

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

6 NOVEMBER 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Sue Anderson

Councillors: † Tony Ferrari * Barry Macleod-Cullinane
* Ann Gate * Jerry Miles

In attendance: Graham Henson Minute 103
(Councillors)

* Denotes Member present

† Denotes apologies received

98. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared during the course of the meeting:

Agenda Item 8 – Corporate Equalities Objectives

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in part of the above item when public health matters were considered as she was employed by NHS Harrow. She left the room whilst the matter was considered and the Vice-Chairman took the Chair.

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a non pecuniary interest in that her son was not in employment, education or training (NEET). She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered.

99. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

100. Public Questions and Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions received.

101. References from Council and Other Committees/Panels

None received.

RESOLVED ITEMS

102. Chair's Report

The Sub-Committee received a report which set out issues considered by the Chair since the last meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

103. Corporate Equalities Objectives

An officer introduced a report which updated the Sub-Committee on the development of Equalities polices in response to changes in legislation and best practice over recent years. The report advised on the progress made in addressing the underlying issues and described the next steps on embedding equalities practice. The Sub-Committee were updated on the Council's ambition to seek external accreditation against the Equality Framework for Local Government. The officer made the following comments:

- the Single Equalities Scheme (SES) had been agreed by Cabinet on 15 December 2010 and this placed certain requirements on the Council. As a part of the SES a three year action plan for six key objectives was agreed;
- a three year programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) was developed and directorates were asked to develop annual EqIA programmes which aligned with their Service Plan. EqIAs were required for all key decisions;
- the Equality Act 2012 introduced a new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which placed 2 specific requirements on public authorities. The new PSED covered 9 protected characteristics. One of the requirements of the PSED was to publish by 31 January 2012, and annually thereafter, information to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty. The Council was commended for the document and data it provided, 'Our Harrow, Our Story'. The second requirement was to prepare and publish by 6 April 2012, and at least every 4 years

thereafter one or more equality objectives. The Council consulted on its equality objectives and 8 were adopted by Cabinet. The performance indicators for the objectives were taken from each directorates scorecard to help embed equalities within the organisation and to prevent duplication;

- the Corporate Equality Group would receive 6-monthly reports on the progress on achieving the objectives and annual reports would be submitted to the Corporate Strategy Board (CSB) and to a scrutiny committee meeting. Each of the directorates would produce quarterly progress reports against their scorecards for the Improvement Boards;
- a new performance and improvement framework for equalities, Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) replaced the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG). The Council was currently at the 'achieving' level under the EFLG and had committed to achieving the 'excellent' level;
- the EFLG had been reviewed in March 2012 and the London Equality Group had carried out some research to ascertain which authorities would be seeking external accreditation. The accreditation was only being sought by one authority. The majority of authorities were adopting the framework for use as a tool to measure improvements;
- a Cabinet decision would be required to adopt the approach of not seeking external accreditation and following the alternative option of using the framework to measure improvements. There were significant resource implications in seeking the external accreditation.

The Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder attended the meeting and commented that the Council was doing well with regard to equalities and supported the alternative option to seeking external accreditation.

A Member asked about staff support groups and whether these were still active. The officer responded that there was a Corporate Equalities Group which was chaired by the Corporate Director for Community, Health and Well-being and that each directorate had its own task group. The support groups did still exist but not all of them were still active. A sub-group of the Corporate Equalities Group was looking at the staff survey results and the annual equalities report and asking if staff were aware of the groups, and if they were why were they not attending them. The support groups were valuable as a means of engaging with staff and receiving comments on policies.

Members then examined the progress against the performance indicators for the 8 objectives and asked questions about the 'Red, Amber, Green' (RAG) ratings. They also expressed concerns that some of the information included in the progress report was not up to date and that there were gaps in some of the data for the performance indicators. In response to Members questions, an officer made the following comments;

- the three year action plan had been replaced by an annual EqlA programme and directorates had been asked to align this with their commissioning panel and services plans. Each directorate now had an EqlA programme in place and these were not still being developed as included in the progress report;
- the data and information included in the Corporate Equality Objectives progress report was up to date until the end of quarter 1, the quarter 2 data was being received from each of the Improvement Boards;
- some of the RAG ratings had a question mark and this was because the information required was collected in either an annual or bi-annual survey. An example was the indicator for safeguarding adults from harm in Objective 6;
- an annual report would be submitted in May or June 2013 and this would allow for comparisons between the data available in March 2012 and March 2013. There were difficulties in aligning the different cycles of meetings;

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services commented that the data was collected from the Improvement Boards and if the Sub-Committee meeting had been slightly later in the month the quarter 2 data would have been available. The progress report provided a running assessment of progress at a given point in time. The Council was only required to publish an annual report and the progress report was an additional report which it had been decided to produce.

A Member asked questions about the re-offending rates for young people, the target for 2016 and the progress for this indicator in objective 6. The Member also expressed concerns that the correct data was not being included for each performance indicator and that the information from the recent inspection reports had not been included in the progress report. In response, the officer explained that the target was set on an annual basis when the service plan was reviewed. It was anticipated that the targets and indicators would be more explicit in the future. The information to compare current progress against the target for March 2013 had not been received from the scorecard.

