

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

18 NOVEMBER 2014

Chairman:	† Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond * Jeff Anderson James Bond * Michael Borio * Kam Chana	* Jo Dooley (5) Barry Kendler * Chris Mote * Paul Osborn (Vice-Chairman in the Chair) * Kiran Ramchandani
Voting	(Voluntary Aided)	(Parent Governors)
Co-opted:	Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	† Mrs A Khan
Non-voting	Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	
Co-opted:		
In attendance:	Pamela Fitzpatrick	Minute 45
(Councillors)	Barry Kendler	Minute 44
	Barry Macleod-Cullinane	Minute 40

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

35. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillor Josephine Dooley

36. Members' Right to Speak

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with Committee Procedure Rule 4.1, the following Councillors, who were not Members of the Committee, be allowed to speak on the agenda items indicated:

Councillor

Agenda Item

James Bond

6a

Barry Macleod-Cullinane

6a, 6b, 8, 9 and 10

37. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 7 – Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel

Councillor Osborn declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he had been the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Access Harrow during its restructure. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Almond declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was an appointee on Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau, which had provided evidence to the Challenge Panel. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Macleod-Cullinane declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he had worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau, a branch of which had provided evidence to the Challenge Panel. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

38. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2014 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following additions:

Item 32, page 4, following paragraph 1 add:

A member asked what, if any, relationship there was between the OLF money and private sector investment since OLF1 by Debenhams and at St. George's and St. Ann's centres. The Chief Executive of the BID said they were not directly related.

Item 32, page 4, amend final paragraph to:

In respect of consultation, the Head of Economic Development and Research stated that in North Harrow retailers and residents had not always agreed about what was best for their local area in respect of on-street parking bays, which residents had not wanted.

Item 32, page 4, following the final paragraph add a new final paragraph:

He was asked by a member which relevant non-statutory resources or services had been cut and he cited stretched staff resources.

39. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at this meeting.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

40. Report from the Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director, Partnership Development and Performance, which set out the findings and recommendations of the Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel.

The Panel Chair introduced the report and described the background and rationale for the focus and work of the Panel. He thanked all those who had taken part in the review and in particular the policy officer who had supported the Panel and drafted the report.

The Panel Chair stated that the Panel had considered a broad range of impacts, direct and indirect, resulting from welfare reforms, and had discovered many cost issues for claimants. He also noted that the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme had since been withdrawn.

Members commented and asked questions as follows:

The Chair suggested that if the Panel's recommendations were referred to Cabinet, the video evidence should be shown in support as it was a powerful piece of work. He observed that the report had demonstrated how severe the proposed scheme was, and he welcomed the withdrawal of the changes.

A Member queried if reducing staff numbers would mean that their ability to provide support and a good service to claimants would be compromised.

A Member said that working on the Challenge Panel had been a positive experience and the report was a document the Panel could be proud of. With regard to negative impacts, she had been made aware that residents could only contact the department by telephone, but for many this was an impractical and expensive method, which exacerbated their difficulties and distress.

In conclusion the Chair expressed his gratitude to the Challenge Panel and noted that the report and their recommendations had been taken seriously.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That

- (1) the Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel's findings and recommendations be referred to Cabinet for consideration;
- (2) the report author be commended and thanked for his work on the review.

RESOLVED ITEMS

41. Petitions

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the Committee received a petition containing 245 signatures on a matter which was already the subject of a petition that had been presented to the Cabinet meeting of 16 October, and which had been referred by Cabinet to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Item 6 on the agenda.

RESOLVED: To note that

- (1) a petition containing a further 245 signatures on the matter of Cambridge Road car park was presented by Councillor Janet Mote;
- (2) the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise and the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety were informed about the additional signatories.

42. Reference from Cabinet - 16 October 2014 - Petition on Cambridge Road Car Park

Members received a reference from Cabinet in relation to a petition which requested that the Council consider a change to the status at Cambridge Road car park from 'District' to 'Local' and a change in the charge for the first hour from 80p to 20p.

The Chair expressed his disappointment that neither the Portfolio Holder nor senior officers were present and proposed that the committee discuss the matter briefly and defer the item for full consideration to a later meeting when the necessary personnel could be present.

A Member introduced the petition and described the impact of car park charges on local businesses and residents. Local business owners had reported a significant loss in business to neighbouring local areas. A promised free hour of parking had not materialised with the failure of a major supermarket to locate in the area, and this fact, together with the loss of banking facilities, suggested that a 'local' designation was more appropriate.

She proposed that a pilot scheme be introduced at the cheaper rate, to be evaluated and monitored over a suitable period. In response to Members' questions she explained that the 20p rate had been suggested as it compared with the charge in Hatch End, but it would not translate to a day rate in order to discourage commuters.

A Member stated that the issue should not be looked at in isolation, but should form part of a strategy encompassing on-street and off-street parking, and in relation to the viability of local retail centres.

A Member observed that the Council would benefit more from a lower charge if it resulted in more usage.

A Member informed the committee that a major construction project was underway in the vicinity which could aid regeneration and increase footfall. He believed that a 20p charge in the car park would assist in reducing traffic congestion in the area.

A Member added that businesses also suffered through increased rentals and leases, and not only because of decisions made by the Council.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) consideration of the petition on Cambridge Road Car Park be deferred to a later meeting;
- (2) the Portfolio Holders for Environment, Crime & Community Safety, and Business, Planning & Regeneration, along with the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise and Head of Economic Development and Research, be requested to attend the meeting at which the petition will be considered.

43. Reference from Council - 13 November 2014 - Petitions on Harrow Arts Centre

Members received a reference from Council in relation to two petitions objecting to the Council's proposal to close Harrow Arts Centre, one from the Hatch End Association containing approximately 6000 signatures, and the second from U3A containing approximately 5300 signatures..

The Chair noted that the reference had been made by Council at its meeting on Thursday 13 November, and had been notified to the committee on Friday 14 November. As there had been only one full working day between receipt of notice and the committee meeting, it was not unreasonable that the Portfolio Holder for Community, Culture & Resident Engagement and officers had been unable to attend. He therefore proposed that consideration of the item should be deferred to a later meeting of the committee when all relevant personnel could attend.

RESOLVED: That the petition be deferred for full consideration until a later meeting of the committee when all relevant personnel can be present.

44. The Capital Funding Challenge Panel

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director for Partnership Development and Performance which set out the draft scope for the Capital Funding Challenge Panel.

A Member introduced this report and informed the Committee that the Performance and Finance Sub-Committee had requested that there should be a review of the recurrent underspend of the general fund, and in particular, to consider the impact this has on the Council's service delivery and performance.

Members commented that failure to spend on infrastructure did not necessarily constitute a saving but could result in greater revenue expenditure, particularly if buildings and systems were not maintained to a reasonable standard.

A Member suggested that 'prioritise' should be added in para 6 of the scope, to read 'prioritise and manage' but the Panel Chair was of the view that this should be for the Panel to decide and that 'prioritisation' would be addressed within the Council's budget planning exercise.

Members were also of the view that historically low borrowing costs had not been used to the maximum advantage, especially as these were unlikely to last beyond the next few years.

In response to a Member's comment the Panel Chair agreed that it would be beneficial to have a clear 4 year capital programme.

The Chair suggested that the Challenge Panel seek evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Business, Planning & Regeneration.

RESOLVED: That the scope for the Capital Funding Challenge Panel be agreed.

45. The Funding Challenge - Saving £75m from the Council's Budget Challenge Panel

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director for Partnership Development and Performance which set out the draft scope for the Council's Budget Challenge Panel.

The Panel Chair introduced the report and commented that there was a very tight timeframe for consideration of the issues, and that the review was unlikely to have an impact on this year's budget planning, but should prove beneficial for the following year. She invited suggestions for who might be invited to give evidence.

In response to the Chair's comments on shared services, Members agreed that it would be useful to compare and consult with other boroughs.

RESOLVED: That the scope for the Funding Challenge Panel be agreed.

46. Minutes of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the minutes of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 20 October 2014 be noted, subject to an amendment to record that a public question had been asked;
- (2) the minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 9 October 2014 be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 9.25 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR PAUL OSBORN
Vice-Chairman in the Chair