

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

8 NOVEMBER 2016

Chair:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	Ghazanfar Ali	* Jo Dooley
	* Richard Almond	* Ameet Jogia
	* Mrs Chika Amadi	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane (3)
	* Jeff Anderson	* Stephen Wright (1)
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided)	(Parent Governors)
	† Mrs J Rammelt	
	Reverend P Reece	
Non-voting Co-opted:	Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	
In attendance: (Councillors)	* Sue Anderson	Minute 188
	* Mrs Christine Robson	Minute 189

- * Denotes Member present
- (1), (3) Denotes category of Reserve Member
- † Denotes apologies received

181. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Chris Mote
Councillor Paul Osborn

Reserve Member

Councillor Stephen Wright
Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

182. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Chika Amadi declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 7 (Scrutiny Review of Health Visiting in the Borough) in that she was involved in community health activities. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Ameet Jogia declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 9 (Homelessness Scrutiny Review Challenge Panel) in that he had been a beneficiary of the Right to Buy scheme in the Borough. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

At the commencement of consideration of Agenda Item 10 (Prevent Strategy), there was a discussion about relevant interests and Councillor Jeff Anderson declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his wife was the Portfolio Holder for Community, Culture and Resident Engagement. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

183. Minutes

With reference to Minute 177 (Implementation of the new Youth Offending Case Management System), Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, who had been in attendance for that item, stated that he recalled much more serious criticism of the system, including from the Corporate Director, People Services, than had been reflected in the minute as drafted.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 September 2016 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to amendment of the fifth paragraph Minute 177 to include the addition of the following as the second sentence: "The Committee noted the serious concerns expressed in relation to the impact of the system failures, including the criticisms of the Corporate Director, People Services".

184. Public Questions and Petitions

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

185. References from Council/Cabinet - Community Involvement in Parks

The Committee received a reference from the Cabinet which confirmed that the recommendations of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel had been accepted.

In considering the reference, Members made the following comments:

- the report's statement that there were "no specific performance issues", was at odds with the further statement that performance would be monitored on a quarterly basis. The Chair suggested that the monitoring arrangements were simply standard practice.

- the responses from the Cabinet to the review's recommendations were generally positive, but also anodyne.
- Cabinet should have been clearer about the implementation of the "Daily Mile" and Young Champions initiatives. The commitment to explore opportunities to expand Green Gyms should state timescales and particular parks rather than being left open-ended and vague.
- it was acknowledged that Cabinet's response was light on specific timescales and detailed plans, but the overall tenor was supportive of the proposals put forward in the scrutiny review.

RESOLVED: That the response of proposed actions in response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel Review Group, as set out in the report, be noted.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

186. Homelessness Scrutiny Review Challenge Panel

The Committee considered a report which set out the findings and recommendations from the Homelessness Challenge Panel (Scrutiny Review).

Councillor Jeff Anderson, Chair of the Challenge Panel, introduced the panel's report and recommendations; while he acknowledged that the latter were not particularly innovative, they did nevertheless recognise the seriousness of the issues and identify key drivers for homelessness.

A Member referred to the possible impact on the Council's finances of the proposed changes to the treatment of the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee and suggested that the Council should be lobbying in respect of the Homelessness Reduction Bill. It was also pointed out that the Bill had now passed its Second Reading in Parliament and its progress should be reflected by updating the panel's report; the introduction of a definition of homelessness would be an important improvement.

Officers were asked to clarify whether the figure of 27 acquisitions "in the pipeline" cited on Page 65 of the agenda, was part of the anticipated total of 60 purchases in the 2016-17 financial year.

In response to a Member's question about the loss of Private Rented Sector tenancies as a cause of homelessness, it was confirmed that the panel had discussed the issue, but had not made a particular recommendation in this area.

The Committee considered the recommendations arising from the review and agreed that it would be appropriate to add a further recommendation as follows:

“To request that Cabinet make representations to the Government concerning the impact on the Council’s finances of the changes to the treatment of the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee”.

The Committee further agreed that the Challenge Panel’s report be updated to reflect progress of the Homelessness Reduction Bill in Parliament.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That the report of the Homelessness Scrutiny Review Challenge Panel be endorsed, subject to the changes outlined above, and that its recommendations, as amended, be agreed and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

RESOLVED ITEMS

187. Scrutiny Review of Health Visiting in Harrow - Draft Scope

The Committee received a report which set out proposals for carrying out a scrutiny review of health visiting services in the Borough.

It was suggested that the scope for the review should include examination of the expenditure involved in provision of the service and options for the allocation of resources. A Member also referred to the timetable for the tendering exercise and proposed that this should be coordinated with the review. The Committee agreed to these additions.

Councillors Almond, Amadi and Macleod-Cullinane indicated their wish to be involved in the scrutiny review group. The Chair suggested that the option and timescale for others to be nominated, be checked.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the scope for the review, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (2) Councillor Janet Mote be appointed to chair the review group;
- (3) in respect of any further membership of the review group, Councillors Richard Almond, Chika Amadi and Barry Macleod-Cullinane be included;
- (4) the timescales for the review follow the pattern suggested in Appendix 1 to the report, subject to confirmation that this would dovetail with the tendering process.

188. Together with Families Programme

Members received a report which outlined progress with the Together with Families programme since the full endorsement from the Cabinet in July 2016.

The Divisional Director, Children and Young People, outlined the context of the report Members received a presentation, explaining the key aspects of the progress in implementing the programme since the Cabinet meeting in July 2016. The Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People, underlined the key message about the approach to the delivery of these services, namely, the importance of integration of services and partnership between the agencies involved.

A Member queried whether the “turnaround” for the 395 families mentioned in the report could be objectively assessed and confirmed. An officer explained that, in Phase 1 of the programme, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) criterion for being assessed as “turned around” was to meet targets in two out of the three categories of progress; anti-social behaviour, school attendance and worklessness. She accepted that, in Phase 1, there was no sustainability tracking of such improvements, and the targets were focused on individuals rather than taking into account the broader context of whole families. The officer that once the payment of £800 per individual had been secured, there was no requirement to repay should the performance against the indicators slip.

A Member referred to the fact that the statistics in the report did not convey a sense of the real impact on families of the programme. The officer agreed that the material did not reflect powerful narratives of the real experience of families; she suggested that she could provide Members of the Committee with access to videos of interviews with families involved which portrayed significant achievements in keeping families together in spite of significant stresses and challenges. In response to further questions, the Portfolio Holder added that the programme represented concerted progress for vulnerable children and troubled families, with the Council matching the funding available from Government and demonstrating that concrete improvement were being achieved.

A Member referred to his recent visits which had enabled him to appreciate first-hand the effectiveness of this work. In response to his queries, it was confirmed that once outcomes were achieved, children were able to exit the programme, and that families signed consent forms in respect of data protection and confidentiality.

In response to questions as to whether interventions before family crisis could be shown to be saving costs, the officer confirmed that the early support model based in three community hubs allowed for relevant cases to be escalated to statutory services if necessary. For those cases in the “edge of care” cohort, it was much more difficult to divert children and families away from the care options. However, given the very high costs of care, even success in diverting a few cases would result in significant savings.

In reply to a Member’s query about the use of IT, the officer underlined that face-to-face support was the most important and effective, but the service was keen to develop online options to supplement this eg. keeping in contact over a weekend; she hoped it might be possible to attract commercial interest and sponsorship in this area.

Information on comparisons with other authorities and on the demands on lead workers were allocated to each family was sought and the officer reported that Harrow had done well in the first round of funding claims with 80 successful claims registered compared with a projection of 50; she would provide more detailed information to Members. The Divisional Director confirmed that the Council was trying to maintain reasonable caseloads for staff in the social work teams; supervision was provided to support staff and performance was monitored through regular reporting.

Clarification was sought on the value and range of joint work with partners. The officer advised that key partners included the Probation service, the Police, the Youth Offending Team, Early Years services, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Public Health, the voluntary sector and social workers. Partners were involved in an overall Board managing the programme and on an operational group; these mechanisms facilitated better coordination, cleared blockages and progressed joint initiatives such as workforce development. The Council's Corporate Leadership Group (CLG) was available to deal with any more significant strategic issues and ongoing challenges. The Divisional Director underlined the importance of moving beyond the narrow focus on children's social care, to the broader remit of public services contributing to sustaining and supporting families, eg. the value of getting an adult in a household into work.

A Member suggested that there might be opportunities for investing in services to generate savings down the line; he felt this should have been addressed in the financial implications paragraphs of the report. He considered that there was insufficient information for Members to make any reliable judgement on the financial context, including the relationships with partners' funding arrangements and the prospects for commercial involvement. The officer acknowledged the issues and indicated that a mapping exercise of the public sector resources engaged, particularly in the health sector, would be helpful. The Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning, cautioned that, given that the DCLG reward grant amounted to a maximum of £1,800 per family, there should be realism about how much should be invested. The Member expressed the view that there may be financial grounds for a different approach irrespective of DCLG reward grant.

In response to a number of questions which sought to clarify various aspects of the programme the officer confirmed that:

- some families continued to receive appropriate support even though they had formally exited the programme;
- "edge of care" cases were those in which there was a risk of family breakdown and often related to existing Children in Need and Child Protection plans;
- the programme staff included a performance analyst, a data assistant, a project officer and an employment adviser based in Economic Development, with an employment adviser seconded from the DWP;

the costs were covered by a service transformation grant. It was hoped that, after April, it would be possible to carry out a mapping exercise which would inform the future structure and funding for the programme.

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

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the programme progress and key developments since Cabinet endorsement, that is, from July 2016 up until October 2016, be noted;
- (3) reporting back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee throughout the duration of the programme from 2015 – 2020, be agreed as on an annual basis.

189. Prevent Strategy

The Committee received a report which outlined the Council's approach to meeting the Prevent Duty in partnership with other agencies and the community.

A Member questioned whether a Committee Member, Councillor Jeff Anderson, had a conflict of interest in the participation in the scrutiny of the Prevent Strategy given that his wife, Councillor Sue Anderson, also in attendance, as the relevant Portfolio Holder responsible for implementation of the strategy. The Committee was advised that beyond the category of disclosable pecuniary interests, which was not considered to be relevant in this case, it was for the Member concerned to determine whether a non-disclosable pecuniary interest or a non-pecuniary interest was applicable under the Council's Code of Conduct. Declaration of such an interest would not necessarily preclude continued attendance at the meeting or even participation in the discussion or decision.

An officer introduced the report, outlining the key aspects and inviting Members to ask questions about the area of work. In considering the report, Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- It was questioned whether any reliable assessment could be made of the "success" of the programme given that it was difficult to determine what might have occurred in the absence of the Prevent initiatives. The officer acknowledged that it was hard to measure the effectiveness of the programme from an outcomes perspective, a factor also recognised by the Home Office. It was nevertheless clear that, without it, there would have been increased risk of radicalisation, even if it was also clear that risk could not be completely eradicated. The Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning added that, although it was impossible to be sure of the impact, it was still the case that, to date, there had been no significant known incidents involving any resident of the Borough.

- In response to a question as to whether the Council was given access to security information, say, from MI5 or GCHQ, the officer explained that there were different levels of information-sharing and many sensitive datasets were not available to the Council. However, there was a local counter-terrorism profile issued annually to the Council which was particularly helpful to risk assessment and coordination with local Police and the Counter-Terrorism Command.
- The officer confirmed that some 1,500 staff had already been WRAP trained (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent), including foster carers, and that there were very few refusals of such support. There was no explicit power to compel individuals to participate, but other measures would be followed in those rare cases of non-compliance.
- In terms of the engagement of schools in the Prevent Strategy and the resources available for this, the officer advised that work had been done directly with Borough Headteachers and with Safeguarding leads; training continued to be offered to schools. A representative of the Department for Education was due to address headteachers and this would refer to Ofsted expectations and requirements of schools. There was increasing interest in this area. With respect to funding and capacity, the Divisional Director confirmed that the Service Manager, Cohesion and Engagement, was the key resource along with an element of his own time; it was challenging to deliver on a statutory duty with limited resources.
- There were instances of the Council's IT firewall blocking some inappropriate websites but not others, and it was queried therefore whether the existing filters were strong enough in the context of the Prevent Strategy. The officer confirmed that this was a difficult area as there were many arguments that making such firewalls too robust would obstruct knowledge and understanding, and even that they would infringe rights to freedom of expression.
- In response to a Member's challenge that there should be reference to the Prevent Duty in Council contracts, the officer reported that legal advice had been obtained via Barnet Council and the current approach was to prioritise including relevant clauses in new contracts, though consideration would be given to others as appropriate. The Divisional Director explained that this followed a risk-based assessment of services and contracts.

A Member asked a number of questions in relation to the strategy and it was reported that

- the Prevent Working Group and Prevent Action Plan group were in fact one and the same;
- the Council was investigating the extension of filters on IT equipment;

- that any instances of IT misuse in schools had been investigated and appropriate action taken;
- reference in Item 6 of the action plan was to statutory agencies rather than voluntary groups;
- there was an aspiration that new contracts include clauses related to the Prevent Duty, as appropriate; and
- mosques in the Borough had been positive and proactive in raising awareness.

RESOLVED: That the approach being taken in Harrow to meet the requirements of the Prevent duty, as set out in the report and discussed at the meeting, be endorsed and supported.

190. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4B of the Constitution), it was

RESOLVED: At 9.55 pm to continue to 10.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair