

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 8 April 2014

Subject: Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Responsible Officer: Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director,
Strategic Commissioning

Scrutiny Lead Member area:

- Children and Families
- Community Health and Well Being
- Environment and Enterprise
- Performance and Finance scrutiny sub-committee
- Resources

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

The report accompanies the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members.

Recommendations:

The Committee is requested to consider the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members and agree the actions proposed therein.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

This report outlines details of the work of the Scrutiny Lead Members. It is the final report from Scrutiny Lead Members for this administration.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Performance Issues

There are no performance issues associated with this report.

Environmental Impact

There is no environmental impact associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

There are no risks associated with this report.

Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? No

This report outlines the activities of the scrutiny lead councillors; it makes no proposals to change service delivery.

Corporate Priorities

The Scrutiny Lead Members' responsibilities cover all areas of the council's activity.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers:

None

SCRUTINY CHILDREN AND FAMILY LEAD MEMBERS

Briefing – 24 February 2014

PRESENT

- § Cllr Lynda Seymour, Policy Lead Children and Families
- § Catherine Doran, Corporate Director Children and Families Services
- § Roger Rickman, Divisional Director, Special Needs Services
- § Fola Irikefe, Scrutiny Officer

SEN Briefing

Councillor Seymour enquired over what the difference was between a SEN statement and the Education Health and Care Plans which will replace SEN statements and what was the basis for the change. The Divisional Director, Special Needs Service explained that a single plan will replace SEN statements as they only covered educational needs. The new plans would cover education, health and social care. The plans would allow for services for children with SEN to be developed in a holistic way and in so doing hopefully provide more parental choice.

Councillor Seymour enquired over what happened to children who were on the autistic spectrum of having special educational needs and asserted that she felt professionals were very quick to label and diagnose children from an early age. This was because over the past few decades there have been more children labelled as having SEN owing to autism. The Divisional Director, Special Needs Service said that is it not clear whether the increased number of children described to have SEN owing to autism was due to increased diagnosis or increased awareness.

Autism Briefing

Councillor Seymour enquired over whether targets were set for making diagnosis. It was confirmed that there wasn't a target in relation to diagnosing children. However, there was a target in place once children have been diagnosed in relation to their assessments. The Divisional Director, Special Needs Service explained that diagnosis was at least in part usually made on the basis of what parents themselves had observed in their children and not any specific test as such. Professional observation is also then applied more so than any specific test.

Public Health

It was reported that Public Health would be taking over the Health Visiting Service. Health Visitors are available in Children's Centres for under 5's and GP's are keen to have Health Visitors in the GP service. There is also work currently taking place to see where school nursing will sit. On query over how many were currently operating, it was heard that there are currently 7/8 school nurses in the borough working between a number of schools. There will be a substantial investment in the service post April 2014 as they are presently only involved in safeguarding work.

Families First Project

An update on the Families First project was provided. The Families First project is Harrow's approach to the Government's Troubled Families initiative.

The early intervention team are involved in triaging and are working with the families. An overall improvement of 70% in families was reported. Families are supported for example to ensure that children are going to school, parents are getting off benefits and going back into work and youth crime is falling. This is how improvement is measured.

The family action group had developed a parent mentoring scheme for complex families through home start successfully.

There has also been a recent bid to Cabinet to develop volunteering with early intervention.

Ofsted Thematic Inspection

The Corporate Director Children and Families Services reported that the Ofsted inspection looked at universal services and early intervention thresholds. Councillor Seymour was informed that in the main the Children and Families Directorate know themselves well in terms of where their weaknesses and strengths lie and this placed the service in a good position to make improvements.

Areas for improvement included:

- § Variation in practice both very good and not so good
- § The model of early help assessment and planning delivery relationship with universal services
- § The culture in the directorate in respect of both front line and strategic aspects.

AOB

A general discussion took place on the speech and language therapy service. Councillor Seymour enquired over what was happening with the speech and language therapy service as she has been advised that there is no funding available and children are being given a limited amount of sessions and then are put back onto waiting lists.

The Divisional Director, Special Needs Services explained that the service is jointly commissioned with the CCG and the new model of delivery is working well with schools and he is unaware of any complaints from parents.

It was explained that a review would soon be carried out on Early Years services. On enquiry over where early years funding come from, Councillor Seymour was informed that services are funded from both the council's Children and Families Service and also Health.

**SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS COMMUNITY HEALTH AND
WELL BEING
Wednesday 5th February 2014**

PRESENT

§ Cllr Nana Asante, Performance Lead Children and Families

§ Marianne Locke, Divisional Director, Community and Culture

§ Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

This briefing had been arranged in order for the Community Health and Being scrutiny leads to be advised as to how the borough's leisure and library services are being utilised to contribute to residents' well being, particularly in the context of the new contracts in place to deliver these services.

The Divisional Director outlined for Cllr Asante, how the Leisure and Library Services will contribute to the community health and well being of the borough.

Leisure.

The contract for provision of the leisure service specifies a number of requirements against which the provider's performance will be measured:

- Provision of high quality activities and access to opportunities for sport and leisure, particularly for children and under represented groups
- Contribution to achieving a healthier and active lifestyle – this is linked to the achievement of public health outcomes for the borough – in particular addressing issues of obesity, cardio-vascular disease and diabetes, which are high in the borough
- Continuous improvement in service and levels of user satisfaction
- Environmental outcomes
- Socio-Economic outcomes – including training and apprenticeship opportunities.

Libraries

The contract for the provision of the Library Service similarly specifies a number of requirements against which the provider's performance will be measured:

- Increased usage of library services
- Broader community service provision – including libraries as community hubs
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Positive improvements in social and economic sustainability
- Positive impact on health – there are no specific indicators for this.

Joint partnership meetings with providers and the 2/3 boroughs, which monitor the provider's performance take place on a monthly basis – to reduce to ¼ ly.

The most recently reported results of this monitoring were provided as follows:

Leisure

Despite a dip in participation rates in September/October, results for November/December show an increase in numbers visits over the previous twelve months of 1000. The number of visits over the twelve months to the end of December 2014 was 3000

With regard to the participation of under represented groups, the contractor is appointing a community development officer and has invested in a targeted gym for the use of particular groups e.g. GP referrals (the provider is working with GPs to provide health checks at the gym) women only sessions.

The provider is expected to provide a demographic break down of service users. This will be done via the collection of information as residents register for the Everyone Active Card. Some information, which could be used as a baseline, was being collected by the previous contractor but this only related to the social identity of users completing the satisfaction survey. Cllr Asante is concerned that the opportunity to gather demographic information about service users is not lost. The Divisional Director will pass the information currently available to Cllr Asante.

Squash courts have been renovated to such a high standard that England Squash and Racquet Ball have expressed an interest in the centre becoming a centre of excellence. They will provide a coach to work with schools to encourage young people's involvement in squash.

An open day for schools was held in December and a general open day held in January attended by 4000 residents has resulted in an additional 100 members.

The climbing wall will be reinstated in a more prominent position in the centre, and this has resulted in interest in the establishment of a bouldering wall for the centre, again offering services at national standards.

£30k funding has been received to provide equipment for disabled children's sports activities. The Divisional Director emphasised that, whilst integration is the general approach to the provision of sports facilities to people with disabilities, sometimes specific equipment is required to facilitate this integration.

The service is working towards the Inclusive and Active standard as specified by Sport England

The provider has also applied to Sport England for funding for cricket nets but has been unsuccessful in this application

With the Sports Development Team, 3-year funding from Sport England (Sportivate) has been awarded to support the creation of sports clubs which can provide progression routes from schools sports. This has been used to establish:

- Harrow Blackhawks – basketball club
- Judo Club
- Women Back into Netball

The provider had been asked to provide the 'net promoter' score in order to identify whether customers would promote the leisure service. The provider is also expected to meet national standards, specifically QUEST accreditation, and to report on their progress in this area every two years.

The Divisional Director also advised that all vending machines are providing Fairtrade products, as specified in the contract. Recycling facilities have also been introduced on the site.

The provider is expected to pursue and report on:

- Inclusive Fitness Initiative
- Equality Standard for Sport
- Investor in People
- Staff profile analysis
- Number of local suppliers
- Attrition rate
- Complaints

The provider is expected to offer a minimum of 10 apprenticeships – so far there are 7 offered in Brent and 5 in Ealing. To improve performance in Harrow, the provider is working with the Harrow XCite project

Libraries

There was an increase in the number of complaints picked up by the libraries as the contract was taken over, but the numbers are small and do not represent any significant issues.

There has been a 2% increase in visits which is likely due to the improved ICT facilities. However, there has been a marked reduction in the number of book loans for the last quarter (Sept – Dec). This is under investigation as although nationally book loans are overall reducing (due to factors such as a shift towards the use of E Readers) this is a larger than anticipated reduction. This may be caused by the installation of a new libraries management system which may mean the issues are being counted differently by the two systems and we may have to establish a new baseline figure.

The council already has baseline information on the participation of targeted groups. The provider is expected to report on the increase in participation of these groups every two years but to provide an outline of action being taken to increase participation at each joint partnership meeting

Annual plans for each library are being produced and an overall annual library plan for the service will be presented in April..

The provider is expected to pursue additional funding and has recently been successful in a bid entitled Enterprising Libraries to develop libraries as small business hubs providing support and advice to local SMEs and entrepreneurs

The restructure of the libraries has taken specific time. 4.5 FTEs will be made redundant as a result of this process.

The provider is expected to increase customer satisfaction and will participate in the annual public library user survey. A customer satisfaction baseline figure is already in place. Mystery shopping exercises will take place every 2 years.

Like the Leisure contractor, the Libraries provider is expected to provide:

- Customer Satisfaction (Public Library User Survey)
- Environmental targets – including accreditation in accordance with ISO 14001
- IIP
- Staff satisfaction and staff profile analysis
- Apprenticeships/local supply chains etc

Reports in all of these areas will be required at the end of the 1st year.

More detailed performance indicators to cover the following will also be expected:

- Total library visits per 1000 population
- Stock – adults and children
- Feedback and complaints resolution
- New member and active member analysis
- Use of People Network and WiFi
- Attendance at library events

Cllr Asante asked for information regarding the usage of libraries – both visits and issues.

The Divisional Director commented that the CIPFA statistical returns made by all authorities show that Harrow has the 4th highest number of loans in outer London and 7th highest number in London as a whole in 2012/13. This information will be provided to Cllr Asante.

The Divisional Director advised that study space has been increased at Gayton Library and that space has been opened at the Masefield Suite to augment this in peak study periods. It was agreed that this space needs to be properly advertised in order to make sure the space is used. Use of outreach and schools advisors might be helpful in this.

Cllr Asante asked about the future of the library service. The Divisional Director confirmed that the contract specifies the number of libraries required to be run and the minimum opening times.

FOR ACTION

The Environment and Enterprise Leads will receive the information offered by the Divisional director and a report on the performance of the Library and Leisure contract will be received by the Performance and Finance sub committee in the next administration.

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS COMMUNITY, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Briefing Wednesday 5 March 2014

Present

- Councillor Chris Mote, Scrutiny Policy Lead, Community, Health and Wellbeing
- Councillor Nana Asante, Scrutiny Performance Lead, Community, Health and Wellbeing
- Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director, Housing Services
- Jon Dalton, Service Manager, Housing Needs
- Alison Pegg, Service Manager, Housing Partnerships and Strategy
- Dave Roberts, Housing Finance Business Partner
- Toni Burke, Head of Resident Services
- Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer

Housing need

The Service Manager, Housing Need advised that approximately 1,400 households are threatened with homelessness, but that the council works with households as early as possible to prevent homelessness, including prior to court action. The council can offer help such as top-up rent payments.

Housing benefit has not kept pace with rents and there is a shortfall of affordable properties. A recent examination of Zoopla (which covers most of the rental market) found that only 4% of properties were available at the Local Housing Allowance level. This makes it difficult for households to find accommodation and also puts pressure on existing tenants as landlords believe that they could re-let their properties for a higher rent given the level of demand.

Of the 1,400 at risk of homelessness, the council formally assesses and accepts about 150 (1 in 10) as homeless and in priority need. The council has secured 268 properties in the private rented sector but there are still nearly 100 households in bed and breakfast accommodation. If the council can secure a further 150 properties this would help to further reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation. The council is having to provide landlords with heavy financial incentives to accept tenants and there is significant competition from other local authorities who are also providing landlords with incentives.

With regard to residency requirements, under the council's new allocations scheme (agreed in October 2013) there is a five year residency test to secure a council property. The council will help households after six months' residency but the household will not qualify for council or social housing.

Members were advised that the council can assist households going into emergency accommodation by providing storage. There is however, no free storage available and households are charged a maximum of £50 per week. A Member responded that her casework suggested that households without family/friends to help with storing items could not meet this cost. The officer responded that most households avoided B&B accommodation where storage

is limited; in any case there could be some flexibility in budgets as households were not required to pay utilities, for example, while in B&B accommodation. The Member added that living in B&B accommodation was more expensive to the household because of, for example, limited cooking facilities.

The Divisional Director advised that the council's legal duty is restricted to providing temporary accommodation for households in priority need. There was no requirement for the council to pay incentives, to pay rent upfront or to offer storage. However, without the council providing some of these services the number of homeless households would only increase. There was also some provision in the emergency help scheme that might be able to assist.

The council can find households accommodation but this is not always in the borough. Most households do want to stay in the borough. Out of the 268 households who have been found accommodation, 40-50 have been outside London.

Future housing development

Take up of the Grants to Move scheme has been low. The increase of the Right to Buy (RTB) allowance to the £100,000 level has meant that the £38,000 grant offered under Grants to Move is not financially attractive enough. It is difficult to replace the properties lost through RTB; RTB is also impacting on the cost effectiveness of regeneration schemes because of the cost to the council in buying back properties in order to regenerate. Notices can be served to stop RTB sales but the council needs firm plans to do so. The level of discount makes RTB very appealing especially in cheaper parts of the borough.

Housing associations have been building properties (more than in the private sector) and the council has nomination rights to more than 1,000. However, there is insufficient building to meet demand. The council receives money from the New Homes Bonus scheme for each completion regardless of tenure, however in the context of a reduced grant overall, this has not resulted in an increase in funding and the money has been used for projects in the General Fund.

The council has undertaken a review of the impact of welfare reform on patterns of spend. This has changed the support that the council provides; it was noted that changes are not yet complete.

A Member commented that there seemed to be a focus on fees and charges rather than on the wider opportunities for income generation. The Divisional Director responded that as part of the Regeneration Strategy, the board, chaired by the Corporate Director, Environmental Services, was considering both the civic centre site and the council's corporate asset base to determine how the council could maximise income generation. This could include a range of future uses including homes, businesses and owner-occupation. Under the Homes for Harrow project, architect's drawings have been commissioned for developments on garage sites and consultation is underway on eight small regeneration sites.

Although the level of income in the Housing Revenue Account is sufficient for the council to borrow to build new property the council is prevented from doing so by current Government policy. The council is considering a range of investment models whereby General Fund borrowing could fund new development (either fully or partly council owned) but ultimately the route taken will be a Member level decision.

Action:

- Housing to provide presentation on Homes for Harrow – completed
- Housing to provide briefing on impact of welfare reform – completed
- Housing to provide briefing on investment approaches – completed

**SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' ENVIRONMENT AND
ENTERPRISE
Briefing Tuesday 4 March 2014**

Present: Councillor Phillip O'Dell, Performance Lead, Environment and Enterprise
Caroline Bruce, Corporate Director, Environment and Enterprise
Philip Hamberger, Divisional Director, Business and Service Development
Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer

Apologies: None

Update on Towards Excellence project

The Divisional Director advised that the remaining six teams will be live by 7 March 2014. There is some recruitment still underway. Technology is now the main area of focus. He explained that customer enhancements will be introduced in the summer, which will involve changes to the website and to webforms. Environmental health and public protection will now be included. Users will be able to see whether work has been reported, as well as details of when work is scheduled to be completed. In response to a question from Cllr O'Dell, he confirmed that the upgrades to the front-end of the website have been delayed pending a corporate upgrade affecting the whole website. The directorate is working with Capita to make alternative plans should the upgrade be uncompleted when the enhancements are fully introduced in the autumn.

Cllr O'Dell queried whether a MyHarrow account will be required for licensing payments and was advised that in general there is a push for the MyHarrow account to be used. Officers undertook to clarify the position.

As well as staff launches, the Corporate Director advised that the directorate is also undertaking a leadership development programme for all managers.

Actions:

- Monitoring of the Towards Excellence project by the scrutiny leads be incorporated into the annual report. (Scrutiny)
- To confirm whether a MyHarrow account will be required for licensing payments. (E&E)

Corporate Plan 2014/15

The corporate plan was discussed with regard to the areas of focus for the directorate.

Tree Strategy

The Corporate Director advised that a strategy has been drafted in accordance with best practice and the spatial requirements of the Mayor. It describes action the council will/will not take as well as cyclical maintenance strategy. All trees must be inspected, but it is for the council to determine the appropriate level of maintenance. Additional revenue and capital funding has been included in the budget for 2014/15. There is a full capital allocation for tree replacement. Cllr O'Dell requested a briefing on the Tree Strategy and that the matter be followed up by scrutiny.

Action:

- A briefing on the Tree Strategy to be arranged. (E&E)
- The Tree Strategy to be included in the annual report for future follow-up by scrutiny. (Scrutiny)

Performance update Q3

The following areas were raised by Cllr O'Dell:

Harrow Town Centre – Lowlands – the Corporate Director advised that further information was sought on negotiations with the GLA. Work is underway to quality assure the design for the space following concerns raised by the contractor.

Cashless parking (RingGo) – Cllr O'Dell sought further information on the scope of the project and whether it included visitor parking in addition to CPZs.

NI 195 – street cleanliness – Cllr O'Dell asked whether a conscious decision had been made to focus on addressing litter in primary retail areas; the Corporate Director confirmed that this was the case. She added that the indicator included all visible graffiti regardless of whether or not it was on council property. All offensive graffiti is removed regardless of its location.

Sickness absence – Cllr O'Dell sought an update on sickness absence in the directorate. The Corporate Director advised that in the last year 30% of absences related to 20 staff members; these absences have now been addressed through the absence procedure. The directorate is increasing its robustness with regard to return to work interviews.

Actions:

- To clarify scope of the Cashless Parking project. (E&E)
- The Regeneration Strategy to be added to the annual report for future follow-up by scrutiny. (Scrutiny)

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE CHAIR/VICE CHAIRMAN

Briefing Tuesday 4 March 2014

Present

- Councillor Sue Anderson, Chair, Performance and Finance sub-committee
- Sarah Kurylowicz, Violence against Women and Girls Co-ordinator
- Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer

Apologies

- Councillor Anthony Seymour, Vice-Chairman, Performance and Finance sub-committee
- Councillor Lynda Seymour, Scrutiny Lead, Children and Families
- Councillor Chris Mote, Scrutiny Lead, Community Health and Wellbeing
- Councillor Nana Asante, Scrutiny Lead, Community Health and Wellbeing

Repeat incidents of domestic violence

Definition

Following a review in May 2013 the Home Office definition is as follows:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, and financial. This includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

It now covers coercive control, young people aged 16-17 (reflecting abusive teenage relationships) as well as family relationships. It is not restricted to intimate relationships.

Reported incidents in Harrow

Reported incidents include both crime and non-crime. Crimes include assault or grievous bodily harm, whereas non-crimes include disturbances. There are approximately 2,300 reported incidents each year. The British Crime Survey suggests that there are about 6,000 incidents, which reflects the level of under-reporting.

Crimes in Harrow

Comparing the criminal offences with overall total crime, in 2013, domestic crime represented 10% of the total in comparison with an average of 7% across London. Harrow's rate seems high but this must be viewed in the context of Harrow being a low crime borough overall. Awareness and reporting has generally improved over the past thirty years and the police recognise when incidents are related to domestic abuse.

MARAC

The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is a monthly meeting where agencies meet to share information about the highest risk cases (top 5%) and to put action plans in place. The Harrow MARAC usually reviews 15-20 cases per month.

Repeat incident indicator NI32

A repeat incident is when a case previously seen at the MARAC is re-referred within a twelve month period. To identify the repeat incidents, organisations should 'flag and tag' their files so that repeat referrals can be identified. The expectation is that each organisation has systems in place but it is for each organisation to determine its own process. Effectiveness of flagging is related to having both appropriate systems in place and staff knowledge.

The CAADA¹ recommends that between 28-40% of cases considered by the MARAC should be repeats. This reflects the severity and complexity of the cases reaching the MARAC.

The performance indicator is therefore both positive and negative: CAADA suggests that if more than 40% of cases are repeats then the MARAC's action planning may not be effective, but if there are fewer than 28% systems may not be in place to identify repeats. Between October 2012 and September 2013 the Harrow MARAC repeat rate was 12%.

Action to improve performance

Harrow has undertaken a self assessment with CAADA. An audit of participating organisations has been undertaken to ensure that organisations are properly flagging and tagging cases. In addition ongoing training is being run jointly by the council and the police to improve staff awareness.

Action:

The NI32 indicator be included in the scrutiny annual report as an area for follow-up by scrutiny in the next administration.

¹ Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse – the body quality assuring MARACs

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' RESOURCES

Briefing Monday 17th March 2014

Present

- Councillor Varsha Parmar, Scrutiny Policy Lead, Resources
- Councillor Amir Moshenson, Scrutiny Performance Lead, Resources
- Tom Whiting, Corporate Director Resources
- Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

The Corporate Director updated the scrutiny lead councillors on the key issues and challenges in the Resources directorate.

Project Minerva

Project Minerva is the key development in Resources Directorate. It was launched March 2013 to address long term challenge of cost reduction in the Resources Directorate post 2015 and to develop a recommendation for the re-let of the IT Contract.

Minerva recommendations agreed at Cabinet January 2015 which allow us to:

- Go back to market for IT so to have a new IT contract in place from October 2015
- Implement the 20% cost reduction programme identified in Human Resources, Finance & Assurance and Revenues & Benefits
- Continue to explore opportunities for Shared Services with other Councils

Cllr Moshenson queried the time for pay back of the costs associated with outsourcing. The Corporate Director clarified that the payback from the outsourcing option was less attractive than the in house option. An internal examination of the potential to reduce savings had identified the possibility of reducing costs by 17% without the cost associated with outsourcing. The Corporate Director clarified that the costs relate to replacement of the SAP system and the relocation of staff. The Directorate has also looked independently at the potential to replace the SAP system. The payback from this would be delayed for between 4- 6 years.

Human Resources

Key points discussed include:

- A new contract for the recruitment of permanent staff has been agreed at Cabinet January 2014 which will make use of the Pertemps contract and redesign the recruitment process.
- Following Phase 1 of the Minerva project a review of the HR function is about to commence led by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) and the Institute of Employment Studies (IES)
- The proportion of the top 5% if earners who are women continues to be above target and the percentage of BME employees shows a very slight improvement.

- The proportion of the workforce for the whole Council with an IPAD has increased to 92% from 86%.
- The proportion of the top 5% of earners who are BME or who declare a disability is below target. Performance is monitored by the Corporate Equalities Group. The Council's recruitment and selection policy remains to appoint the person best suited to the role.
- The overall figure for the average number of days lost through sickness across the Council this quarter shows a slight increase from 9.39 to 9.56 of which 60% is long term absence. Challenges are greatest in Enterprise & Environment where sickness is 13.54 days per employee. An approach to reducing the volume of sickness has been agreed at CSB.

Councillors discussed the arrangement of the HR functions and the roles of staff within HR. In particular Cllr Moshenson queried the location of the payroll function and why it hadn't been located with either the IT function or finance. The Corporate Director explained that the location was felt to facilitate the exchange of information between contracts staff and payroll staff in the most efficient manner but acknowledge that different authorities organise their payroll functions in different ways. He offered to accompany Cllr Moshenson on a visit to the overall HR division to demonstrate how the different units' co-location supports the effective delivery of HR support to the authority.

Cllr Parmar queried what action is being taken to address the rising levels of sickness. The Corporate Director commented that there are clear procedure in place to deal with staff absence but that these processes are able to distinguish between long term serious ill health issues and persistent short term absence. He also clarified that whilst sickness levels are increasing across the council, there is a particular issues for depot based staff.

Finance and Assurance

Key points discussed include:

- Council-wide, a forecast underspend is projected at Q3 on the revenue budget.
- Work has been ongoing to prepare the Council's Budget for Full Council February 2014.
- The Finance restructure has been completed

Strategic Commissioning

- There is improving performance with regard to a number of crime indicators – burglary detection and domestic residential burglary
- Media coverage for the Council has improved since September with the monthly media points score improving from 477 to 559 in December and peaking in October at 651, reflecting the greater emphasis on the media in the Communications Plan.

- The reputation tracker question with regard to whether the media is portraying the council positively or negatively is showing a deteriorated score since May 2013.
- There is a reduced number of cases presenting to the MARAC
- The restructure of the policy function in Strategic Commissioning is proceeding

Commercial, Contracts and Procurement

Key points discussed include:

- A new Commercial Strategy is under development led by the new Divisional Director and Commercial Business Partners and will shortly be ready for discussion.
- The recruitment to the permanent team has progressed well and has significantly reduced the expenditure on the team. One Commercial Business Partner role has been hard to fill and one further role will be advertised. Two category specialists have been appointed now as internal promotions.
- The WIFI concession is almost complete.
- New Contract Procedure Rules are being drafted which will be designed to be simpler and more user friendly while at the same time strengthening practice across the Council. These will be considered by the Constitution Working Group before being presented to Council in July.

Legal and Governance

Key points discussed include:

- Preparation is fully underway for the Elections May 2014.
- Work is underway to deliver individual electoral registration and is progressing as planned.
- The Harrow Barnet Legal Practice restructure is complete.
- Steady improvement in Freedom of Information response times which has increased from 51% in Q2 to 67% Q3. A review of the handling of FOIs is now complete and common responses will be placed on the Council's website. Reporting is being improved to support all Directorates showing the full ongoing FOI caseload and an early warning system for cases that are reaching 20 days.

Cllr Moshenson queried why there is a problem with FOI response times. The Corporate Director clarified that there has been an increase in overall volume and also the response clearance process means that responses are being released more slowly, the early warning system should help in this regard.

Cllr Moshenson asked whether the council has analysed potential FOI caseload going forward. The Corporate Director commented that this is

difficult as each FOI is unique and will require different information in order to generate a response, however, it is likely that the number of requests will continue to increase.

Cllr Moshenson asked if any work has been undertaken to quantify the costs of dealing with FOI. The Corporate Director commented that information is not currently collected as no time reporting is undertaken in the council except within Legal Services with regard to case costing. He will check to see if FOIs in Legal Services are treated as cases and therefore whether any information is available regarding costs from which an overall sense of the resource impact of FOIs on the council can be extrapolated.

Customer Services

Key points discussed include:

- 18th March likely to be the busy day of the year for Access Harrow following the despatch of Council Tax bills.
- Call volumes are increasing especially in Council Tax and Housing Benefit
- The % of issues resolved at first point of contact has increased to 94%, above target. Resolution rates have increased within Public Realm and Housing Repairs pushing the quarterly achievement up.
- Wait times in the One Stop Shop have increased to 05:56mins from 04:37 mins, although this is well ahead of target. 91% of customers were seen in less than 10 minutes. Customer satisfaction remains high with the OSS at 96% despite the introduction of the appointment system.
- The number of phone calls answered in 30seconds has improved from 84% to 87% and the number of calls abandoned has fallen from 9% to 5%. The number of calls that we classify as avoidable have fallen from 20% to 16%.
- 95% of emails and 99% of web forms were answered within a timely manner despite an increase of in email volumes. Completion is high due to end to end integration of webforms into both CRM and the LOB system.
- The council has rolled out over 52,000 MyHarrow accounts on the back of the electoral canvass.

Council Tax and Revenue and Benefits

Key points discussed include:

- Collection rates are as expected and overall collection rate is on target. This includes expecting to achieve the 70% forecast collection rate under the CTS scheme.

IT

Key points discussed include:

- The Council achieved its Public Sector Network (PSN) compliance certificate with a significant amount of changes having to be out in place and after lengthy discussion with the Cabinet Office. Nationally a number of improvements will be made by Cabinet Office in their approach to the

programme. It did however cause Harrow significant difficulty with unclear requirements and a lack of communication.

- The IT upgrade is now 18 – 24 months behind schedule
- The delivery of the two remaining ITO projects for Citrix Migration and End User Devices was halted in December due to multiple performance issues on the new devices. It is hoped that the migration will start again before the end of March
- Upgrades to both CIVICA and SAP are also in train.

Councillors expressed concern that having identified the potential source of the problem being experienced in December, these were still unresolved. Cllr Moshenson asked for a copy of the root cause analysis report on SAN issues in CITRIX. The Corporate Director undertook to provide this.

For Action

- The Corporate Director will investigate if FOI requests are treated as 'cases' and thus whether resource impact of FOIs on the council can be extrapolated and advise the leads
- The Corporate Director will provide the leads with a copy of the root cause analysis report on SAN issues in CITRIX.

This is the final meeting of the Resources Leads in the 2013/14 municipal year.