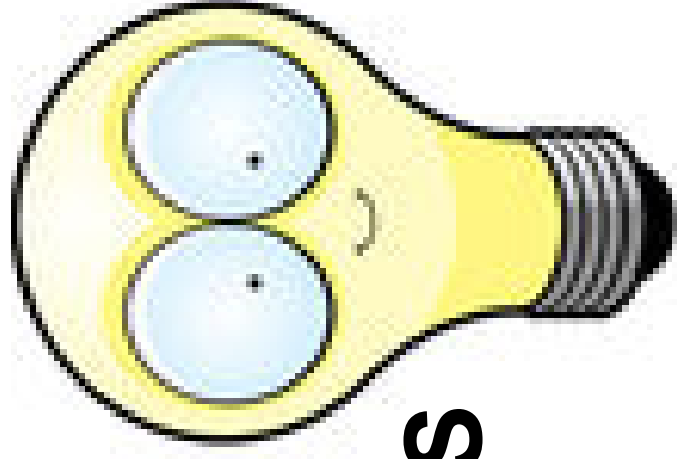


Process

- Meeting and conversing with a number of national experts, local authorities
- Holding a drop-in session for young people at the Wealdstone Youth Centre
- Focus group meetings with Harrow Youth Parliament, British Youth Council, National Children's Bureau, the National Youth Agency and young people with disabilities and their carers.
- Written survey for young people and residents, distributed through a school council to be used as a basis of conversations between youth workers and young people.
- Use of the scrutiny's Facebook and Twitter pages.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Commissioning Decisions

- “ The council should involve young people from design to implementation wherever appropriate
- “ Part of a wider involvement scheme which rewards youth engagement
- “ Used by Hammersmith and Fulham councils
- “ More likely to meet young people’s needs with successful outcomes

Harrowyouth Website



- To be overhauled
- Made similar to the ‘student room’ which offers useful opportunities for conversations about local issues,
- To provide clear links to volunteering, jobs, skills development opportunities and community events
- work with young people and facilitate development of the website

Summer Uni

- free courses to young people providing them with skills and volunteering opportunities
- Backed by a commercial and/or charitable partner
- Camden's summer university and Tower Hamlets' Futureversity
- To help their future employability as well as providing positive activities during summer holidays, bringing together different groups of young people



You have a role to play in giving young people support and direction and in doing so the council can learn from us and gain valuable insights to help you plan ahead with our services.