A Member then raised concerns about the RAG rating and progress of a number of indicators relating to children and young people. The officer explained that the Chair of the Children's and Families Directorate Equalities Group had recently left and a new officer, the Divisional Director for Quality Assurance and Service Improvement, was now in place as Chair. Additional information about which community groups were disproportionately affected was required, as this would enable the objectives and actions to be more targeted. There were 11 indicators for the Children's and Families Directorate across the objectives. For those indicators where there was not currently any baseline data it was important to know the details and what required improvement as this could then be included as a target in the action plan.

At this point the Chair declared a pecuniary interest as the matters being considered related to public health. The Chair left the meeting and the Vice-Chairman took the Chair.

A Member questioned what the definition of a 'child' was in relation to the indicator for number of vulnerable children accessing sexual health services as public concern and the appropriate policy responses would necessarily differ significantly according to the age of those accessing such services. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services commented that the indicators had been selected to match with the objectives and agreed that there was a need to break down each of the indicators.

A Member asked when the targets and performance data would be included for those indicators which not need have any listed. In addition, the Member questioned how the Council was performing in comparison to neighbouring boroughs on matters such as disability awareness and sexual health. The officer advised that a comparison with neighbouring boroughs would be included in the annual report. It was explained that the data included in this progress report had been taken from the quarterly reports from the directorates.

A Member questioned who was leading on equalities from the Children's and Families Directorate. The officer advised that the new Chair of the Children's and Families Directorate Equalities Group wanted to consider different social groups and set targets for each of those. It was expected that when the service plans were reviewed it would be an opportunity to review the measures and to make them 'SMARTER'. The indicators which had been included were national ones and it was suggested that there was a need to have local indicators which would help to identify groups which were disproportionately affected.

A Member raised the issue of sexual health and public health responsibilities and the additional role which the Council would be assuming with regard to public health. The Member asked how the allocated funds for sexual health services would be protected. The officer responded that EqIAs were completed once the commissioning panel had suggested a project proposal. The EqIA would identify any potential implications and the cumulative impact of projects would be drawn up. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services commented that the grant for public health was not known yet. Any proposals and budgets were subject to an EqIA.

A Member stated that the public health responsibility would outweigh the funding available and that at present there was a budget with an allocation of £33 per head of which £22 was for sexual health services. The Member asked who would be responsible and the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services responded that the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Portfolio Holder would be responsible. The officer advised that an EqIA was being completed on the transfer of responsibility for public health to the Council. The Portfolio Holder for Children's, Schools and Families and the Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder would be responsible.

A Member questioned the inclusion of an indicator relating to sexual health as the Council would not have any control over this matter until March 2013. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services responded that at present the Council had responsibility for vulnerable children and children in care and that the Primary Care Trust (PCT) was responsible for other children until April 2013.

A Member requested clarification regarding the progress against the indicators for access to mental health support for vulnerable children and young people through direct commissioning services. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services explained that the information was taken from the Directorate's scorecard. The officer advised that when the objectives and indicators were reviewed the targets would be made 'SMARTER'. It was explained that some of the indicators for Children's and Families had been taken from the Children and Young People plan and this was why local indicators should be included in the scorecard.

The Chair rejoined the meeting, following the conclusion of the discussion on public health and re-took the Chair.

A Member questioned why the RAG rating for NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) was low red and commented that one year not spent in work at an early age had significant negative impacts on a person's life chances. The Member also drew attention to the Youth Offending Team (YOT) report and commented that the percentage for young offender NEETs was not meant to exceed 20%. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services responded that the NEET figure in Harrow was low and that the percentage for young carers may appear to be high because of a low total number of young carers where one change would have a significant impact on the percentage.

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

- how was the figure for 16-18 year old NEETs calculated and tracked?
- who was the owner and, therefore who was responsible for inequality issues?
- the protection of the vulnerable should be a priority;
- the role of the committee was to question performance and therefore more information was required;
- the YOT inspection report, the Ofsted report and the issues around children and young people safeguarding had shown that there were significant shortfalls in the provision for vulnerable groups.

The officer made the following comments in response:

- the information presented in the progress report had been taken from the directorate scorecards and from the information presented to the Improvement Boards;
- the Chairs of the Directorate Equality Groups would be invited to the meeting of the Committee when the annual report was considered. The Chairs would be in a better position to answer specific questions in relation to the service plans, work plans and objectives for each directorate.

A Member commented that some departments appeared to have mainstreamed equalities more than others and asked who had overall responsibility and was accountable for equality issues. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services responded that he had Cabinet responsibility and that all Portfolio Holders had responsibility for their directorate. The officer commented that 4 workshops were being held with the directorates to provide assistance in meeting their equality duties and to develop an annual EqIA programme which aligned with the Key Decision Schedule. A quality assurance group had been established. The officer advised that the annual report would give a full account of performance against the objectives.

A Member suggested that the annual report should include a column with the name of the responsible Member and officer and that this would be especially useful where there was cross-over between areas. In addition, further information was required to explain which indicators had more impact than others, as in some cases a RAG rating of low green would be worse than high red because of the time it would take to recover.

A Member asked why there were only 1,010 neighbourhood champions when the target was 2000. The officer advised that a recruitment campaign was currently underway and that the figure included was for quarter 1.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress made against the Single Equalities Scheme (SES) action plan and the Corporate Equality Objectives be noted;
- (2) an annual report on progress against the Corporate Equality Objectives be received in order to quality assure and provide challenge to further improve the Council's performance in mainstreaming equalities across the organisation.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.52 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR SUE ANDERSON
Chair