

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

24 FEBRUARY 2015

Chair:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond * Jeff Anderson * Michael Borio	* Kam Chana * Chris Mote * Paul Osborn * Kiran Ramchandani
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)	Simon Brown Pamela Fitzpatrick Graham Henson Barry Kendler	Minute 73 Minute 74 Minute 71 Minute 75

- * Denotes Member present
- † Denotes apologies received

66. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

67. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members.

68. Minutes

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2014 be taken as read and signed as a correct record;
- (2) the minutes of the special meeting held on 20 January at 6.00pm be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:
minute 60, p37, paragraph 5, line 5, after "... for decision in April." insert the sentence: "Whatever was produced would go out for further consultation."
- (3) the minutes of the special meeting held on 20 January at 7.30 pm be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

minute 65, page 43, first paragraph, after "... nowhere to move to," amend the remainder of the sentence to: "and only 5% of private sector rented accommodation in Harrow is at or below the housing benefit rate, which means families are having to find the extra from somewhere else."

minute 65, p44, paragraph 9, add the following sentence:
"The Youth Parliament representative did not support it either."

69. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

70. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

71. Corporate Plan 2015/16

The Committee received a report which contained the proposed Corporate Plan for 2014-19 which set out the Council's strategic direction, vision and priorities for the next four years. It incorporated the Council's Corporate Equality Objectives

The Chair advised the Committee that the report had already been considered by the Cabinet and that the Corporate Plan would be finalised at the Council

meeting on 26 February 2015. The Committee were being asked to provide comments that would be forwarded to the Council meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources & Policy Development introduced the report and made the following points:

- moving to a 4 year Corporate Plan was intended to provide stability;
- the Corporate Plan set out the vision for the Council's direction, alongside the Council's ambitions;
- the summary contained the 'golden thread' of 'Making A Difference' and set out both what to do and how to do it;
- the intention to 'mainstream' the Equalities agenda had been achieved with the inclusion of the Corporate Equalities Objectives in the Corporate Plan.

A Member noted the commitment to 'engage with residents differently' and asked how the Council would move towards a new model of local government in which residents were more involved. The Portfolio Holder responded that the process had begun with the 'Take Part' consultation, and would continue as the Council considered how to improve engagement and response rates. The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning, added that a research project would seek to identify the best means of improving engagement and involvement.

A Member noted that £31m had been secured for regeneration in the heart of Harrow, and that a pilot scheme was in place to tackle rogue landlords. The Portfolio Holder agreed that these projects were good news. He added that the licensing scheme would be monitored for its effectiveness.

A Member queried how the success of planned outcomes would be measured as there were no targets contained in the Corporate Plan. The Portfolio Holder and Divisional Director explained that these would be contained in the corporate scorecard which would be reported to Cabinet quarterly.

A Member commented that the proposal to change the petition scheme, and reduce the threshold for the number of signatures required to trigger a debate went against the stated objective to improve engagement. In his view the petition scheme as it stood had been very successful in garnering public opinion and engagement in issues that mattered to residents and he could not understand why it was necessary to change a successful mechanism for engagement. The Portfolio Holder replied that the terms could be changed if necessary. The Member added that plans to reduce the amount of scrutiny taking place would lose yet another opportunity for engagement.

A Member queried the stated ambition of the Council, in that the Corporate Plan aimed to be 'one of the safest boroughs', when in fact statistics showed that Harrow was considered to be the safest London borough. The Divisional Director explained the statistical analysis and stressed that the ambition to

remain at the top had not changed. However, he believed that the perception and fear of crime remained high despite the facts, and work would continue to address this.

A Member asked how the Council would verify its commitment that Labour Members would work in the community. The Portfolio Holder pointed out that the commitment was to do a minimum of 50 hours over the year, and that many councillors did more.

A Member asked what measures were in place to support the commercial sector in Harrow. The Portfolio Holder responded that work was ongoing to promote apprenticeships, local procurement, and requirements for contractors to recruit locally. This would all support increased employment, which would in turn improve commercial activity. Another Member commented that it was equally important to retain what already existed in the small town centres.

A Member asked whether parks were accounted for in the Plan. The Portfolio Holder reiterated that with savings of £83m to be made, hard decisions had to be made. The Council would invest in services for the vulnerable, such as the Youth Offending Team, Adult Services, and the Under 5s but could not support every service. It was possible that regeneration and increased income could produce some mitigation, but he was also of the view that attitudes to litter had to change, with the public taking more responsibility for their actions.

In response to queries about named commitments not being explained elsewhere in the Plan, the Portfolio Holder stated that the current model of local government was not sustainable. It would be necessary to empower local communities and devolve some decision making. He agreed that in such circumstances it may well prove possible that a community could take on the responsibility to maintain a local park.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Council)

That the Committee's comments be considered.

RESOLVED ITEMS

72. Reference from Cabinet on 19 February 2015

Members received a reference from Cabinet in relation to a petition which requested that the Council reconsider cuts to the Parks Service in respect of Pinner Memorial Park. The reference had been received as the petition contained over 1000 signatures, which required its consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The lead petitioner attended the meeting and read the terms of the petition.

The Chair outlined the practical options for the Committee in respect of the petition, in that it could be referred to Cabinet with the Committee's comments, or referred to Council for consideration within the budget item. He observed that a referral to Cabinet would take place once the budget had

been set, and if referred to Council, the petition may get lost among others being presented. He informed the Committee that in view of this, he had spoken to the Leader already and drawn his attention to the petition. The Leader had assured the Chair that he would take the petition and residents' views into account when considering cuts to the service.

A Member commented that short notice of the matter had prevented a number of local groups attending the meeting or putting forward their views. He requested that consideration of the petition be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee. A Member pointed out that this would take place after the budget had been set and it would no longer be possible to influence the decision. In response, the Member pointed out that consultation was still taking place and that a high level of public interest had occasionally resulted in a change to proposals.

RESOLVED: That consideration of the petition be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee on 24 March 2015.

73. Short Quality Screening Inspection by HMI Probation Service

The Corporate Director, Children and Families, introduced the report and described the background to the current situation in respect of the performance and assessment of the Youth Offending Team and service. The results of the team's 'Core Case' inspection in 2011 had been disappointing, and following a new inspection regime, with an increase in standards expected, the recent Short Quality Inspection had also given a disappointing result. Consequently an action plan had been produced, and the report highlighted those issues already addressed, and those which remained outstanding.

While he in no way excused the results, or was complacent about the need for improvement, he believed that the team had made significant improvements and would continue to do so. Staffing issues had been addressed and he was confident that the team was well placed and equipped to deliver better performance and outcomes. A number of audit and quality assurance mechanisms had been introduced, which ensured that senior management was aware of problems and potential failures to meet targets.

The Service Manager highlighted a discrepancy that skewed performance figures, in that when a home visit was made to a young person, if the young person failed to meet or engage with staff, this was recorded as a failure to meet, even though the staff member had made the visit. A Member asked why this detail could not be added to the statistics to illustrate the variance.

A Member commented that a glossary of abbreviations would be helpful, and that the format of the report was not helpful in comparing information.

A member asked how the Committee could be confident that genuine change and improvement was underway, as similar claims had been made some years ago at a time when the service was seen to be underperforming. The Corporate Director reiterated his belief that staff and measures were now in place to provide continued improvement, but that he recognised there was a

long way to go. He accepted the findings of the SQS report, which had inspected a sample of cases, but believed that the report had in some aspects been overly critical. Feedback had been sought but not given, and comparison with other local authority inspections suggested that there had been a difference in assessment.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools & Young People assured the Committee that he received regular briefings from officers and that he continued to scrutinise and challenge the work and performance of the team.

RESOLVED: That the report, the Short Quality Screening Action Plan, and progress made since the Core Case Inspection, be noted.

74. Revenue Challenge Panel Report

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning, which set out the observations and findings of the Revenue Challenge Panel with regard to the Council's budget setting and associated processes.

The Chair thanked all those involved in the review for their work and informed the Committee that the recommendations, if agreed, would be taken to the Cabinet meeting on 19 March.

The Panel Chair introduced the report and described the key points identified during the review, namely:

- there was a need for a longer term budget – a 3 year forecast would be more helpful;
- it would be necessary to move away from directorate based budgets towards outcome based budgets;
- the review panel had received presentations from a number of other local authorities and had been particularly impressed with Warrington.

In response to a Member's query about whether the shift would be incremental, the Panel Chair replied that the review panel had been cautious about the speed of change, and had suggested a timeframe of 100% outcome based budgets by 2020. The process would begin with next year's budget.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report of the Revenue Challenge Panel review be noted;
- (2) the recommendations included in the report be agreed and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

75. Capital Challenge Panel Report

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning, which set out the observations and findings of the Capital Expenditure Challenge Panel with regard to the Council's capital programme.

The Chair thanked all those involved in the review for their work and informed the Committee that the recommendations, if agreed, would be taken to the Cabinet meeting on 19 March.

The Panel Chair outlined the key findings of the panel, and in particular that there was no overall corporate strategy or structure to manage the capital programme; once the budget was agreed by Council there was a silo approach in taking the projects forward.

He pointed out that some under spend could arise for positive reasons, for instance when a contractor had underperformed then the full contract price might not be paid. However, it was important to have clarity in reports as to the reasons for an under spend or slippage. He highlighted one problem created by the need to scan invoices for audit purposes, which resulted in a bottleneck for payments.

The report also demonstrated the need for less bureaucracy and greater flexibility in approving expenditure, as the threshold for Council approval was inhibiting the ability to respond to changing conditions or developments. He agreed that the wording for a proposal to change the constitution in respect of this needed to be refined, but acknowledged that there had been pressure to complete the report within deadline.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report of the Capital Expenditure Challenge Panel be noted;
- (2) the recommendations included in the report be agreed and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

76. Libraries Review Scope

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning, which set out the draft scope for the Scrutiny Review of Libraries.

The Chair noted that the Council was working jointly with the London Borough of Ealing to review the current contract with Carillion Integrated Services and its performance in delivering library services across the two boroughs.

The Panel Chair stated that the aims of the review were set out in the draft scope document.

RESOLVED: That the scope for the Scrutiny Review of Libraries be agreed.

77. Minutes of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the minutes of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 24 November 2014 be noted;
- (2) the minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings held on 27 November 2014 and 6 January 2015 be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.48 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair