

## APPENDIX B

### PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

#### Chair's briefing – Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> November

##### **Members:**

Councillor Sue Anderson (Chair)

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane (Vice-Chairman)

##### **Officer attendees:**

Julie Alderson, Corporate Director of Resources – Finance Update (items 2 & 3)

Martin Randall, Senior Professional – Performance & Data Services

John Dalton, Service Manager – Housing Needs (item 4)

David Harrington, Service Manager (Performance Management) – Child Protection Plans (item 5)

Hasina Shah, Senior Professional – Finance Update (items 2 & 3)

Guy Fiegehen, Scrutiny Officer

## NOTES

### **1. Welcome/introductions**

The Chair and Vice-Chairman welcomed officers attending.

### **2. Last P&F questions and matters arising**

The Corporate Director and Senior Professional presented revised tables on the budget clarifying changes that had made been in year. Two projects had now been allocated, and an unexpected income of £224,555 had been allocated to the Finance corporate budget. The Chair and Vice-Chairman said it was important that virements are clearly identified and asked that in future these are shown in separate columns. They were concerned at the total number of virements, and it is important to accountability that Performance and Finance Members are aware of virements as well as Cabinet. They asked that details of virements be presented to P&F at the year-end.

The Chair and Vice-Chairman also thanked officers for the list of acronyms used in Finance reports.

### **3. Q2 Finance – Update**

The Corporate Director Service Manager said the full Q2 revenue report was not yet ready. The Senior Professional said £400,000 increased pressures mainly from West London Waste and homelessness would be offset to some extent by higher than expected investment income. The aim was to contain overspends within the overall existing budget e.g. through vacancy management. The Corporate Director said that the council was better placed than at the same time the year before.

The Chair and Vice-Chairman said that it is important to know about underspends as well as overspends. They expressed concern about departments' continuing ability to absorb cost pressures. The Corporate Director said she was confident that officers know where the issues are and that the council is pursuing feasible options to reduce costs e.g. through better procurement. The Senior Professional added there had been no calls on the contingency reserve so far this year.

#### **4. Homelessness Prevention**

The Service Manager said benchmarking continues to show Harrow has an effective service compared to other West London boroughs as well as below-median overall costs. He suggested this combination (effectiveness and low overall cost) is due to Harrow's relatively high spending on prevention. All eleven recommendations in the last report on the service had been implemented. The Chair and Vice-Chairman agreed that placing people in bed and breakfast (B&B) is a mark of failure. The Service Manager said the B&B numbers had been rising and are expected to rise again next year. He said that although the number of people coming into the borough seeking housing had increased he had seen no evidence that other boroughs are pushing people in Harrow's direction. After the new benefit cap Harrow will be just as affordable as Kensington & Chelsea for poorer people.

The Chair and Vice-Chairman thanked the Service Director for his report and the service for its continuing good work.

#### **5. Child Protection Plans**

The Service Manager (Performance Manager) said Harrow has had too many Child Protection Plans (CPPs) lasting for more than two years. Good practice is that a CPP should be progressed within two years or other options should be considered such as taking the child into care. A corporate priority had been set for 2011-13 to reduce this to a reasonable level involving a new protocol that requires each case to be scrutinised for the prospects of a timely completion at the statutory 15 month review. Morning Lane Associates are providing specialist support to improve practice in the social care teams.

He said the steps taken have led to significant improvements in progressing plans. CPPs lasting over two years had peaked at 30 in 2011 but reduced to 12 at the end of 2011-12. The total had risen again to 18 at the end of Q1 2011-12 and then dropped to 15 by the end of October. That temporary increase has largely been due to a group of 6 siblings whose CPPs went over two years in August 2012. This family case is complex and currently subject to review. More generally, even were there not to be a successful outcome for this family the total of CPPs lasting more than two years is expected shortly to be in single figures. An average level for a London borough like Harrow would be around eight. Outstanding authorities would have rate around four.

The Chair and Vice-Chairman said they found the report quite encouraging. They expressed concern about the need to ensure the local NHS, including GPs, are engaged in child protection issues. The Service Manager said the council was working with partner organisations to improve pathways from health and the police.

#### **6. Corporate Scorecard Q2 2012/13 and update on indicators identified for further monitoring**

The scorecard was reviewed and updates considered. Detailed comments and follow-up action are identified in the attached appendix. The Chair and Vice-Chairman said they needed to take stock at the next meeting of the number of items on the 'watch' list for further monitoring which had risen over the last few briefings.

#### **7. P&F sub-committee meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

A booking had been made at Wealdstone Youth Centre for the special meeting on 'Engaging Young People'. The two agenda items will be

- Progress report on the 'Engaging Young People' review
- Progress on Academies – performance outcomes.

## **8. P&F sub-committee meeting – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013**

The provisional agenda items were confirmed as follows:

- P&F Chair's report (Guy Fiegehen)
- Revenue and capital monitoring (Q2) (Julie Alderson)
- Contracts and procurement savings – mid-year report (Richard Hawtin)
- Household planning application performance – update (Stephen Kelly)
- Council's use or performance information – progress report (Alex Dewsnap & Martin Randall)
- Draft Annual Report (Guy Fiegehen)

**Guy Fiegehen**  
Scrutiny Officer  
January 2012