

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

14 NOVEMBER 2012

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Kam Chana * Ann Gate * Krishna James * Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Paul Osborn * Krishna Suresh (5) * Sasi Suresh (4) * Stephen Wright
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) Mrs A Khan
In attendance: (Councillors)	Mitzi Green	Minute 334

- * Denotes Member present
- (5), (4) Denote category of Reserve Members
- † Denotes apologies received

328. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Sue Anderson
Councillor Zarina Khalid

Reserve Member

Councillor Sasi Suresh
Councillor Krishna Suresh

329. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared during the course of the meeting:

Agenda Item 7 – Post Ofsted Improvement Plan

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was employed by London Councils. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

330. Minutes

The Committee agreed to consider the minutes as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda. In considering the minutes, Members reminded officers that they were expecting copies of the answers to residents unanswered questions in relation to Vaughan School.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2012, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

331. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

332. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

333. References from Council/Cabinet - Reference from Cabinet - 11 October 2012 - Private Rented Sector Housing in Harrow

The Committee agreed to consider the reference from Cabinet as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda. The Chair advised that the scrutiny report on Private Rented Sector Housing in Harrow had been well received by Cabinet and that all of the recommendations had been taken on board. He expressed his thanks to the Chair of the review group and the other participants for their work.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet's response be noted.

RESOLVED ITEMS

334. Post-Ofsted Improvement Plan

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families, the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director of Children and Families and officers to the meeting.

The Committee received a report which set out the key issues arising from the Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services

carried out in May 2012. The report advised that the Corporate Director of Children and Families had convened an Improvement Board to secure rapid improvements through an Improvement Plan agreed by all partners.

The Chief Executive stated that safeguarding was a priority and that a rating of 'adequate' was not good enough and that the report before Members would be used as a catalyst to raise the bar. He stated that he would welcome Members thoughts and advice on the improvement plan.

The Corporate Director of Children and Families endorsed the sentiments expressed by the Chief Executive and advised that the inspection was also a judgement on the partnership between the Council and Health. She advised that there was now a Looked After Children Doctor in place and that the new Safeguarding Chair met regularly with the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families as well as herself. There were, however, still major challenges ahead and she outlined the changes to her team and the work currently being carried.

Having considered the report, Members asked questions and made the following comments:

- Members expressed their concern and disappointment that the action plan did not include any data and was therefore not informative. There appeared to be issues with poor assessments and a Member made particular reference to N160. An officer advised that the report had been prepared in the context of one of the most regulated areas of local government and if all the available data had been included it would have taken up the entire report. The Corporate Director added that Ofsted had recommended that the 'front door' thresholds had been too high. There had been an increase in the number of children going back and forth through the system but that they were now receiving a long term allocation. The Interim Divisional Director advised that there had been 100% staff turnover and, with the exception of two newly qualified social workers, all staff were currently agency although there were plans to recruit permanent staff in the 'front door' and introduce a new role of advanced practitioner.
- A Member commented that the N160 appeared to be worse than it had been several years ago and, following the response from the Corporate Director that she had concerns about the robustness of the historic figures, he expressed concern that problems with performance data may be more widespread. He stated that he had been informed twice that day that data was incorrect in two areas of Children's Services. As the former Portfolio Holder for Performance he had been assured that data was accurate and he therefore was not confident in taking the data on face value now. The Corporate Director responded that there had been data issues with regard to the Youth Offending Team but these had now been corrected.

An officer advised that the problems with the quality of some of the data had come to light the previous year and that it was the system that had highlighted the issue. Staff had been closing cases down to 'stop

the clock ticking' and then re-opening those cases which had therefore manipulated the performance indicator. In some cases the focus had been meeting timescales rather than quality. The Corporate Director of Children and Families added that it was because the system was robust that it picked up issues in practice which were thoroughly looked into. As part of the New Operating Model, the collection and oversight of data collection had been moved to the Performance unit.

The Chief Executive stated that a clear explanation would be provided to Members in terms of data quality. Ofsted had been of the view that whilst systems were good, additional work was required on the quality of the work. A greater emphasis on quality assurance was required and he was keen that the Council learnt from the good practices in other authorities. The new staff that had been brought into the service were of a high calibre.

- A Member commented that in terms of the improvement plan there was an issue in that he was unsure what, as a Member, he was supposed to do and stated that it was unclear what aspects had improved. The Corporate Director advised that the plan had been prepared in line with the requirements of Ofsted and that there was a need for Members to see an increased quality of outcomes.
- A Member questioned how much it would cost to address the issues detailed in the improvement plan and was advised that they could be contained within existing budgets. The Corporate Director advised that there were no immediate financial implications and that she would use some of her potential underspend. The Chief Executive added whilst Children Services were not exempt from making a contribution to budget savings he was keen to protect front line social workers. He accepted the Member's comment that costs should be made more explicit.
- Responding to a Member's comments that the improvement plan was incomplete and included out of date data, the Interim Divisional Director advised that it had been subject to fortnightly and, on occasion, more regular revision.
- In terms of staff turnover, a Member stated that this indicated that there was a possible problem with morale. The report did not include a departmental structure and he questioned where any additional staff would be placed. The report should also have included one-off costs and the costs of quality assurance and highlight where there would be savings. He questioned whether the department's culture encouraged an escalation of problems/issues. The Corporate Director responded that morale was high overall but that the 'front door' and YOT had presented issues. The new culture in Targeted Services under the present management was one of the senior managers having an open door to staff and she was clear that problems staff were experiencing needed to be shared openly and solutions shared. Recent changes of management in the 'front door' had gone a long way to address the

issues and a new aggressive campaign to recruit staff and strong managers was underway. Poor performing managers had moved on and stronger quality assurance systems were in place. The Directorate had, like all other departments, made significant savings of £6m and had grant cuts of over £2.3 m. This had been in the context of demographic growth. The Corporate Director advised that there was now a more robust system for quality assurance following the London Councils model.

- In relation to pre-birth safeguarding, a Member stated that the improvement plan only appeared to relate to Northwick Park hospital. She reminded officers that women had a choice in terms of where they wished to give birth and she questioned whether similar arrangements were in place with other hospitals. Members were advised that the protocol would apply to all expectant women and that work had been done with them and the Primary Care Trust.
- A Member questioned the parameters used to ensure that a more robust quality assurance model would be implemented and was advised that there would be a greater focus on outcomes. Work had been done on IPADs (ie appraisals) and observers had attended social workers on visits. The Corporate Director took on board the Member's comments that using a traffic light system in the plan would be helpful.
- In response to a Member's question, the Interim Divisional Director advised that a health assessment of Children Looked After (CLA) was carried out within the first 28 days of their entry to care. Issues such as contraception were addressed with CLA as appropriate. In terms of those children with dual heritage the Council would, wherever possible, seek to ensure that their needs in terms of worship, food and other such issues were met by the foster carer.
- In terms of pay and retention, a Member questioned how many of those staff who had just been advised that their salary would be cut by 1% would now receive an increase in order to retain them. Officers advised that it was approximately 60 permanent staff and the advice had been to deal with this via market supplements. The Chief Executive undertook to check whether Equality Impact Assessments had been carried out on the social worker posts as part of the work on terms and conditions. The Member requested a report on the number of staff that would receive market supplements following the implementation of the changes in terms and conditions.
- A Member requested that an urgent report be submitted to the Committee by the Assistant Chief Executive and Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning on data quality. The Corporate Director reiterated that the review by an independent team had addressed the issues of data quality and that her team would continue to be robust in this area. She could provide Members with the outcome data and was happy to meet and discuss this information.

- Responding to a Member's question as to whether every CLA in Harrow was safe the Corporate Director advised that Ofsted had rated Harrow as 'good' in this area. Whilst her team were trying to make the system as safe as possible, she could not guarantee that there would never be a problem.
- A Member made reference to a report that had been considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee on equality outcomes that had included many gaps in information. An officer undertook to look at the report.
- The Corporate Director confirmed that the recommendations arising from the scrutiny review of project management were followed in Children's Services. An officer added that both Ofsted and the Department for Education were satisfied with the data provided. It was, however, important have clarity as to what the data was being used for.

The Chair advised that following a request at the last meeting of the Committee a document had been prepared in relation the issues in the Youth Offending Team. The view had been taken that it would be helpful to consider this at a cross party working group but that this would not preclude its consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

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

RESOLVED: That (1) the actions in the Improvement Plan to secure rapid improvements against all 22 recommendations in the Ofsted report be noted; (2) a report be submitted to the next meeting by the Assistant Chief Executive and Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning on the issues raised in relation to the performance data and data quality issues in Children's Services and detailing what audit had been done to assure that there was not a problem elsewhere in the Council..

335. Scrutiny Work Programme Proposals

The Committee received a report which outlined proposals for inclusion in the scrutiny project programme for the remainder of the current administration and it also provides a brief update on projects currently underway.

Members considered the appropriateness of using diabetes as the case study investigation of how effectively public health/preventative/ early intervention services were delivered with differing views expressed. A Member suggested that COPD, a congested terminal condition, might be a more beneficial subject.

RESOLVED: That (1) the proposed projects and the proposal to complete all projects by January 2014 be agreed; (2) the subject of the early intervention case study be discussed at the scoping meeting.

336. Standing Scrutiny Review of the Budget - Report on Progress

The Committee agreed to consider a report, Standing Scrutiny Review of the Budget – Self Financing of the Housing Revenue Account, as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

The Chair of the review group introduced the report and outlined its contents. He advised that the repayment of the self financing loan would be over 50 years and for this reason it was important to get the decisions right now. The report presented the review group's findings and set out some useful ideas for consideration. He thanked members of the review group, experts, the Divisional Director of Housing and officers for their participation.

An officer advised that the Corporate Director of Resources had advised that some minor amendments were required to the report.

The Chair stated that this was a good piece of work and it was

RESOLVED: That, subject to making some minor amendments, the report of the Standing Scrutiny Review of the Budget be referred to Cabinet in December 2012 for consideration.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.32 pm, closed at 9.28 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman