

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

AGENDA

DATE: Wednesday 8 June 2016

TIME: 7.30 pm

VENUE: Committee Room 5,
Harrow Civic Centre

MEMBERSHIP (Quorum 4)

Chair: Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillors:

Ghazanfar Ali
Mrs Chika Amadi
Jeff Anderson
Jo Dooley

Richard Almond
Ameet Jogia
Chris Mote
Paul Osborn (VC)

Representatives of Voluntary Aided Sector: Mrs J Rammelt/Reverend P Reece
Representatives of Parent Governors: 2 Vacancies

(Note: Where there is a matter relating to the Council's education functions, the "church" and parent governor representatives have attendance, speaking and voting rights. They are entitled to speak but not vote on any other matter.)

Representative of Harrow Youth Parliament

Reserve Members:

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ms Pamela Fitzpatrick | 1. Stephen Wright |
| 2. Kairul Kareema Marikar | 2. Lynda Seymour |
| 3. Ajay Maru | 3. Barry Macleod-Cullinane |
| 4. Aneka Shah-Levy | 4. Susan Hall |
| 5. Antonio Weiss | |

Contact: Vishal Seegoolam, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Tel: 020 8424 1883 E-mail: vishal.seegoolam@harrow.gov.uk

AGENDA - PART I

1. ATTENDANCE BY RESERVE MEMBERS

To note the attendance at this meeting of any duly appointed Reserve Members.

Reserve Members may attend meetings:-

- (i) to take the place of an ordinary Member for whom they are a reserve;
- (ii) where the ordinary Member will be absent for the whole of the meeting; and
- (iii) the meeting notes at the start of the meeting at the item 'Reserves' that the Reserve Member is or will be attending as a reserve;
- (iv) if a Reserve Member whose intention to attend has been noted arrives after the commencement of the meeting, then that Reserve Member can only act as a Member from the start of the next item of business on the agenda after his/her arrival.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary or non pecuniary interests, arising from business to be transacted at this meeting, from:

- (a) all Members of the Committee;
- (b) all other Members present.

3. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 18)

That the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 19 April 2016 and the special meeting held on 19 May 2016 be taken as read and signed as correct records.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS *

To receive any public questions received in accordance with Committee Procedure Rule 17 (Part 4B of the Constitution).

Questions will be asked in the order notice of them was received and there be a time limit of 15 minutes.

[The deadline for receipt of public questions is 3.00 pm, Friday 3 June 2016. Questions should be sent to publicquestions@harrow.gov.uk

No person may submit more than one question].

5. PETITIONS

To receive petitions (if any) submitted by members of the public/Councillors under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4B of the Constitution).

6. REFERENCES FROM COUNCIL/CABINET

(if any).

7. HOMELESSNESS PRESSURES (Pages 19 - 42)

Report of the Divisional Director of Housing.

8. WELFARE REFORM SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP - REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION (Pages 43 - 64)

Report of the Divisional Director - Strategic Commissioning.

9. FINAL REPORT OF THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY REVIEW (Pages 65 - 76)

Report of the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning.

10. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17 (Pages 77 - 90)

Report of the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Which the Chairman has decided is urgent and cannot otherwise be dealt with.

AGENDA - PART II - NIL

*** DATA PROTECTION ACT NOTICE**

The Council will audio record item 4 (Public Questions) and will place the audio recording on the Council's website, which will be accessible to all.

[**Note:** The questions and answers will not be reproduced in the minutes.]

Deadline for questions	3.00 pm on Friday 3 June 2016
------------------------	----------------------------------

This page is intentionally left blank

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

19 APRIL 2016

Chair:	† Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond Jeff Anderson * Michael Borio * Susan Hall (4)	* Paul Osborn (Vice-Chair in the Chair) * Primesh Patel * Aneka Shah-Levy (1) * Stephen Wright (1)
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided)	(Parent Governors)
	Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	Vacancy Vacancy
Non-voting Co-opted:	Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	
In attendance: (Councillors)	Simon Brown Graham Henson	Minute 146 Minute 147

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

140. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Chris Mote
Councillor Marilyn Ashton
Councillor Jerry Miles

Reserve Member

Councillor Stephen Wright
Councillor Susan Hall
Councillor Aneka Shah-Levy

141. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 7 – School Expansion Programme

Councillor Paul Osborn declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a Governor at Norbury School. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Richard Almond declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a governor at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Primesh Patel declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a Governor at Bentley Wood School. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Michael Borio declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a Governor at Norbury School. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

142. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2016, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

143. Public Questions and Petitions

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

144. References from Council/Cabinet

There were none.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

145. Scrutiny Annual Report 2015-16

The Committee received and considered the Scrutiny Annual Report which outlined the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Scrutiny Sub-Committees and the scrutiny lead councillors during the 2015-16 municipal year. It was noted that the Council's Constitution required the Committee to report annually on its activities to Council.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Council)

That the annual report be endorsed.

RESOLVED ITEMS

146. School Expansion Programme

The Committee received a report which set out how the school expansion programme had equipped schools to accommodate the additional children requiring places in Harrow schools and the opportunities taken to improve the school estate.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People introduced the report, informing the Committee that to date the school expansion programme had created 26 additional permanent Reception forms of entry through the expansion of existing schools, six additional permanent year 7 forms of entry through the expansion of two existing schools and six schools had opened additional special educational needs places. Most of the phase 1 and 2 projects were reaching project completion and were being handed over except for a issue with regard to Whitchurch Primary School which was awaiting resolution. The final accounts were under review and robust contract monitoring arrangements had been established to hold all parties to account.

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

- Did the uncommitted primary SEP4 budget of £3.615m take account of the virement of £1m to SEP1 and SEP2 schemes?

The officer confirmed that this was the situation.

- Which were the three free schools that were the result of successful applications by Harrow schools? What form did the support provided by Harrow Council take both prior and subsequent to approval of free schools? Who administered the admissions process for free schools?

Harrow schools had made successful applications to establish The Jubilee Academy, Pinner High School and Harrow View Primary School. The opening of Mariposa Primary had been deferred by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) to September 2017. On receipt of a proposal for a free school, officer time was made available to talk through the plans and provide realistic advice on viability. No funding support was available. Once a scheme obtained approval the dialogue and guidance for successful delivery continued but this did not extend to help with setting up which was the responsibility of the EFA.

Free schools were their own admissions authority with Harrow Council acting as a clearing house for applications and the free schools allocating places. Free schools were included in Head Teacher Groups

and were encouraged to buy in to Harrow School Improvement Partnership (HSIP).

- Although financial implications were addressed in the report, more detail was required particularly with regard to any budget overrun with Keepmoat.

Problems had arisen in concluding the final accounts and officers were in dispute with Keepmoat in relation to a number of projects on which legal advice was being taken to try to reach resolution prior to any legal action. The cost of agreeing all claims would be in the region of £2-3m but they were being robustly challenged and the overall costs should be contained within budget. It was intended to draw forward from SEP 4 to offset SEPs 1, 2 and 3 but until resolution of the claims and potential legal issues this could not be quantified.

- What was the estimate regarding risk and how exposed was the Council?

There was currently no additional cost to Harrow and the intention was to minimise the risk of any extra Harrow funding. The officers were reviewing the situation with cost consultants and were looking at individual items. Costs were still being received from schools and third parties. Risk analysis took place every Monday and there was an escalation process.

- Could further detail be made available on the number of building issues which had come to light during the 12 months defects liability period? Could the next report to the Committee include a list of issues, whether complete or incomplete and with a timeline? It was difficult to assess the situation given the high number of projects and issues without knowledge of funding or the source of funding.

The officers were seeking clarification of the defects list in a situation where the Council had identified items as defects whereas the contractor alleged the cause was damage by the school. A decision was then required on which party put it right, whether the cost was deducted or the issue rectified by the contractor or whether the Council bore the cost. The Corporate Director People Services met with the regional director of Keepmoat to attempt to resolve the issues without recourse to law.

The Committee was advised that issues included: the damp proof course at Stanburn School on which independent advice had been sought on the contractor's report; drainage at Cannon Lane School on which an independent investigation and samples for analysis were being taken; Newton Farm School electrical distribution; Elmgrove School damp and asbestos; Kenmore School electrical supply; and Belmont School collapsed drain.

A matrix of key disputed items which highlighted what was coming forward would be made available to the Committee.

With regard to funding, virements had been used where a need for additional funding had been identified. The programme had progressed to Phase III and a range of government funding schemes for free schools, basic needs, and direct funding of new schools had been used.

- What impact would the Department for Education national funding formula consultation have on the school expansion programme?

Officers would confirm the situation but the understanding was that this was largely revenue funding so there would be no impact on the programme.

- Was any Education Funding Agency funding outstanding and do grants include the cost of supervising contracts such as requirements for legal officer input?

No EFA funds were currently outstanding and no more had been made available although a Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) round could become available. The time spent by the Children's Capital Project Team had been taken into account in the SEP capital monies. However, the time spent by the Corporate Director People was not included.

- Did Harrow Council have any role in claims regarding faulty workmanship in Free Schools?

No.

- What sanctions were available if the contractor failed to attend claim resolution meetings?

The contract for SEP 1 & 2 had been a partnership agreement and had not contained any provision for damages resulting in very little leverage regarding timeliness or quality and only economic loss could be sought. The SEP III contract included provision of £1800 per day for damages.

- Had any school expansions been signed off subsequent to the last report to the Committee?

Whilst there had been partial or full sign-off it did not mean that they were defect free for schools to make use of, for example the Cannon Lane Primary drainage defect. The vast majority of the schools were using the available space and some SEN provision would be available at half term. The officers were unaware at this stage of the final costs and it was agreed that the Chair, Vice-Chair and the two Scrutiny Leads meet to go through this and recommend to Scrutiny Leadership.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

147. Community Safety Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime & Community Safety introduced a report which summarised the Community Safety Strategy 2016-19 including current trends, emerging priorities and the implications of the Strategy. He made the following points

- it was a live document which would go back to Safer Harrow;
- there was a greater focus on high impact and high profile events around the world;
- although there were concerns at the reduction in police numbers and its effects had been recognised, Harrow was one of the safest London Boroughs. Harrow police also assisted at the more high profile events in Central London;
- concerns had been expressed regarding the increase in violence with injury involving persons who knew each other;
- co-ordination had been improved with the sharing of data and information working successfully.

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

- Statistical comparison was difficult due to the recording of figures for recorded crime for the London context being the year to January 2016 whilst those for the Local context were for October to September. This should be raised with the Police as the information was used to compare Harrow with the rest of the country. Attendance by a Police representative at the Committee would have been helpful.
- The difficulty in making comparisons with such data was noted. The figures were provided centrally by the Police Information Unit. Consideration would be given to the subtraction of data in order to report on a common period although as it was received in pdf format there was a capacity issue. The Borough Commander had access to more recent data than the officers.
- The fact that Safer Harrow was assisted in its work by the efforts of other strategic partnerships that had their own agendas and action plans suggested a lack of coordination.

The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning undertook to take the issue to the partnership Chairs in his capacity as the co-ordinator of the Community Strategy.

- Concerns regarding IT systems in the Youth Offending Service had been expressed for some time. Whilst it was reported that the introduction of the new IT for the service had not been problem free and that in the medium term it would make the operation of the team more effective, information was sought on the short term effects. The Committee requested the submission of a report to Members of the Committee outlining the problems and the expected date of resolution.

Difficulty had been experienced in rolling out the new system which had gone live in September. Teething problems had been reported to the supplier and progress was being made. There had been some infrastructure issues during the move onto Citrix resulting in the system not working some years ago, but this was the old system rather than the new system. The officers undertook to report back on the matter as requested.

- Additional information was sought on the increase in violence with injury of 10.4%. How was it measured that this was due to an increase in reporting and not an increase in crime? A request was made to track reports of domestic violence over the previous 5 years in order to see if there was a trend and, if so, more evidence was requested as to why reporting had increased.

There were a number of aspects such as crime on the street and although it was not possible to substantiate, it was considered that the main reason for the increase was the national trend in the increase in domestic violence reporting.

The Portfolio Holder reported that it inferred increased signposting such as in hospital and by the police. In addition there had been reclassification in the way data was reported to include children and blood as violence and injury.

- What percentage of the 23% increase in domestic and sexual violence reporting was violence with injury as the latter had increased by 10.4%?

The officer undertook to provide a breakdown of the information.

- What was the source of the five key attributes for cohesive communities?

This reflected national formats.

- With regard to community cohesion, the report recognised the importance in identification of changing issues, and responding quickly and effectively when there were tensions to be addressed. However, in the absence of information on which areas of the Council were responsible for which activities, it was difficult to monitor how issues were addressed and who was responsible.

The Safer Harrow representatives together with Lead partners in Harrow co-ordinated activities. The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning, had responsibility for community cohesion matters but did not have management of front line services. The Portfolio Holder stated that a page in the report identifying who was responsible for the different activities would be useful.

- Although the attributes for community cohesion that could be influenced by other social programmes and outcomes were listed, there were no figures to supplement the indicators. As the action plan was developed could it be reported to the Committee together with data, measures and baseline.

The action plan would be submitted to the Committee as it developed. Work was taking place with the community to develop trust and work together. It was noted that the Action Plan referenced was the Prevent Action Plan and not the Community Cohesion Action Plan.

- What does 'political trust' mean?

The officer undertook to check the source and come back.

- What were the reasons for the reduction in burglary, did it result from specific initiatives?

The arrest of prolific burglars affected the figures.

- It would be of interest for the Borough Commander to make a presentation on his aspirations for Harrow to be a safer borough and what the steps would be.

The comments of the Committee would be submitted to the Safer Harrow Group.

RESOLVED: That the comments of the Committee on the draft Community Safety Strategy be referred to Cabinet.

148. Equalities Vision and Objectives

The Committee received a report which set out a summary of the recommendations agreed by the Corporate Equalities Group arising from the Equalities review undertaken to develop a Vision for the Council for Equalities and revise the Corporate Equality Objectives which were a requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) introduced by the Equality Act 2010.

An officer presented the report and made the following points:

- a revised set of Corporate Equality Objectives had been developed subsequent to consultation and discussion on a review commissioned by the Corporate Equalities Group in order to be clear on the focus and priorities for equalities and how it would be delivered;

- following feedback on the Corporate Equality Objectives, the options in the vision had been shortlisted to two and the objectives narrowed down to three in order to focus on a few priorities and do them well in order to make a real difference;
- there had been a change in emphasis from identification of work that was taking place in accordance with the vision to analysis of data and identification of where improvements could be made;
- a review of staff representation groups had resulted in a reduction to one group, the Making A Difference Group.

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

- How did the percentage data from the staff survey that 20% of gay men and 38% lesbians strongly disagreed/disagreed that Harrow demonstrated through its actions that it was committed to being an equal opportunities employer compare with responses from other protective groups and staff generally? 77.23% of staff had not answered the question about sexual orientation in the latest staff survey, how many people did that equate to?

The percentage response from gay men and lesbians had been disproportionately high against other protective characteristics. With regard to the actual numbers the percentages in the staff survey equated to, the officers would seek the information. The annual equality monitoring report was based on different data.

- Why was the decision taken to reduce the staff representation groups to one? What was the attendance at the Making a Difference Group?

The consultation feedback was that the groups did not represent the intended staff, did not add value and a single group was sought. The Making a Difference Group had done some excellent work and was open to all staff. There were about 100 staff on the database and over 250 staff had attended a recent International Women's Day Event. There had been good feedback from community organisations.

An Equality event was planned for 11 May with the objective to reach out and engage. Initiatives to respond to recognised need had included special safe places for LGTB staff.

- Is the low proportion of Harrow Council employees aged less than 25 and the number of them leaving comparable with other boroughs? Can barriers, for example driving vehicle age restrictions, presented by insurance requirements for under 25 be removed?

Information on comparisons with other boroughs would be sought from Human Resources. The officer was not aware of the issue with regard to insurance for young people.

- With regard to the low number of staff who had answered the question around sexual orientation, was the objective a better response or a better attitude?

The staff survey was anonymous whereas staff were aware that the staff reporting exercise was not so the figures were different. It was challenging to show staff why the data was required and to do so successfully required staff to feel that the Council was more inclusive and that the information was of value.

- The Corporate Equality Objectives Action Plan referred to an action plan that specified the actions required to deliver each priority but it was not attached.

The action plan would be sent to members of the Committee.

- The Council was seeking to achieve a top 200 place in the workplace index in 2016. What was the current position?

The Council was currently 399 for its first submission out of 419 so it was a positive target,

- Was it a legal requirement to have a Corporate Equality Group?

It was not a legal requirement but was a sensible part of the governance framework in holding services to account

- Feedback from frontline staff that they sometimes felt uncomfortable in requesting information on protected characteristics from service users was reported. What was the information and what in what circumstances? How was the Council aware of which groups do not use a service?

In order to ensure that services were inclusive, staff needed to be confident and inform service users that the information on protective characteristics was required to tailor services to their needs. To identify if certain communities do not use services, such as to see who used a service and compare with the local demographics. Knowledge of the protective characteristics of complainants could provide the ability to make small changes to address the situation.

- What were the reasons for the lack of staff who had declared their ethnicity as BAME on pay band 6? Was data available on the number of applications by BAME staff, the numbers shortlisted and those interviewed?

The Annual Equality Employment report indicated that this situation arose across London. It could be the result of a number of things and needed to be recognised in the objectives. The data for applications had been published.

The Committee thanked the officer for his hard work and attendance.

RESOLVED: That the comments of the Committee on the Equalities Vision and Objectives be referred to Cabinet.

149. Expression of best wishes

The Committee expressed its best wishes to Mrs Miles, wife of the Chair, and hoped that she would have a speedy recovery.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.10 pm).

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

This page is intentionally left blank

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL) MINUTES

19 MAY 2016

Chair: * Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillors:

* Ghazanfar Ali	* Ameet Jogia
* Richard Almond	* Chris Mote
* Jeff Anderson	* Paul Osborn
* Jo Dooley	

Voting Co-opted: (Voluntary Aided) (Parent Governors)

† Mrs J Rammelt	Vacancy
Reverend P Reece	Vacancy

Non-voting Co-opted: Harrow Youth Parliament Representative

* Denotes Member present
† Denotes apologies received

150. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

151. Declarations of Interest

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

152. Appointment of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Paul Osborn as Vice-Chair of the Overview: and Scrutiny Committee for the 2016/17 Municipal Year.

153. Establishment of Sub-Committees For 2016/17

The Committee considered the proposed memberships and Chairs of the Sub-Committees for 2016/17 which had been circulated on the supplemental agenda.

RESOLVED: That the Sub-Committees of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be established for the Municipal Year 2016/17 with the memberships and Chairs detailed on the supplemental agenda.

154. Appointment Of Lead Members 2016/17

The Committee considered proposals relating to Lead Members for Scrutiny for 2016/17.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Lead Members and their areas of responsibility, as detailed on the supplemental agenda, be agreed.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 8.53 pm, closed at 8.55 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	8 June 2016
Subject:	Homelessness Pressures
Responsible Officer:	Lynne Pennington (Divisional Director of Housing)
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Cllr Jeff Anderson, Cllr Manji Kara Scrutiny Lead Members for Environment and Enterprise
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 Managing Homelessness Demand Appendix 1a Comparative Homelessness Activity Data

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the background to the acute homelessness pressures being experienced in Harrow at present and demonstrates the work being done across the Council to manage demand and mitigate the impacts on the homeless households and on the Council's budgetary situation.

Recommendations:

The Panel are asked to:

- Consider the report,
- Note the factors behind the current homelessness demand and
- Support the drive to manage customer expectations so that they are more realistic in relation to the Council's ability to secure affordable housing locally.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The draft scrutiny work programme has identified homelessness as a topic for 2016/7; members requested a comprehensive report to come to committee in June, as part of the process for defining the scope for a scrutiny project that doesn't duplicate other work going on in this field.

Members noted that homelessness is rated as an A1 risk for the Council and requested information on:

- the nature of the problem (who is presenting as homeless and the breakdown of housing need)
- what we are doing about it
- what factors are being taken into account for planning purposes
- whether our policies are preventing homelessness

Background and current situation

In response to the on-going homelessness pressures the Community Directorate has initiated a round table project looking at the issue of homelessness, how demand is managed and also what might be done to stimulate supply. This report concentrates on the management of demand. See appendix for detailed information. There will be a short presentation to the meeting highlighting the main elements of the report.

A senior officer challenge panel was held on 25 May 2016 to look at how homelessness was managed and to identify whether any more actions could be taken corporately and with partners to mitigate the pressures. An action plan is being developed from that meeting.

The round table will reconvene in June to review progress on this and other aspects of the action plan in relation to supply initiatives.

The appendix references the work needed to make homeless applicants more realistic about the lack of affordable housing options in Harrow. This requires a concerted communication effort internally and with partners, including the voluntary sector. This is potentially complementary to the work being carried out to develop an Advice and Information Strategy with the voluntary and community sector, on which consultation is planned over the summer.

Financial Implications

Due to the homeless activity and B&B costs outlined in the appendix, the over-spend on the B&B budget for 2015/6 was £1.7m, of which £1m was met by a one off use of reserves.

Due to the B&B growth in 2015/6 there is an immediate pressure at the start of 2016-7 as the number of families in B&B is significantly higher than was assumed when the budget was originally set. This, combined with the continuing homelessness pressures, the prospect of further welfare reform, a need to decant residents for the Grange Farm regeneration scheme and low supply of new affordable housing, mean it is likely that B&B numbers will rise at least as fast as last year. At current average B&B costs this indicates a potential pressure of £3.5 - £4.5m in 2016-7.

Performance Issues

Performance is covered in the appendix.

Environmental Impact

There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

Separate risk register in place? No

The risk is to the Council's budgetary position.

Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? No (

If no, state why an EqlA was not carried out below:

This report is a position statement.

Council Priorities

The homelessness situation, and measures to manage it, impact on the corporate priorities of:

- Build a Better Harrow – we are trying to improve the existing housing stock and develop new affordable housing
- Be more business-like and business friendly – our work with private landlords, potential tenants and developers will help to improve the local economy
- Protect the most vulnerable and support families – homelessness prevention work, advice and options aims to support (potentially) homeless families so that they can continue with their lives.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Dave Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 26/5/16		

Ward Councillors notified:	NO
-----------------------------------	-----------

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jane Fernley, Head of Business Development and Transformation, tel. 020 8424 1283

Background Papers:

Appendix 1 - Managing Homelessness Demand
Appendix 1a – Comparative Homelessness Activity Data

Appendix 1 - Managing Homelessness Demand

This report is part of a council wide project looking at what we are taking to control homelessness demand and promote supply. This report concentrates on controlling demand.

Background

The fundamental issue driving homelessness in Harrow is that as we have one of the smallest social housing stocks in London. We are far more dependent on the private rented sector (PRS) to meet housing need than other boroughs. Following years of policies that have not enabled lower cost rented accommodation to be built, the PRS is now seriously overheated and dysfunctional in London. Rents are rising at double digit inflation rates, whilst housing benefit, which is available for low to moderate income families to help pay for accommodation in London, is frozen.

Our neighbours are suffering similar pressures but have fewer families in B&B as they have other options. Brent for example has a far larger social housing stock and now uses 80% of new lettings for homeless households, (although this is likely to stoke up homelessness pressures in the future). Ealing is facing serious pressures and is now unable to find sufficient traditional B&B because of pan London agreements on price caps, and makes extensive (and expensive) use of commercial hotels such as Premier Inn. Croydon is heading for an over-spend in excess of £10 million. See Appendix 1a for comparative data.

Financial Position

Due to homelessness activity and B&B costs in 2015-16 the over-spend was £1.7million, of which £1 million was met by a one off use of reserves in that year. The B&B growth experienced in last year means that there is an immediate pressure at the start of 2016-17 due to the number of families in B&B being significantly higher than was assumed when the budget was originally set.

B&B numbers as at 1st April 2015 were 153, with numbers at the end of the 2015-16 of about 310 (including Harrow Hotel which is now having to be decanted). So in 2016-17 we start the year with over 150 more families in B&B than 1st April 2015

There is no sign of a reduction in homelessness pressures or significant new supply of accommodation, so it is likely B&B numbers will rise in 2016-17 at least as fast as 2015-16. At current average B&B unit costs this indicates a potential pressure on the B&B budget of about £3.5million to £4.5million in 2016-17, taking into account other pressures through further welfare reform and regeneration reducing other temporary accommodation supply.

Controlling Demand through Homelessness Prevention.

Officers are trained in negotiating skills and we hold regular prevention workshops.

The largest group of families now facing homelessness are existing private rented tenants being evicted by their landlord.

For Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenants, at first contact they are questioned why they have been told to leave or why they believe the landlord wants to evict them. They are also made to understand that if they are evicted, they are likely to get a poorer housing solution such as Out of London, smaller accommodation, and/or may have to contribute (more) towards the rent from their benefit or earned income. Any issues such as disrepair, poor property management etc are discussed so they can be resolved. An assessment of how much they can contribute to rent payment is undertaken.

Next there is a discussion with the landlord to find out why they want to evict. Grants and financial assistance can be offered to tackle disrepair and rent top ups are available. A cost benefit analysis is undertaken, and agreed payments signed off by a manager. Usually it is about money, landlords believing (correctly) that they can rent the property to other households for far more money. Other issues such as a poor relationship with the tenant are explored and attempts are made to resolve these issues. Any problem with the tenant such as rent arrears, tenants' damage etc are considered, so either they can be resolved or they may form the basis for an Intentionality investigation and decision. If the tenant needs to move, an attempt is made to get the landlord to give as long a time as possible before the tenant must leave. We also attempt to get the landlord to accept a new nominated tenant, with an incentive payment (if the property is suitable).

The landlord is reminded of the cost of evicting the tenant in terms of court costs, voids etc. which can amount to 25% or more of an annual rent. We also point out new regulatory requirements e.g. Right to Rent (checking immigration status) is now an issue for landlords taking on new tenants, as well as new requirements around Section 21 notices and Retaliatory eviction.

For family or friend exclusions, detailed discussion takes place with the applicant and excluder, to try to extend the stay whilst they and we source alternative accommodation. This is usually going to be better than having to move into a B&B room, sharing facilities etc. We also make use of Relate mediation services to resolve family difficulties.

Applicants are advised (if appropriate) of the likelihood of being accommodated outside London/Harrow.

Team Managers monitor individual officers housing advice prevention targets (HAPI's) to ensure that prevention work is being carried out.

Team Managers hold regular one-to-ones (bi-weekly) with officers to review cases and discuss issues and try to find new options to prevent homeless.

Limiting homelessness through thorough scrutiny of applications

Housing Advice & Assessment Officers are required to establish clear proof of homelessness before requesting emergency accommodation.

Those in rented accommodation are required to provide their Possession order and Bailiffs warrant. If an applicant is a licensee and being excluded, the Housing Advice & Assessment Officer is required to speak to the excluder to establish homelessness.

The Housing Advice & Assessment Officer (HA&AO) is required to check ID for all homeless applicants to ensure that they are eligible. Documents checked are passports and/or birth certificates and, if applicable, (e.g. EEA Nationals from outside the UK) provide proof of current employment to establish eligibility.

The HA&AO needs to be satisfied that applicant has a priority need, either through having dependent children or vulnerability. Documents checked to establish this, include child benefit and CTC award letters, bank statements which show these awards and supporting medical information.

The HA&AO checks bank statements for the last 2 months, utility bills and benefit award letters to ensure that homeless applicant has resided at the accommodation that they have stated on their application form. The HA&AO is required to make enquiries and investigate intentionality for all homelessness cases.

Prior to putting a case through to the Team Manager for acceptance, the HA&AO is required to carry out an Experian check to establish if applicant is currently linked to any other addresses. If they are, further investigation is required.

The Team Manager checks and authorises/rejects all cases put forward for emergency accommodation placement, and also has to approve before formal notification of a decision on an application (of acceptance of the full homelessness duty, or other finding). The Team Manager checks Intentionally Homeless (IH) decision letters to ensure that they are of a standard that will stand up to legal scrutiny and that the notice period given for household to vacate emergency accommodation period, is reasonable. (A finding of Intentionality doesn't necessarily save the council any money as Children Services has to accommodate the family until a long term housing solution is found. So where IH may be an issue, a discretionary offer of accommodation outside London is often made at an earlier stage, to try to avoid the lengthy and costly application, investigation and accommodation involved in IH decisions. It is also better for the family/children).

Senior Team Managers carry out spot checks on households being put forward for Emergency accommodation and acceptances.

Reducing the need for expensive B&B accommodation (offering and encouraging alternative accommodation before homeless duties or emergency accommodation is needed)

Approximately every 2 weeks there is a county court bailiff day that results in multiple evictions from private rented accommodation on the same day. (Currently there are often 2 eviction days a month with an average 13 evictions on each, but it can exceed 20. We anticipate at least 330 such evictions this year).

Applicants are offered the opportunity to find their own accommodation, with financial assistance as appropriate (deposit, rent in advance and administration fees, subject to their income and savings). They are also advised of the likely gap between Housing Benefit entitlement - HB (determined by Local Housing Allowance - LHA) and the actual rents; they are offered assistance to review their budget, to see how much they can contribute to the HB to meet their housing costs.

Assessment of whether they have a significant need to stay in Harrow is undertaken, and they are notified if they are likely to be housed by the Council outside Harrow or outside London. So they have an opportunity to obtain local accommodation for themselves, as an alternative.

As an alternative to Emergency Accommodation, the B&B team offer the option for applicants to make their own short term arrangements (with friends or family) for a couple of months and receive a grant of £1000 for doing this. We have had about 5 takers in the last few months. (It represents excellent vfm compared to the net cost of B&B to the Council.)

Once in B&B there is still very regular contact - an officer telephones families especially those who have been placed for over 6 weeks in shared accommodation. Families in shared B&B are offered self-contained accommodation where available outside London that they can use as emergency accommodation or long term temporary accommodation. The officer reiterates that they need to be looking for their own accommodation, that we can help finance the move and that they are extremely unlikely to be offered anything in Harrow.

The officer also checks that the family are still in B&B and asks questions about work, medical and education needs to ascertain if they have a priority to stay in Harrow/London.

Appeals against our homelessness decisions

All homeless applicants have the right to a review of decisions we make. We have an officer who independently assesses offers of accommodation we make in connection with homelessness duties. About 25% of accommodation we offer is withdrawn. This is usually because the customer has provided new information that indicates the accommodation is unsuitable. When an applicant refuses an offer of accommodation that is suitable, the homelessness duty ends. This decision is then reviewed, and in 90% of cases the decision is legally upheld by the reviews officer.

All other negative decisions are considered by a reviews officer; for example a finding of intentional homelessness or a decision that an applicant does not have a priority need. 118 reviews were requested in 2015/6, and two thirds of these were upheld. There is a balance between making tough decisions, but then having those decisions overturned on review or by the courts. If too few Review cases are overturned, this suggests the original decisions may be too “weak”. If too many are overturned, this suggests original decisions may have been poorly investigated.

Nudge Psychology

Customers still fail to appreciate the very limited options we can provide to families becoming homeless. This is in spite of them being repeatedly advised by their caseworkers that they will not receive social housing as a result of their homelessness, and any accommodation we can provide is likely to be outside London. This message has been reinforced through leaflets, newspaper articles etc. We’re moving to even more repetitive messaging and we’re seeking advice on “nudge psychology” to improve communicating this message. (Social housing is now only available for homeseekers in Band A and A+ with the most severe housing need. Homeless applicants are Band C)

Every contact with Housing Needs and enquiry about rehousing will contain the message that families will not get social housing in Harrow and private rented accommodation outside London is likely to be the outcome of homelessness.

We know that in cases when families have exhausted the homelessness process and reject the “suitable” accommodation outside London that we can offer, they sometimes are able to find accommodation for themselves. So we need to get families to try for this before they become homeless and stay in shared Bed & Breakfast accommodation for months. (Applicants can choose accommodation that we couldn’t offer, do a deal themselves with a landlord that pan London agreements prevent the council from doing, and/or consider a wider area that they had previously rejected.)

Pressure from other services / advocates

Unfortunately sometimes clients are advised that they have the right to obtain local and/or social housing, and that they should hold out for it. We recognise that we may need to do more work with internal colleagues and external partners to help them understand the current situation better (i.e. that there is no realistic prospect of affordable housing in Harrow for many households) and to help manage customer expectations.

We work closely with Children's Services, who often have to accommodate families that have turned down suitable accommodation and for whom no further housing duty exists. We attend team meetings to explain what housing options are available, and have a monthly joint liaison meeting with Children's Services.

Improving alternative housing options – the Out of London Team

Harrow is largely dependent on the Private Rented Sector to meet housing need which is now unavailable/ unaffordable for those on low to average incomes in Harrow and London. The Councils Temporary Accommodation (TA) Allocation Policy and TA Procurement Strategy have identified that more than half of all homeless applicants may now need to be housed outside Harrow. As an example of the problem, a couple with 2 children earning £40,000 per annum (an above average income) would still be entitled to some HB to pay rent on a private rented flat in Harrow. But as HB is roughly £200 per month below actual local rents, the family would need to top this up from income that the HB system disregards as it is reasonably needed for their other living expenses. See strategies:

http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7721/ta_allocation_policy-1_dec_2015

http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7720/ta_procurement_strategy-1_dec_2015

Harrow was one of the first London boroughs to start helping families move outside London. We still have difficulty coordinating the whole process of identifying suitable applicants, procuring suitable property in appropriate locations and supporting families with the move. All of this has now been made considerably more difficult because of recent litigation and out dated unrealistic legislation which has not been amended to take account of the government's welfare reform agenda.

This new initiative to bring together all staff working on this into an 'Out of London' team should significantly increase the number of successful moves, and families will have a clear understanding of the help that we can provide.

Other Harrow Initiatives

Harrow has always been in the forefront of developing new initiatives to assist households facing homelessness. Over a decade ago Harrow pioneered the housing options approach to homelessness.

- a) We were one of the first councils to undertake a thorough review of the way we interacted with our customers facing homelessness and developed Enhanced Housing Options.
- b) We were the first London borough to develop a social lettings agency (Help2Let) that has been copied by many. Initially it was able to generate an income by offering services to landlords and enabled us to stop using B&B. But the market has changed so fundamentally, that this is no longer possible. However the “brand” still gives us an advantage compared to our neighbours.
- c) We developed a voucher scheme to assist single homeless (non statutory) applicants, which has now been adopted by all our neighbours in West London Housing Partnership. (It is funded from DCLG grant for single homelessness)
- d) We were one of the first councils to offer accommodation outside London, and we are now the first council to be developing partnerships with councils (outside London) with excess social housing to be able to make binding offers of this accommodation. We are also the first council to use our services to link families into employment in their new area.
- e) We initiated a prospective tenants’ training course to help them obtain private rented accommodation and understand their rights and obligations. This has been widely imitated. We have now added training for single homeless households.
- f) Harrow, jointly with AHAS (Association of Housing Advice Services) and funded by the West London Partnership, developed an affordability methodology and report in the run up to the introduction of the household benefit cap. It has actual costings/data and is useful in deciding on housing options, and helps prevent challenges on affordability. It has been widely adopted.

Partnership Working

The Head of Housing Needs is joint chair of AHAS (a pan London Housing Needs managers group) and chairs the West London Housing Partnership Housing Needs & Homelessness group. Through these, we work closely to develop best practice in homelessness sharing success and learning. Harrow staff run workshops on prevention, affordability, Help2Let both in London and nationally etc.

We hold regular landlord fora to keep in touch with our main providers, and reach out to new landlords. The aim is to ensure landlords are up to date with the law to

ensure good standards of management. We also use the opportunity to find what services landlords want from the council, and to promote our various Help2Let products.

We are currently working on developing a joint West London service to procure accommodation and resettle families outside London

We work closely with Housing Benefit service on the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments, Welfare Benefit changes etc..

We have a joint panel with Children Services looking at accommodation issues for families for whom the homelessness duty has ended (because they are not eligible or refused suitable accommodation or are intentionally homeless).

We also coordinate with all London Councils on the prices we pay for emergency accommodation and private rented or leased temporary accommodation in London.

Future Pressures and Concerns

- 1) Following reorganisation of the council's Housing Benefit service, assessment of new claims has been taking 8 weeks. This is leading to rent arrears and makes landlords avoid benefit dependent tenants even more. Applications can now only be made online and there is now no one in Access Harrow or HB service to help, or offer advice on claims. For our tenants in emergency accommodation we are no longer able to tell if a customer has submitted a claim. (Tenants in our emergency and temporary accommodation have to pay rent). We estimate 40 to 50% are now not completing applications. To combat this, Housing Needs is having to employ a new benefit officer to undertake calculations to advise customers what their weekly contribution to the rent will be, and to ensure HB claims are made.
- 2) The next round of benefit cuts in the form of reductions of the overall household benefit cap starts in September. This reduces total benefit for non working households from £26,000 to £23,000 p.a. in London and £20,000 outside London. In work benefits are also effectively being cut. The amount private tenants can claim in Local Housing Allowance towards their rent is now frozen for 4 years to 2020; this is in spite of the fact that private sector rents are experiencing double digit annual increases in London.
- 3) Legislation change: the government has indicated it is going to be legislating to increase the duties on local councils to homeless households, and will extend the help we must provide to all homeless households. Currently single people without dependent children in reasonable health are only entitled to be given advice. The government accepts extra resources will be needed, but it is unlikely to provide sufficient extra funding, and there is simply not enough local accommodation to meet the needs of current statutory homeless households without extending duties to far more people. The Crisis Independent Report on Homelessness which includes such recommendations

is available online – see link. ([The homelessness legislation: an independent review of the legal duties owed to homeless people](#)).

- 4) The government has indicated the subsidy arrangements for Temporary Accommodation (TA) will change from April 2017. But the details have not been announced. Although there may be more resources set aside for this initially, it is likely the amount any local authority receives will be frozen, possibly based on accommodation used on 31st March this year.
- 5) The impact of government changes to social housing such as Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants, plus sales by councils to pay for this, is likely to reduce the supply of social housing further. We also expect to see more Housing Association properties let at, or near market rents meaning they are unaffordable for many families. Our regeneration programme for the Grange Farm Estate is also impacting on the supply of our stock that can be used as TA in the future.

Supply Issues

A separate report will outline the initiatives that we are undertaking to increase the supply of accommodation for homeless households.

Jon Dalton

Head of Housing Needs

May 2016

Appendix 1a - Comparative Homelessness activity data

1. Council Housing Stock

Harrow Council rented stock currently approx. 4860 homes.

West London Boroughs		
Dwelling stock: Number of Dwellings by Tenure and district as at 1 April 2015 (Table 100)	Local Authority (incl. owned by other LAs)	Registered Provider
Brent	8250	17020
Ealing	12530	10620
Harrow	4880	4070
Hammersmith & Fulham	12380	13180
Hillingdon	10050	7390
Hounslow	13090	7820
Kensington & Chelsea	6810	12960

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

Other comparators: Kingston-Upon-Thames, Redbridge and Sutton

Other comparable boroughs		
Dwelling stock: Number of Dwellings by Tenure and district as at 1 April 2015 (Table 100)	Local Authority (incl. owned by other LAs)	Private Registered Provider
Kingston- Upon-Thames	4790	2610

Harrow	4880	4070
Redbridge	4510	4810
Sutton	6010	5080

2. Right to Buy

Half of our 10,000 homes have been sold since RTB was introduced in 1979:

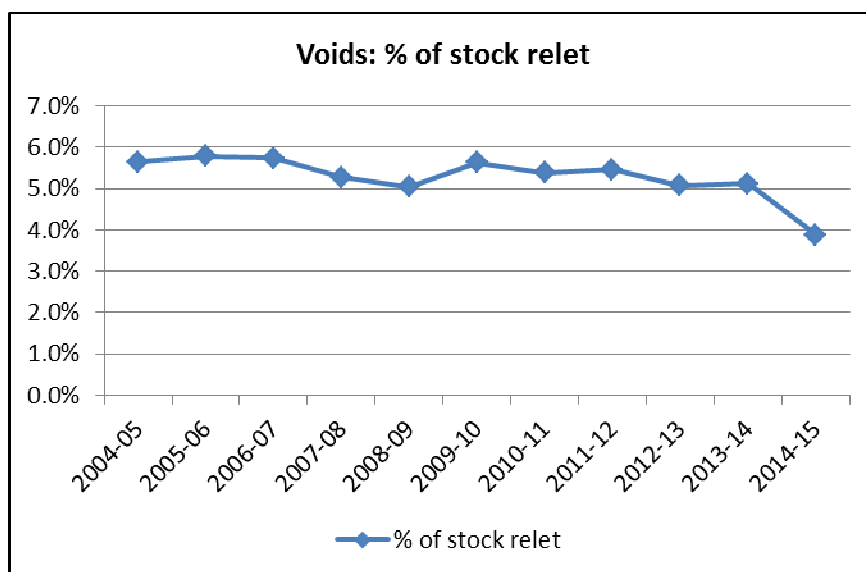
Year	1979-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
RTB Sales	4010	0	14	36	37	34

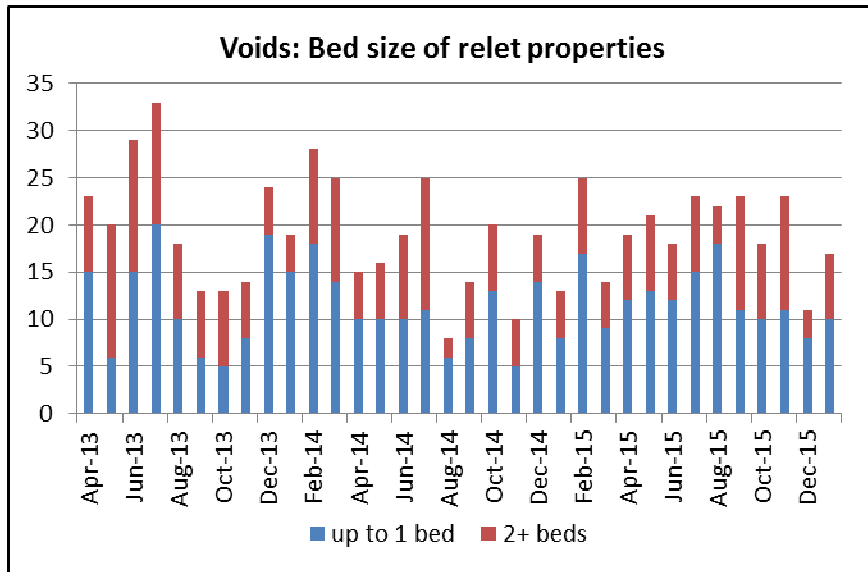
Many RTB homes are then let as private rented accommodation, which has an impact on HB and on turnover and social cohesion on estates. Currently 46% of leaseholders are non-resident.

3. Voids & Lettings

We have a low turnover of stock. In 2014/2015 48 of our own units were used for TA and 151 properties were let but only 53 were family size. Of the 98 properties that were 1 bed or bedsits/studios 42 were Sheltered Housing and 56 general needs.

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
No of properties relet	297	299	294	268	255	285	272	272	252	253	191
Stock	5262	5175	5122	5089	5067	5064	5059	4983	4965	4951	4915
% of stock relet	5.6	5.8	5.7	5.3	5.0	5.6	5.4	5.5	5.1	5.1	3.9





4. Housing Needs

As at 31 March 2016 in Harrow:

- 286 families are in B&B (including 507 children and pregnant women)
- 196 families in Emergency & Temporary Accommodation have been placed outside of Harrow (59 of these are in B&B)
- 104 households with children/pregnant women have been in B&B for more than 6 weeks
- The average cost to Harrow is £10.5k pa per household
- Spike on 'bailiff days'

The West London picture at the end of Quarter 3 (Dec 2015) is as follows:

- Temporary Accommodation numbers are down except in Harrow & RBKC
- B&B use is down except in Harrow & RBKC
- the number of families in B&B is slightly down except in Ealing, Harrow & RBKC
- the use of nightly paid self-contained TA is significantly down (from 1548 to 1338) except in Harrow, Hillingdon & RBKC
- prevention & relief is up (mainly due to a large increase in prevention – remain in home in Ealing)
- there has been a big increase in acceptances (from 863 to 1039)
- there has been a big increase in acceptances due to end of AST (from 401 to 517)
- the number of families in B&B for > 6 weeks is up from 107 to 178 (down in Brent; still none in H&F and RBKC).

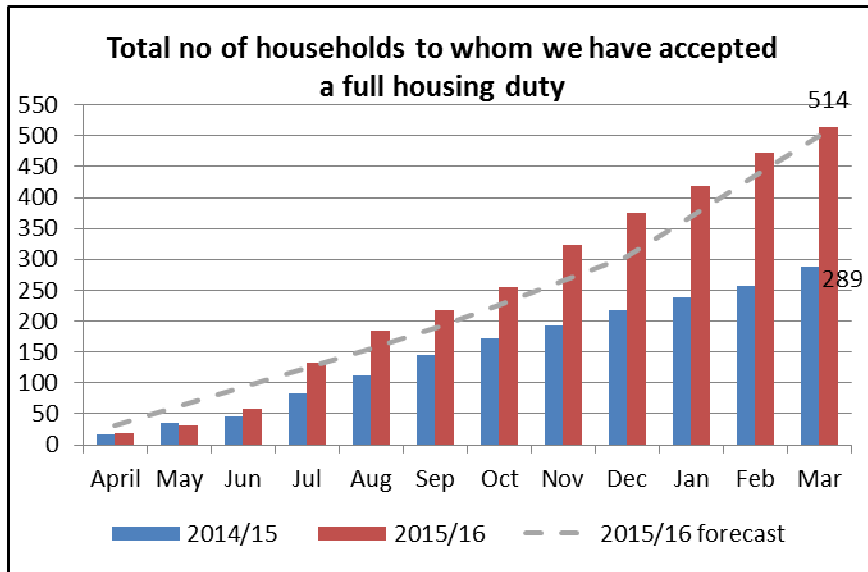
**Local authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985
and 1996 Housing Acts (financial year)**

2014/2015	Numbers accepted as being homeless and in priority need	Number accepted as being homeless and in priority need per 1,000 households	Eligible, homeless and in priority need, but intentionally	Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	Eligible, but not homeless	Total decisions
Brent	847	7.33	63	282	377	1569
Ealing	926	7.15	106	482	458	1972
Hammersmith & Fulham	444	5.52	21	52	53	570
Harrow	280	3.15	28	28	107	443
Hillingdon	307	2.89	69	32	128	536
Hounslow	452	4.44	19	37	63	571
Kensington & Chelsea	402	5.19	90	414	218	1124
Kingston-Upon-Thames	222	3.31	12	66	120	420
Redbridge	447	4.24	154	198	319	1118
Sutton	277	3.36	35	54	57	423

Harrow	Numbers accepted as being homeless and in priority need (unintentionally homeless)	Total decisions
Q4 2015/2016	139	187
Q3 2015/2016	162	218
Q2 2015/2016	156	219
Q1 2015/2016	59	97
Total 2015/2016	516	721
Q4 2014/2015	66	95
Q3 2014/2015	73	100
Q2 2014/2015	95	135
Q1 2014/2015	46	113
Total 2014/2015	280	443

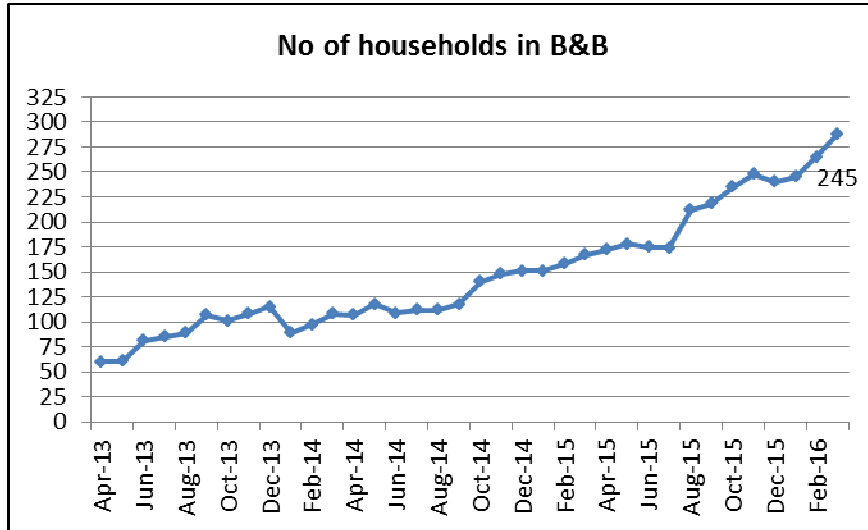
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

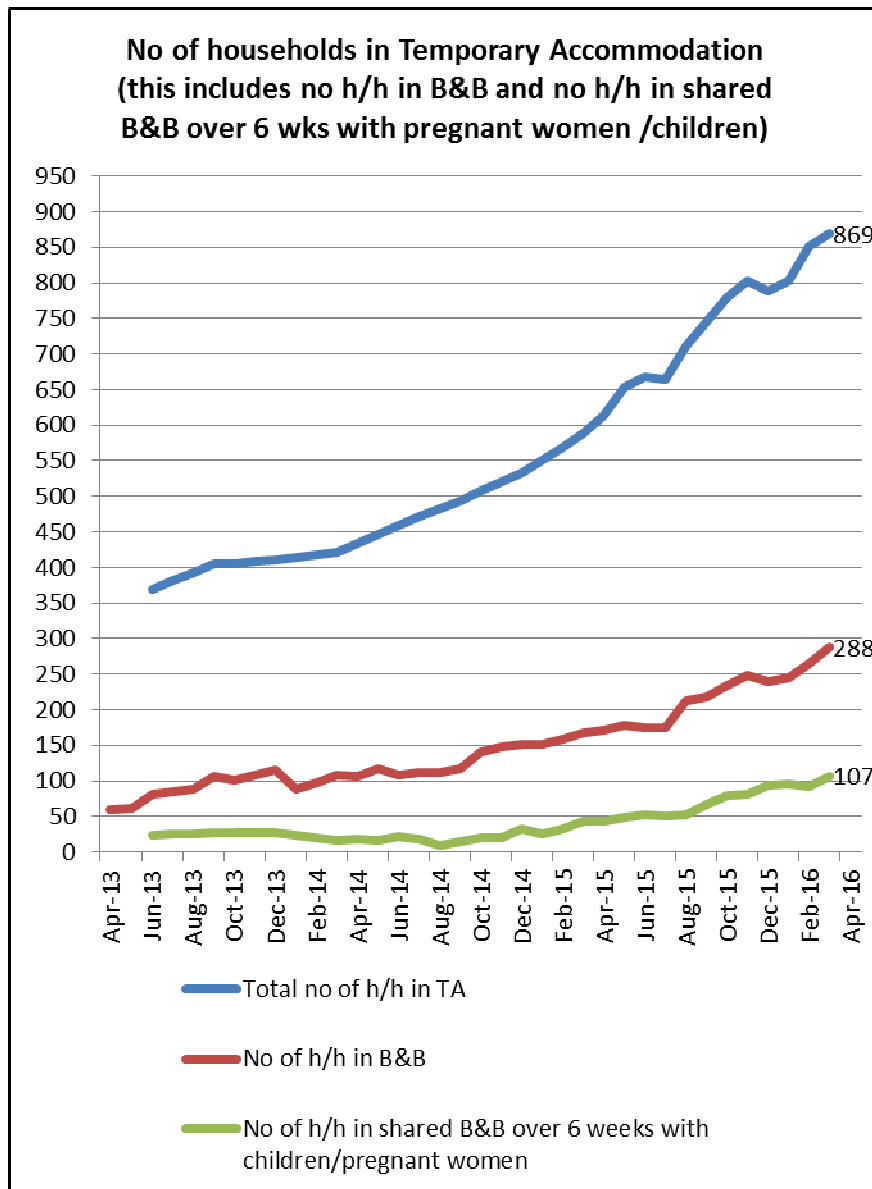
Total no of households to whom we have a full housing duty												
	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2014/15	16	35	46	83	113	145	173	193	218	238	258	289
2015/16	19	32	59	133	185	217	256	324	375	418	472	514



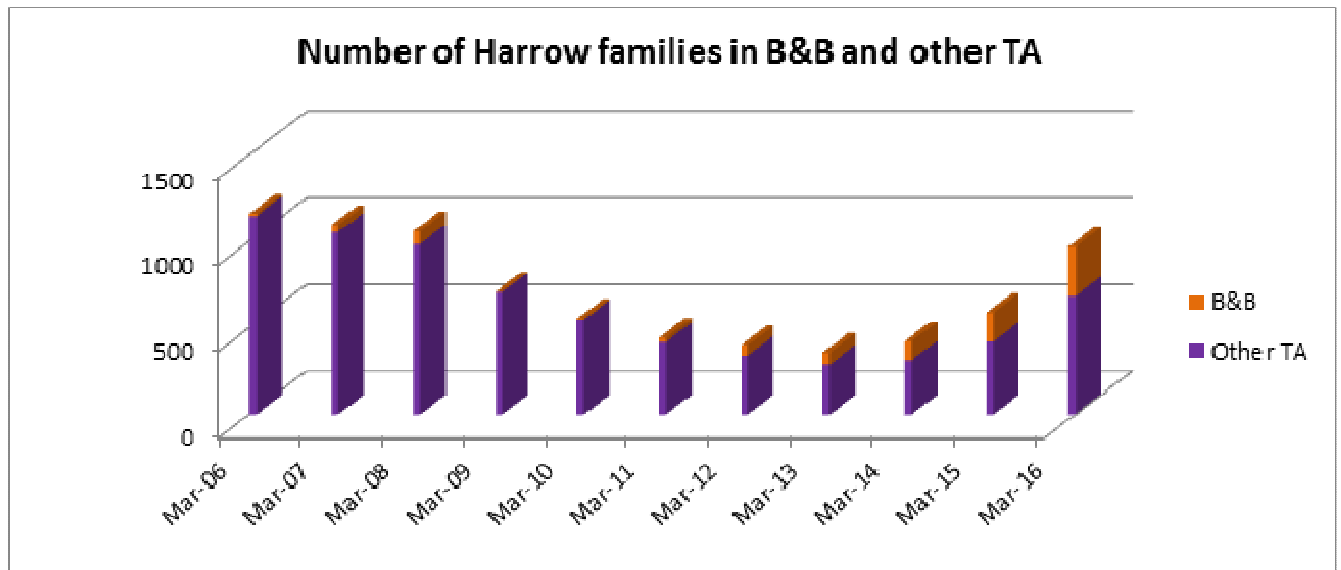
Households in Temporary Accommodation (snapshot at the end of each month)			
	Total no of h/h in TA	No of h/h in B&B	No of h/h in shared B&B over 6 weeks with children/ pregnant women
Apr-14	434	107	18
May-14	447	118	16
Jun-14	460	109	21
Jul-14	471	112	19
Aug-14	482	112	9
Sep-14	494	118	15
Oct-14	507	140	20
Nov-14	520	148	20
Dec-14	533	151	32
Jan-15	551	151	25
Feb-15	569	158	32
Mar-15	588	167	43
Apr-15	614	172	44
May-15	654	178	48
Jun-15	668	175	53
Jul-15	665	174	50
Aug-15	711	212	52
Sep-15	745	218	67

Oct-15	780	235	79
Nov-15	802	248	81
Dec-15	788	240	93
Jan-16	803	245	95
Feb-16	851	265	92
Mar-16	969	286	104





Number of Households in Temporary Accommodation											
Type of Accommm	Mar-06	Mar-07	Mar-08	Mar-09	Mar-10	Mar-11	Mar-12	Mar-13	Mar-14	Mar-15	Mar-16
B&B	14	40	73	2	5	25	60	69	108	167	286
Other TA	1,146	1,053	985	706	547	417	340	289	314	421	684
Total	1,160	1,093	1,058	708	552	442	400	358	422	588	970



5. Reasons for homelessness

Main reasons for homelessness:

- loss of an assured shorthold tenancy
- relationship breakdown, including domestic violence
- parents, friends or relatives unwilling or unable to continue to accommodate.

In 2014/2015 we reported 1426 cases of homelessness prevention and relief (1404 prevention and 22 relief). Homelessness prevention means helping people to address housing issues and avoid homelessness. Homelessness relief means helping someone secure accommodation when we've been unable to stop homelessness, even when they were not in priority need or intentionally homeless.

6. Income & Welfare context

70% of council tenants are in receipt of full or partial housing benefit

73% of tenants are aged 45 or over- an ageing profile

Figures for February 2016 for the whole of Harrow show that we currently have 478 households affected by the Bedroom Size Criteria in Harrow and 205 households are subject to the Benefit Cap. In February 2016 the council made 154 Discretionary Housing Payments and managed a caseload of 16384 HB cases and 13374 CTS cases.

The total number of people on Universal Credit in Harrow as of 10 March 2016 is 402; this new benefit started to be rolled out in Harrow on 5 October 2015.

7. PRS Rent levels

LHA rates from April 2016		
Number of bedrooms	Weekly	Monthly
Shared room rate	£87.40	£379.77
1 Bedroom (self-contained)	£185.81	£807.39
2 Bedrooms	£242.33	£1,052.98
3 Bedrooms	£303.00	£1,316.61
4 Bedrooms	£374.40	£1,626.86

Average Market Rent levels- May 2016	
Number of bedrooms	Weekly
0 Bedroom (studio/bedsit)	£208
1 Bedroom	£300
2 Bedrooms	£362
3 Bedrooms	£457
4 Bedrooms	£672

This page is intentionally left blank

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	8 June 2016
Subject:	Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group – Report and Recommendations for consideration
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap (Divisional Director - Strategic Commissioning)
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Councillor Pamela Fitzpatrick
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	None at this stage
Enclosures:	Final report of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group which met between August 2015 and March 2016. The Group focused on the areas of the Benefit Cap and low pay.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Consider and endorse the report from the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group
- 2) Forward the Review's report and recommendations on to Cabinet for consideration

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The recommendations are based on the evidence gathered throughout the Review, which comprised a literature review; three challenge panels and an "Out and About" phase. Members were provided with information from a number of partner organisations, service users and expert witnesses and carefully considered this evidence in the forming of these recommendations.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, if the report's recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, the services affected will need to provide detail of any costs likely to be incurred.

Performance Issues

There are no specific performance issues associated with this report.

Environmental Impact

There are no specific environmental impact associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

There are none specific to this report.

Equalities implications

Equality implications may have to be considered on implementation of the recommendations.

Council Priorities

This review relates to the corporate priority of:

- Making a difference for the vulnerable
- Making a difference for families

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Statutory clearances not required.

Ward Councillors notified:

NO

** Delete as appropriate.*

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Rachel Gapp, (Head of Policy)
rachel.gapp@harrow.gov.uk,
020 8416 8774

Background Papers:

Briefings prepared by the policy team, internal officers and external stakeholders which were presented to this Review Group at the meetings of 19 October 2015, 2 March 2016 and 30 March 2016.

This page is intentionally left blank

Overview and Scrutiny

IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORMS IN HARROW

A report by the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group

May 2016



Contents

Chair’s Foreword.....Page 3
Scope of Review.....Page 4
Executive Summary.....Page 4
Methodology.....Page 5
Executive Summary.....Page 5
Context.....Page 7
Membership.....Page 17

Chair's Foreword



On behalf of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group, it is a pleasure to present this report to you.

The welfare reforms have had a major impact on the lives of those living and working in Harrow, and the ways in which the Council and its partners respond to this is critical.

The recommendations made in this report address a wide range of issues raised throughout the Review, from Council Tax Benefit right through to procurement practices.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the many officers who attended meetings, prepared briefings, presentations and provided critical information often at very short notice; and the many agencies and partners who gave up their time to contribute to this Review in such a meaningful way.

For me, the most rewarding part of the Review was meeting with the service users to hear their individual and collective stories of how the welfare reforms are affecting their everyday lives. The tenacity and courage they showed was an inspiration, and it is my hope that if the recommendations we have been made can be implemented, that they will make a tangible difference to their lives.

And finally a sincere thank you to the members of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group for their perseverance and dedication, committing to a number of meetings in order to cover this vast and challenging area, undertaking research, and getting out into the community to hear from those affected first hand.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'P. Fitzpatrick'.

Pamela Fitzpatrick
Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group Chair

Scope of Review

To understand the experiences of benefit claimants and those who have needed to claim benefits in the past or may need to in future.

To understand what services are available and what policies are in place to help people come off, live better on, or avoid needing benefits and how effective they are.

To propose robust recommendations which if accepted and implemented by Cabinet, will help people come off, live better on, or avoid needing benefits.

Executive Summary

Local Government is facing an increasingly challenging financial situation with funding having been cut significantly in recent years. The Government has introduced a radical package of welfare reforms which is likely to have an impact on many thousands of households across the capital; and London has been hit hard due to the high cost of accommodation in the city. The likely consequences of the reforms are contested and hard evidence is only now beginning to emerge.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 saw the start of significant reform to welfare provision in Britain. The Conservative government has continued this reform programme with the welfare announcements made in the summer budget of July 2015 and the Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

The welfare reform programme has changed over time, but can be said to have four key themes and intentions:

- a number of out of and in work working age benefits to be replaced by Universal Credit to simplify and improve work incentive
- transfer of claimants from benefits related to disability or illness through a reassessment of work capability, extending work conditionality to a wider group of claimants; conditionality has also been extended to lone parents with youngest children over the age of 5
- a single welfare to work programme for the most disadvantaged (the Work Programme), in which the risk of underperformance has been absorbed by contractors to an unprecedented degree
- an ongoing programme of reduction in coverage and value of working age benefits.

The welfare reforms implemented at the point of starting this review included:

- restricting the annual uprating of many working age benefits to 1%
- lowering the rates for Local Housing Allowance
- the Benefits Cap
- means testing Child Benefit
- limiting contribution based employment and support allowance
- the Social Sector Size Criteria
- replacing Council Tax Benefit with Council Tax Support
- restrictions on Working Tax Credits
- raising the deduction rate for non dependents

In addition, a number of other reforms were implemented from April 2016 or are being gradually implemented over several years, including the selection below. Other reforms are planned for introduction in subsequent years:

- housing benefit backdating: for four weeks maximum, down from three months
- benefit freeze: working age benefits, including tax credits and Local Housing Allowance (not maternity allowance, maternity pay, paternity pay and sick pay) – for four years

- Benefit Cap reduction: to £23,000 in London
- Personal Independence Payment migration: There is an ongoing process of reassessing Disability Living Allowance claimants and transferring them to Personal Independence Payment. As part of this process, a quarter will not be eligible for any Personal Independence Payment and many others will see their payment reduced.

The increased use of sanctions was also discussed in detail throughout the Review.

The Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Group was established in August 2015 and due to the area of welfare reform being both vast, complicated and fast moving, it sought to focus on the Benefit Cap and low pay, and the impact these specific areas were having on the local population. The Group's aim was to understand what the Council and its partners and stakeholders could potentially do better to improve the lives of those who may be adversely affected and enable them to come off, live better on, or avoid needing benefits.

Several key themes emerged during the course of the Review including the barriers to employment and improving the employment prospects faced by those where English was not their first language. Harrow is proud of being a diverse Borough, but it is important to recognise that with this diversity comes particular challenges, and this was one such challenge which, although not unique to Harrow, became apparent as a key issue in the Review.

Another key area investigated was the impact that Harrow Council could have in relation to its pensions fund investments and procurement practices and a number of recommendations have been made around potentially gaining Living Wage accredited status for the Borough.

The recommendations from the Review seek to address the key issues raised by Service users and expert witnesses.

Methodology

Literature Review – Each member researched a number of written sources, (briefings, government papers, articles etc.) and set aside one meeting in the Review to feedback and discuss the available literature.

Three **Challenge Panels** were held, with internal officers and external organisations being invited to provide expert opinion on the subject areas

An “**Out and About**” phase: where members visited organisations and service users in the local community, to gain further insight into the effect that the welfare reforms were having on the local population.

The Group formed recommendations after each stage of the Review and these are outlined below.

Recommendations

Please note the context around each recommendation is set out further on in the report.

1. Harrow Council should ensure that sufficient provision remains in place for residents who will struggle to complete transactions with the Council using the internet and set out robust measures for determining if this is being achieved
2. Harrow Council should ensure that residents are able to transact with Harrow Council about their Council Tax using email, rather than simply by post
3. Harrow Council should record first or preferred languages for people with poor English and explore the use of vetted volunteers to translate information relating to debt and support options into first languages where required
4. Officers to investigate ways of ensuring that appointments are not automatically cancelled through failure to respond to a confirmation email (often due to lack of regular internet access)

5. Harrow Council to contact residents who are likely to be affected by the reduced Benefit Cap at the earliest possible opportunity and often thereafter, ensuring a joined up package of support across departments and organisations is provided; this should go beyond sending letters and be tailored to the needs of the individual households
6. Harrow Council should ensure that housing officers and other relevant officers are trained to understand how best to work with clients in order to encourage them to recognise and address debt issues at the earliest opportunity. This includes behavioural aspects and how and when to engage to achieve the best outcome
7. All households affected or likely to be affected by the Benefit Cap to be offered a referral to a relevant voluntary sector organisation for holistic financial advice to maximise income, reduce outgoings and deal with emergencies and priority debts
8. Undertake a journey mapping exercise to understand the experiences of people using information and advice services to inform Harrow Council's information, advice and advocacy strategy development. This could include a focus on Care Act related services as they are relatively new services
9. Harrow Council should ensure that letters regarding Council Tax arrears are easy to understand and more supportive, and not threatening, in terms of the language used. They should include details of the local Citizens Advice and other relevant organisations that may be able to offer assistance and how residents can appeal decisions made by Harrow Council
10. Harrow Council should consider whether to provide a Discretionary Housing Payment to all those who are applying for a Benefit Cap exemption benefit (e.g. Personal Independence Payment) until the outcome is known
11. Officers to monitor how many Council Tax support claimants are subject to legal proceedings each year, and to report back on this to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee
12. Officers to investigate signing up to the best practice protocol, produced jointly by the Local Government Association and Citizens Advice, on collecting Council Tax arrears
13. Vulnerable clients (as defined by the Council's Vulnerability Policy) to receive more proactive support with debt or money related issues at an early stage when they become known to Harrow Council
14. Monitor how many people who receive an Emergency Relief Scheme award are subject to the Benefit Cap and use this intelligence to understand what is driving emergency needs and how best to respond to it
15. Make the Council's policy on the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment available to all relevant voluntary and community sector organisations
16. Harrow Council to ensure that departments share information about households to better understand, for instance, the impact of housing, debt or poverty issues on other needs, outcomes and services. This information should be used to improve the way services are delivered to individual families and build business cases for wider change
17. Encourage schools to be aware of good practice in relation to identifying families at risk of homelessness and helping them to prevent this by signposting when possible
18. Investigate whether concerns expressed about the potential for carers to have to give up responsibility for caring for people (who don't live with them), with subsequent additional costs for the local authority, are actually happening

19. The Leader of the Council to write to the relevant Minister to request that the Government reduce the time taken for information about changes in benefit entitlement to be communicated to Harrow Council, to enable timely payment of appropriate benefits to residents. Officers to provide data to substantiate this claim
 20. Harrow Council should undertake a quicker assessment of housing benefit claims and reassessment in response to changes in income (people on zero hours contracts, moving in or out of work, or self employed etc.)
 21. Investigate how often housing benefit forms are returned to applicant because they are not completed properly, and whether anything needs to be done as a result
 22. Investigate whether Harrow Council and its partners could do more to support victims of domestic abuse who have left the abuser and are living in unaffordable temporary accommodation, or are not leaving for financial reasons. This should include clarifying the scale of such issues
 23. Recommend to the Pension Fund Forum that it considers participation in the Investor Collaborative by signing joint investor letters; selecting particular companies for deeper engagement (i.e. at AGMs); and speaking directly to Asset Managers about areas of concern
 24. Officers to consider the Social Value weighting in procurement to determine whether there is any scope for extending this beyond 10%, or any way of expanding/ clarifying the questions for this section of the tender documentation to encourage companies to pay the living wage and to see this as a positive move
 25. That the issue of low pay is identified in Harrow Council's Corporate Plan as a priority area for tackling in Harrow – this will allow Procurement colleagues to identify low pay as a particular issue in the Social Value section of the tendering documentation
 26. Officers to contact the Living Wage Foundation with a view to getting advice towards Harrow Council becoming Living Wage accredited, and how to tackle the issues it faces in this (around contractors paying the Living Wage in particular)
 27. Officers investigate whether there are any London Borough's comparable to Harrow that are Living Wage accredited, and if so to have a discussion with them to gain information as to how they have managed this.
- Note: London Boroughs currently accredited are Brent, Camden, Lambeth, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Hounslow, Islington, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich and City of London.*
28. Officers to investigate ways of highlighting workers' rights to particular areas of the community (ie those who do not speak/ understand English well)
 29. Officers to investigate ways of extending access to ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes in the Borough
 30. Officers to investigate opportunities for upskilling start up businesses in financial management
 31. Officers to investigate Camden Council's pilot into utilising flexi working in apprenticeships to enable young parents to take up places, and to assess as to whether a similar project could be run in this Borough
 32. Officers to undertake pilot research on the prevalence of payment below the minimum wage and National Living Wage, with a focus on high risk sectors and apprentices.

Context

Benefit Cap – Meeting of 19 October 2015

The Benefit Cap was announced by the government in the 2010 spending review as part of its strategy to reform welfare for people of working age; the rationale being that work is the best route out of poverty and whilst income is important, poverty is about more than income in isolation, it is about lack of opportunity and being caught in a cycle of deprivation. The government's aim was to strike the balance between increasing incentives to work, introducing greater fairness, making financial savings, all whilst continuing to protect vulnerable claimants for who work is not an option. The Benefit Cap sets a limit on the total amount of benefits that working age households can receive so that, generally, households on out of work benefits will not receive more in welfare payments than the average weekly wage. As announced in the Queen's Speech 2015, the Benefit Cap will be lowered from £26,000 to £20,000 (£23,000 in London), capping the amount a household can receive at £442 per week, down from £500. A single person without dependent children is currently capped at £350 per week.

Implementation of the Benefit Cap in **Harrow** commenced in August 2013. 282 households (of approximately 90,000) were capped in July 2014, and there has been a gradual decline in the number of households capped, since the October 2013 peak at 353.

Benefits and tax credits (with the exception of working tax credit and housing benefit for those living in supported accommodation) that provide an out of work income for adults, or support for children and housing are **taken into account** in applying the Benefit Cap (including child benefit, child tax credit, housing benefit, incapacity benefit, income support and job seekers allowance), and where the household's total amount of benefit income exceeds the Cap, the local authority will reduce the household's housing benefit by the amount of the excess. Legislation specifically **excludes state pension and pension credit**, as the policy is aimed at working age people; it also excludes one off payments, non cash benefits (including free school meals) and payments not made by the government (including statutory sick pay). Working tax credit and some **disability related benefits** are also **exempt** from the Cap and an exemption also applies if the claimant or their partner has been in employment for at least 50 weeks out of the 52 weeks before their last day of work.

The Review Group heard **evidence** from:

- Megan Jarvie – Child Poverty Action Group,
- Jo Silcox – Harrow Law Centre,
- Susan Kearney – Citizens Advice,
- Raksha Pandya – MIND in Harrow,
- Councillors Sachin Shah – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Major Projects,
- Cllr Glen Hearnden – Portfolio Holder for Housing,
- Jon Dalton – Service Manager for Housing Needs,
- Fern Silverio – Head of Collections and Benefits,
- Paul Hewitt – Divisional Director of Children and Young People Services,
- Charisse Monero – Head of Service for Troubled Families Transformation,
- Councillor Simon Brown – Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People,
- Mark Billington – Head of Economic Development and Research
- Victoria Isaacs – Project Manager – Xcite Project

Megan Jarvie from Child Poverty Action Group, advised that she worked on London wide campaigns and had recently authored research looking at the impact of the welfare reforms on the London population and further that she had undertaken work on the potential impacts of the reduction of the benefit cap. CPAG were lobbying the government on this Bill, with a particular emphasis on protecting children who will be disproportionately affected by the Bill on implementation. Megan provided a synopsis of the households affected by the Bill, in particular advising that only 15% of capped households were in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance, and so the remaining 85% had limitations in terms of seeking employment; with half of this cohort being lone parents with children under 5, and 10% being lone parents with children under 1. Childcare was a significant barrier in terms of these households entering employment. Megan cited the example of the London Borough of Brent where this had been identified as an issue and the council had

taken action to train child minders in certain areas of the Borough, which provided local employment opportunities as well as making childcare more accessible in areas where it was required most.

Jo Silcox from Harrow Law Centre provided an overview of the implications of the Benefit Cap in a national context and advised of the local position and in particular that the Benefit Cap was having a large impact in Harrow due to the large proportion of people living in private rented accommodation, the high rents experienced in temporary accommodation, and the high proportion of larger families in the Borough. She explained that there were also issues for those who were able to gain employment to contend with, including the inflexibility of the system, the high number of people on zero hours contracts (and the problems this creates when assessing entitlement when income varies) and long delays in establishing a claim for housing benefit and reassessment of benefits (especially housing benefit) when income varies. Jo advised that many of her clients were experiencing difficulty in accessing suitable properties, due to landlords not wishing to take on tenants in receipt of housing benefit, or demanding large deposits, or credit checks being required.

Susan Kearney from Citizens Advice raised the issue of people entering into zero hours contract jobs or self employment that did not prove to be very profitable, in response to those affected trying to gain access to employment as a means of getting out of the benefit cap; and Raksha Pandya (MIND) spoke through a number of cases MIND in Harrow had dealt with in relation to the Benefit Cap.

Jon Dalton summarised the action taken by his team prior to the introduction of the Benefit Cap, advising that they had contacted 700 households, but this number had been inaccurate and only around 200 households had actually been affected by August 2013. In Harrow, it was generally larger families who were affected by the Cap, so it was difficult to source alternative housing for them as they were more likely to have one or more child in a key stage of education; support was provided through Discretionary Housing Payments. Around 200 families were being supported, with around 50% of these from the original cohort. The introduction of the reduced cap would affect smaller households, and those in both housing association and local authority housing. The team had estimated that 400 additional families would be affected by the lowering of the cap, but this number may fall. It may be easier to find alternative housing for smaller households as they were less likely to have children in key stages of education, but in his view, the more effective way of assisting these households was through them gaining employment.

Fern Silverio advised that the Discretionary Housing Payment budget had been reduced, and that officers were not aware as to what the future allocation of this fund would be.

Councillor Shah continued that the Council's budget was currently projected to overspend and that this was mainly due to housing needs and homelessness; this was having an impact across the Council as all departments had to make further savings to mitigate against this.

Paul Hewitt advised that his Service did not collect data on the Benefit Cap but that there was a clear impact on families with the number of families requiring debt support having increased, and also the first response team are dealing with around five households a week affected by homelessness; and Victoria provided a synopsis of the services provided by the team. Work was undertaken on a one to one basis to ascertain individual needs, then officers would consider options, including job matching and CV workshops. In particular she outlined services offered for those with serious mental health conditions, in collaboration with the Central and North West London Mental Health Trust (CV writing, interview practice, help in assessing their skills and assistance in looking for local job opportunities). This was slow work but had moved people closer to the labour market, and one into one work so far, with work experience negotiated for others.

Mark Billington advised that the team had received funding from London Councils and European funding for an individual placement service for those with common mental health conditions; this was currently out to tender and he hoped to have the service in operation by January 2016.

"Out and About"

The Review Group undertook on the ground research to inform their deliberations. This was referred to as the "Out and About" phase of the Review. Councillors visited three local organisations (detailed below) to

talk to service users and staff about their experiences, circulated a written account of these visits to members of the Review Group and highlighted key points at the following meeting:

- MIND in Harrow
- Citizens Advice
- Harrow Association of Somali Voluntary Organisations

Further to the varied input from all in attendance, and the evidence gathered at the “Out and About” phase of the project, the Group made the following **recommendations**:

Customer Service

Councillors visiting HASVO reported that the residents they met reported that they sometimes found they could not get access online when they attempted to use the My Harrow Account and when they telephoned through for support they were referred back to online services. It was also noted that many claimants of benefits asked their children to set up My Harrow Accounts and make appointments on their behalf.

Whilst only around 8% of Harrow residents do not have access to the internet either at home or at work, many others may not feel confident using the internet for transactions.

- 1. Harrow Council should ensure that sufficient provision remains in place for residents who will struggle to complete transactions with Harrow Council using the internet and set out robust measures for determining if this is being achieved**

A number of Councillors reported receiving correspondence from constituents who had emailed the Council regarding their Council Tax/ Council Tax Support, to be told that the email address was not being checked. Some report being advised to use the post instead. Case studies were provided to the Group.

- 2. Harrow Council should ensure that residents are able to transact with Harrow Council about their Council Tax using email, rather than simply by post**

Councillors who visited MIND reported that the service users they spoke to identified that it would be helpful if there were “letters from the Council which were written in their first language explaining the help that is available on debt management”

- 3. Harrow Council should record first or preferred languages for people with poor English and explore the use of vetted volunteer to translate information relating to debt and support options into first languages where required**

Councillors visiting HASVO reported that “many claimants of benefit do not have IT accounts. When someone offers them an appointment some of them have to use their children’s accounts to make this. The system is that two days before the appointment they have to confirm their attendance but because they’re using their children’s accounts they don’t hear about the appointment in time and therefore do not have a chance to confirm and they lose the appointment”

- 4. Officers to investigate ways of ensuring that appointments are not automatically cancelled through failure to respond to a confirmation email (often due to lack of regular internet access)**

Officers advised that in advance of the introduction of the Benefit Cap, the households that were thought likely to be affected were contacted by the Council to inform them and to ask them to make contact so that proactive support could be offered to improve their situation and prevent or minimise the negative consequences of the Benefit Cap upon the households. It was reported that this contact, whilst consuming resources, resulted in limited engagement from the households contacted and as such, the conclusion was arrived at that ‘it is not worth starting intensive casework too soon’. As such, the Housing Needs departments were not intending to contact households likely to be affected by the reduction in the Benefit

Cap until the implementation date was relatively close. This concerned Review Group members, who felt that residents should be given as much warning and support to change their circumstances as possible.

Citizens Advice related more positive experiences of past interventions to support those affected by welfare reforms and asked, “whether a council steering group could be set up to support the larger group of clients who may be affected (by the reduction in the Benefit Cap level) as they have been effective in the past.” The organisation asked that “the Council takes action to ensure that all households have sufficient advance warning of the cap to allow enough time for them to take action prior to being affected, using proactive communication, particularly where households have little current engagement with the Borough or a housing provider; housing associations could be effective allies in this work, but sufficient attention should also be paid to the private rented sector.”

- 5. Officers to contact people who are likely to be affected by the reduced Benefit Cap at the earliest possible opportunity and often thereafter, ensuring a joined up package of support across departments and organisations is provided; this should go beyond sending letters and be tailored to the needs of the individual households**
- 6. Harrow Council should ensure that Housing Officers and other relevant officers are trained to understand how best to work with clients in order to encourage them to recognise and address debt issues at the earliest opportunity. This includes behavioural aspects and how and went to engage to get the best outcomes**
- 7. All households affected or likely to be affected by the Benefit Cap to be offered a referral to a relevant voluntary sector organisation for holistic financial advice to maximise income, reduce outgoings and deal with emergencies and priority debts**

Harrow Law Centre told the Review Group that before clients of the Law Centre become known to them, “they have often been signposted from one agency to another without anyone managing to sort out the problem. Consequently the issue has often escalated to the point where they are facing homelessness. There is a need for early intervention and good quality casework advice rather than just signposting”.

The Review Group were concerned to hear this and keen that the Council determine the extent of such experiences.

- 8. Undertake a journey mapping exercise to understand the experiences of people using information and advice services to inform the councils’ information, advice and advocacy strategy development. This could include a focus on Care Act related services as they are relatively new services**

Finance

Councillors who visited both HASVO and MIND reported how the residents they met found the letters from the Council about benefits and Council Tax debt to be harsh in their wording, citing repossessions, among other things. This was a source of stress and anxiety for these individuals. Moreover, it was felt that there was not enough advice from the Council on how to manage debt.

- 9. Harrow Council should ensure that letters regarding Council Tax arrears are easy to understand and more supportive, rather than threatening, in terms of the language used. They should include details of the local Citizens Advice Bureau and other relevant organisations that may be able to offer assistance and how residents can appeal decisions made by the Council**

Citizens Advice noted that some people may have the Benefit Cap applied to them during the period in which they are applying for, or awaiting the outcome of an application for, a benefit that would give them exemption from the Benefit Cap, for instance Personal Independence Payment. They proposed that the Council should make Discretionary Housing Payment available to all those in this situation.

10. **Harrow Council should consider whether to provide a Discretionary Housing Payment to all those who are applying for a Benefit Cap exemption benefit (e.g. Personal Independence Payment) until the outcome is known**
11. **Officers to monitor how many Council Tax support claimants are subject to legal proceedings each year**
12. **Officers to investigate signing up to the best practice protocol, produced jointly by the Local Government Association and Citizens Advice, on collecting Council Tax arrears**
13. **Vulnerable clients (as defined by Harrow Council's Vulnerability Policy) to receive more proactive support with debt or money related issues at an early stage when they become known to Harrow Council**

In 2015/16, Harrow allocated £200,000 to an Emergency Relief Scheme. Those who met the eligibility criteria are given a financial or in kind award for basic or essential goods that they could not otherwise afford. In 2015/16, the majority of spend was allocated to white goods and furniture.

Council Officers provided the Review Group with considerable information about the use of the Emergency Relief Scheme but only limited data was available on the characteristics of those who used the ERS. This included whether they were subject to the Benefit Cap.

14. **Monitor how many people who receive an Emergency Relief Scheme award are subject to the Benefit Cap and use this intelligence to understand what is driving emergency needs and how best to respond to it**

In their written evidence, Citizens Advice noted that they “would like to have more clarity on the way the Discretionary Housing Payment budget is operated. Consideration of how decisions are made and if the criteria is fair would be helpful. We have seen cases where someone who has made repeated Discretionary Housing Payment applications and not moved has been turned down but their circumstances mean they are not able to move to somewhere more affordable.”

The Review Group considered that it was important for organisation such as Citizens Advice that provided advice services to people facing homelessness, to be clear on the Council's policy for the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment and recommend that the Council rectify this.

15. **Ensure Harrow Council's policy on the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment is available to all relevant voluntary and community sector organisations**

Children's Services

Officers representing Children's Services explained that 'Targeted and Early Intervention Services' work with a number of families who are homeless for a variety of reasons, including the Benefit Cap. The First Response Team dealt with around five households affected by homelessness per week.

Many such families are offered temporary housing outside of Harrow in neighbouring boroughs, but due to having stable school placements and family and social networks in Harrow turn these offers down. The families are then considered to be 'intentionally homeless'. This results in families moving away from their communities and networks, creating isolation and disruption to children's education.

Officers further noted that the number of families requiring debt support had increased.

Data on the number of families who were in contact with Targeted and Early Intervention Services who were subject to the Benefit Cap had not been collected. The Review Group felt that it was important for officers to hold this information and use it both to identify and act upon trends and identify causal

relationships, and to ensure that individual support plans for families were tailored to their circumstances, working with other Council departments where appropriate.

- 16. Harrow Council to ensure that departments share information about households to better understand, for instance, the impact of housing, debt or poverty issues on other needs, outcomes and services. This information should be used to improve the way services are delivered to individual families and build business cases for wider change**

In relation to Homelessness, representatives of the Children and Families Directorate told the Review Group that in “some cases schools have been supportive, providing pastoral support, after school child care through the pupil premium to help with the challenge of being placed a significant distance from the school creates. This has enabled families to minimise the impact of homelessness on their children and to maintain some stability. In one case a young mother would bring her older child to their school in Harrow and spend the rest of the day in the Borough with a young baby as they could not afford the travel costs to and from Brent. In other cases schools have encouraged families to apply for schools in the borough they have been placed rather than retain a place in Harrow”.

Individual Councillors were also aware of schools that did excellent work identifying families who were at risk of homelessness and providing support to prevent homelessness.

The Review Group welcomed the support provided by schools to vulnerable families and would like to see support of the highest standard available through all schools to all families facing or experiencing homelessness. Officers stated that schools had no duty or capacity to identify or help families to prevent homelessness except to tell them who to approach.

- 17. Encourage schools to be aware of good practice in relation to identifying families at risk of homelessness and helping them to prevent this by signposting when possible**

Adult Services

Harrow Law Centre informed the review that, “a person who is caring for another person and receiving carers allowance for their role is not required to...find work because it is recognised that they provide full time care for the relative. However, they are not exempt from the Benefit Cap. Therefore a person who becomes subject to the cap may find they must make the choice to give up caring for the disabled person to find employment to avoid the Benefit Cap. This obviously has the potential for a significant impact on the Local Authority”.

- 18. Investigate whether concerns expressed about the potential for carers to have to give up responsibility for caring for people (who do not live with them), with subsequent additional costs for the local authority, are actually happening**

Housing Support

Harrow Citizens Advice reported that people “no longer subject to the cap because they have found work are reporting delays in getting the cap removed by Housing Benefit – we understand that this is because Housing Benefit have to wait to hear from the Department for Work and Pensions for authority to remove the Cap”. This was confirmed by Council officers. Citizens Advice expressed concern that “those people in receipt of Housing Benefit will face an enormous challenge to find another private sector home suitable for their family in London if they lose their home because of rent arrears.”

Councillors who visited HASVO identified a similar problem: “A large number of Somali clients are on Zero hours contracts and an advisor at the centre suggested this was around 70%. As a result they have a fluctuating income. This is difficult because they have to be assessed for benefit every month. They have to submit a payslip on a particular day of the month and then have to wait 4 weeks for this to be processed. Some months they have to pay back an amount assessed from the previous month and then they do not earn enough to manage on and have difficulty finding money for food”.

Harrow Citizens Advice also stated that “when changes of circumstances are reported to the Council (either being exempt from the cap or no longer exempt from the cap) their housing benefit is suspended and they are likely to fall into rent arrears or have an overpayment by the time the award goes back into payment”.

Harrow Citizens Advice provided the following case study on this topic: “In order to avoid the Benefit Cap she took on a zero hour job as a part time carer... she is juggling looking after mother and children and she was exhausted. Her reason for seeking advice was that her irregular hours were causing lots of problems with housing benefit. Housing Benefit had to be adjusted on a fortnightly basis, if not Housing Benefit would take an average and it would not be accurate. Client putting everything she could into rent payments to avoid arrears and she was under great financial stress (council tax reminder, utility debts)”.

Harrow Citizens Advice reported that they “have met several clients who appear to have been encouraged into self employment to avoid the Cap without realistic advice about whether their business plan is viable. Many clients have very little turn over and fail to build up a customer base and are living almost entirely on tax credits”. Further, they “are finding that Housing Benefit claims for those who have become exempt from the Benefit Cap through self employment is also a problem and can be interrupted for unusually long periods because people are not skilled in providing the information required by housing benefit. Forms appear to have to be returned fairly often for further information to be supplied”. As a result, Citizens Advice asked “whether short workshops could be held for people who move into self employment and will need to meet obligations”.

- 19. The Leader of the Council to write to the relevant Minister to request that the Government reduce the time taken for information about changes in benefit entitlement to be communicated to Harrow Council, to enable timely payment of appropriate benefits to residents. Officers to provide data to substantiate this claim**
- 20. Harrow Council should undertake a quicker assessment of Housing Benefit claims and reassessment in response to changes in income (people on zero hours contracts, moving in or out of work, or self employed etc.**
- 21. Investigate how often Housing Benefit forms are returned to applicant because they are not completed properly, and whether anything needs to be done as a result**

In their written submission to the Review, Harrow Law Centre argued that “The Cap as it stands particularly affected women fleeing domestic violence. There is currently no exemption from the Cap for temporary accommodation. We are concerned that those who do not access advice may be at risk of returning to a violent partner because they cannot afford to live in temporary accommodation”. The Review Group agreed that this if such instances are occurring in Harrow, this would indeed be concerning.

- 22. Investigate whether Harrow Council and its partner organisations could do more to support victims of domestic abuse who have left the abuser and are living in unaffordable temporary accommodation, or are not leaving for financial reasons. This should include clarifying the scale of such issues**

Low Pay – Pensions and Procurement – Meeting of 2 March 2016

As of April 2016, the government has introduced a higher minimum wage for people aged over 25, which it has called the ‘**national living wage**’. This legal minimum is referred to in the below text by its full name. Other references to the ‘Living Wage’ refer to a notional wage level, intended to represent the minimum pay needed for an employee to maintain an acceptable standard of living.

Outside of London, the Living Wage is linked to the ‘Minimum Income Standard’. London uses a different methodology. The **London Living Wage** is calculated by the Greater London Authority and is based on the average of two methodologies, plus 15% to protect against unforeseen events: Estimate of ‘Low Cost but Acceptable’ budget for various households to achieve adequate warmth and shelter, a healthy palatable diet, social integration, and avoidance of chronic stress. In 2015 this was £7.80; wage required to attain 60% of the median income for London (using different medians for different household types, then

weighting these in the overall calculation). In 2015 this was £8.60. If means tested benefit were not taken into account (that is, tax credits, housing benefits and council tax support) the Living Wage would be approximately £12.00 per hour.

In Harrow in 2015, 41.8% of jobs based in the Borough paid below the (London) Living Wage. The only higher figure was 41.9% of jobs paying below the (outside of London) Living Wage in West Somerset. Whilst this is not a comparison against the same benchmark, it can be considered a valid comparison as the Living Wage levels used are both supposed to reflect the cost of living etc. in each area, which clearly differ. The figure for residents paid less than the London Living Wage is 21.1% (2013/2014 average), reflecting that many of the people who live in Harrow do not work here; 21% of jobs based in Harrow in 2010 paid below the London Living Wage and Harrow has the largest percentage growth of low paying jobs of any London Borough (from 21.1% to 41.8%). Harrow's economy is made up of small businesses and SMEs rather than large multinational organisations. According to the Rowntree Foundation, minimum wage jobs account for 1 in 8 jobs in micro businesses and 1 in 20 jobs in large firms (250 or more employees).

The Review Group heard evidence from:

- Lisa Nathan – Share Action
- Treasury and Pensions Manager – Harrow Council
- The Divisional Director for Commercial, Contracts and Procurement at Harrow Council.

The following recommendations were formed as a result of this meeting:

Share Action made a case for the links between responsible investments and the living wage; in particular outlining the work which had been undertaken on lobbying investors at AGM meetings, and working with Asset Managers to promote the benefits of paying a living wage (the Investor Collaboration).

- 23. To recommend to the Pension Fund Forum that it considers participation in the Investor Collaboration by signing joint investor letters; selecting particular companies for deeper engagement (ie at AGMs); and speak directly to Asset Managers to raise issues of concern**

The Divisional Director for Commercial, Contracts and Procurement at Harrow Council advised the Group of the current practices in Harrow Council in terms of procurement. He advised that there was a social value weighting attributed to the process, and that this was currently 10% of the consideration in tenders. He expanded that low pay was not currently specified in the Council's Plan as a priority area, and if this was the case, he could include it specifically within the social value aspect of tenders in the future.

- 24. To request that officers consider the Social Value weighting in procurement to determine whether there is any scope for extending this beyond 10%, or any way of expanding/clarifying the questions for this section of the tender documentation to encourage companies to pay the Living Wage and to see this as a positive move**
- 25. To recommend to Cabinet that the issue of Low Pay is identified in the Council's Corporate Plan as a priority area for tackling in Harrow – this will allow Procurement colleagues to identify low pay as a particular issue in the Social Value section of the tendering documentation**

Councillors asked Lisa Nathan from Share Action for her advice in relation to how the Council could overcome challenges it faced in relation to becoming an accredited Living Wage employer. She suggested that the Council make contact with the Living Wage Foundation and have discussions with London Boroughs who have attained accredited status.

London Boroughs currently accredited are Brent, Camden, Lambeth, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Hounslow, Islington, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich and City of London.

- 26. To request that officers contact the Living Wage Foundation with a view to getting advice towards the Council becoming Living Wage accredited, and how to tackle the issues it faces in this (around contractors paying the Living Wage in particular)**
- 27. To request that officers investigate whether there are any London Boroughs comparable to Harrow that are Living Wage accredited, and if so to have a discussion with them to gain information as to how they have managed this.**

During the course of discussion, Councillors raised concerns that there were particular pockets of the population in Harrow who were being taken advantage of as they were not aware of their rights, specifically due to language skills.

- 28. To request that officers investigate ways of highlighting workers' rights to particular areas of the community (i.e. those who do not speak/ understand English well)**

Low Pay – Enterprise – Meeting of 30 March 2016

As well as **reducing likelihood of being in employment**, the native immigrant **wage gap** in the UK attributable to having **English as an additional language** is about 26% for males and 22% for females. Non native speakers with a good command of English are three times more likely to work in higher professional jobs than those who struggle with English. England is the only UK nation not to have a national strategy for ESOL provision. Demand for **ESOL** (English for speakers of other languages) is increasing, but public funding – through Skills Funding Agency – has reduced 40% in the last 5 years. (The Joseph Roundtree Foundation paper titled Entry to, Progression in and Work). Over five million adults lack functional literacy and numeracy skills, and 11 million do not have basic digital skills. At the current rate of enrolment in learning, it would take 20 years to support all the adults that would benefit from help.

Members heard evidence from:

- Stephen Evans – Deputy CEO Learning and Work Institute
- Mark Billington – Head of Economic Development and Research
- Paddy O'Dwyer – Education Professional Lead and formed the following recommendations based on the evidence presented:

Through the course of discussion it was recognised that due to the make up of the local population there was a real demand for ESOL classes, and that this may be one way of breaking down barriers to people in low paid jobs improving their prospects, and for those not in work to gain employment. In answer to a specific question, Mark Billington stated that financial management was the biggest factor in start up business failure – but that Harrow did have the lowest failure rate in London (45%). Members also made reference to Camden Council's apprenticeship pilot, where flexi working was encouraged as a way of enabling single parents to take up places they would otherwise not be able to commit to and strengthen/build their skills in a particular area to enhance their careers.

- 29. To request that officers investigate ways of extending access to ESOL classes in the Borough**
- 30. To request that officers investigate opportunities for upskilling start up businesses in financial management**
- 31. To request that officers investigate Camden Council's pilot into utilising flexi working in apprenticeships to enable young parents to take up places, and to assess as to whether a similar project could be run in this Borough.**

The Office for National Statistics estimate is that around 1% of jobs (approximately 250,000) pay below the minimum wage, although it is argued that the official figure is likely to be 'much lower than the actual number' due to the methodology used (Settle for Nothing Less, Centre for London). Other research finds:

- 157,000 to 219,000 workers in the care sector were being underpaid the National Minimum Wage, when travel time was taken into account – Kings College 2011
- 14% of apprentices across Great Britain did not receive the basic minimum appropriate for their age (BIS Research Paper No. 207)
- 17% of Newham residents aged over 21 in employment were paid less than the minimum wage in 2013 (Ipsos Mori, Newham Household Panel Survey)

Newham Council (Pay by the Rules) have argued for devolution of the full suite of powers to enforce the National Minimum Wage to local authorities, giving them the freedom to tackle non compliance.

32. Pilot research on the prevalence of payment below the minimum wage/ national living wage, with a focus on high risk sectors and apprentices.

Membership

- Pamela Fitzpatrick (Chair)
- Councillor Ghazanfar Ali
- Councillor Jeff Anderson
- Councillor Marilyn Ashton
- Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
- Councillor Margaret Davine
- Councillor Josephine Dooley
- Councillor Ameet Jogia
- Councillor Barry Kendler
- Councillor Vina Mithani
- Councillor Chris Mote
- Councillor Janet Mote
- Councillor Phillip O'Dell
- Councillor Christine Robson
- Councillor Rekha Shah

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contacts: Edward Smith; Rebecka Steven (Policy Team – Strategic Commissioning)

Background Papers:

Briefings prepared by the policy team, internal officers and external stakeholders which were presented to this Review Group at the meetings of 19 October 2015, 2 March 2016 and 30 March 2016.

All available via [SharePoint](#)

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting:	8 June 2016
Subject:	Final Report of the Social and Community Infrastructure Scrutiny Review
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Environment & Enterprise: Policy Lead – Councillor Jeff Anderson Performance Lead – Councillor Manjibhai Kara
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	Report from Social and Community Infrastructure Scrutiny Review Group

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report presents the findings and recommendations from the Social and Community Infrastructure Scrutiny Review. The review examined the general “soft” infrastructure provision that helps community formation from new and expanded residential development and sought to then identify specific provision that would be appropriate.

Recommendations:

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Consider and endorse the report from the Social and Community Infrastructure Scrutiny Review.
- 2) Forward the review’s report and recommendations on to Cabinet for consideration.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

1. A Scrutiny Review Panel was established in late December 2015 to:
 - Examine the factors that contribute to a new residential development becoming a community from examples across the country;
 - Examine the factors that help an existing community accept and integrate with new residents and vice-versa from examples across the country;
 - Explore in particular the contribution that can be made by the Council and voluntary and community sector organisations to develop less tangible community benefits such as cohesion, self-help, volunteering, neighbourliness and mutual support; and
 - Recommend initiatives that could facilitate community development in the Borough of Harrow.
2. In summary, the Review Panel was tasked with considering the general “soft” infrastructure provision that helps community formation from new and expanded residential development and then identifying specific provision that would be appropriate.
3. The Review Panel comprised Councillor Marilyn Ashton, who chaired the Review, and Councillors Jeff Anderson, Michael Borio, Ameet Jogia, Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Primesh Patel and Stephen Wright. The Panel met on four occasions and received presentations from Paul Nichols, Divisional Director of Planning; Mark Billington, Head of Economic Development and Research, Edwin Whittingham, representing the Institute of Directors and Frank Vickery, Architect and social housing entrepreneur. The Panel also undertook a site visit to identify lessons that could be learnt from developments that have taken place comparatively recently in the Borough. The Panel also reviewed an extensive library of reports and publications relating to various aspects of the brief.

Recommendations

4. Cabinet is recommended to:
 1. Commission a site-specific master plan supported by Supplementary Planning Documents to ensure that the regeneration programme for Harrow fulfils the ambitions for successful cohesive, sustainable communities including quality housing, employment opportunities, viable retail, entertainment uses and a heritage offer (paragraph 8);
 2. Ensure that existing communities are substantially involved in the design of new developments and that these do not repeat some of the mistakes the Panel has identified in comparatively recent schemes (paragraph 11);
 3. Commission a strategy for attracting and retaining employments

uses in Harrow that recognises the Borough's advantages (paragraphs 21 and 24);

4. Evaluate the Complete Streets and Create Streets concepts in relation to the vision for residential regeneration in Harrow (paragraphs 9-11 and 27);
5. Investigate further the potential advantages of retaining the freehold of Council-owned land that forms part of the regeneration area to give greater control over the form of development and the tenure residential development provided (paragraph 28)

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, if the report's recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, the services affected will need to provide detail of any costs likely to be incurred.

Performance Issues

There are no specific performance issues associated with this report.

Environmental Impact

There are no specific environmental impact associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

There are none specific to this report.

Equalities Implications

The review considered during the course of its work, how equality implications have been taken into account in current policy and practice and considered the possible implications of any changes it recommended. This is reflected throughout the review group's final report.

Council Priorities

This review relates to the corporate priority of:

- Build a Better Harrow

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Statutory clearances not required.

Ward Councillors notified:	N/A
-----------------------------------	-----

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Rachel Gapp, Head of Policy, rachel.gapp@harrow.gov.uk, 020 8416 8774

Background Papers: Final report of the Social and Community Infrastructure Scrutiny Review.

Report of the Scrutiny Review into Social and Community Infrastructure

Introduction

1. A Scrutiny Review Panel was established in late December 2015 to:
 - Examine the factors that contribute to a new residential development becoming a community from examples across the country;
 - Examine the factors that help an existing community accept and integrate with new residents and vice-versa from examples across the country;
 - Explore in particular the contribution that can be made by the Council and voluntary and community sector organisations to develop less tangible community benefits such as cohesion, self-help, volunteering, neighbourliness and mutual support; and
 - Recommend initiatives that could facilitate community development in the Borough of Harrow.

2. The brief approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified the following measures of success:
 - Production of a menu of community infrastructure projects and initiatives, and their impact, that have been introduced across the country that contributed to the success of major residential development in terms of community cohesion both amongst new residents and between new and existing communities;
 - Recommendation of a specific package of measures for consideration in relation to the development in the Borough of Harrow that can lead to:
 - Successful integration of the new and existing communities;
 - The diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances being appreciated and positively valued;
 - Those from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities; and
 - Strong and positive relationships being developed between people in the area.

3. In summary, the Review Panel was tasked with considering the general "soft" infrastructure provision that helps community formation from new and expanded residential development and then identifying specific provision that would be appropriate.

4. The Review Panel comprised Councillor Marilyn Ashton, who chaired the Review, and Councillors Jeff Anderson, Michael Borio, Ameet Jogia, Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Primesh Patel and Stephen Wright. The Panel met on four occasions and received presentations from Paul Nichols, Divisional Director of Planning; Mark Billington, Head of Economic Development and Research, Edwin Whittingham, representing the Institute of Directors and Frank Vickery, Architect and social housing entrepreneur. The Panel also undertook a site visit to

identify lessons that could be learnt from developments that have taken place comparatively recently in the Borough. The Panel also reviewed an extensive library of reports and publications relating to various aspects of the brief.

Amongst these background documents, there were several definitions of sustainable and cohesive communities, many of which mixed physical features, service provision and social attitudes, but were not clear about how these less concrete qualities could be engendered. However, a common theme was that a cohesive community is one where there is a common vision and sense of belonging, and where people from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities so that the place where they reside becomes more than simply a place to sleep.

Approach

5. The Review Panel identified three significant aspects to their brief early in the project: namely
 - Developing a vision for an area/borough and master and site specific planning to achieve that vision;
 - Providing a range of employment opportunities; and
 - Ensuring inclusivity in design.
6. The Panel felt that there were more fundamental issues that influenced the successful development of a community than the 'soft' issues set out in the brief. These fundamental issues included ensuring that there were adequate transport links for new developments; that the design did not visually and physically divide social from other forms of housing tenure in a manner where the development comprises a demarcation between the 'haves' and 'have nots'; and that there were employment opportunities and leisure provision so that, in the widest sense, there were 'things to do'. Without these basic elements built into regeneration proposals from the beginning, none of the softer social initiatives would have a realistic chance of success and, equally, if these elements were present, the need for social cohesion programmes would be reduced. These themes ran through the evidence provided by expert witnesses and spoke to the need to ensure development in general should reflect local needs articulated through supplementary planning documents to inform potential developers how an area needs to evolve.

Master Planning and site specific guidance

7. The Review heard about the scale of the regeneration envisaged for the 'Heart of Harrow area', which it is hoped will include investment of some £1.75 billion and the development of around 5,500 new homes, as well as schools and other infrastructure buildings. The Divisional Director of Planning has justifiably called the scale of proposed change to amount to "Place Making". In this context, it is important to have a vision of the sort of place that the Council is trying to make.

8. The regeneration programme includes helping to meet the need for more residential accommodation, which could include the conversion of office floor space to residential uses; and relocating the Civic Centre. These ambitions need to be defined through more detailed outcomes that describe the sort of place that the Council wants Harrow to become. The evidence that the Panel heard clearly indicated that without the use of specific, site-by-site master planning, supported by supplementary planning documents, there is a danger that the economics of piecemeal development will produce an undesirable and incoherent result. The current very high value of residential development sites will tend to drive out other uses and exacerbate the danger of Harrow becoming a residential only location, better known as a purely dormitory borough, without a convincing employment, retail, entertainment or heritage offer. In fact, inappropriate and incoherent regeneration programmes can deliver the destruction of existing communities and has a less well-established capacity to create them.
9. The Review considered the work of Create Streets, a non-partisan social enterprise and independent research institute focusing on the built environment which encourages the creation of more and better urban homes. Create Streets believe that what gets built has become divorced from what people actually want. They think that this is due to:
 - density targets;
 - building and planning regulations;
 - very high land values;
 - little focus on long-term returns;
 - a contempt by some for how most wish to live.
10. New developments often therefore meet top-down targets rather than real people's needs. Communities, neighbourhoods, even landowners have lost control of what is built in this country. The 'market' for new homes in certain instances is broken. Many oppose new homes as they don't like what gets built, hence the need for the adoption of comprehensive master planning and the adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents.
11. While the Review Panel does not support all of the analysis that Create Streets put forward, there is some compelling evidence that, as the demand for residential accommodation across the whole of London in particular is so far in excess of supply, there is little incentive for the market to produce well designed schemes that promote formation and sustainability of communities. The evidence that the Panel received suggested that the involvement of existing residents in estate renewal and existing communities in local area regeneration can help to define plans that support the development of a place in which people will actively want to live with a good prospect of becoming a community. Create Streets have been involved in the development of an alternative development proposal for the Mount Pleasant former post office sorting office site in Camden. The land owner's proposal was for a series of large blocks which local people have described as being like a fortress whereas Create Streets and the local community have proposed a higher density, but human scale alternative called Mount Pleasant

Circus. Their lesson is that attractive development proposals only need imagination and need not provide fewer units on a site.

12. The importance of design was underscored by a site visit that members of the Panel undertook to comparatively recent developments in Harrow. At Bentley Grove, the Panel identified first, that the development is isolated due to the lack of easily accessible transport links making it very hard to get there without using a car. The Panel also noted that the development includes three blocks of flats within an estate otherwise comprising houses. The Panel found that these blocks were out of character and inappropriate because such a high density development belongs in a more urban environment and not in a Green Belt site such as this. The lessons from this development need to be applied to future development proposals such as that likely to be made at the RNOH.
13. Similarly, at RAF Stanmore, the Panel was stuck by the narrowness of the streets, which lead to a congested feel with parked cars creating pinch points. There are detached garages that are dotted around the estate looking like strange small houses. The design of the individual dwellings was acceptable, but they seem to be crammed in, giving an impression of overcrowding. The biggest issue here, however, was the complete separation of the social housing from the owner occupied dwellings and this degree of separation runs the risk of creating ghetto-like areas. The Panel felt that, with a little more imagination, RAF Stanmore Park could have delivered a real sense of place that people would have been really proud of as opposed to simply being somewhere to live.
14. The Panel also visited Stanmore Place where, again, the segregation of the social and private housing was plainly evident with no connectivity between the different homes provided giving no impression of a sense of community.
15. These examples, and particularly the estate version of the “poor door”, demonstrate that without site specific planning requirements, developments can too often provide designs that undermine the aspiration for a cohesive community, a common sense of belonging and give a physical manifestation of different life opportunities.
16. The next section, which deals with employment opportunities, also reinforces the importance of providing a vision for the Borough and site specific supplementary planning documents to ensure that the loss of employment in Harrow is halted and reversed.

Employment

17. The Panel heard evidence from a representative of the Institute of Directors. This contrasted Harrow’s approach to seeking to expand the employment opportunities available in the Borough with those exhibited by Watford in generating a medical business campus adjacent to Watford General Hospital. The message of this evidence was that, rather than suggesting Harrow was available for all or any businesses,

it needed to examine the local factors that would appeal to particular forms of enterprise and market the Borough accordingly.

18. For Harrow, the plus factors included the quality of the environment, of education and of the quality of life that the Borough could offer. It has good transport links –especially rail - although this could also be a dis-benefit since it makes it easy to commute to work elsewhere in London and beyond.
19. Harrow’s benefits were confirmed by an examination of a report prepared by Grant Thornton which scores a number of Business Location factors. The report helps local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, central government and other stakeholders understand and identify opportunities to address the factors that make areas less attractive. It is also used by businesses in making decisions about where to locate their premises. The combined Business Location Index score ranks the overall quality of areas but, as costs are also a critical factor, it includes an analysis of the costs of operating from each area. The most attractive business locations are also often the most expensive places.
20. Eight of the top ten performers on the index are in London. All London Boroughs score above the national median but the top locations are central London areas. Harrow does not feature in the top 25 authority areas nationally for quality versus cost; economic performance or people and skills. However, it is 18th in the Environment and Infrastructure category, which looks at connectivity, innovation based on the presence of universities and R&D centres and the quality of life based on health, school performance, crime levels and access to local amenities and an attractive natural environment. The current and projected level of traffic congestion is likely to threaten this good result if it can not be addressed.
21. The Institute of Directors advised that, rather than adopt an “open for anything” approach, Harrow should play to the strengths identified in the Grant Thornton report and other advantages including the diversity of the population as a draw for businesses based in Asia, and perhaps parts of Eastern Europe, developing an education business hub related to Harrow’s strong education performance, and the extensive small business sector in the Borough.
22. In relation to retail, the Panel heard that that the range of shops in Watford, Uxbridge, Brent Cross and Westfield at Shepherd’s Bush would make it difficult for Harrow to compete for a mass shopping market. However, in addition to satisfying the local market, there might be scope for growing one or more niche shopping markets.
23. The change in planning legislation that allowed offices to be converted to residential uses without the need for new planning consent had led to a loss of available office floor space – although much of that which had been lost had been vacant for some time and, therefore, this had not had an immediate impact on employment potential. The reducing supply and use of offices did however impact on the attractiveness of

the Borough as a headquarters location as evidenced by the migration of companies out of the borough following mergers. In relation to new office uses, the Panel also considered the Government's Estates Strategy, but this envisages a concentration of staff into buildings currently in Government ownership rather than seeking new accommodation.

24. The Panel accepted the view that, in relation to employment opportunities, the Council needed to decide what it wanted from the regeneration opportunities, and to hold out for development that would advance this vision. The suggestion made earlier in this report regarding site specific planning briefs would be equally important to promote employment as attractive residential development. Without the Council having robust master planning and the adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents, it will find itself on the 'back-foot' with developers telling the Council what they want to build rather than the Council setting out its vision and enshrining that vision into adopted planning policy.

Inclusivity in Design

25. One of the background papers that the Panel received was a report prepared by the Prince's Foundation entitled "What People Want" which examined the forms of housing development that are the most popular and how communities have influenced regeneration proposals through community consultation. Their research has revealed a reasonably clear picture: people want where they live to be more than just a building. They want it to be somewhere distinct, somewhere that enhances their quality of life: a place. Creating places goes beyond merely creating spaces - it means designing buildings that cater to the needs of residents, supporting quality public spaces and providing opportunities for communities to thrive. Their research has shown that people do want parks and green spaces but they also want buildings that respect a traditional form and (often) style. Very few people want to live in huge or high buildings. People prefer streets, blocks and squares. Mixed use and mixed communities are valued by most. Perhaps above all, communities want to be genuinely involved in a real and not stage-managed consultation process.
26. The report concluded that people do not want rapid urban development that is exclusive, overbearing or which compromises the character of their local areas. Policy-makers, developers, local representatives, designers and architects need to give these public preferences the consideration they are due if we are to achieve a successful, thriving built environment.
27. The design message of the Prince's Foundation report was echoed in a report prepared by Savills for the Cabinet Office, which suggests that more and better housing can be provided by replacing existing estates with what they termed "Complete Streets". This term means streets of terraced housing and mid-rise mansion blocks, which would also contain neighbourhood employment, services and shops. The report

envisages increasing densities from the average for a 'blocks and towers' estate of 78 homes per hectare to an average of 135 homes hectare plus neighbourhood community and commercial premises. This insight should form part of planning briefs for the regeneration of Harrow, including in relation to re-provisioning of the Council's own stock.

28. These messages were given practical expression in evidence that the Panel received from Frank Vickery, architect and social housing entrepreneur. Mr Vickery described how, predominantly in East London, he had been involved in the development of high quality affordable housing through involving public sector land owners who in one way or another provide development land for little or no cost. While these approaches may not be directly applicable to the regeneration of Harrow, the Panel felt that there were valuable lessons to be gleaned from his description of partnership approaches, the advantages of retention by public bodies or social landlords of the freehold interest in land to maintain influence over the form and tenure of developments, and the use of cross subsidies to enable some of the issues that the Panel had identified in relation to master planning and design to be realised.
29. The Panel also noted the benefits of "meanwhile" uses of land proposed for redevelopment in the future – in the case of the Coin Street development, land had been used for temporary car parks over a number of years yielding significant income to support the provision of high quality social housing.
30. Finally, the Panel heard of the success of the HARCA in Poplar – a Housing and Regeneration Community Association. Poplar HARCA is a charity and Housing Association working in the capital's most deprived neighbourhoods, tackling entrenched poverty through an innovative approach to delivering youth work, employment, health, financial inclusion, social enterprise and community organising. Poplar HARCA was established in 1996 and is a resident led housing association. Working only in Poplar enables it to focus resources into the local neighbourhoods with a view to transforming these into thriving areas where people are proud to live. Again, the example may not be immediately applicable to Harrow, but it does embody the advantages of co-ordinated master planning for all of the land uses that contribute to supporting a successful, cohesive community to demonstrate that Harrow's regeneration could be more than just housing.

Recommendations

31. Cabinet is recommended to:
 1. Commission a site-specific master plan supported by Supplementary Planning Documents to ensure that the regeneration programme for Harrow fulfils the ambitions for successful cohesive, sustainable communities including quality housing, employment opportunities, viable retail, entertainment uses and a heritage offer (paragraph 8);

2. Ensure that existing communities are substantially involved in the design of new developments and that these do not repeat some of the mistakes the Panel has identified in comparatively recent schemes (paragraph 11);
3. Commission a strategy for attracting and retaining employments uses in Harrow that recognises the Borough's advantages (paragraphs 21 and 24);
4. Evaluate the Complete Streets and Create Streets concepts in relation to the vision for residential regeneration in Harrow (paragraphs 9-11 and 27);
5. Investigate further the potential advantages of retaining the freehold of Council-owned land that forms part of the regeneration area to give greater control over the form of development and the tenure residential development provided (paragraph 28)

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	8 th June 2016
Subject:	Scrutiny Work Programme 2016/17
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	All
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	Scrutiny Work Programme 2016-17

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report accompanies the scrutiny work programme 2016-17.

Recommendations:

Councillors are recommended to:

- I. consider and agree the scrutiny work programme 2016-17

Section 2 – Report

The council's constitution requires the Overview and Scrutiny committee to consider its work programme at the first full meeting following Annual Council.

The attached document sets out the themes and issues scrutiny wishes to consider in 2016/17 through scrutiny leads, reports to committee or scrutiny challenge panels. The Scrutiny Leadership Group comprising the chairs and vice chairs of the scrutiny committees and scrutiny leads are the guardians of the work programme and will meet quarterly to review and prioritise the items on it, taking into account any new, emerging or topical issues that may arise during the course of the year and warrant scrutiny's attention.

The items in the work programme for the various scrutiny committees will be turned into a forward plan that also takes into account the standard and statutory items that also come to committee such as petitions, scrutiny reviews and progress reports, policies that are part of the council statutory policy framework, items from health etc.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Performance Issues

There are no performance issues associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

Equalities implications

An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken for this report as it summarises the activities of scrutiny and does not propose any changes to service delivery.

Corporate Priorities

All

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Rachel Gapp, Head of Policy, 0208 416 8774
rachel.gapp@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

This page is intentionally left blank

DRAFT Scrutiny Work Programme 2016/17

Topic	Why	Outcome	Methodology	Comment
Challenge Panels				
1	Community Involvement in Parks	Supports service improvement	Challenge Panel	This review has started. Challenge panel will take place in June and report in July.
	To examine the current levels of community involvement in Harrow's parks. To develop an understanding of what residents want from their local parks. To explore innovative practices in the delivery of park services. To identify ways in which Harrow Council can best deliver 21 st century parks for residents. To inform the development of Harrow's parks and open spaces strategy 2016-19. To develop the park users' forums. To inform the progress of Project Phoenix and the commercialisation strategy for parks.			
2	Maximising Volunteering	Supports the Council & Executive in the development of strategy/policy before the decisions are made	Challenge Panel	
	The council has an ambition to maximise volunteering in the Harrow Ambition Plan, what are the barriers currently faced by residents wanting to volunteer or organisations needing to recruit volunteers?			
3	Homelessness	The strain on the Council's budget with reduced government grants may divert	Challenge Panel	A comprehensive report to come to committee first in June as part of the process for defining the scope for a scrutiny project that doesn't duplicate other work going on in this field.
	What is the problem, who is presenting as homeless, what is the breakdown of housing need, what are we doing about it, what factors are being taking into			

		account for planning purposes? Are our policies in preventing homelessness? A1 risk for the Council.	revenue to areas of other services?		
4	Shared service arrangements	Review the efficiency and effectiveness of the various shared service arrangements we have. Scrutiny is interested in issues around political arrangements, accountability and lessons for sharing larger services in the future.	Helps secure service improvements	Challenge panel	Internal Audit will be looking at this this year. Scrutiny to define the scope for this challenge panel once the audit report has been published. The Internal Audit report would then form part of the background papers for the challenge panel. The audit review would not be considering the role of scrutiny in shared service governance arrangements.
Other Scrutiny Support					
5	Health	The continued roll out of Shaping a Healthier Future and its impact on the performance of Northwick Park and delivery of Harrow Out of Hospital Strategy and access to GPs remain important issues for Harrow residents following the Independent Healthcare Commission report.	Helps secure service improvements Champions issues of concern to local people	Capacity for visits, additional research and engagement	As health sub only meet 3 times a year their ability to influence anything in a timely manner is limited. By using additional officer capacity we can ensure we are engaged in the right consultations and undertaking proactive research that will enhance the quality of our health scrutiny in Harrow.
Health Committee					
6	Smoking cessation numbers quitting	Is our approach right? The targets for numbers quitting continually to well below target so is why go about seeking to help quitters right?	Spending on public health may be reduced. The outcome is better health for those who quit.	Health Committee	

7	Future of the walk in centres in Harrow	<p>Both Pinn & Alexandra Avenue are currently going through a retendering process which could see a private healthcare company replacing the current local GP led consortium that runs these centres. A final decision on this will be announced early next month. There will also be a further procurement process (again) for these centres either later this year or in 2017 following a local reorganisation of services by the CCG. Equally a new walk in centre will be built in Harrow East and the procurement process for this centre will take place at the same time as the other two centres. Possible locations for the new walk in centre include Belmont, Kenton or Honeypot Lane. There will be a public consultation by the CCG on the new walk in centre in mid April.</p>	<p>Helps secure service improvements. Champions issues of concern to local people</p>	Health Committee	
8	Resident access to register with a GP's and book appointments	<p>Resident feedback is telling us this is a problem, having to wait weeks for an appointment is resulting in people attending A&E instead. This was further backed up by the recent independent Healthcare Commission report into Shaping a Healthier Future</p>	<p>Helps secure service improvements for residents, champions issue of concern for local residents, fulfil statutory requirements around health scrutiny.</p>	Health Committee	
9	CCG primary care commissioning			Health committee	

O&S Committee					
10	Digitalisation and access to services online	Feedback from residents as well as VCS organisations has highlighted the difficulty in accessing various services and the need to have services which are accessible.	Help secure service improvements	O&S committee	
11	People Services Directorate: progress update & LAT Review	In terms of timing this needs to follow discussion at both HSCB & LSAB, making late Sept/October 2016 the earliest possibility.	Fulfils a statutory requirement - This is in compliance with the June 2015 Local Assurance Test key recommendations.	O&S Committee	Late sept/early Oct
12	VCS strategy (Inc Info & Advice Strategy)	In 2016 work will take place to develop a strategy for working with the voluntary sector in Harrow including a new information & Advice strategy for the Council.	Supports the Council & Executive in the development of strategy/policy before the decisions are made	O&S committee	Sept O&S
13	Landlord Licencing	The understanding is that this has now been running in Edgware prior to being run out across the borough, so a review of its effects/impact may be timely.	Supports the Council & Executive in the development of strategy/policy before the decisions are made. Helps secure service improvements	O&S committee	
14	Recycling, flytipping, street cleanliness	Review effectiveness in general what has been the effect of the introduction of food caddies	Helps secure service improvements	O&S committee 6 months after implementation in	It would be useful if a report can to committee when the latest NI195 data is available so scrutiny are looking at the most current data

					April	
15	Troubled Families phase 2	A key programme for the Council that will define our early intervention offer and help turn the lives of families around	Helps secure service improvements		O&S committee review of phase 1 and plans for phase 2	Autumn?
16	Prevent	High profile issue, what is the council's reaction to Syrian crisis e.g. access to services, PREVENT, community cohesion, helping to integrate	Issue of concern to local people and helps hold the executive to account		O&S committee	
17	Child Sexual Exploitation & FGM	High profile issues which are under-reported in Harrow. How are our efforts to increase awareness and reporting going	Help secure service improvements		O&S committee	
18	Disability services	The creation of the People's directorate has enabled the creation of a single disability service for both adults and children. What benefits has this join up had and what impact are the savings (including a review of the decision around The Bridge) having on outcomes?	Helps secure service improvements for residents, champions issue of concern for local residents,		O&S Committee	
P&F						
19	Commercial strategy	The commercial strategy is set to raise £15m of income for the Council by 2019 through a variety of means. Scrutiny could look at the programme holistically or pick individual projects such as the	Helps secure service improvements		P&F 6 monthly	

20	<p>Sickness rates amongst staff days lost per FE post.</p>	<p>private lettings agency or MOT bay</p> <p>The figure for this performance area is continually well above target. Efficiency of services is affected when staff are absent and may lead to higher service complaints. It is estimated that sickness costs the Council approx £400,000 a year. With revenue falling and the possible effects on services ways of improving this figure should be investigated.</p>	<p>Help secure service improvement</p>	<p>P&F update report on worst performers</p>	
21	<p>Equalities Annual Report</p>	<p>The priority for equalities in 2016/17 is to improve the Council's standing in the Stonewall list of LGBT friendly organisations. We are currently 399</p>	<p>To help deliver our equality objectives to be a good employer and ensure our workforce is reflective of our community</p>	<p>Monitor through performance reporting and annual equalities report to P&F</p>	
22	<p>Budget monitoring</p>	<p>Detailed scrutiny of in-year budget monitoring, MTFS and budget gap</p>	<p>To be assured that the council can deliver a balanced budget and that the three year budget is on course</p>	<p>P&F</p>	
23	<p>The valuation of business rates yield</p>	<p>The yield from business rates continues to drop dramatically and may affect services of the Council particularly with Government proposals regarding this area. Why because the Council has to plan how it is going to prepare for the</p>	<p>Help secure service improvement</p>	<p>P&F</p>	

		potential loss of revenue.			
Leads					
24	Staff declaration of social identity information	There has been a pattern of staff and service users not declaring their social identity information, especially disability and sexual orientation (almost 83% didn't answer this question). This data is important to help policy development and service improvement.	Help secure service improvement in terms of policy development and efficiency savings EqIAs	All Leads	
25	Planning Enforcement			E&E Leads	
26	Domestic Violence Strategy and Action Plan in Action	As a key priority for the council, and with the Strategy having been in operation for over one year, it is timely to ensure it has a correct focus and is delivering in the most important areas	Deliver better outcome based services with evidence based solutions for those affected by DV	Resources Leads	
27	Health visiting service	The council took responsibility for this service in 2015. How are we doing?	Helps secure service improvements	Health Leads	
28	Childcare & Children's Centres	Affordable, high quality and flexible childcare is important for child outcomes & employment – could more be done? Also, many providers are struggling to provide the 30 hours promised by the government, what is the local situation? Monitoring the new model for childrens centres, the action	Helps secure service improvements	Children's Leads	

		plan and success measures				
29	SEND implementation	Monitoring the effectiveness of SEND reforms and EHC plans			Children's leads	
30	Harrow Arts Centre	What happens if the money is not raised, what is the plan B			E&E Leads	
31	Housing benefit and Council tax Support	What is happening to cause numerous errors in assessing people's claims			Resources Leads to look at data and complaints to get a sense of the scale of the problem	
32	Improve the quality of our homes and estates by implementing the Harrow Better Homes Standard	The Harrow Ambition Plan sets out the ambition to approve a rolling 5 year Better Homes programme		Helps secure service improvements	E&E leads	
To Be Determined						
33	Closing the educational attainment gap	Topic left over from previous work programme.		Help secure service improvement	To be determined	
34	Getting young people into work	What impact are our efforts to increase the number of apprentices having and what impact will government changes about apprenticeship levy and quota have.		Help secure service improvement	To be determined	

35	Family/Community services for asylum seekers	These communities tend not to engage or trust public services, so what are we doing to ensure they are aware of, engaging with and accessing services available to them.	Help secure service improvement	To be determined	
36	Discretionary Housing Payment Criteria	This was suggested as an area for further investigation during the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review. DHP can be a lifeline for households facing homelessness, enabling them to stay in their homes and avoid temporary accommodation or disruption. How it is allocated is therefore important. On the other hand, Harrow spend on homelessness is increasing all the time and considering just how DHP is used may have little impact.	May identify that some vulnerable people are getting less support than others. Changes to the Councils approach could be recommended as a result.	To be reviewed once the welfare reform report has been completed	
37	Disability Benefits	Many disabled people are experiencing reductions in benefit income and claim/review process that have been criticised as slow or stressful. Wider reforms, like the private sector size criteria, are said to have impacted on some disabled people too.	Determine the relationship between income, benefits and health & wellbeing of disabled people and whether the Council should or could do more to improve things for disabled people	To be reviewed once the welfare reform report has been completed	
38	Child poverty	Two thirds of UK Lone Parent households are below the 'Minimum	What is the situation of lone parent households	To be reviewed once the welfare reform	

		Income Standard”, the highest of all household types (MIS is an alternative measure of relative poverty not based on median income, but on what the public think households need for an acceptable living standard). Effect of poverty on educational attainment.	in Harrow and should or could the Council do more to improve things for lone parent households.	report has been completed	
39	The tightening of the Housing Allocation criterion			To be reviewed once the welfare reform report has been completed	