

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

9 JUNE 2015

Chair:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond * Jeff Anderson * Jo Dooley (5)	* Chris Mote * Paul Osborn † Primesh Patel * Stephen Wright (1)
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) Mrs A Khan
Non-voting Co-opted:	Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (5) Denote category of Reserve Members
† Denotes apologies received

100. Declarations of Interest

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

101. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Marilyn Ashton
Councillor Michael Borio

Reserve Member

Councillor Stephen Wright
Councillor Jo Dooley

102. Minutes

A Member commented that there were two actions which required an update presented to the Committee. These were that an officer had undertaken to investigate whether any work had been carried out locally to measure the use of food banks and that officers would also be liaising with colleagues regarding specific schemes for young adults who were out of work. The Chair agreed to follow this up on behalf of the Committee

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 14 April 2015 and the special meeting held on 19 May 2015 be taken as read and signed as correct records.

103. Public Questions and Petitions

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

104. References from Council/Cabinet

RESOLVED: That the references from Cabinet relating to the following items be noted:

- Response to Scrutiny Challenge Panel Report 'Capital Expenditure';
- Response to Scrutiny Challenge Panel Report 'The Funding Challenge Saving £75m from the Council's Budget';
- Response to Scrutiny Challenge Panel Report on 'Libraries'.

105. Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

The Committee received a report which set out the work being undertaken in schools in order to provide school children in Key Stage 1 (aged 5-7) with a free school meal.

A Member of the Committee asked that the report be deferred until the next meeting as one of the Scrutiny Leads mentioned on the front page of the report had not been consulted on it. The Committee agreed that the report would be considered at this meeting and if there were any significant issues, this could come back to the next meeting. A Member stated that it was important to ensure that as a standard practice, Scrutiny Leads were consulted and briefed on all reports concerning their area before being presented to the Committee.

The Corporate Director of Children and Families introduced the report and explained that the Government had allocated approximately £150 million nationally of capital funding in the 2014/15 financial year to support the roll out of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM). The Corporate Director also made the following points:

- this universal offer raised a significant issue in that parents and carers of children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 may no longer choose to confirm their eligibility for a free school meal. This was significant as eligibility for free school meals provided schools with Pupil Premium funding and deprivation formula funding;
- the Council had aligned the capital work on the provision of UIFSM with the school expansion programme to achieve maximum value for money and deliver better UIFSM. The £500k allocated to Harrow would not be enough to deliver this successfully in all of Harrow's schools;
- some schools still had to buy in hot meals as they did not have the facilities to be able to produce these on-site;
- surveys were being conducted with schools to provide further intelligence. The information in these surveys included information about school meals and their kitchens;
- there was likely to be an impact on the funding provided to schools due to the reduction in deprivation linkage and the way funding was arranged nationally;
- there had been a significant drop in the last year in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals in Harrow.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People commented that the Council was working closely with the schools on this issue and to try to encourage as many parents as possible to declare their eligibility.

The following questions were made by Members and responded to accordingly:

- What was the School Food Standards and what did this mean? Was this the same across all schools?

The Corporate Director would need to confirm this and respond. The assumption was that this did not apply to Independent Schools;

- Was the figure of 90.4% of young children in Harrow taking up the UIFSM offer correct? This contradicted the figures provided further in the report which indicated the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.

These figures related to two different matters. The figure of 90.4% related to the percentage take up of those pupils who were eligible for free school meals.

- The reduction to the percentage to Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils eligible for Free School Meals had reduced from 16.5% to 10.1% between January 2010 and January 2015. What was the explanation for the decrease?

The reason for the decrease particularly in the last year was assumed to be because of the changes requiring parents to declare their eligibility. More and more parents were becoming aware of this fact and due to the stigma of having to make this declaration, it was natural that more parents would prefer not to make this declaration.

- Was the decrease to do with more parents being aware that they did not need to make this declaration as there was a decline between January 2013 and January 2014 which had nothing to do with the new scheme.

This would have to be revisited and the date on which the new arrangements were announced. The difference between the table on page 29 of the report would also be clarified. This information would then be provided to the Committee.

- Who was responsible for obtaining the declarations from parents confirming their child's eligibility for a free school meal?

Ultimately the responsibility rested with the school itself. The Council was trying to support schools into ensuring that they could obtain the relevant information from parents.

- Have schools tried to outline the issues to parents relating to eligibility for free school meals?

Schools had been making efforts to ensure that this message was being communicated to parents effectively. This was not information that they currently held. The Council was unable to pass on the data they held directly to the schools due to Data Protection laws.

- Did the Council currently advise parents when applying under the Council Tax Scheme, that their details may be passed on to the schools for identifying that their child would be eligible for free school meals?

This was a helpful suggestion and would be considered.

