

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes

7 November 2023

Present:

Chair: Councillor Amir Moshenson

Councillors: Dan Anderson
June Baxter
Govind Bharadia
Graham Henson
Maxine Henson
Eden Kulig
Vipin Mithani
Samir Sumaria

Absent: Harrow Youth Parliament
Representative
Reverend P Reece
Ms M Trivedi

60. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

61. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

62. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

63. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

64. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

65. References from Council/Cabinet

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

Resolved Items

66. Youth Justice Plan

The Committee received the Annual Youth Justice Plan, in advance of it being presented to Cabinet on 16 November 2023. Cabinet be requested to recommend the Plan to Council for approval and note the submission of the report to the Youth Justice Board. Cabinet might also make suggestions to feed into next year's plan.

The Youth Justice Plan outlined the arrangements and planned priorities for the Harrow Youth Justice Partnership to deliver Youth Justice Services in Harrow.

The Committee requested that Portfolio Holders be invited to future meetings to respond to queries on the Administration's priorities.

In the discussion that ensued, Members raised questions and the following issues:

- What police resources were available from the Borough Command Unit, and whether they were sufficient for Harrow?
- What was the percentage rate of re-offending?
- Whether the Harrow Youth Justice Service worked with the families of young people involved in crime, and whether resources were available to them, such as parenting classes;
- Why had the Wealdstone Action Group ceased operating and providing support in stopping knife crime?
- Why were knife crime and county line issues not referenced in the report?
- Whether over-crowding and unsuitable housing in Wealdstone could be addressed to reduce crime among the youth;
- Whilst the report had listed outputs, there seemed to be a gap in providing data on what was working well;
- What role could Harrow Councillors play in the Harrow Youth Justice Service?
- Whether Harrow Council met the remand costs;
- Citing page 45 of the report, how many cases were there per year?
- What trigger points resulted in the Harrow Youth Justice Service being involved in a young offender's life?
- What was the percentage of minority groups in care of the programme and how had that percentage changed over the years?

In response to the questions, the officer advised as follows:

- The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) had provided Harrow with two officers with experience in youth justice. However, one had been seconded to Brent, and the replacement officer would be joining Harrow within the next few weeks;
- The re-offending rate among 16-18 year olds was around 22.2%. The data presented to the Committee showed that Harrow had a lower rate than statistical neighbours and the London and National averages.
- Harrow Youth Service worked with families of young offenders, and conducted home-visits to determine reasons behind offences and administer questionnaires. The return rate of the questionnaires was 100% from the young persons and 78% from their parents. However, the intervention with parents was voluntary and some did not wish to participate;
- Wealdstone Action Group had been a community action project involving residents, businesses and statutory partners. With regards to addressing street drinking, it had been successful, as the Holy Trinity Church had noticed a reduction in the disposal of empty beer cans from 100 to 20 per day within six months. Currently, the Youth Justice Service engaged a teacher to work with the youth and assist them into employment, education, and training. Furthermore, work on county lines was conducted through a joint partnership with Brent Council, and still operated on a “rescue and response” basis;
- Knife crime and county lines were still issues in Harrow, however, overall numbers had reduced. The detail of these were not in the report as they were part of the Community Safety reports, to which the Youth Service contributed;
- Housing still remained an issue in Harrow and was a city-wide problem. Whenever the Youth Service was alerted to a housing issue, efforts were made to re-house, particularly if it was gang related.
- The plan did not capture all details on what was working well but would seek to do so in future plans;
- Councillors could continue playing a significant role in promoting the idea that young offenders were “children” first and foremost. Any negative attitudes towards children being referred to as young offenders should be challenged. Councillors could also go on visits with Youth Justice Service officers. Another area to offer support was in facilitating secure premises in which to see children;
- Remand costs were met by Harrow Council. But these were partly refunded through grants;
- There were between 90 to 100 cases of youth offending per year;
- Harrow Youth Justice Service would get involved when there was a conviction by the courts or an admission to an offence in court. Being arrested did not necessarily lead to the Service being involved in a young person’s life. However, the strategic direction was to provide more early intervention and prevention work.
- There was a higher percentage of young black offenders than other ethnicities but that the percentages were substantially influenced by small changes due to the low number of cases. The percentage rate had remained similar over the past 2-3 years.

The Committee thanked the officer for the plan and responses to their questions.

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the Plan be noted; and
- (2) the Committee's comments be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 7.57 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Amir Moshenson
Chair