

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Minutes

### 20 October 2020

**Present:**

**Chair:** Councillor Sachin Shah

**Councillors:** Dan Anderson  
Jeff Anderson  
Stephen Greek  
Jean Lammiman  
Chris Mote  
Kanti Rabadia  
Sasi Suresh

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

Mr N Ransley  
Reverend P Reece  
Ms M Trivedi

**Non-voting Co-opted:** Harrow Youth Parliament  
Representative

**In attendance (Councillors):** Graham Henson Minute 133  
Varsha Parmar Minute 135  
Adam Swersky Minute 133  
Antonio Weiss Minute 134

**Apologies received:** Councillor Sarah Butterworth

**Absent:** Mr M Chandran Councillor Honey Jamie

## 127. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Sarah Butterworth

Councillor Sasi Suresh

## 128. Declarations of Interest

**RESOLVED:** To note that

- (1) the Declarations of Interests published in advance of the meeting on the Council's website were taken as read and it be also noted that Councillor Jean Lammiman declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to agenda item 7 in that she was Chair of Shaftesbury High School;
- (2) Members of the Committee and Co-opted Members who had declared interests remained in the virtual meeting whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

## 129. Minutes

In considering the minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2020, a Member indicated that there appeared to be a suggestion that the Committee would be in favour of the purchase of affordable homes and that this was not the view that was expressed. Members agreed and acknowledged this clarification.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2020 and the Special meetings held on 7 July 2020 and 1 September 2020 be taken as read and signed as correct records, subject to the following amendment:

2 June 2020 – Minute 108 – Declarations of Interest

Councillor Jeff Anderson received services from the Government, not the Council.

## 130. Public Questions

None received.

## 131. Petitions

**RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions had been received.

## 132. References from Council/Cabinet

None.

## Resolved Items

### 133. **Question and Answer Session with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council on the Council's ongoing Emergency Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Councillor and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources to the meeting. The Chief Executive had submitted his apologies but had offered to meet with both the Chair and Vice-Chair if there were any issues that they wished to discuss.

Members received a presentation, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting, from the Director of Strategy and Partnerships on the Council's ongoing response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The Director outlined the content of the presentation, with particular focus on slide 5, and advised that Harrow had moved into Tier 2 of the Local Covid Alert Levels and that the situation was getting more challenging. In terms of the strategic response (slide 10), the expectation currently was that the situation would continue for a minimum of six months. He emphasised the issues of capacity and resilience of staff and flagged up that difficult decisions would need to be made in relation to the Council's priorities. An update report would be given at Cabinet in November and officers were happy to report again to the Committee.

The Leader of the Council updated Members on the latest figures in terms of case numbers. Whilst the Council was in a good position in terms of dealing with the second wave, it should be acknowledged that staff had not had a break from dealing with the ongoing pressures of the pandemic. If infection rates across London did not reduce it was likely that Harrow, along with the other boroughs, would move into Tier 3.

In response to a Member's question about moving between tiers of restrictions, the Leader advised that it had been agreed, across London, that it would be easier to proceed as one city to ensure commonality of communications and therefore Harrow would not seek a differentiated approach. He acknowledged that financial support in Tier 2 would be an issue. Currently, the Council was seeking to guide residents and businesses and was making preparations in terms of Adult Social Care and the community food offer but the detailed work on which services to either prioritise or close had not been completed. The Director added that services would need to be delivered within both financial and staff resources whilst at the same time continuing to keep staff motivated. Innovation in the way services were delivered may be required.

Concern was expressed in relation to the resilience and wellbeing of staff and clarification sought on the measures that had been put in place to address this. The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD) explained that, in addition to the individual risk assessments and constant reviews, the staff Pulse survey would gauge the progress that had been made now that the level of support had improved by way of IT and the successful rollout of MS Teams. There was now a focus on wellbeing and mental health with a series of webinars due to be launched. It was recognised that staff maybe experiencing increased levels of anxiety and may

also face issues such as domestic abuse, as had been highlighted as impacting on many people during lockdown.

The Director of HROD advised that the quality / levels of communication between managers and shielding staff was being considered but it was clear that managers were doing well in terms of encouraging and supporting a safe return to work of staff in that category. The promotion of more social interaction between staff by way of 'coffee rooms', networks around crafts and sports for example, and how this could be facilitated was also being considered.

Members asked a series of questions which were responded to as follows:

- all business continuity plans had been 'stress tested' in March on the basis of staff being off work due to COVID 19 .The roll out of new devices had assisted as staff would be able to continue working if they had to self-isolate and were not unwell. Business continuity plans were being reviewed again ahead of the next wave of the pandemic;
- during the first wave, staff were stretched and were therefore requested to take annual leave during the summer. It was recognised that annual leave was important in order to remain productive and staff were still being encouraged to take it;
- lessons had been learnt in terms of setting up the local testing site in South Harrow and this would be applied to future sites. Officers had tried to ensure that residents were fully aware that centres were 'walk in'. The Chair indicated that it would be helpful to have details of the numbers tested included on the Councillors weekly update;
- the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN) was a funding stream from government with the aim of encouraging people to go back to the high street. Members of the Committee had differing opinions and feedback from residents on the LTNs. The Leader advised that the widening of pavements would mean people could pass by each other safely whilst the virus was circulating but this would be continually reviewed;
- in terms of schools, there were ongoing assessments in terms of COVID 19 and the Council was working with the schools to support where they could;
- funding had been provided to assist with accommodating the homeless during the pandemic but this had now ended, although further funding might be forthcoming. Rules in relation to evictions had been relaxed but shelters could not be located in churches as they were not COVID safe. The Council had appointed a new Housing Manager who would look at this issue, together with the impact of mental health/ domestic violence/ family breakdown, but there was a shortage of genuinely affordable housing in Harrow . These issues would be considered by the multi-agency Homelessness Action Board. Members expressed the view that this should be discussed at the scrutiny leadership group.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and stated that it was pleasing that members of the Committee were concerned about the welfare of staff.

**RESOLVED:** That the presentation be noted.

#### **134. Borough Plan Update**

Members received a presentation on the Borough Plan Update from the Director of Strategy and Partnerships, which set out the next steps and proposed changes to the Plan.

The Director reported that the significant change to the plan was a new cross cutting priority on racial disproportionality and this change to the plan would be a recommendation to Cabinet in November. The non-Executive member of Cabinet and political lead for the Plan explained how it reinforced the need for prioritisation. Delays to the original timelines were due to the pandemic and there would be an update to the delivery plan submitted to Cabinet in due course.

Members were advised that, as an organisation, the Council would need to prioritise what needed to be delivered as a result of COVID 19 whilst at the same time maintaining other services. Value had been added to each of the Council's eight priorities despite the pandemic, for example, health integration had accelerated.

**RESOLVED:** That the presentation be noted.

#### **135. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Framework**

Members received a presentation on the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Framework and the response to Black Lives Matter.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships reported that there was a fundamental change in approach in how equalities, diversity and inclusion would be dealt with and he provided an update on the response to the three stranded approach to Black Lives Matters; address inequality in life outcomes, review of services and action as an employer. Patrick Vernon OBE had been appointed to assist in this work.

The Portfolio Holder, Environment, in her role as Chair of the cross party Member Group, reported that work on the third strand, action as an employer, had commenced. She explained that 1-1s had been carried out to ensure that views were captured. She emphasised that the Black Lives Matter Staff Group was open to all staff and she would welcome input, ideas and discussion points. The Director of HROD added that the Black Lives Matter Staff Group had received a positive response and that there was considerable participation by non BAME staff.

A Member questioned whether the historic lack of BAME senior staff had been considered and was advised that it would take time to address this. The Director of HROD advised that Harrow's underlying position was progressive

if the management grades were considered more generally. Black staff were, however, disproportionately represented in more junior grades of the organisation.

In response to a Member's question about the Equalities Impact section in Committee reports, the Director of HROD advised that the need for meaningful Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs) had been identified as a subject for consideration by the Equalities sub-group. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships added that the framework of EqIAs had been refined over time and that there needed to be a culture rather than process shift.

In summary, following the discussion both on the strategic framework and Borough Plan, the Committee broadly felt that the Council was on the right track, particularly in relation to equality and looked forward to seeing the Plan progress to Cabinet and Council and to reviewing it over the next 10 years.

**RESOLVED:** That the presentation be noted.

### **136. Refreshed Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21 to 2021/22**

Members received a report which provided the refreshed Scrutiny Work Programme for 2020/21 to 2021/22, as developed by the Scrutiny Leadership Group which comprised the chairs and vice-chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its sub-committees, and also the Scrutiny Lead members.

The Chair indicated that Members should advise either him or the Vice-Chair if there were topics/areas of work that should be included in the work programme.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (1) the refreshed Scrutiny Work Programme to guide Harrow scrutiny's work for 2020/21 to 2021/22 be approved;
- (2) the Council be requested to endorse the Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21 to 2021/22 to Full Council for endorsement.

### **137. Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-20**

Members received the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2019-20, as developed by the Scrutiny Leadership Group which comprised the chairs and vice-chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its sub-committees, and also the Scrutiny Lead members.

All Members agreed that the new style and format of the report was an improvement and they acknowledged the work of officers in making the changes. The report demonstrated the value of scrutiny.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (1) the Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-20 be agreed;

(2) Council be requested to endorse the Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-20.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 8.34 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Sachin Shah  
Chair