

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2014-2015



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## Introduction

This report summarises some of our most important achievements this year, the first year of a new four year cycle of scrutiny work following the local elections in May 2014. The election also saw a large turnover in the number of Councillors, with around half of those elected being elected for the first time. That means that, this year, we have a rich mix of Councillors new to Scrutiny and experienced in Scrutiny work which has helped to bring new perspectives to our work.

The big issue continues to be the serious financial difficulties we face and the fact that the Council is required to deliver a further £82m of savings over the next four years. The impact of reductions on this scale will be felt by residents, so the role of scrutiny in championing the needs of our most vulnerable residents has never been more important. That is why our first review this year was of the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme. It is also the reason why Scrutiny has received four major public petitions for consideration this year.

However, the resources supporting the Council's scrutiny function have not been immune from the budget savings and were also reduced and reorganised in 2014. The new work programme that was agreed in September reflects this decrease in capacity, so it is crucial that our activities are targeted on the most important issues, where we can have a real and meaningful impact and that we use the most effective means of undertaking our investigations. Scrutiny can add real value to the work of the Council. We fervently believe that by engaging scrutiny early in the process of policy development, we can bring extra capacity, challenge, ideas and experience to the debate that would ultimately lead to better outcomes for our residents. We will continue to encourage the executive and officers to engage with scrutiny earlier in the decision-making process.

As in previous years, the Scrutiny Leadership Group, comprising the chairs and vice-chairs of the committees and scrutiny leads, continues to provide strategic direction to the scrutiny function and is helping to ensure we maintain an effective focus for our work. We are extremely grateful to all of the councillors who have contributed to the Leadership Group this year.

The two scrutiny sub-committees continue to play a key role in our deliberations:

- The Performance and Finance Sub-Committee's focus on the performance and finances of the organisation continues to provide an excellent steer to our deliberations.
- The Healthy and Social Care Sub-Committee maintains a determined oversight of the activities of our health partners as they undergo similar significant change and budget challenges.

Reports from both of the Sub Committees and the Call-In Committees are included below. Similarly, this report also includes a summary of the work undertaken by each of the lead councillor pairs and the major reviews we have undertaken.

We have got off to a great start and have already achieved a huge amount in a short space of time this year. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. And if you have any suggestions for issues that you think scrutiny should look into, please do let us know.



Cllr Jerry Miles  
Chair of Overview & Scrutiny



Cllr Paul Osborn  
Vice Chair of Overview &  
Scrutiny

# Report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Our Committee

The committee has met 10 times this year. The papers and details of the outcomes from all of these meetings can be found [here](#).

Our remit continues to be the consideration of the Council's and our partners' strategic direction and major projects and policy decisions and we are grateful for the support we have received in doing this from portfolio holders, council officers and representatives from partner agencies. A full list of the portfolio holders who have supported our Committee's discussions is given at the end of this section of the annual report.

## Our Meetings

During the course of the year we have, as in previous years, met with the Leader of the Council, the Finance Portfolio Holder, the Interim Head of Paid Service and the Finance Director for a question and answer session to consider the budget proposals (in January). We are grateful for the information which they shared with us. This year we have also received four major petitions as references from Cabinet for consideration. These were on:

- Cambridge Road Car Park
- Harrow Arts Centre
- Harrow Museum
- Cuts to Park Services – Pinner Memorial Park

The specific items which have been considered at ordinary meetings of our Committee include:

- Corporate Plan
- Community Safety Plan
- Youth Justice Plan and the Youth Offending Team Inspection
- Progress towards national procurement standards
- The impact of the Outer London Fund on Harrow town centre
- Children's services self-assessment & Child Sexual Exploitation
- Project Minerva (back office restructuring) and IT contract re-tendering
- Scrutiny Work Programme
- Implementation of Universal Credit
- Implementation of the Care Act
- How well is the Council doing at being a Public Health Authority
- Introduction of universal free school meals to infant schools
- West London Waste Plan

## Review Programme

We have started a new programme of more detailed scrutiny investigations, undertaken mainly via in-depth reviews or challenge panels. The content of the review programme is identified through the Performance and Finance Sub-Committee's deliberations or via our

scrutiny leads and is discussed at the Scrutiny Leadership Group and then agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny committee.

This year we have conducted four reviews:

- a. Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel – Chaired by Cllr Barry Macleod-Cullinane
- b. The Funding Challenge: Saving £75m from the Council's Budget Challenge Panel – Chaired by Cllr Pamela Fitzpatrick
- c. Capital Expenditure Challenge Panel – Chaired by Cllr Barry Kendler
- d. Libraries review Challenge Panel joint with Ealing Council – Chaired by Cllr Paul Osborn.

We have been helped in our work by members of the public, the voluntary and community sector, other Councils and organisations, Members and officers and in particular the staff of the Policy Team. We would like to thank all of them for their time, evidence, research and constructive way in which they have engaged with the scrutiny of the Council.

### **a. Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel**

As part of the Spending Review 2010, the Government announced that it would localise support for Council Tax Benefit (CTB) from 2013/14, passing that budget over to local government but at a level 10% less than the CTB grant. Local Authorities were required to set up localised Council Tax Support (CTS) Schemes to provide support to low income households liable for council tax for implementation from 1 April 2013. In light of proposed changes to Harrow's current CTS Scheme, the Scrutiny Leadership Group decided to review both the Scheme and the implications of the proposed changes recently consulted on. The CTS Scheme Challenge Panel took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

The Challenge Panel gathered substantial evidence, heard from and questioned several key witnesses and considered evidence put before them to understand the impact of the Council's current CTS Scheme upon those residents affected by it. The Panel had particular regard to the impact Harrow's CTS Scheme is having on household debt. The Panel also sought to assess the likely impact of the Administration's proposed changes so as to produce a report that could inform councillors deliberating in both Cabinet and at full Council on implementing proposed changes to the CTS Scheme.

The Panel's key findings and unanimous recommendations were grouped by the following themes:

- Consultation
- Harshes Scheme in the Country
- Recovery, Collection Rates and Enforcement
- Access and Customer Service
- Mitigating the Impact

The Panel recommend that the Council overall makes a decision to prioritise alternative spending cuts above reductions to CTS, but that, whatever the final state of the Scheme, to consider the series of important recommendations on consultation, collections, and the hardship fund. The Panel's aim was to both lessen the impact of Harrow's current extremely harsh CTS Scheme and to mitigate the impact of the proposed changes of the Scheme on some of our most vulnerable residents.

Whilst Scrutiny is pleased that as a result of this review, further detrimental changes to the scheme were not made, we are disappointed that recommendations to improve the incentives to work by reducing the minimum payment for working age claimants and reducing the taper were not accepted.

### **b. The Funding Challenge: Saving £75m from the Council's Budget**

It is clear that the next few years will see big budgetary challenges for Harrow Council. It is essential that Harrow Council's budget-setting process and other associated processes are as effective as possible at enabling Harrow to rise to the financial challenges ahead.

Incremental Budgeting uses the last year's budget as a starting point, and makes incremental changes according to new legislative requirements, additional or reduced resources, service developments, anticipated price inflation and labour costs. This approach has helped Harrow to make significant savings to date but it is less well suited to scrutinising the cost and effectiveness of spending. Further, since departments consider spending reductions separately, cross-departmental efficiencies are likely being overlooked.

The Challenge Panel supports the ideas of reform in the budget-setting process, particularly moving to an Outcomes Based Budgeting approach, with zero-based budgeting elements. This allocates funds according to a set of pre-defined outcomes and priorities, focussing on what impact the wide variety of services run by a Council has on outcomes.

The Panel believes that the key benefits of such an approach could be:

- Providing the evidence to support investment in prevention and early intervention.
- Allowing us to be much clearer about the impact of capital programme proposals on outcomes and therefore being able to prioritise between them, or between revenue and capital spending.
- Encouraging innovative ideas to reduce duplication or improve outcomes through new ways of thinking in areas in which multiple departments operate.
- Using zero-base budgeting to re-set the expectation that funding levels for a service will be derived from adjusting previous funding levels, rather than the level of funding needed for a service to deliver outcomes.

The Panel believes that the Greater Manchester 'Cost Benefit Analysis' tool may help the Council advance along a journey to outcomes based budgeting, and perceive this to be very useful for advancing public sector partnerships to deliver public value and better outcomes too.

In this context, public consultation approaches will need to change to give the public a say on the Council's priority outcomes and help them understand the outcome impacts from various options featured in a consultation. Whatever the budgeting process, in future, consultations must give residents a choice and give them the information they need to understand the trade-offs involved in these choices.

Scrutiny's recommendations went to Cabinet in March. We expect their response in April.

### **c. Capital Expenditure Challenge Panel**

A Challenge Panel to investigate the recurrent capital underspend of the Capital Programme Budget was requested at the meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee (3 July 2014).

The Challenge Panel gathered evidence, heard from and questioned witnesses, and considered evidence put before them in order to understand the impact of the capital underspend upon the residents of Harrow, the Council and its partners. The panel also sought to identify the key reasons for the capital underspend and to assess the financial implications. Additionally, the panel reviewed the management of the Council's capital programme and identified proposals for improvement.

The key findings and recommendations are presented in the report, grouped by the following themes:

- Governance Management
- Financial Management
- Project Management

The panel found that overall, the corporate business processes to develop the capital programme is strong and well managed, but there are areas of weaknesses within the management of the programme which require improvement. The current system needs to be strengthened to ensure that there is a corporate overview of the whole programme; that a formal interface is established between the programme management boards and members; and that the Council's decision making, payment and contract processes do not delay the start and completion of capital projects.

Extending the rolling capital programme in alignment with the four year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) will give greater stability and opportunities to plan spend. Furthermore, the panel recognise the importance of improving the profiling of capital expenditure so as to better identify genuine underspend from slippage.

Scrutiny's recommendations went to Cabinet in March. We expect their response in April.



#### **d. Libraries review Challenge Panel joint with Ealing Council**

This review considered Carillion’s performance in providing a library service for Harrow and Ealing residents in the first year of the contract (2013/14). It also considered the outcomes of the Take Part consultation on the future of Harrow libraries which ran from November 2014 to January 2015. Given the timeframe for this review, it was not in a position to influence the decisions around the budget for 2015/16, but rather inform the strategic direction of library services for 2015/16 and beyond.

The aims and objectives of the review were:

Jointly with Ealing Council:

- To review the current contract with Carillion Integrated Services for the delivery of library services across the two boroughs.
- To examine the current performance of libraries in Harrow and Ealing, as provided by Carillion.

Harrow specific:

- To consider the changes proposed for Harrow’s libraries in light of the proposed budget savings for 2015/16 and the outcome of consultation with residents (November 2014 to January 2015).
- To develop an understanding of what residents want from their local libraries.
- To explore innovative practices in the delivery of library services by Councils.
- To identify ways in which Harrow Council can deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries for residents within the context of the financial challenges facing local government.
- To inform the implementation of a 3-year Harrow Library Strategy and work towards a potential West London Library Strategy with the other library authorities also managed by Carillion (Ealing and Hounslow).

The final report and recommendations are due to be agreed by Scrutiny at their April meeting and presented to Cabinet in April. We expect their response in May.

<b>MEETING STATISTICS</b>	10
Committee meetings	
Attendance by Portfolio Holders	<p>Cllr David Perry – Leader of the Council; Strategy, Partnerships &amp; Corporate Leadership Portfolio Holder x2</p> <p>Cllr Varsha Parmar – Environment, Crime &amp; Community Safety Portfolio Holder</p> <p>Cllr Sachin Shah – Finance &amp; Major Contracts Portfolio Holder x2</p> <p>Cllr Simon Brown – Children, Schools &amp; Young People</p>

	<p>Portfolio Holder x3</p> <p>Cllr Graham Henson – Performance, Corporate Resources &amp; Policy Development Portfolio Holder x2</p> <p>Cllr Sue Anderson – Community, Culture &amp; Resident Engagement Portfolio Holder</p> <p>Cllr Keith Ferry – Deputy Leader of the Council; Business, Planning &amp; Regeneration Portfolio Holder</p>
Attendance by Partners	CX Business Improvement District Harrow Town Centre



Cllr Jerry Miles  
Chair of Overview & Scrutiny



Cllr Paul Osborn  
Vice Chair of Overview & Scrutiny

# 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 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. The papers and details of the outcomes from all our committee meetings can be found [here](#).

## Our meetings

Our regular Chair and Vice-Chair'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 2014-15 have been:

- Revenue and Capital Monitoring – we have been briefed on a quarterly 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.
- Strategic Performance Report – we are briefed quarterly by the Divisional Director for Strategic Commissioning on performance against key indicators in the Corporate Scorecard. We have paid particular attention to the increased use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and rise in homelessness across the borough this year.
- Adults and Children's Complaints Annual Reports 2013/14.
- Update on implementation of scrutiny review recommendations – Accessible Transport Review and Customer Care Review.
- Mid-year voluntary and community grants monitoring report.
- School expansions programme – we have questioned the effectiveness and milestones of the contracts used in The School Expansion programme.
- Staff Survey results and the costs of sickness absences to the authority and how such costs could be reduced in the current climate of reducing Council budgets.
- Corporate Equality Objectives Review and Annual Monitoring.
- School travel plans.

<b>MEETING STATISTICS</b>	5
Committee meetings	
Attendance by Portfolio Holders	<p>CLr Glen Hearnden – Housing Portfolio Holder</p> <p>CLr Sue Anderson – Community, Culture &amp; Resident Engagement Portfolio Holder</p> <p>CLr Simon Brown – Children, Schools &amp; Young People Portfolio Holder</p> <p>CLr Graham Henson – Performance, Corporate Resources &amp; Policy Development Portfolio Holder</p> <p>CLr Anne Whitehead – Public Health, Equality &amp; Wellbeing Portfolio Holder</p>



Cllr Phillip O'Dell  
Chair of Performance & Finance



Cllr Barry Macleod-Cullinane  
Vice-Chair Performance and Finance

# **Report from the Health and Social Care Lead Members and the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

## **Our Sub-Committee**

The Health and Social Care Sub-Committee considers health, social care and wellbeing issues key to Harrow residents on a local, London-wide and national level. Much of the scrutiny activity undertaken in 2014-15 was focused on the performance and inspections of the hospitals and health services that serve the residents of Harrow and our on-going participation in the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee that scrutinises the implementation of 'Shaping A Healthier Future', the NHS Programme which is implementing significant re-configuration of acute healthcare in North West London. The papers and details of the outcomes from all our committee meetings can be found [here](#).

Given the many different partners and boards involved in health policy, we requested that a protocol be drafted to outline the independent, but complementary, roles and responsibilities of the Council's health scrutiny function, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the local Healthwatch. Each body has distinct roles but there are potential overlaps in work and therefore scope for duplication. This duplication can be positive if the bodies are approaching the issues from different angles and adding value, however where the duplication is unnecessary, this does not represent the best use of resources. Therefore, developing a protocol for working collaboratively and making best use of resources is particularly warranted at a time when resources in the public sector are being further stretched. We expect the protocol to be in place by the summer of 2015.

## **Our meetings**

Our main areas of interest in 2014-15 have been:

- Local Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report
- Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee reports on Shaping a Healthier Future
- Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Central North West London Hospital Trusts Quality Accounts
- Response to health checks scrutiny review
- Integration of public health into the Council – 1 year on
- North West London Hospitals Trust and Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital inspection results
- Clinical Commissioning Group Commissioning Intentions
- Public Health Annual Report
- CQC inspection of Central North West London Mental Health and Community Services
- Northwick Park winter pressures
- Healthwatch annual report and updates
- Annual Local Account

<b>MEETING STATISTICS</b>	6
Committee meetings	
Attendance by Portfolio Holders	None
Attendance by Partners	Deputy Chief Executive Officer London North West Hospitals Trust
	Chief Operating Officer London North West Hospitals Trust x2
	Interim Medical Director London North West Hospitals Trust

## Looking Forward:

### Care Act implementation

The introduction of the Care Act 2014 will come in two stages for Harrow:

- i. From April 2015, with new rights for carers to request assessments on the same basis as those that they care for, portability of care support packages when service users move into other boroughs, and the requirement that local authorities signpost people to independent advice and information services;
- ii. The introduction of the new care accounts, the introduction of the £72,000 care cap, the extended means test threshold and the increase in people coming forward for assessments following the introduction of the new care accounts/care cap (most of them previous self-funders).

The Department of Health has previously promised to “fully fund” the Care Act’s implementation costs for local authorities. However after discussions we have had with Council officers and London Council scrutiny members on this, we remain concerned about the situation in Harrow where there is an estimated funding shortfall of up to £3 million from 2015 – 2017. Similarly, London Councils have estimated a funding shortfall of around £30 million for Councils in London in 2015/16. The main financial pressures on Harrow (and other local authorities) will come in 2016 when the second wave of the Care Act’s measures are introduced and again in 2019/20 when service users start to reach the care cap. We therefore recommend the need for continued monitoring of the implementation of the Care Act in Harrow.

### Better Care Fund

The £5.3bn Better Care Fund was announced by the Government in the June 2013 spending round to ensure a transformation in integrated health and social care. The Better Care Fund (BCF) is one of the most ambitious programmes ever across the NHS and Local Government. It creates a local single pooled budget to incentivise the NHS and local government to work more closely together around people, placing their well-being as the focus of health and

care services. Lead members will keep a close eye on how progress against plans will be managed.

### **Accident & Emergency Waiting Times**

The Sub-Committee is monitoring how North West London Health Trust is improving the emergency care at Northwick Park Hospital. We are concerned that current performance levels at Northwick Park Hospital are unacceptable and have not been helped by the closure in September 2014 of the Accident and Emergency (A&E) department at Central Middlesex. Whilst there are signs of improvement, the system has failed to meet its national target. North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, which manages the hospital, has failed to meet current waiting time targets as it struggles to cope with the demand. We hope that the implementation of the Out of Hospital Strategy and the £21m investment of a new emergency department will bring expansion and improvement. However, until the committee is satisfied we will continue to monitor the performance.

### **Care Quality Commission Inspections (CQC)**

A comprehensive inspection of North West London Hospitals Trust was carried out by the CQC between 20 and 23 May 2014. The CQC rating was inadequate for critical care and A&E required improvement. The hospital has had some issues in the past, particularly around its maternity services. However, the management team has worked hard to address these. Improvements had been made to a number of areas within the maternity services, but it still requires further improvements in order to provide a safe, effective, caring and responsive service.

The A&E department at Northwick Park required improvement. There were inadequate staffing levels to provide safe care to patients within the major treatment area. The Chief Operating Officer presented a report to the committee and proposals for addressing the issues. The committee will be monitoring the progress of the action plan and also those relating to the inspections of the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital and Central North West London Mental Health and Community Services that took place in 2014/15 and any other inspections that will take place in 2015/16.

### **NHS Harrow Clinical Commissioning Group**

The NHS Harrow Clinical Commissioning Group is responsible for buying Harrow health services including community health and hospital services. The committee is monitoring their plans and intentions.

### **Public Health Report**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Public Health which looked back over 50 years at a selection of topics which were then public health issues and remained issues currently, and the report contained proposals to address these. They had the following key areas of responsibility:

- Health protection and ensuring appropriate plans were in place,
- Leading health improvement and reducing health inequalities,

- Public health support to health service commissioning and joint Commissioning
- Providing public health knowledge and intelligence

There is a great deal of work that will need to be done over the coming year to monitor progress and consider service development and changes.

### **NHS Health Checks**

NHS Health Checks were a mandatory service which local authority public health functions have been required to deliver since 1 April 2013. Health checks were piloted and the scrutiny review showed that uptake on Health Checks in both Harrow and Barnet boroughs had been lower than expected. The Committee was informed that the take up rate for Health Checks had improved since 2014. The point of care testing equipment had been rolled out to local pharmacies and had also been offered at other venues to improve uptake even further. We will be inviting the Public Health Director to our future meetings to report on progress with these and other Public Health issues.



Cllr Mrs Rekha Shah  
Chair Health Sub Committee



Cllr Michael Borio  
Vice-Chair Health Sub Committee  
& Policy Scrutiny Lead



Cllr Mrs Vina Mithani  
Performance Scrutiny Lead for Health



## **Report from the Children and Families Lead Members**

In 2014/15 we addressed a range of important issues that affect children and young people in Harrow. We have had meetings with the Corporate Director of Children's Services and officers every three months. The issues we have raised and discussed include:

### **Housing Needs**

Concerns were raised over children leaving care and the connection between Children's and Housing services. We heard how the Council is intending to provide a planned distribution of permanent housing (i.e. quotas). The housing service and Children's and Families Services will continue to work in partnership and actively manage and respond to care leavers' housing needs.

### **Education and Children Looked After**

We requested information on the action being taken to address under-performance in closing the educational gap and, in the process, learnt more about the Virtual School for Children Looked After that provides robust support and has a school improvement plan with excellent targets for 2014/2015. The virtual head has overarching control for stability and security, reviews Personal Education Plans every term and is recruiting to key roles in the team.

### **Youth Offending Team**

The short quality screening inspection by HMI Probation Service in 2014 was disappointing as it was in 2011. Consequently a quality screening action plan has been produced and the report highlighted those issues already addressed and those which remain outstanding. Staff issues have been addressed to deliver better performance and outcomes, and measures are now in place to provide continued improvement. We will continue to monitor how the action plan is being implemented and the impact it is having.

### **School Expansion Programme**

The need for school places ever increases and schools are being invited to offer to open additional bulge classes in September. The school expansion programme is being managed according to the Council's project management framework and regularly monitored by the stakeholder reference group and Overview & Scrutiny. Our focus has been on the delivery, transport assessment and schools travel planning of phase 3. We also heard that the free school programme is progressing well with free schools for Harrow being accepted by the Department Of Education.

### **Care Act**

We attended a London Scrutiny Network Training Day for councillors on the delivery of The Care Act 2015. We will need to monitor the effect on young carers next year.

## Looking Ahead

Our focus in the forthcoming year will be to continue to monitor Children Looked After with regard to housing; the virtual school; the performance of the Youth Offending Team; school travel plans and the support being given to schools to reach Gold Standard and lastly the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.



Cllr Lynda Seymour  
Policy Lead for Children's and Families



Cllr Janet Mote  
Performance lead for Children's and Families

# Report from the Resources Lead Members

This year, the Resources Scrutiny Leads have focused on three areas within Corporate Resources: the ongoing delivery of Project Minerva, intended to make substantial savings in back office costs; the performance of the Access Harrow contact centre and website; and the impact of Universal Credit on Harrow.

## 1) Project Minerva

Project Minerva was agreed by Cabinet in January 2014 in anticipation of the need for the Council to continue to make substantial savings over the course of the 2015-2020 Parliament. The project is intended to reduce costs significantly in a number of back-office functions, including HR, Finance, Revenues and Benefits and IT. Over the course of the year, there have been several significant developments, notably the start of a shift towards a self-service HR model and the re-procurement of Harrow's end-to-end IT contract. Critical to the success of this project is the delivery of savings while performance is maintained or even improved (particularly in the case of IT).

## 2) Access Harrow performance

Scrutiny had major concerns about the performance of the Access Harrow call centre earlier in the year after widespread reports of unacceptable call wait times. Following a detailed review of operational metrics, it is clear that this issue was almost entirely due to increasing Revenue and Benefits calls resulting from welfare reform changes. This was accompanied by a reduction in the number of staff available to answer those calls. Since then, call wait times in "Revs and Bens" have fallen substantially. We will keep a sharp focus in this area in the near term as 2015/16 bills are sent out. The increase in headcount in this area provides some reassurance that we will not see a repeat of last year's problems.

Aside from this issue, Access Harrow continues to perform well on most dimensions, especially in terms of encouraging channel shift towards online access through the MyHarrow account. We look forward to a continued dialogue with Corporate Resources about developments in this area, particularly around ensuring that digitally-disadvantaged residents get equal access and, at the other end, improved mobile compatibility.

More broadly, the customer services team have responded to a 2013/14 Scrutiny review with the development of a revised set of Customer Services Standards and Complaints Procedures.

## 3) Impact of Universal Credit

The introduction of Universal Credit (UC) to Harrow residents this autumn (through a long phased approach) will have a knock-on implication for the Council. Firstly, the Department for Work and Pensions will not be providing any in-person support for people claiming UC. This means that many residents may end up approaching the Council for help. Secondly, Harrow will no longer be responsible for processing Housing Benefit claims, since these will

be centralised. As a result, Harrow will lose its grant for delivering this service – yet we are likely to still be expected to support DWP to verify some aspects of Housing Benefit claims.

Aside from these delivery challenges, we anticipate that some of the issues with UC (e.g. direct payment to residents at the end of the month, rather than to landlords/weekly) will have a serious, negative impact. The Council may, therefore, be called on to support people who are made homeless or suffer a loss of income as a result of issues with their UC claim. We will continue to review this carefully both in the run-up to, and the aftermath of, UC's introduction to Harrow.

### **And finally...**

We would like to thank the fantastic support we have had from Tom Whiting, the Corporate Director for Resources and his team over the course of this year. In particular, we would single out Jonathan Milbourn and Fern Silverio for exceptionally helpful presentations. The detailed briefings and responses to questions we have received have been invaluable in allowing us to fulfil our Scrutiny role.



Cllr Adam Swersky  
Performance Lead for Resources



Cllr Stephen Wright  
Policy Lead for Resources

# Report from the Community, Health & Well-being Lead Members

Our focus this year has been the performance of Northwick Park A&E. At times, this has been characterised by very long waiting times, people held in casualty as no beds were available, and ambulances stacked up the delivery ramp. The new casualty department was delayed in its opening but the A&E at Central Middlesex Hospital closed anyway. Things got worse at Northwick Park.

This made us decide to look at the numbers treated and the numbers that were looked after by the urgent care teams. Both had risen. The figures are still being monitored as the new A&E opened and we wanted to get a full view of the throughput. There is only a forty bed unit to receive the patients after they leave casualty. On one day, over one hundred patients had to be admitted. We ask why this was not thought about before. Now there are plans to build a further sixty beds in a modular unit, giving over one hundred beds but this still may not be enough at times.

We think that there need to be more urgent care centres with longer opening hours than at present. Again we are trying to get figures for Pinn Medical Centre and Alexander Road Centre to see what their throughput is, as well as the Care Centre at Northwick Park.

We feel that the chart below needs to be made available everywhere to guide people in what they should do if they think they need medical care. If this was used, it would reduce the demand and waiting time in casualty.



## Looking ahead

We will continue to maintain our focus on A&E waiting times at Northwick Park in conjunction with the Health scrutiny leads and Sub-Committee. Other areas to be looked at are the community use of the Borough's parks and the impact of library closures, both items from the 2015/16 Budget. We will look at the affect of the closure of four libraries on the people of the borough as libraries are not just about books but are a community asset. Parks are now all getting green gyms and we are pleased to say that they are being well used this year. We will need to look at the parks and the affect that the planned reduction of maintenance will have on their usage.



Cllr Chris Mote  
Policy Lead for Community, Health and  
Well-being



Cllr Kiran Ramchandani  
Performance Lead for  
Community, Health and Well-  
being

## Report from the Environment & Enterprise Lead Members

Overview and Scrutiny considered reports on Climate Change and Delivering Warmer Homes Strategy to ensure progress of the Council's strategy and that the Council was successfully meeting carbon emission targets. We also considered the impact of the Outer London Funding on Harrow, noting a healthy vacancy rate continued despite small increase caused in part by the loss of some large chain stores. A positive trend in employment was also noted, boosted by growth in office jobs that in turn increased retail footfall and spend. The creation of a new park, including cafe and performance space on Lowlands Recreation Ground was progressing on schedule.

The Environment and Enterprise Leads met with the Director and other divisional managers to look at progress and work programmes within the Directorate and other public realm/environment issues including refuse collection and access; and the plans for the improvement scheme for Sudbury Hill Village (Sudbury Hill Shopping Area), a joint Scheme with London Borough of Ealing as the centre straddles the borough.



Cllr Jeff Anderson  
Policy Scrutiny Lead for  
Environment & Enterprise



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## Report from the Call-in Sub-Committee

The Call-In Sub-Committee met three times in 2014/15:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014
- 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015 (education sub committee)
- 10<sup>th</sup> March

On the **2<sup>nd</sup> October** the Call-In Sub-Committee met to consider the outcome of the consultation on the senior management arrangements submitted by 10 members of the Council.

The reasons for the call-in of the decision to the Sub-Committee were:

- The Council had to make significant financial savings in the next couple of years. By re-establishing the role of the Chief Executive this would add to the savings required;
- There had been an inadequate amount of consultation and this had only involved members of staff. There had been no widening of the consultation to involve residents. Additionally the time period over which the consultation had taken place was too short;
- In a poll conducted by a local newspaper, 66% of residents had indicated that the role of the Chief Executive should remain deleted;
- There had been no engagement with the Overview and Scrutiny Process on the new proposals;
- There was no independent evidence obtained to support the new proposals. The only source of independent evidence from the Council's auditors had not highlighted any issues with the Chief Executive role having been deleted;
- There was no specific evidence contained in the report to Cabinet which supported its decision;
- The Council had passed its Revenue Budget for the financial year. This had included financial savings of up to £1.5 million as a result of the deletion of the role of the Chief Executive. By re-instating the position this would be contrary to the Budget Framework;
- Re-establishing the role of the Chief Executive was contrary to the Council's adopted Pay Policy Statement;
- The Corporate Plan also referred to the Council achieving Value for Money. Re-introducing the role of the Chief Executive would be contrary to this principle.

The Committee resolved that the challenge to the decision should be taken no further and the decision be implemented.

On the **2<sup>nd</sup> February**, the Call-In Education Sub-Committee met to consider the proposals for the expansion of Grimsdyke School which was called in by 8 members of the Council. The reasons for the call-in of the decision to the Sub-Committee were:

- The school was unique in relation to its location and the issues which impacted on its proposed expansion;



- The objection to the proposed expansion of Grimsdyke School was not related to its performance or reputation. It was recognised as a good school and the need for more school places in the borough was recognised;
- It was felt that there was inadequate consultation on the proposals. Residents within the area who would be affected by the proposals had not received any notification of the proposed expansion. These included residents on Derwent Avenue and Coburn Road;
- Of the consultation that did take place, 56% of residents were against the proposed expansion. 70 letters of objections to the proposed expansion had been submitted;
- This Sub-Committee had rarely met over a number of years. This was an indication of the level of objections against the proposed development;
- There were severe traffic problems in the area of Grimsdyke School. There was only one access route for all of the houses in that area via Coburn Road and any proposed expansion would only add to the difficulties encountered;
- There were concerns that the traffic issues around Grimsdyke School currently prevented Emergency Vehicles from entering the surrounding roads and this issue would only become worse if the expansion proposals were agreed;
- There was insufficient evidence on which Cabinet based their decision on. There was no evidence provided on how the traffic issues expressed would be mitigated. There was also no consideration given to the responses provided to the proposed expansion and how this would be addressed.

The committee resolved on a majority basis that:

- The call-in on ground (a) – inadequate consultation with stakeholders prior to the decision be not upheld;
- The call-in on ground (b) – absence of adequate evidence on which to base a decision be upheld and referred back to Cabinet for re-consideration as it was believed that the evidence provided to Cabinet was too broad and strategic for the borough and should have been more focused and specific to Grimsdyke School, particularly in relation to the traffic management issues.

On the **10<sup>th</sup> March**, the Call-In Committee met to consider the Environment and Enterprise Medium Term Financial Strategy Implementation Plan which was called in by 7 members of the Council. The call-in related specifically to the 'Garden Waste' element of the decision, which is a major part of the E&E department's savings programme over the MTFS. Having considered the report in conjunction with the main budget report it was resolved that:

- The outcome of the public consultation on the Environment and Enterprise proposals be noted;

Subject to the approval of the related budgetary proposals by full Council, the Environment and Enterprise proposals be approved and the Corporate Director for Environment and Enterprise be authorised to take all necessary steps to implement the proposals.