- Would schools be willing to pay the Council if it offered to chase up the parents on their behalf?

In the current financial environment it was difficult to get schools to agree on a collective way forward. However this was a helpful suggestion and would be discussed with Headteachers.

- Could a document be circulated to the Committee identifying works associated with the UIFSM project particularly in relation to kitchens?

This document would be circulated to Members of the Committee. It was also important to note that the Council had been looking at what other Local Authorities were doing and how they had been supporting their schools in obtaining the relevant declarations from parents.

- Was there a way to provide incentive for parents to make a declaration that their child was eligible for free school meals and was there an opportunity to use any funds received in a bespoke way for that specific child?

One of the authorities that the Council were currently researching and liaising with, adopted this practice. This would be considered further.

- Would the Council be issuing guidelines for Headteachers and schools into the provision of special dietary requirements?

Special dietary requirements were always a sensitive issue and the responsibility for this now lies with the Headteachers. Schools tended to make their decisions based on their cohort.

- How many primary schools in Harrow were Academies?

There were currently five primary school Academies.

- Could parents just fill in a questionnaire which contained categories which they selected rather than making a formal declaration about their child's eligibility to have a free school meal?

This would not be permitted as the process was subject to audit.

- Where there any plans to ascertain the general benefits of universal school meals and its impact on pupils?

It was expected that the Government would conduct some type of evaluation given that they were investing money into this scheme. The Corporate Director would speak to the Director of Public Health and see if they would also be doing any work around this area.

A Member commented that the concerns expressed by the Corporate Director in relation to the new scheme had not been made apparent in the report and this would have added value to it.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

RECOMMENDED ITEM

106. Community Safety Strategy

This Committee considered a report which introduced the draft Community Safety Strategy for 2015 -18 and invited the Committee's comments to Cabinet for consideration before the Strategy was recommended to Council for adoption.

The Head of Policy introduced the report and explained that the Community Safety Strategy was a statutory plan. She then made the following points:

- the Safer Harrow Partnership had made the decision for the Strategy to shift away from high volume crimes. Whilst these were important there was a feeling that there had to be a shift towards focusing on those issues that would be more significant for the community as a whole including: terrorism, radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, gangs and domestic and sexual violence. Underpinning these would be issues such as community cohesion, data sharing and governance;
- the strategy had been divided into a number of thematic groups and for each of these, a sub-group would be comprised which each would have their own action plan.

The Deputy Borough Commander then addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- he reflected on the International Picture in respect of terrorism, the National Picture in terms of Crime and notable incidents, then the local picture in terms of Crime Reduction achievements. There was a need to focus on areas of serious harm and risk that would ultimately threaten community cohesion;
- he also noted that Anti Social Behaviour needed to be considered for inclusion. Notwithstanding reduction in volume and repeat callers, because the borough had experienced a number of serious incidents.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety addressed the Committee and commented that he had been to a number of the Safer Harrow meetings where this had been discussed and welcomed comments from Members.

The following questions were made by Members and responded to accordingly:

- Was reference to the Community Safety Strategy the same as reference to the Community Safety Plan? These terms appear to have been used interchangeably.

This was correct.

- Why was there duplication in the content of the cover report presented to the Committee and the Strategy itself?

This would be corrected for future reports.

- Why were acronyms being used in the Strategy? This was confusing for those who did not know what these were. A glossary would be a helpful addition.

This suggestion was helpful and would be considered.

- Was there any concerns regarding the ongoing dispute in Harrow between the mosques?

There were no specific concerns and if any tensions arose these would be dealt with.

- The structure and layout of the Strategy was confusing and there was little information about the methodology in achieving the outcomes set out.

These were helpful comments and more work would be done to sign post the methodology used in achieving the outcomes.

- Could more work be done in schools to educate about preventing Hate Crime?

It was becoming an increasing challenge for the Police to get this subject discussed at schools. Any influence Members were able to exert in their roles as school governors to address this would be welcomed.

- Were there any figures in relation to domestic violence issues in Harrow?

There were approx 500 allegations involving violence. There were approximately 7,000 non-criminal domestic allegations.

- Could the police be more aware that the internet was becoming an increasing tool by perpetrators of Hate Crime, cyber bullying etc? Further action was required.

This was a welcome suggestion and would be looked at in due course.

- There were a large number of unreported crimes taking place at school. This usually related to assaults and thefts.

Schools and underreporting was an issue. Greater dialogue was required and Members were again encouraged, in their roles and school governors, to help address this issue.

- What was the difference between a faith and religious crime?

This was a good question and this would be provided to the Committee as there were technical differences

The Chair thanked the attendees for presenting the report.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That the Committee's comments on the draft Community Safety Strategy be provided to Cabinet.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.24 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair