

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 SEPTEMBER 2012

REFERENCE FROM CABINET – 19 JULY 2012

Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report 'Redefining Youth Engagement'

Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director Children and Families responding to the recommendation set out in the Scrutiny Review 'Redefining Youth Engagement'.

Cabinet welcomed key representatives of Harrow's Youth Parliament and invited them to address the meeting. In their presentation, representatives of the Youth Parliament thanked the Chairman and Members of the Scrutiny Review Group for their support and made the following points:

- young people were not a homogenous group;
- Councils and politicians had a key role to play in inspiring the next generation and making politics more relevant to teenagers;
- young people did not know what the Council did or how it related to them;
- young people wanted consistent conversations with feedback and a visible demonstration of follow up;
- young people wanted opportunities to genuinely influence debate and decision-making.

They added that in terms of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Group, recommendation 8, the Council should lead a major 'Youth Summit' with partners, politicians and local businesses as part of Harrow Youth Week which recognises and celebrates Harrow's young people and as part of the Council's ongoing Let's Talk programme and commitment to engage with people, provided a gateway to the other recommendations. They were of the view that the Council had a role to play in giving young people support and direction and in so doing the Council could learn from the youth and gain valuable insight to help plan ahead with service provision.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Review Group addressed the meeting and outlined the desire of young people for change. She added that the implementation of the recommendations would not be a costly and it was important that the young people were celebrated with the report being used as a main vehicle for such a celebration and investment in the youth of the borough. She was concerned that the recommendations had not received a multi-partner response.

Representatives of Harrow Youth Parliament responded to various questions from the Portfolio Holders. They stated that their participation in the Scrutiny Review Group had expanded their knowledge of the way the Council worked but it was important that such knowledge was not concentrated amongst a few individuals. It was essential that the Council reached out to some 60,000 young people who lived in Harrow to make them aware of the Council's role in the community. In order to improve the job market for young people, the Council should look to re-introduce a Summer University Scheme which would also help improve skills. It was important to ensure that engagement activities were crucial 'progression routes' to employment because of the soft skills young people gain, which employers were

demanding. It was the links between engagement and progression routes to jobs that were the most important factors because what young people told the Review was that what they wanted most was: Council influence and a prospect of a job when they left school.

Portfolio Holders were invited to attend meetings of the Youth Parliament and their attention was drawn to recommendation 10 of the Review Group which looked for greater dialogue between the Council and young people.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families assured the Youth Parliament that the recommendations would be taken forward in partnership with key stakeholders in order to ensure that the aspiration of young people were met.

An officer from the Children and Families Directorate congratulated the Youth Parliament for their participation in the Scrutiny Review Group and the numerous meetings and consultations that had been delivered on. He acknowledged the need for an established dialogue with the young people of Harrow and undertook to explore the potential which could involve the entire Council.

The Corporate Director Children and Families stated that the recommendations were challenging and had cost implications. However, she would work alongside Cabinet Members with a view to reviewing service provision for young people to ensure that served their purpose for the future. She supported the holding of a Youth Summit and would investigate the possibility of using the budget allocated to the Council's Transformation Programme.

The Leader of the Council thanked all participants of the Scrutiny Review Group for an excellent report and the ideas put forward. The Leader would discuss ways in which the recommendations could be taken forward by the Council and how various stakeholders could engage in the process. He acknowledged that the Council had not always succeeded in engaging with the young people but gave an assurance that the recommendations would be taken seriously and moved forward.

Representatives of the Youth Parliament stated that a key aspect of the debate had been about the costs associated with the recommendations. However, the recommendation should be seen in the context of an Invest to Save Strategy. It was acknowledged that Invest to Save and Early Intervention Strategies had a 3-year time lead and that savings were not always easy to quantify. The Portfolio Holder for Finance stated that he would be sympathetic to the use of the Transformation Programme money to help move the recommendations forward.

Cabinet applauded the contributions from the representatives of Harrow Youth Parliament.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Corporate Director Children and Families, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families, be authorised to develop and implement the response, in partnership with local schools and the Harrow Youth Parliament;
- (2) it be noted that the development and implementation of the response would include joint working with the Council's Grants Advisory Panel and contact with those local authorities referred to in the report, (such as Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham and Tower Hamlets), each offering different approaches to youth engagement;

- (3) it be noted that with the Council's focus on statutory and targeted work, significant decisions have previously been put into effect which had already removed many universal services for young people.

Reason for Decision: The Council's 'resident involvement' agenda aimed to change the culture of youth engagement and to establish stronger links with young people living and being educated in the borough. This would inevitably be a dynamic process, requiring the commitment of officers across all departments and Councillors alike, and would take time to embed.

The 'Youth Engagement' report had already become a key document underpinning the work of the Youth Development Team within Children and Families Service and was compatible with the priority actions of the Harrow Youth Parliament.

Bearing in mind the current operating model with the Children and Families Service and the ongoing pressure to achieve further short and medium term savings, it is important to note that additional resources would be required in order to fully consider the cost benefits to the Council and to find external funding sources and sponsorship.

FOR INFORMATION

Background Documents:

Report submitted to Cabinet - 19 July 2012

Draft minutes of the Cabinet – 19 July 2012

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