

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

24 MARCH 2015

Chair:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond * Jeff Anderson * Michael Borio Margaret Davine Barry Kendler	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane (2) * Paul Osborn * Kiran Ramchandani Sachin Shah * Stephen Wright (4)
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)	Barry Kendler Margaret Davine Sachin Shah	Minute 82 Minute 83 Minute 84

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

78. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana
Councillor Chris Mote

Reserve Member

Councillor Stephen Wright
Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

79. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared:

Agenda Item 7 – Implementation of the Care Act in Harrow

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he had been the Portfolio Holder when the Market Position Statement had been published. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

80. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2015 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following additions:

Minute 71, page 7, paragraph 5,
“The Leader agreed that a measure to record recycling performance would be included in the corporate scorecard.”

Minute 71, page 8, paragraph 2,
“The Portfolio Holder agreed to look at a measure to record community work by Members in the corporate scorecard.”

81. Public Questions and Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions or petitions had been received.

RESOLVED ITEMS

82. Petition Referred from Cabinet - Pinner Memorial Park

Members received a reference from the Cabinet meeting on 19 February in relation to a petition which requested that the Council reconsider budget cuts in relation to Pinner Memorial Park. The Lead Petitioner read out the terms of the petition, and informed the Committee that the petition was still live and now contained over 1700 signatures. He added that the park keeper, whose continued employment was a request within the petition, had recently been off sick and there had been a noticeable reduction in the maintenance and cleanliness of the park.

The Service Manager, Public Realm, informed the Committee of the planned changes to maintenance in Harrow’s parks, including:

- a reduction in the number of grass cuts;
- a reduction in litter collection (from twice weekly to once weekly);
- a reduction in pruning;
- a reduction in leaf clearance;
- a reduction in pond clearance;
- the removal of dedicated park keepers.

There would be new standards for park maintenance across the borough, with the exception of Canons Park, which was subject to certain funding requirements. There would be 6 mobile park keeper teams, comprising 2 or 3 operatives, and these would be supported by a 'blitz' team for urgent response. The park keeper named in the petition would be seconded to the mobile team covering Pinner Memorial Park, thereby providing for a level of continuity and continuing relationship with the local community.

The Service Manager commented that the operational coverage would in fact be comparable with the standards originally in place when Pinner Memorial Park had first received 'green flag' status.

In response to queries, he confirmed the following:

- that a further 'green flag' assessment for Pinner Memorial Park was due in May but the new standards would continue to apply and no extra support would be given in advance of this;
- the aspiration was to maintain 'green flag' status for all Harrow's parks currently holding the award;
- new litter bins with covers and a larger capacity would be installed;
- Pinner Memorial Park enjoyed support from a number of local organisations, in particular the Pinner Association, and he hoped to explore these relationships further with a view to securing local support for planned events;
- the budgerigars in the park had been fed and watered during the keeper's absence.

Members discussed the importance of keeping 'green flag' status for parks and the need to monitor maintenance and cleanliness standards following the introduction of the new standards. They also discussed whether it was appropriate or desirable to use NIS monies for maintenance purposes.

The Chair concluded that despite the need to reduce maintenance and cleansing standards, the existing park keeper would be retained at Pinner Memorial Park as a member of a mobile unit covering the park, that the park benefitted from the involvement of strong and committed user and resident groups, and that officers were hopeful of retaining 'green flag' status across parks in the borough. He thanked the lead petitioner for his interest and involvement.

RESOLVED: That the new standards for park maintenance and mitigating actions taken be noted.

83. Implementation of the Care Act in Harrow

The committee received a report of the Director, Adult Social Services, which set out the programme for implementation of the requirements of the Care Act in Harrow.

The Head of Safeguarding, Assurance and Quality Services tabled a summary of the key points in the report, including the purpose, governance and implementation of the Act, and identified risks. He commented that the Act consolidated various laws governing many aspects of care, and now gave carers the same rights as service users.

Notable points included:

- personal budgets – Harrow had already successfully introduced these;
- transitional arrangements from Children’s Services to Adults’ Services;
- a national threshold for eligibility;
- portability of care packages between authorities until a new assessment is undertaken;
- independent advocacy;
- a change to the threshold in 2016 which will result in greater costs for Harrow;
- introduction of a universal deferred payments scheme – Harrow already offers this;
- adult safeguarding now has a statutory foundation.

In response to Members’ queries, he stated that the deferred payment scheme should be cost neutral as the authority could charge interest and administrative costs. He believed the Council’s cash reserves were sufficient to meet interim costs without the need to borrow. He informed the Committee that the voluntary sector would provide the advocacy service and officers were liaising with representatives to ensure they had the necessary capacity to meet demand.

Members discussed modelling future demand, and the Project Manager for Implementation said that a financial toolkit would be made available which would make this more straightforward. Some decisions, eg on capped figures, had been deferred until after the general election. A Member asked for figures for worst and best case scenarios for implementation of the universal deferred payments scheme. The Head of Safeguarding, Assurance

and Quality Services did not have the figures to hand but agreed to provide them after the meeting.

Members considered the raised threshold for savings and noted that the figure of £118k was inclusive of property value. A Member suggested that there should be regional banding for this figure as it would not benefit residents in London. The Head of Safeguarding, Assurance and Quality services agreed and stated that this point had been raised regularly.

The Portfolio Holder commented that while the requirements of the Care Act would be challenging, it also presented opportunities for a new way of doing things.

RESOLVED: That the following matters be noted:

- (1) the Council's approach to implementation of the Care Act;
- (2) identified risks and progress made on implementation of the Care Act;
- (3) that figures for 'best' and 'worst' case scenarios on the universal deferred payment scheme will be provided to Members.

84. Local Implementation of Universal Credit

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director, Resources, on the roll out of the Universal Credit element of the welfare reform programme in Harrow.

The Director, Customer Services and Business Transformation, updated the Committee on a recent meeting with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and confirmed that the roll out of universal credit would commence during October and November 2015 in Harrow, although only for the most straightforward cases in the first instance. It was clear that the DWP were keen for Harrow to sign up to a Partnership Delivery Agreement, but this would require a decision by Cabinet by July, if it were to be in place by October. She believed the main risks in implementation would be service users' difficulty in budgeting for making their own payments, and that claimants would have to be supported with this and with making online claims.

The Head of Collections and Benefits informed the Committee that 20k households could be impacted by the scheme in the longer term. He agreed that support for claimants in managing their budgets would be critical. Officers were highlighting possible risks ahead of implementation but there were many unknowns which made it difficult to plan for mitigations at this early stage as details about specific Universal Credit impacts were only available from limited pilot authorities.

Members compared Harrow's situation and progress with other London boroughs, and agreed that more work was necessary before a decision could be made about entering into a Partnership Delivery Agreement.

RESOLVED: That the following points be noted:

- (1) the roll out of Universal Credit will commence during October and November 2015;
- (2) if Harrow decides to act as front line delivery support for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) a Delivery Partnership Agreement, it would require a decision by Cabinet.

85. Minutes of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 5 February 2015 be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.15 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair