

Report from Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Our Sub-Committee

The Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee looks in detail at how the council's services are performing in-year.

We monitor service and financial performance by analysing data and then requesting briefings or details of action plans in place where necessary. The sub-committee can make recommendations for improvement and if necessary make referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny committee if further work is needed.

This work includes, for example, regular review of the Cabinet's Revenue and Capital Monitoring report and quarterly Corporate Scorecard. In addition, we can decide to review and monitor the performance of the council's partners.

This is the last report from the Performance and Finance sub committee in this administration and we would like to thank the councillors – both scrutiny and executive – and officers who have supported the work of the sub committee during this time. We would also like to thank Cllr Ferrari, who chaired the sub committee from May to September this year before joining Cabinet as Finance Portfolio Holder.

Our meetings

Our regular Chair and Vice-Chairman's briefings and co-ordination of items with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee together drive the work programme of the sub-committee. Our main areas of interest in 2013-14 have been:

- **Revenue and Capital Monitoring** – we have been briefed on a regular basis by the Director of Finance and Assurance on the revenue and capital position of the authority and have been able to seek assurance with regard to the council's likely outturn position and to question the Director on any particular areas of concern.
- **Complaints** – this is the second year that we have received the annual complaints reports for children's and families' services and adults' services rather than the Overview and Scrutiny committee. We were pleased with the detail provided in both reports. We noted that in Children's Services, increased number of complaints were received with regard to communications, policy decisions and staff attitudes. More reassuringly, complaints with regard to service reduction/withdrawal remain low. With regard to Adults' Services it was satisfying to note the small number of escalations between stages in the complaints process.
- **Residual waste and its impact on the budget** - We have been interested in the collection of waste in the borough, particularly the percentage of waste that is recycled. The Council's target is 50% but this has not been met in quarter 1. During our briefing meetings, we have been informed that the total kilograms of waste per household have been going down so overall less waste has been sent to refuse. We will continue to be briefed on the performance in this area.

- **Children's Services' Performance** – During the previous municipal year, scrutiny councillors, including ourselves became concerned about a number of areas of Children's Service performance. We have continued to monitor this and a report on performance in the Children's and Families Directorate was presented to the P&F Committee in July and a further report was presented in February. The report covered a number of areas around which we have raised concern including Children Looked After education and achievement, Youth Offending Team performance and schools place planning and also gave our committee an overall analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the Children's Services' Directorate. We will continue to monitor this area of service delivery.
- **Equalities** – we now receive, on an annual basis a report on the council's performance in terms of progress against our corporate equality objectives. We were able to hear from officers from across the council who have responsibility for delivering these objectives. We look forward to continuing to receive these reports and to support the council in the delivery of equality objectives, both within the council and for our residents.
- **Business Continuity and IT Disaster Recovery** – following consideration of these areas at both the Governance, Audit and Risk Management committee and the Overview and Scrutiny committee we were happy to receive a report to our February committee which addressed a number of concerns which had been raised by members with regard to our corporate resilience.
- **Towards Excellence** – there has been significant change in the Council's Environment and Enterprise Directorate with changes to structures and staffing, ways of working and technology. We were pleased to receive an update from the Corporate Director on how the reorganisation of this important directorate is progressing.
- **Staff sickness** – during our consideration of performance, we raised questions regarding the continuing deterioration in terms of staff sickness levels. On further investigation we were advised of the significant number of 'blank' returns made with regard to reasons for sickness and we have asked for further information on this. We would recommend that this is something investigated further by our successors in the next administration.
- **Third Sector Strategy** – we were pleased to receive an update on the Third Sector Strategy which has been developed by the sector itself, we look forward to continuing to work with the council and the third sector to improve service delivery for our residents.
- **Inspection of Food Premises** – we noted poor performance in this area and were therefore pleased to be briefed by the Service Manager Environmental Services Delivery n about how the indicator is derived and the action being taken to improve the number of food premises in the area that are compliant with food hygiene law. We will propose to our successors that they monitor performance against this indicator as the new team in Environmental Health is established and beds in..
- **Repeat Incidents of Domestic Violence** - during our consideration of the corporate scorecard we also noted concerns with regard to repeat incidents of domestic violence and we please to be briefed by the Violence Against Women and Girls Co-ordinator on what the specific indicator is showing and what this means for council performance.
- **Past reviews** – we have continued to monitor progress on past reviews, including:

- Private Rented Sector Housing: a report was presented to the July P&F meeting which outlined the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the scrutiny review into PRSH. The January meeting also received a report on the development of the Private Rented Sector Strategy, which was referenced during this review as our consideration of performance information had identified concerns
- Housing Revenue Account - Standing review of the Budget: a report was presented to P&F in January outlining progress on implementation of the Standing Review's comments.

During discussions with regard to the private rented sector and the self financing of the Housing Revenue Account, concerns were raised with regard to the extent to which Harrow residents are using pay day loans. This is something which we recommend is followed up by our successors.

- **Member development** – in October, the Director of Finance and Assurance provided a session on the process of setting the Council's annual budget. This session took councillors through the content of the regularly produced revenue and capital monitoring report, explaining the content and the implications. The session was well received and we plan to incorporate training on performance information and information on finance information to offer to new councillors after this election.

Our Conclusions and Next Steps

This is the end of our time as scrutiny councillors. The Performance and Finance sub committee has grown in strength and authority during this administration and is now ensuring that the scrutiny structures truly have performance at their core – by focussing on those areas that are performing less strongly, we have ensured that precious scrutiny resources are targeted at areas which most need our oversight.

But the improvement journey does not stop because the administration ends and we believe that there are issues which scrutiny should continue to monitor. With this in mind we would recommend that our successors continue to use performance and financial information to drive their deliberations and that in particular, the following areas are considered by the next scrutiny administration:

- Children's Services Performance – including inspection outcomes
- Implementation of the Libraries and Leisure contract
- Use of pay day loans
- Staff sickness
- Number of food premises compliant with food hygiene legislation



Councillor Sue Anderson
Chair, Performance and Finance



Councillor Anthony Seymour
Vice-Chairman, Performance and Finance

MEETING STATISTICS

Committee meetings	5 ordinary
Attendance by Portfolio Holders	Cllr Macleod-Cullinane , Adults and Housing Portfolio Holder