

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Minutes

### 8 December 2020

**Present:**

**Chair:** Councillor Sachin Shah

**Councillors:** Dan Anderson Honey Jamie  
Jeff Anderson Jean Lammiman  
Sarah Butterworth Chris Mote  
Stephen Greek Kanti Rabadia

**Voting** (Voluntary Aided)

**Co-opted:** Mr N Ransley

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

**In attendance** Adam Swersky For Minute 144  
**(Councillors):** Krishna Suresh For Minute 145

**Apologies** Reverend P Reece  
**received:**

**Absent:** Mr M Chandran (Parent Governor)  
Ms M Trivedi (Parent Governor)

**138. Attendance by Reserve Members**

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

### **139. 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;
- (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.

### **140. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

### **141. Public Questions**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were received.

### **142. Petitions**

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

### **143. References from Council/Cabinet**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no references were received.

## **Resolved Items**

### **144. Update on the Implementation of New IT services**

Members received a presentation on the transition to the new IT service. The Committee welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources to the meeting.

In making the presentation, the Director of ICT reminded Members of the timeline of the transition to the new IT service and outlined the planned service model, client side structure and the self-service customer portal. The portal provided customers with the ability to report issues 24/7 and whilst the feedback so far had been largely positive any negative feedback was followed up 'in person'. He explained that the ICT team consisted of approximately 30 members of staff with a focus on customer service and that the previous large single source contract had been replaced with multiple smaller expert suppliers which he hoped would be more cost effective.

The Director of ICT reported on the deployment of Windows 10 devices and that the new telephony solution was currently being rolled out. He outlined the next steps in terms of ensuring that Forward Drive was fitted out with the necessary kit/ solutions. The presentation also addressed Cloud Infrastructure Migration and cybersecurity. The Portfolio Holder commended the Director of ICT and his team, the current IT supplier and partners for what

had been achieved, particularly in such a short timescale against the back drop of a global pandemic.

Following the presentation, Members made comments and asked questions including the following:-

- a Member noted that he understood that there were issues with the technology behind webforms and problems with the Planning Portal. Members were advised that the Planning system was managed by the Planning service as it was a 'devolved application'. It was accepted that there had been problems especially when workload was extremely high, as had been seen recently. However, this was as much to do with the devolved planning system and associated processes as it was to do with the web interface. The Portfolio Holder reported that the Council had put a lot of effort into developing its web and 'front end' experience and, in his opinion, the Council's website was now one of the best in terms of interaction. The Chair added that the scrutiny sub-committee and Leads would be considering this issue and noted a Member's comments that one of the main complaints received was that webforms needed to be simplified;
- in response to a Member's question as to the efficiencies delivered by the cultural shift in ways of working, the Director of ICT explained that Harrow had made rapid progress in adopting new tools such as Teams during the Covid pandemic, but there was still more to do. In the coming six months further support would be provided to officers and Members in their use of Teams collaboration, OneDrive and other new technologies now available;
- a Member sought clarification as to how efficiencies and savings were measured, stating that a project should not be undertaken without this information. The Portfolio Holder responded that the situation on costs and budgets was complicated by the move of devolved applications to the Cloud and the IT service taking on the strategic responsibility for IT from individual services and Sopra Steria, but it was expected that the result of the in-sourcing of the IT service would result in savings and efficiencies. The Corporate Director of Resources added that savings were not the only value to be gained from in-sourcing IT; there would also be improved services resulting from the Council being in better control of its IT on an ongoing basis. Within the original business plan for the in-sourcing, savings had been identified and were being tracked. The Director of ICT also explained that Office 365 provided benchmark information on adoption of the new technologies. The Chair requested that this data be circulated to Members;
- in response to a Member's question in relation to the use of Amazon Web services, the Director ICT advised that the Council instead had a relationship with Microsoft Azure web services. This was procured under UK government framework terms which took account of ethical issues on a national basis.

In summing up the discussion, the Chair stated that the improvements in IT had been remarkable with the shift to home working, virtual meetings whilst at the same time bringing services in house. He thanked officers and the Portfolio Holder for their work, presentation and attendance and acknowledged the need to talk about IT, how it was used and communication with residents.

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

#### **145. Quarterly Crime Report December 2020**

Members received the quarterly Community Safety update which provided the latest position on Harrow's priority crime areas, as agreed with the Mayor's Office for Crime and Policing (MOPAC). The Committee welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Crime and Acting Chief Inspector Ed Baildon, Neighbourhood Partnerships, to the meeting.

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships introduced the report and explained that all Community Safety Partnerships were required by law to conduct an annual assessment of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within the borough and that this was known as the Strategic Assessment. The capacity to complete the Assessment had been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The Portfolio Holder then provided Members with some background to the report and figures and advised that Harrow continued to have the second lowest crime figures in London. He encouraged Members to attend the Safer Neighbourhood Panel meetings and welcomed community led intelligence via social media such as whatsapp groups.

In terms of community safety, a Member commented that year on year Harrow appeared to have lower figures in terms of crime and suggested that whilst this may be a result of the pandemic, there might be lessons that could be learned. The Director of Strategy and Partnerships stated that this year had been a unique set of circumstances and that there was a correlation between economic factors and crime. Acting Chief Inspector Baildon added that burglars were opportunistic and with more people staying at home such opportunities were reduced. As the country returned to normal it was likely that crime figures would increase.

Members made comments and asked a number of questions including the following:-

- it would be useful to be provided with information in relation to the reporting of domestic violence as it had been well documented that there had been a rise in this crime during the pandemic. An officer explained how these figures were reported in terms of comparison with the previous year and undertook to provide further information via his contacts within the BCU;
- tags were appearing outside houses and the Member questioned whether residents should be alerted. Acting Chief Inspector Baildon advised that he would speak to the relevant Safer Neighbourhood Team to send out alerts via OWL;

- concern was expressed at the levels of victim satisfaction with the police and Members were advised that this matter would be considered alongside the Mayor of London's recently released Plan. An officer undertook to follow this up and to provide Members with details on satisfaction rates;
- a Member stated that a reduced visible police presence in some neighbourhoods was a cause of concern to residents. Acting Chief Inspector Baildon advised that there were now more dedicated ward officers than there had been at the beginning of the year and he sought to reassure Members that the turnover of police constables was due to an influx of officers. The Portfolio Holder advised that whilst the Council was working to build good relationships with police teams this was difficult as teams were regularly moved around. This had been raised at London Councils and with the Deputy Mayor for Policing to see if staff could be more permanent.
- a Member expressed concern in relation to MOPAC and violence reduction work in schools and questioned whether initiatives had had to be changed due to the closure of schools, the impact assessed and the impact on funding in future years. The Acting Chief Inspector reported that the youth engagement team was fully funded and that work in primary schools continued to be delivered. The Director added that funding was guaranteed this year.
- following a question from the Chair in relation to the impact of Low Traffic Neighbourhood Schemes on police response times, Acting Chief Inspector Baildon advised that response teams had not noticed an impact and that Harrow was in line with the rest of the BCU but he acknowledged that there was always room for improvement.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder, Acting Chief Inspector Baildon and officers for their attendance and participation in what had been a useful debate. He noted that there were a number of actions in terms of requests for further information/ data.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and the Committee's comments feed into the forthcoming review and update of the Community Safety Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation strategy and action plan.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 8.26 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Sachin Shah  
Chair