

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

26 FEBRUARY 2013

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| Chairman: | * Councillor Jerry Miles | |
| Councillors: | * Sue Anderson * Ann Gate * Susan Hall (4) * Zarina Khalid | * Barry Macleod-Cullinane * Paul Osborn * Sasi Suresh (4) * Stephen Wright |
| Voting Co-opted: | (Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece | (Parent Governors) † Mrs A Khan |
| Non-voting Co-opted: | Harrow Youth Parliament Representative | |
| In attendance: (Councillors) | Keith Ferry Thaya Idaikkadar Sachin Shah | Minute 359 Minutes 356, 360 Minute 362 |

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

351. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly constituted Reserve Members:

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana
Councillor Krishna James

Reserve Member

Councillor Susan Hall
Councillor Sasi Suresh

352. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members.

353. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2013 and of the Special meeting held on 16 January 2013, be taken as read and signed as correct records subject to the amendment that the last paragraph of Minute 344 should read 'that it was stressed that the Cabinet Members should ensure that reports were complete, correct and meaningful'.

354. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

355. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

356. Corporate Plan

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which formed part of an integrated series of papers, including the budget papers, which had been considered by Cabinet on 14 February and were due to be considered by Council on 28 February 2013.

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning to the meeting. The Leader, in introducing the report, stated that the Corporate Plan set out the Council's strategic direction, vision and priorities for the next two years. In addition, for the first time, a balanced budget for next two years was proposed.

Some Members expressed concern that there appeared to be no base lines in terms of performance management. It was unclear what the indicators meant and what the measures were. A Member expressed the view that clearly defined measurable outcomes were required. The Divisional Director, whilst acknowledging the comments, responded that the Plan aimed to set out the core outcomes which aimed to articulate in greater detail the corporate priorities. As the Council moved more towards the measurement of outcomes, the Plan set out what these measures could be, and more work was ongoing to agree these with targets for the Corporate Scorecard. The

Plan itself included more specific actions than previous plans as to what was being set out to be achieved, and progress against these would be measured. The Corporate Scorecard could be made available for a future meeting of the Committee, or the Performance and Finance Committee.

In considering the Corporate Plan, Members made comments and asked questions including the following:

- The Safety Deposit Scheme did not appear to be included in the Plan and the Member requested that he be provided with details of the work on the scheme to date. The Leader advised that it had not been included as a detailed study to identify potential usage was being progressed.
- A commitment to introduce the Harrow Card was included in the Plan and it was questioned how this could be done without the completion of a feasibility study. The Leader advised that it was right that the Plan included the aspirations of the Administration and it was right that this was included.
- Concern was expressed in relation to the Environment department and the Leader was questioned as to how he could reconcile the proposed £3m savings with the corporate priority of keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe. The Member went on to state that not locking parks and cemeteries at night would result in a rise in crime. The Leader responded that a higher grant from Government would have enabled the Council to deal with issues in a different way but that the reality of the situation was that alternatives had to be found. He advised that, for example, on the spot fines for dropping litter may act as a deterrent.
- Referring to the grant the Council had received from Government a Member stated that Merton Council received less than Harrow per head but had, unlike Harrow, frozen its Council Tax. The Leader stated that to his knowledge Merton had significant financial difficulties but that he would look at their budget papers.
- In terms of the priority 'Supporting and Protecting people who are most in need', a Member stated that a representative of Mencap had recently advised that the most vulnerable tended to receive proper care and it was in fact those who were vulnerable, but not so drastically, that required the most support.
- Referring to the aspiration that contractors offer the London Living Wage, a Member questioned how this was costed, the timescale, how this could be measured and what the indicators were to show that this was on track. The Leader responded that whilst all directly employed staff received the London Living Wage, it was an aspiration to extend this to contractors.

- Following a Member's concern that a proposal in his ward would increase the risk of flooding, which appeared to contradict the aspiration in the Corporate Plan, the Divisional Director undertook to look at whether an indicator in relation to flooding could be developed.
- A Member expressed the view that the outcomes listed under each corporate priority heading in the plan did not seem to match the delivery of outcomes. For example, in terms of mental health it was unclear how the outcomes would be delivered from the projects mentioned. Similarly, the stated desired outcome of reducing fear of crime did not appear to be addressed by the projects listed, but instead the reduction of crime. She stated that it would be helpful to include mention of measures such as the dispersal zone and types of street lighting in the Plan to enable Members to see the success or otherwise in terms of delivery.
- Referring to the corporate priority 'Supporting our town centre, our local shopping centres and businesses', a Member questioned how key projects would be delivered given the proposed savings in the Planning department. The Leader stated that it was expected that £2m development would be attracted to the town centre as a result of the projects/initiatives.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning for their attendance and responses.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Council)

That the Committee's comments be considered.

RESOLVED ITEMS

357. References from Council/Cabinet - Response to Scrutiny Review of Housing Revenue Account Self Financing

The Committee received the response from Cabinet to the Scrutiny Review of Housing Revenue Account Self Financing.

The Chair of the Review Group reported that there had been a lengthy discussion at Cabinet on the report and he expressed his thanks to all those who had been involved in the review.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

358. Introduction by the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise

The Chair informed the Committee that whilst the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise had been invited to attend the meeting she had unfortunately been unable to attend. He therefore proposed that the item be deferred.

Some Members, whilst acknowledging that circumstances sometimes meant that it was not possible for officers to attend meetings, expressed concern that the agenda had specifically been organised around environment issues and that this was not the first meeting that the Corporate Director had not attended. Members also expressed their dissatisfaction that the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety, although invited to the meeting, was not in attendance and that no reason had been given.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the item be deferred to the next meeting;
- (2) the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee;
- (3) in accordance with paragraph 43 of the Committee Procedure Rules (Part 4B of the Council's Constitution), the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

359. Parking Policy

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise which provided an update on the principles underpinning the Council's parking policy, outcomes of the parking review undertaken in 2011, links between parking policy and implementation of the Harrow card, the overall impact of parking policy and proposals on identified issues and the status of all proposals.

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration, the Divisional Director of Environment and other officers to the meeting. In response to questions, the Portfolio Holder explained that in terms of implementation, the feasibility study had not yet been completed but that he was happy to share it with scrutiny colleagues. The Harrow card, free parking and tiered charges were all interconnected and it was necessary to have a programme to ensure that they were introduced in an ordered way. The Harrow card did not delay the introduction of cashless parking.

Members then made comments and asked questions as follows:

- A Member expressed concern at the implementation of the policy, the expense of altering the pay and display machines and sought clarification on the cost of the Harrow card. The Portfolio Holder advised that the card would cost £10 but that at this stage he could not confirm that it would be progressed.
- In response to a Member's question as to what measures would be used to mitigate the likely worsening of air quality as a result of the parking policy, an officer advised that promotion of use of the card would have an effect on the use of other modes of transport but that it may encourage people to shop more locally.

- A Member questioned the use of the Harrow card to reduce vandalism to parking meters and street crime. The officer undertook provide the data requested and indicated that the provision of a cashless system would reduce the number of machines required.
- A Member expressed concern at the estimated cost of the Harrow card implementation, stated that the interfaces with the IT systems had not been addressed and that, in his view, the Harrow machines would not be able to accommodate the variety of payment methods proposed. The officer confirmed that the internal workings of 150 machines would require replacement.
- In response to a Member's question in relation to the estimated take up of the Harrow card, the Portfolio Holder advised that it was expected that approximately 10% of the Harrow population would take up the card and that the fee for distributing the card would be £10. The card would be valid for 3-4 years.
- In response to a Member's question, the Portfolio Holder advised that the 20 minute parking limit had seemed reasonable and would allow sufficient time for shoppers to visit a shop for items such as milk and newspapers. It would also facilitate the movement of cars from parking bays as there was little point in having 20 minutes free parking if there was nowhere to park. If, however, the parking meters could only be modified to provide 30 minute slots, further consideration may be required.
- A Member stated that there appeared to be a contradiction between paragraphs 2.3.7 and 2.4.6 of the report and expressed concern in relation to some of the financial information. The Portfolio Holder responded that the feasibility study had indicated that there would be 10% take up in the initial year, with a further 10% (that is £210,000) in the following year and the same again in the third year. It would be an incremental increase as people realised the benefit of the card. Even if there were a high take up of the card, the business model would not change much.
- Clarification was sought as to whether Harrow residents would benefit from cheaper parking as a result of the card and was advised that there would be different forms of the card. For example, there would be an under 21s card that would have photograph could be used as proof of age and there would also be a non Harrow resident card.
- A Member expressed concern that the project was not included on the risk register and was advised that risks would be addressed in the feasibility study.
- Some Members expressed concern at the deliverability of projects given the savings proposed for the Environment and Enterprise directorate.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their attendance and responses.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the results of the feasibility study be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

