

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

16 FEBRUARY 2016

Chair: * Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillors: * Ghazanfar Ali * HYP Rep
* Richard Almond * Chris Mote
* Jeff Anderson * Paul Osborn
* Marilyn Ashton * Primesh Patel
* Michael Borio

Voting Co-opted: (Voluntary Aided) (Parent Governors)
Mrs J Rammelt
Reverend P Reece

Non-voting Co-opted: * Harrow Youth Parliament Representative

* Denotes Member present

133. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

134. Declarations of Interest

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

135. Minutes

RESOLVED: That

- (i) the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2015 be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Page 103, 2 bullet point the word 'organisation' be amended to read 'muslim organisation'.

- (ii) The minutes of the special meeting held on 26 January 2016 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

136. Public Questions and Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put or petitions received at this meeting.

137. References from Council/Cabinet

There were none.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

138. Events Policy

The Chair introduced the report and explained that the draft Event Policy had been considered by the Committee at its meeting on 17 November 2015. The Committee had asked for it to be re-presented at this meeting following the conclusion of the public consultation on the policy so that the final version to be presented to Cabinet could be considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety presented the report and made the following points:

- prior to the development of this Policy, the way that organisations could apply to the Council to run an event in the borough was co-ordinated in a haphazard manner;
- the way in which events were applied for were dependent on which officer within the Council dealt with the matter and there was no policy and no guidance;
- Parks and Open spaces were valuable assets for the Council and it was important that these were maintained appropriately;
- as a result the Council has now drafted a Policy with clear guidance and which set out the Council's aims and objectives;

- the purpose of the Policy was to empower local communities and organisations to manage events, ensure that they were aware of their responsibilities and encouraged others to run similar events in the borough;
- the draft Policy went out for public consultation in November 2015 and various changes were made to the policy as a result of the responses received to the public consultation.

The Environmental Services Manager – Community Engagement then addressed the Committee and set out various issues in relation to the consultation responses including:

- there had been approximately 180 to 190 responses to the public consultation;
- 16% of the respondents had been from park user groups and 11% from other organisations. 52% of the total respondents agreed that the Policy was required and necessary;
- the timescale for applications to be made under the Policy had been reduced as a result of the consultation responses;
- in relation to application fees, 69% of respondents felt that there should be no fee for park friends groups and £20 was an appropriate fee for small charity events;
- the feedback had been considered and as a result it had been proposed that the application fee be changed to £50 and a concession of 80% be applied for events held by community organisations, schools, places of worship and registered charities;
- as part of the feedback the Council had also proposed that hire charges for small events should be £400, for medium size events £700 and for large size events £1,700;
- the forms to be used under the Policy had been simplified to make them more user friendly as a result of the feedback received;
- as a result of the consultation and as a result of the Council's commitment to local groups there was no charge for specific civic events including Remembrance Sunday and religious events;
- it was important to note that the Council as a result of the Social Value Policy, a community fund had been established which volunteer groups could apply for which could be used to pay for charges under the Events Policy. These groups had to demonstrate that the funds would add community value;
- the Policy would play a key role in informing event organisers of their legal duties and responsibilities so that no residents were put at risk.

The following questions were made by Members and responded to accordingly:

- it had to be recognised that there were events such as the French Markets in Stanmore, which whilst not being a charitable event, provided a great community benefit and assisted local traders. How was this taken into account?

The person who ran the French Market did so as a commercial venture and made enough profit to cover commercial rates so it was not envisaged that this would cause an issue. Because the event was run in partnership with local traders as a community event, all relevant road closures were done free of charge.

- A Jewish Festival regularly held in Stanmore provided a huge community benefit. However if it was subject to the full charges it would not be able to run. Would this event incur any charges?

This would be classed as a religious event and would be provided concessions for the charges. The idea of the Policy was to put a robust process in place so that everyone knew what was happening. So if other departments or partners such as the Police needed to be aware of the event, the Council could advise them in a co-ordinated manner. Any costs involved would simply cover the costs of the Council in performing the tasks.

- It was important to recognise that the Policy had to be sensitive to the needs of local communities.

A sensitive approach was at the heart of the Policy and where fees could be waived they would be, if appropriate. The Community Fund could also help organisations with any costs that they may incur and it ensured that they were aware of all relevant facts before holding an event.

- How would the Policy ensure that parks and open space would not suffer from any permanent damage?

Prior to the introduction of the Policy, the problem that was occurring was that events were taking place without the Council's knowledge. The Policy enabled the Council to consider issues such as the frequency of use of parks and open spaces and introduce relevant stipulations to protect them if necessary. Additionally large size events required deposits to be paid. The Council could keep hold of these deposits if reparation work was required.

- How could the Council monitor the number of people attending any one event?

The numbers provided by event organisers would be a guesstimate which the Council would consider carefully. For large events where safety was important, such as Bonfire Night, the Council would only allow a maximum number of entrants.

- How would insurance work in relation to events held?

Insurance would be the responsibility of the event organisers as they would be personally liable if they did not have this in place.

- Were there any issues with events being advertised on private land, an estate agent's board for example?

As far as the Council were aware there were no issues with advertising events on private land.

- Would organisations such as the Harrow Youth Parliament be able to draw on the Community Fund if it wished to hold events?

For an organisation to apply for funding it would need to have an appropriate governance structure in place along with a mission statement which had benefit for the borough. It was expected that the Harrow Youth Parliament would fulfill these requirements so potentially could apply for it.

- Whilst the Policy had improved since it was presented to the last Committee meeting in November 2015, there were still concerns regarding it. The Policy had provided no information on baseline figures so an analysis could take place on the effectiveness of the Policy. Additionally no financial implications had been reported so it was difficult to assess how much money the Council could make or lose as a result of the implementation of the Policy.

The application fee that would be charged would cover the basic administration costs, which had been streamlined. It was difficult for the Council to get baseline figures as there had been no co-ordination if how events in the borough had been managed in the past and no record of how many events had taken place.

The Council would also look to attract appropriate commercial events into the borough as a source of income generation.

- There were concerns that terms had not been defined properly in the Policy. For example no definition had been provided of the term Civic Service and the term Community Events. There were also concerns that the Labour Manifesto had been referenced in the Policy.

These suggested changes would be looked into.

- In relation to Community Events the Policy states that discounts will only be offered where all monies gained through entry charges, trader's

fees, caterer's fees and any other means go directly to benefiting the community or a non-executive community organisation. The use of the word 'all' was too encompassing.

This was a fair point and would be considered.

- In relation to the Event Size stipulated by the Policy, it was important to recognise that by calculating the numbers attending per day could cause significant increases in charges for events where there may be no more than 100 people attending at any one point, but by the end of the day have several hundred people attending.

This was also a fair comment and would also be considered.

- The changes made by the Policy were welcomed. The Application Fees for local charities had been set at £10 (with the application of concessions) whereas responded had stated that they were happy with paying £20. What was the reason for the difference?

The reason for the difference was so that consistency could be applied for local charities, community organisations, schools and places of worship.

- How would the Council deal with events proposed that could be inappropriate for the borough? A clear criteria and fair process was required.

Ultimately all proposed events would be considered carefully. If it was believed that an event could be inappropriate there would be the necessary liaison with the relevant Portfolio Holder, Directors and if necessary the Police.

- Could more information be provided on whether weddings could take place in public parks?

The issue of whether a wedding could take place in a public park was very much site specific. Some parks could accommodate marquees. Any application would be considered carefully.

- When would the Policy be reviewed?

It was expected that the policy would be reviewed within 3 years of its implementation and probably in 2018.

- Would civic events not organised by the Council qualify for the relevant concessions under the Policy?

All civic events would qualify for the concessions regardless of whether they were organised by the Council or not.

- Was there a cap on the maximum amount that an organisation could claim under the Community Fund?

The Community Fund was a finite pot and was funded from a number of contracts which related to a direct benefit to the community. The Council would judge all applications to ensure that the fund was not exhausted in one application and a cap would be imposed.

- Would there be criteria in relation to the fees for road closures?

It was important to note that costs in relation to road closures were incurred by ensuring that this was conducted by people who were properly trained and licensed to conduct road closures. Major religious events would not be charged in addition to voluntary events. For the Pinner Panto event, this would be subject to a concession. It normally cost the Council £700 to implement a road closure as advertisement, notices etc. were required.

The majority of Members felt that all of the issues that had been raised at the Committee meeting in November 2015 had been addressed and commended the Policy. Other Members commented that whilst the proposed Policy had been improved since it went out for public consultation, there were still issues that needed to be addressed.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and the officer for their attendance.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That the comments from the Committee on the Events Policy be referred to Cabinet.

139. Corporate Plan

This Committee considered a report which set out the Corporate Plan for 2016 to 2019. The Corporate Plan was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18 February 2016.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Policy Development addressed the Committee and made the following points.

- the Corporate Plan set out the Council's Strategy to deliver its vision of 'Working Together to make a difference for Harrow'. This would be achieved by building a better Harrow, being more business-like and business friendly and protecting the most vulnerable and supporting families;
- there would be approximately £1.75 billion coming into Harrow. The focus was not just about regeneration but also to build capacity in the community by equipping them with skills, jobs etc;

- Local Government had changed and was changing. In order for the Council to generate income and reduce its cost it had to become more commercial and share services with other authorities;
- a new set of values for staff had been proposed. These included being courageous, doing things together and making things happen;

The following questions were made by Members and responded to accordingly:

- How would residents be involved in the regeneration projects across Harrow?

There was a Harrow Residents Panel which involved local residents and this ensured a continued dialogue between them and the Council in relation to various issues. This Panel met bi-monthly and it had been integral in helping the Council make decisions on its Regeneration plans;

- The Corporate Plan proposed was completely different to the version agreed last year which had purported to cover the period 2015 to 2019. There were significant differences and why was this? Why did the Council not simply adopt a Corporate Plan year on year?

The Council's overall priorities had not changed. However Local Government and various circumstances had changed and it was important for the Corporate Plan to take account of this. The Council had proposed a 3 year budget and it was important that the Corporate Plan aligned with this. The Corporate Plan for this year focused on how the Council would deliver its priorities.

- How was the Council making best use of digital technology for residents to access services? How would the Council ensure that those who required face to face interaction were still provided with this?

The Council was working hard to increase the number of services who could access services online. The MyHarrow initiative had 90,000 users registered which provided a portal for residents to access services online. The reality was that if residents made greater use of access to services online, this reduced costs for the Council. The Council was trying to get residents who did have use of the internet to go online for services as this would then free up staff to focus on assisting those residents who required greater assistance and / or did not have access to the internet.

- There had been an instance where a Council email account in relation to Council Tax had been closed which meant that issues were required to be made in writing. This was contrary to the objective of trying to get more residents to access services online. What was the explanation for this?

The reason for closing the email account was due to the difficulty in tracking all of the issues given the volume of queries raised. These issues were now required to be raised as a web based form which meant that all information was contained in one form and one response could be provided.

- A press article had said that Harrow was one of the worst places to live in according to a survey of residents. Why did the Council believe that satisfaction levels were good?

The Council obtained its statistics and conclusions through the use of residents' surveys. The Portfolio Holder asked if a copy of the press article could be provided to her so that she could investigate it further.

- How was the Council becoming more business friendly specifically?

The Council was becoming more commercial, had established Trading Companies and new initiatives such as Project Phoenix and the adult social care e-purse which were being developed. The Council had also started sharing services with other authorities in relation to HB Public Law and Procurement, as examples. The Council was looking at all opportunities to generate income and reduce its costs.

The Council was a business friendly organisation as had been reflected in a recent award had been presented to it. The Council was conducting a range of activities to help businesses such as mentoring, connecting with experts, setting up a business den, conducting various workshops and hosting networking events.

The Council's local procurement policy also meant that the Council was investing in services with a greater number of local businesses.

- Residents were still having issues in getting problems resolved by the Council and encountering difficulties in the Council responding to queries. There had also been an issue where a MyHarrow bulletin had revealed the email accounts of all of its users which was a data breach.

The Council could not say that customer services were in a position where it wished it to be. However the Council had a clear plan to get its customer services to the level desired. It was important to recognise that the Council was on the right track and knew what was required to be done. If residents had a bad experience with customer services this would provide them a negative image of the Council. Additionally if a new service had been introduced this naturally took a while to settle down and could raise a number of queries and concern initially.

In relation to the data breach this was caused by human error and the system was being looked at to prevent this from happening again. Legal advice provided had confirmed that it was not a serious breach of data.

- How would the Council attract larger business to Harrow?

It was difficult to attract larger businesses due to the Government's policy which allowed commercial units to be converted to residential flats, a policy which the Council had lobbied against. However the Council would always try its best to attract larger businesses and it was hoped that the Regeneration proposals would contribute to this.

- The Equalities Implications section of the report had alluded to a number of activities referenced in the Corporate Plan as being proposals with business cases still to be developed. Could some examples be provided? Was the e-purse project an example of this?

Officers were happy to provide a list of these relevant activities. These activities would relate to commercial and regeneration and consultation would be held on specific proposals if appropriate.

The e-purse system was an example of these activities but further development was required and exact dates could not be provided.

The Portfolio Holder undertook to provide the list to the Member prior to the Council meeting on 25 February 2016.

- What objectives from the previous Corporate Plan had not been achieved? It would have been helpful to include this information in the proposed new version to give a balanced view and to know if improvements had been made.

The way that the Corporate Plan had been structured was different to previous years. It was decided that greater narrative was required on the Council's achievements and the previous Corporate Plan and the proposed one were not directly comparable.

A quarterly report was provided to the Improvement Board which provided information on issues where targets and objectives had not been met. This report was also presented to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

- How could the Council be considered to be business friendly when the Portfolio Holder responsible for that area was rude to a local businessman at a recent Council meeting?

It was not considered that the Portfolio Holder had been rude in any way.

- Did the new values referred to in the Corporate Plan replace those which had been adopted previously?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the values had replaced the CREATE values which had been previously adopted.

- What did it mean that the Council wanted to be a values-led organisation?

A values led organisation meant that behaviours would be put into action. It would allow staff and empower them to feed in ideas, work together and take more initiative in their work. It would lead to greater consistency and greater accountability.

- Would opposition Members be allowed to be involved in the Regeneration Board?

This was a question that could only be answered by the Portfolio Holder responsible for that area.

- The Council's aspiration was to be in the top 10% nationally for Key Stage 2 results whereas for GCSE result the Council stated it wished to be in the top 20%. What was the reason for this difference?

In relation to schools it was important to recognised that the vast majority of schools were either rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Ofsted inspections took into account a range of issues including parent's satisfaction. The Council always wished to do better but the Ofsted inspections suggested that parents were happy with the schools and the education being provided to their children.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their attendance.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That the comments from the Committee on the Corporate Plan be referred to Cabinet.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.34 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair