

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

24 OCTOBER 2012

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Sue Anderson * Susan Hall (3) * Zarina Khalid * Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Paul Osborn * Victoria Silver (3) * Ben Wealthy (2) * Stephen Wright
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) * Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) Mrs A Khan
In attendance: (Councillors)	Christine Bednell James Bond Mitzi Green	Minute 320 Minute 315 Minutes 320, 323 and 324

* Denotes Member present
(2) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Members

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

320. Youth Justice Plan and Youth Offending Improvement Plan

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Families which contained the Youth Justice Plan and the Improvement Plan. Members agreed to consider the Inspection of Youth Offending, which had been circulated on the supplemental agenda, as a matter of urgency in order to enable scrutiny of the Improvement Plan. The report had been included on the agenda at the request of a member of the Committee, in accordance with

Committee Procedure Rule 37.4. The Committee agreed that scrutiny policy lead for Children and Families, who was not a member of the Committee, could speak on this item.

The Corporate Director of Children and Families introduced the report stating that this was clearly an area of significant challenge and that there were some long term and ingrained issues to be addressed. She stated that it was both her and her manager's responsibility to turn the service around, that there had been some key staff changes and the service had also moved to a new directorate. She regretted that she had been unable to turn the service around as quickly and effectively as she would have liked and accepted responsibility for that. She expressed her concern that the Youth Justice Plan had not been submitted to Cabinet in the past and that this was a discrepancy. The Plan would be considered by Council on 8 November 2012.

Members expressed their significant concerns at the findings of the Inspection and, in particular, questioned the delay in the submission of the report both to Cabinet and the Committee, the decision making of officers and Members and the chronology of events. Members robustly challenged the officers and Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families on the findings of the Inspection Report and the reporting of those findings and asked questions and made comments which included the following:

- There had been no mention of the poor performance of this service in the Strategic Performance Reports that had been submitted to Cabinet. The purpose of these reports was to flag up to Members key issues such as these. It had not been apparent from the recent Cabinet report the seriousness of the problems in the YOT. The Member expressed concern at the number of Improvement Boards and stated that it would be helpful to have a diagram/flow chart showing how issues were being addressed. He requested that a further report with more data be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and a separate discussion with the Corporate Director on the staffing structure.
- The transparency in relation to the findings of the Inspection was questioned and Members challenged the apparent decision to inform the Council's partners but not elected Members of the findings. An officer advised Members that an Improvement Board had been established to work on the findings. The Portfolio Holder added that the closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court had not helped the delivery of the service.
- A Member sought clarification as to those areas where the Youth Offending Team (YOT) continued to under perform and the Portfolio Holder advised that such significant problems could not be resolved quickly. She added that the financial challenges faced should not be underestimated and that work in the YOT was focused on delivering improvement.
- The report stated throughout that there was substantial or drastic improvement required but there was no sense of ownership in the

Improvement Plan or timescales and it was therefore questioned how this would be moved forward. The Interim Divisional Director of Targeted Services stated that the Inspection should be considered in the context that a number of YOTs across London were facing difficult issues and that the Improvement Plan had been put in place and was constantly refreshed. The YOT management team was overseeing progress. The Corporate Director added that names of the officers leading on the various aspects of the Improvement Plan could be provided to Members. She received fortnightly reports and reported to the Chief Executive on progress/issues.

- There appeared to be a 'culture' problem and until this was resolved performance would not improve. The Member added that there had been no YOT manager since 2010 and problems in the service appeared to have started in October that year. He questioned where the senior management intervention was and why it had taken a year to advertise for a YOT manager. The Corporate Director responded that culture remained an issue in the team and that its functions had been separated. The solutions introduced had not been successful but the performance data had given a different picture. In terms of recruitment, she accepted that in hindsight she should have perhaps requested permission to recruit externally for the manager role rather than fill it with an interim postholder.
- A Member requested that the Improvement Plan remain a regular item on the Committee's agenda given the level of Members concern at the Inspection report. The Portfolio Holder suggested that the relevant scrutiny leads meet with both her and the Corporate Director on a regular basis, noting that the notes of the leads meetings were submitted to the Committee. The scrutiny policy lead for Children and Families expressed her concern at the Inspection report and stated that both she and the performance lead would consider the progress being made on a regular basis.
- A Member questioned the root cause of Councillors not being made aware of the report and reported on the situation in Lambeth following receipt of a poor report. She also questioned whether the risks in relation to the new model had been explored and the position in terms of funding. The Corporate Director advised that there had been no specific decision as to whether the Inspection report should or should not be submitted to Members but that it had been discussed with a number of Members and in her view required consideration by Cabinet. In terms of government funding, the Council had made up the shortfall. There was now a new manager of the YOT who would be considering the risks of the new model.
- A Member stated that the language used when dealing with families was important and that there needed to be an acknowledgement there were issues. Officers, not Members, were responsible for management and he sought a commitment that the Council would do everything it could to help young people secure jobs/ gain skills. The

Interim Divisional Director stated that there was no room for complacency and that it was imperative to engage young people in education/ training. She stated that she would report again to the Committee on this issue if that would be helpful.

- In response to a Member's question as to whether those young people in contact with the YOT received mental health assessments, the Corporate Director advised that not every young person would receive counselling. There had been problems with the Health contribution to the funding of the postholder that would carry out the assessments.
- A Member indicated that, in his view, the Improvement Plan should be considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee. He added that he would have expected to see mention of the Better Deal for Residents in terms of project management as well as PRINCE data.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder, Corporate Director and other officers for their attendance and responses.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Council)

That the Committee's comments be considered and noted.