360. Climate Change Action Plan and Delivering Warmer Homes Report

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise which provided responses to Members comments raised on the draft Climate Change Action Plan and Delivering Warmer Homes (HECA) report when it had previously been considered on 18 December 2013. The Chair drew Members attention to the Lead Member report which appeared on the supplemental agenda. The Committee agreed to consider the Lead Member report as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

Members noted the correction to page 69 of the report in that it was Cabinet Members not officers who needed to ensure that reports were complete, correct and meaningful. The Lead Members stated that the results of their meeting with officers would feed into the consultation process and advised that it had been a useful exchange.

A Member sought clarification on the position in terms of Harrow's application to be a fair trade borough, including how much had been spent to date and how much would be spent going forward. The Director of Environment advised that whilst he did not have this information available he understood that work was underway. The Leader of the Council stated that an error had been made in a response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOI) request in relation to this issue and the cost to date was in the region of £2,000, not £30,000. He added that responding to FOI requests had cost the Council approximately £300,000.

In response to a Member's question in relation to the launch of London Big Switch, an officer advised that the Council would be launching Harrow's Big Energy Switch to help residents to reduce their fuel bills.

In response to a Member's question as to the cost of compliance in meeting the climate change agenda, an officer advised that the officer cost of meeting the statutory requirements such as Display Energy Certificates, the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) scheme, Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reporting and administering the Council's energy reduction programmes was in the region of £100,000 a year. In the current year, the Council had invested £500,000 in its carbon reduction capital programme resulting in a saving of £100,000 in energy costs per year. Making investment in energy efficiency therefore represented a sensible business case going forward. The government's programme to reduce carbon emissions and fossil fuel use was designed to avoid significantly adverse changes to the global climate and

ensure the country's future energy security in a world where energy costs were rising and energy frequently came from politically unstable parts of the world.

A Member expressed concern that the Committee would not have the opportunity to comment on Appendix B, which would set out the revised measurement methodology for the Climate Change strategy, prior to its consideration by Cabinet. It was suggested that either a challenge panel be established or the leads and other interested Members meet to discuss the appendix prior to Cabinet.

The Director reported that the Government had recently published its Carbon Reduction Commitment performance league table for 2011/12 and that Harrow was in the top quartile nationally and in the top 3 in London. Members congratulated officers on this success.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and responses.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the relevant Scrutiny Leads and other interested Members consider appendix B prior to its consideration by Cabinet;
- (2) the Committee's comments be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

361. Lead Members Report on Climate Change Action Plan and Delivering Warmer Homes

The Committee received the report of the lead Members and considered it in conjunction with the substantive officer report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

362. Monitoring Council Tax Collection Rate

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Collections and Housing Benefits which provided an update on what council tax collection monitoring data existed and the plans for future monitoring of the area. The Committee agreed to consider the report as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

The Chair welcomed the Divisional Director of Collections and Housing Benefits and the Portfolio Holder for Finance to the meeting. The Divisional Director outlined the content of the report and provided some context.

A Member sought clarification as to which other local authorities had set a target of 70% collection rate, what the average collection rate was and what the Council would do if there was an overspend. The Divisional Director responded that three other London boroughs had set a target of 70% with the remainder between 30-60%. The average was 50%. He explained that Harrow had been in the top quartile for collection for a number of years and that in the longer term it was expected that caseload would reduce. The

Welfare Reform Debt Management Sub Group had considered the issue of vulnerable residents and that the team was working on identifying and developing a vulnerability policy which would define vulnerability in respect of debt. One of the Council's Baliff contractors had also recently set up a vulnerability team. Work was underway to identify those residents with a mental health issue or extreme physical disability in order that those case were not passed to the bailiffs for action. He advised that there would be a further report to the Committee later in the year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

364. Scrutiny Lead Member Report

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning which accompanied the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the actions proposed be agreed.

365. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14.2.1.2 (b) (Part 4B of the Constitution) it was

RESOLVED: At 9.57 pm to continue until 10.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.30 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman