

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

18 DECEMBER 2012

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Sue Anderson * Tony Ferrari (2) * Ann Gate † Krishna James	* Zarina Khalid † Barry Macleod-Cullinane * Paul Osborn Stephen Wright
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) Mrs A Khan
Non-voting Co-opted:	Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	

- * Denotes Member present
- (2) Denotes category of Reserve Member
- † Denotes apologies received

337. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana

Reserve Member

Councillor Tony Ferrari

338. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared:

Agenda Item 8 – Draft Climate Action Plan and Draft Delivering Warmer Homes (HECA) Report

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in that she was employed by the Primary Care Trust. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon unless the discussion related to her interest at which point she would then leave.

339. Minutes

With reference to the Post Ofsted Improvement Plan, a Member reminded the Committee that the Chief Executive had given an undertaking to provide details on any Equality Impact Assessments that had been carried out on the social worker posts as part of the work on terms and conditions. An officer advised that a response had been included in the Committee's action sheet but that she would seek clarification on this.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2012, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

340. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 17.

341. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 15.

342. References from Council/Cabinet

None received.

RESOLVED ITEMS

343. Changes in Public Realm Services

Members received a report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise which set out a general overview of the Public Realm Services and the changes planned for the service area.

The Divisional Director of Environment outlined the content of the report and explained that the Public Realm Service was currently part of a wider transformation project taking place in his division – the PRISM project. He reported on the new technology in the refuse service, the proposal to reduce the number of refuse vehicles, the ability to provide information more directly to residents, and changes to the street cleansing and grounds maintenance

services. He stated that the changes made had meant that there was a greater ability to focus on those issues that residents reported.

A Member stated that the report did not address the issues that he wished to consider in that over the years there had been a number of cuts and had wanted to see where the Council was in terms of service standards. He wanted to get a sense of what was going on on the ground, for example, in relation to trees. Residents were complaining about trees in terms of pruning and officers were reporting that they could not carry out works unless it was an emergency due to budget cuts. He also requested clarification on the meaning of paragraph 4 on page 12 of the report.

The Divisional Director responded that the department's restricted capacity was acknowledged and that there were some activities that could no longer be performed due to savings. The front line services had, however, been maintained. The proposal was to separate some functions and staff in order to particularly focus on commissioning.

The Member expressed the view that the removal of some of the Access Harrow contact channels would make the current situation worse and residents would instead contact Councillors with their public realm issues/complaints. He questioned how it was envisaged that Members resolve issues raised as they too would have reduced contact channels. The Divisional Director responded that it was important to recognise that many residents now contacted the Council by emailing or texting photographs of problems in the public realm such as graffiti and fly tipping.

A Member stated that in the budget papers there was a line stating that there would be £600,000 savings from a reduction in the public realm service and requested clarification on the implications of this line. The Divisional Director stated that whilst this was not included in the papers before Members, work was being done on efficiency savings. He reported that calls about graffiti and fly tipping were being responded to more quickly but that there would, amongst other things, be a reduction in the level of street cleansing and grass cutting. Decisions on these aspects would be included in the final budget and whilst officers would not choose to make these cuts the Council had to make significant savings. In response to the Member's request for further detail on the number of roads and parks that would not be maintained to the existing level, the Divisional Director stated that work was currently underway but related mainly to the number of posts that would be lost and the reduction in vehicle numbers. The savings would have to be delivered quickly due to the Council's financial position.

A Member questioned whether the work with the Communications team involved looking in to the psychology of behaviour. The Divisional Director advised that the Communications team had some interesting ideas and that education was key. Enforcement activity was undertaken and the Council would not hesitate in prosecuting fly tippers. With their existing powers, the police were able to fine for littering/flytipping and there were ongoing discussions with them in terms of which pieces of legislation the Council would like to use. A report was being prepared for the Portfolio Holder on this issue.

In response to a Member's question on street criteria, the Divisional Director stated that, in his view, some sites may have been assessed incorrectly. Harrow's figures were not that bad it was just that other authorities had improved. Some of these figures may be a little optimistic. He acknowledged the Member's comment that the figures would get worse as the number of street cleanses was reduced.

A Member requested an update on the Drain London project. The Divisional Director undertook to provide the Member with a written update.

In response to a Member's question about engagement with schools in relation to litter, the Divisional Director advised that there was engagement with schools on various projects and also if a particular issue was raised via Access Harrow. The Member expressed the view that she was in agreement with the suggestion that PSOs be able to issue fines for litter offences.

Members questioned the commissioning approach and the view was expressed that there was still a considerable way to go before there was meaningful commissioning. Concern was expressed that officers appeared to be unable to advise Members of the outcomes that were sought or could be afforded as a result of commissioning. The Committee would need to monitor the impact. The new Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise was to be invited to attend the meeting of the Committee in February 2013 and a Member requested that she be asked to set out her vision for the service and the impacts on street cleansing and parks maintenance.

The Chair thanked the Divisional Director for his attendance and responses.

RESOLVED: That the changes impacting on Public Realm Services be noted.

344. Draft Climate Change Action Plan and draft Delivering Warmer Homes (HECA) report

Members received a report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise which set out the draft Climate Change Action Plan (Appendix D) and the draft Delivering Warmer Homes (HECA) report (Appendix I), which were reported to Cabinet on 22 November 2012. These draft strategies/plans were currently subject to public consultation and Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to consider and comment on the drafts. The Chair drew Members' attention to the fact that they were being invited to comment only on the two draft documents (Appendices D and I).

The officer reported that the report to Cabinet in November had provided details of progress of the existing Climate Change Strategy. Whilst there had been good progress in reducing carbon emissions, the officer gave a word of caution in that the previous winter had been particularly mild. In terms of Delivering Warmer Homes, the Council was required to submit a response to the consultation by 31 March 2013.

In considering the report, Members made comments and asked questions which included the following:

- Concern was expressed at the apparent inconsistencies between this and the previous report on the agenda (Changes in Public Realm Services), citing numerous examples, and the lack of joining up of information across the Council. The officer advised that Appendix A was the previous Action Plan which had included everything officers had thought might be required. Appendix D took a more 'broad brush' approach as it was now recognised that the previous Action Plan was too detailed. A consequence of this was that reports had had to summarise a large amount of the information received from a number of departments.
- A Member, referring to page 96 of the report, stated that the population figure was not included in the waste section of Appendix D but that somehow the waste per head and recycling figures were included without this figure. He questioned why, on page 14 of the previous report the figures differed. The officer reassured Members that Appendix D would be completed prior to its further consideration by Cabinet in March 2013 and that these figures would be checked. The figures relating to number of households and population were provided by the Environment Agency.
- There appeared to be no mention of the two main strands in relation to the Council's carbon footprint within Appendix D. In addition, carbon emissions did not appear to have been considered during the commissioning process and there was no activity that monitored the carbon impact of capital spend or commissioning. The officer drew Members' attention to the section in the Appendix which recorded the Council's carbon footprint and stated that the carbon impact of capital spending was taken into account as part of the capital bidding process but accepted that more weight could be given to this. Another Member stated that there should be a way of ensuring that the embedded carbon effect of capital spend was monitored and recorded. The officer replied that, at present, embedded carbon was not measured and that this would be a significantly more complicated exercise. Current government regulations did not require embedded carbon to be measured.
- In response to a Member's question in relation to paragraph 2.2.2 and the bid submission for Warmer Homes, Healthy People, the officer advised that £82,000 funding had been received and that the aim was to launch the scheme in January 2013. Officers were in contact with Age UK and the Citizens Advice Bureau with a view to allocating funding. He added that Harrow had submitted a joint bid with five other West London boroughs to DECC for various energy reduction projects. If the bid was successful this project would be delivered by the end of March 2013.
- In relation to the paragraphs on Biodiversity and the Natural Environment, a Member questioned how officers were going to ensure that the Council's plans were up to date given the financial constraints.

The officer advised that this information had been provided by another team and he was therefore unable to answer detailed questions on this area. The Divisional Director added that the documents were currently draft and would be updated.

- A Member asked whether a new application for Harrow to be recognised as a Fair Trade Borough had been submitted. Officers undertook to check the position.
- A Member indicated that clarity was required in relation to the reference to the NHS's Cold Weather Plan and the 27,000 excess deaths during December and March each year. She stated that the report read as if these deaths were all in Harrow. The officer clarified that this was a national figure.
- The officer clarified that AMR was an abbreviation for Automatic Meter Reading. This technology allowed the Council to monitor energy use on a half-hourly basis in schools and corporate buildings and enabled energy wastage to be more easily identified.
- In response to a Member's question on businesses and the public sector, the officer advised that it had been difficult to get a response from SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) and that the Council was looking to work with the body replacing the Primary Care Trust on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Members expressed their dissatisfaction with the inconsistencies in the report and indicated that, in the future, they would like all relevant officers who were able to answer their detailed questions to attend the meeting. It was questioned how members of the public could make an informed decision when elected Members were having difficulty in getting the information they needed and it was stressed that the Members ensured that reports were complete, correct and meaningful. The Chair suggested that some of the issues could be raised with the Corporate Director when she attended the Committee in February 2013 and that, if possible, a further draft be provided to the Committee at that meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee's comments be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

345. Standing Review of the Budget - Use of Capital Resources

The Chair advised the Committee that this item had been deferred to the next ordinary meeting.

346. Report from the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee Chair

Members agreed to consider and receive the report of the Chair of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee as matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

A Member expressed concern at the timeliness of the data received as it related to quarter 1 when it was now the end of quarter 3. He suggested that this be discussed at the Scrutiny Leadership Group the following day. The Chair of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee echoed the concerns expressed stating that it was a problem that scrutiny officers had tried to resolve.

In terms of corporate equality objectives, the Chair of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee advised that consideration was being given to inviting the corporate equality leads to the quarterly Chair's briefing.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

347. Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Members agreed to consider and receive the report of the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning which accompanied the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members as matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the actions proposed therein be agreed.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.47 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman