

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

23 JULY 2014

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond * Jeff Anderson * Michael Borio	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane (2) * Chris Mote * Kiran Ramchandani * Lynda Seymour (3)
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt † Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) † Mrs A Khan
Non-voting Co-opted:	Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	
In attendance: (Councillors)	David Perry	Minute 12

- * Denotes Member present
- (2), (3) Denote category of Reserve Members
- † Denotes apologies received

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

12. Corporate Plan

Members received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which set out the Corporate Plan. The Plan detailed the Council's strategic direction, vision and priorities for the year ahead. It had been presented to Cabinet and would be presented to full Council the following day. The Leader was in attendance at the meeting.

Following a brief overview of the Plan by the Leader, Members made the following comments and asked the following questions:

- which portfolio would the priority regarding families fall under? The Leader advised that this would come under the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young people.
- how would the introduction of on-the-spot fines for littering be enforced? The Leader advised that there was a due process to be followed with these and that a report would be submitted to Cabinet in September 2014 which would clarify the situation further.
- the foreword to the Plan was a highly politicised document and used very emotive language. Were the Leader and the Interim Head of Paid Service comfortable with this situation. The Leader stated that the statements made in the foreword were factually accurate and in the public domain.
- a Corporate document should use more neutral language and be less emotive. Was the Corporate Director of Resources comfortable with the tone of the document? The Leader stated that his intention had been to convey the seriousness of the nature of the current and future financial challenges facing the Council. He added that the Plan had been agreed with both Member and officer input and support and final sign-off by Council.
- was the use of corporate resources to promote a party political viewpoint, as in the case of the Foreword, an appropriate use of public funds? The Leader responded that, in his view, this was an objective document, however, he had noted the Members' comments for the future.
- the foreword laid responsibility for the cuts in local government on the Conservative-led government. However, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer had stated in a television interview that whichever political party won the next general election would have been obliged to implement extensive savings and economies. The Leader stated that he had not seen the interview in question and could not therefore comment.

- how did the priority of supporting the 'most vulnerable' fit in with the administration's intention to reduce Council Tax benefits and was this in keeping with his Group's policies, particularly in view of the fact that other Labour-led authorities had chosen to absorb rather than pass on these costs to residents. The Leader advised that supporting the most vulnerable residents in the borough was a priority. However, the budgets for Children's Services and Adults' Service were very large and could not therefore be easily ring fenced. The Localised Council Tax Scheme had been proposed and implemented following extensive consultation and Council Tax benefits were being reviewed currently.
- why were residents, who lived in the borough and paid council tax not being consulted regarding the possible re-instatement of the Chief Executive's post? The leader advised that five thousand council staff, many of whom were Harrow residents were being consulted. He added that, last year, residents had not been consulted regarding the deletion of the Chief Executive's post. Furthermore, it was not feasible to consult residents regarding every decision made by the Council.
- why were the priorities regarding the vulnerable and families listed as separate priorities? Why were homelessness and poverty not linked together? An additional sum of £0.5M had been identified for the recruitment of social workers. What was being done to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers? The Leader stated that the priorities had been agreed on the basis of extensive consultation and on manifesto pledges. Children and the vulnerable and retention of social work staff had been identified as areas of challenge. The figures were not currently available regarding social work, which was an area of challenge. The performance indicators set out in the Plan showed the links between and the actions to be taken in relation to each priority.
- how would older, retired residents of the borough be supported? The Leader advised that Energy Switch auctions, a debt conference, information regarding saving on food bills and volunteering opportunities and other awareness raising measures were planned. He added that behind every pledge in the Plan there were a series of detailed business cases and measures in place, but, this level of detail had not been included in the Plan.
- would the Administration be willing to meet with representatives from the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) to discuss CAB's three-year finance plans? The Leader stated that his Group were committed to the Grants Programme, had always been supportive of Third Sector organisations and that both he and the relevant Portfolio Holder would welcome discussions with CAB.
- how would the new initiative of Community Champions differ from the Neighbourhood Champions initiative? The review of how the Council engaged with the Third Sector had been led by the Third Sector and would look at more effective working between it and the Council. The

introduction of Community Champions scheme was a means of building on the success of the Neighbourhood Champions scheme. It would provide additional opportunities to encourage and celebrate volunteering in the borough.

- what plans were there for tackling the issue of domestic violence and how wide-reaching were these? The Leader advised that a multi-agency approach between the Council, the Police, social services and health professions would be used and discussions would be taking place to formulate a detailed strategy. The Head of Policy advised that the strategy would be co-produced with representatives from the Third Sector and this would be presented to Cabinet for approval in September.
- was a District Centre different from a Local Centre? The Leader stated that they were the same.
- what mechanism was there for engaging with and consulting groups such as the vulnerable and their carers and families? The Leader stated that community engagement and involvement was a key priority of his Administration and gave the examples of a representative from the Harrow Association of Disabled People being invited to be a co-opted adviser on the Council's Traffic and Road Safety Advisory Panel, which had responsibility for making strategic decisions with regard to traffic and transportation in the borough.
- how would the pledge of creating 500 new jobs and apprenticeships to support young people into work be achieved? The Leader advised that this would be achieved through building on existing links with businesses, the Excite programme, as well as other measures such as the introduction of questions regarding the anticipated social benefits of a particular contract as part of the tendering process. The 500 figure was a minimum target and had been set for the period 2014-18. The Member stated that the figures relating to the Excite project were misleading as it was not clear whether they were figures to date. The Corporate Director of Resources undertook to look into the figures and update Members after the meeting.
- how would residents affected by the changes as a result of the Care Act, which was due to be implemented in 2015, be supported? The Leader advised that discussions were taking place at a strategic, Member-led level for a smooth transition. The Corporate Director of Resources added that an assessment of the long-term implications of the Care Act was being carried out.
- would full licensing of all homes in the private rented sector drive up costs for landlords and lead to a subsequent reduction in available properties? The Leader advised that this could not be predicted. Private landlords would be encouraged to sign up to a voluntary charter which would bring benefits and security for tenants, however, enforcement would pose challenges.

- was the improved street and environmental cleanliness goal achievable? The Leader stated that the relevant Portfolio Holder was confident that this was achievable.
- how would the £1M set aside for domestic violence be spent? The Leader advised that this figure would be spent over a 4-year period on key targets, however, these targets may change over time and the Council would need to be flexible in order to respond to the changing needs of residents. The Leader stated that to date £200k of the £1M had been allocated and the remaining sum was yet to be allocated.
- how would the procurement process be improved to extract greater value for money from the Council's contracts? The Leader stated that this was an area of priority and the Council was working with the West London Alliance to achieve greater efficiencies.
- what lessons had been learnt from the mistakes made and problems arising from the Capita IT contract and the recent Libraries and Leisure contracts? Was the process for awarding contracts sufficiently robust and what savings could be achieved? The Leader advised that there had been a number of ongoing challenges with the IT contract which was being re-tendered. The Corporate Director of Resources advised that a number of measures such as a Category Management approach to all third party spend, working with the West London Alliance to secure greater efficiencies and a review of all major contracts with a view to re-negotiating prices and specifications, had been implemented. He added that there were no blanket figures designated for procurement savings, as these would be factored into Directorates' budgets instead.
- the Plan stated that resident engagement and involvement would be at the heart of how the Council delivered services and engaged with the community. How far would consultation results, for example, the ones relating to Pinner Park Farm, be used to inform policy decisions? For example, if 51% of consultees were in favour of a particular scheme, would that scheme be implemented as a matter of course? The Leader advised that, in addition to consultation responses, professional advice, other feedback, officer input, legal implications etc would be reviewed in a wider context to inform Members' decision-making.
- how would the targets related to improved relationship with staff be measured? It should be noted that the number of working days lost due to strike action had increased since the previous administration. The Leader advised that an improvement in the relationship with staff was not easily quantifiable in figures alone and that more qualitative data and employees experiences would need to be looked at.
- the Local Government formula grant and any top up grants for Harrow were likely to be further reduced. Would there be an increase in Council Tax to cover this shortfall? The Leader advised that his Group was committed to lobbying central government for a fair grant for the

borough and would not increase council tax above the rate of inflation, per their manifesto pledge.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Council)

That the Committee's comments on the Corporate Plan be forwarded to Council.