

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

Meeting:	Best Value Advisory Panel
Date:	25 th March 2004
Subject:	Harrow Teachers' Centre – Best Value Interim Report
Key decisions:	No
Responsible Chief Officer:	Director of Learning and Community Development
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value Education and Lifelong Learning
Status:	Part 1
Ward:	All
Enclosures:	Appendices A and B

1. **Summary/ Reason for urgency (if applicable)**

- 1.1 This report reviews progress of the Best Value Review of Harrow Teachers' Centre and makes interim recommendations.

2. **Recommendations**

2.1 **For decision by Best Value Review Panel:**

To recommend that the Best Value Report of Harrow Teachers' Centre is incorporated into and superseded by the feasibility study into the potential development of Harrow Council as a Work Based Learning provider.

REASON: Important changes, including the potential development of Harrow as a Work Based Learning provider may significantly affect the outcome of the recommendations of the Best Value Review report.

2.2 **For decision by Cabinet:**

To recommend that there is a change to the rate of fees and charges for using the Teachers' Centre above the rate of approximately 2.8% agreed at Cabinet.

REASON: The Service Level Agreement with schools for using the Teachers' Centre will cease on 31st March 2004. Use of the Teachers' Centre (e.g. attendance at INSET sessions by school staff) will instead be on a pay-as-you-go basis for all users from 1st April 2004. An interim rate of fees and charges was approved by Cabinet based on an inflationary increase of 2.8% pending the recommendations from the Best Value Report.

3. **Consultation with Ward Councillors**

3.1 None

4. **Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)**

4.1 The Harrow Teachers' Centre Best Value Review is a functional review, which forms part of the Life and Learning themed review established within the corporate review programme that applies from 2001. The Review process commenced in 2002.

5. **Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

5.1 The implementation of the interim recommendations will contribute to the Council's Lifelong Learning Priorities.

6. **Background Information and options considered**

- 6.1 The Harrow Teachers' Centre Best Value Review process started in 2002. The review team concluded at an early stage, that Harrow Teachers' Centre (HTC) was not a single entity, but instead is composed of a series of interrelated functions and services: Room hire for training, meetings and other purposes; Catering Services; Media Resources; The Library; Office Accommodation for departmental staff.
- 6.2 The review process considered the financing arrangements and charging structure for HTC, parking facilities and the shared site agreement with Whitefriars First and Middle School. It also considered the implications for the present staffing structure arising from the review.
- 6.3 The High Schools opted out of the Schools Service Level Agreement (SLA) for 2003/04 which has contributed to a budget shortfall of £71,000. In response to this, the SLA for schools will cease on 31st March 2004. A "pay-as-you-go" system for room use will replace this as a source of income from 1st April 2004. Interim recommendations for room rate charges have been presented to and approved by Cabinet (appendix A).
- 6.4 Recent significant changes have impacted on the information that had been considered by the HTC BVR panel. These include the introduction of the "pay-as-you-go" system for room use; a successful bid to the West London Learning & Skills Council for the establishment of a satellite Professional Development Centre for "Skills for Life" for teachers of adults at HTC; a large scale change management programme within Harrow Council; the possibilities for HTC to be central in the potential establishment of Harrow Council as a Work Based Learning provider serving as a focus for Harrow Council becoming a learning organisation; the New Harrow Project with the establishment of the new directorates.
- 6.5 As already stated the Service Level Agreement with schools for using the Teachers' Centre will cease on 31st March 2004. Use of the Teachers' Centre (e.g. attendance at INSET sessions by Early Years, school staff and others) will instead be on a pay-as-you-go basis for all users from 1st April 2004. An interim rate of fees and charges was approved by Cabinet based on an inflationary increase of approximately 2.8%. However a detailed analysis of the budget and projected hours of use require that higher charges be set if the income is to balance expenditure. The higher rates are set out in appendix A. It is likely that there will be serious financial difficulties in 2004/5 unless the fees and charges are further increased.
- 6.6 It is important to consider that the Service Level Agreements with school had the potential to generate £173,000 for the financial year 2003/04 if all schools had

subscribed. Depending on the size of the schools, the cost varied from just over £1,000 to almost £6,000 (appendix B). Since schools will no longer be paying the SLA they will have the choice of allocating this budget to Staff Development / training to pay for the increased charges as part of the “pay as you go system”. An essential consideration in this change is one of linking the contribution made by schools (and others users) to the Teachers’ Centre budget to use made of the facilities rather than the number of children in the school. This system eliminates the hidden subsidy paid by schools within the Service Level Agreement system of a range of uses made of the Teachers’ Centre by other users for which no payment, or an uneconomic payment was made.

6.7 It is vital and responsible that decisions affecting the future of HTC take into account

- the current and potential future situation, rather than relying on a partially out-of-date scenario.
- that there will be serious financial difficulties in 2004/5 unless the fees and charges are increased to reflect realistic levels as well as to the changes caused by the cessation of the Service Level Agreements with schools.

6.8 With this in mind, it is recommended that

6.9 The value of a HTC BVR is re-assessed in light of current changes and developments to ensure the best possible fit to current trends and innovations including the detailed Work Based Learning initiative feasibility study currently being undertaken on behalf of Harrow Council. Consequently it is recommended that the feasibility study currently being considered for Harrow Council becoming a Work Based Learning provider, incorporates information and recommendations from the HTC BVR process and, furthermore, supersedes it.

6.10 There is a change to the rate of fees and charges for using the Harrow Teachers’ Centre above the interim rate of 2.8% agreed at Cabinet. This will ensure that there is a strategy in place to generate sufficient income for the Teachers’ Centre and by so doing will eliminate the hidden subsidy formerly paid by schools.

6.11 In the meantime, HTC will not stand still but will continue its valuable work in supporting the work of users. These include the very successful in-service programme for early years and education staff managed by School Development Services (SDS), the Harrow Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) as well as other forms of training for Harrow Council staff. It will also continue to remain a key venue for meetings and conferences as well as a community resource.

6.12 HTC will benefit from some interim recommendations based on the deliberations of the BVR panel that will strengthen the organisational and financial situation of HTC. These include a rationalisation and updating of support services linked to changes in technology and changing need; a staffing review; taking a fresh look at the relationship with Whitefriars First and Middle School; strengthening links with Harrow Council’s Adult & Community Learning programme as well as a review of office accommodation for departmental staff. All will be considered within the framework of being compliant within the New Harrow Project.

7. Consultation

7.1 Consultation formed a central and very important part of the Best Value Review process and included :-

7.2 A series of events to capture the views of staff and stakeholders including a launch event, telephone interviews, and focus groups. The review team also received the results of the

analysis of the Service Level Agreement questionnaire undertaken annually by the Schools' Finance Team.

- 7.3 The Harrow Service Level Agreement Questionnaire 2002/03 provided the following information:- 41 schools completed the SLA questionnaire related to the Teachers' Centre. 28 schools (69%) graded the quality of service provided by the Teachers' Centre as good or excellent. 12 (29%) thought that it was acceptable. Only 1 school (2%) thought that it was poor.
- 7.4 A Launch Event. An open invitation was extended to key stakeholders to attend an event to Launch the Best Value Review of the Teachers' Centre. This event provided an opportunity to undertake a SWOT analysis.
- 7.5 Telephone Interviews. Telephone interviews were conducted with Headteachers and staff in First and Middle schools, High schools, Special Schools and the 2 FE Colleges situated in Harrow. Other Harrow Council sections consulted were the Central Training Unit, the School Development Services (SDS) and the Education SIMS Team.
- 7.6 In addition external users were also involved in expressing their views and included Kodak, Thales Acoustical, the Metropolitan Police and the Workers Educational Association (WEA).

8. **Finance Observations**

- 8.1 The 2004/2005 budget has been set on the basis that expenditure for the Teachers Centre will be funded from income except for the capital financing charges which the Council funds. Ceasing the SLA with schools from 31st March 2004 requires a pay-as-you-go system to replace this funding from 1st April 2004. It is unlikely that the interim recommendations for room rate charges at approximately 2.8% will cover the loss of this funding. The higher level of charges is therefore recommended to avoid serious financial difficulties in 2004/5.

9. **Legal Observations**

- 9.1 None

10. **Conclusion**

- 10.1 The work of this Review that started in 2002 has already resulted in some positive and beneficial changes in the way that the Harrow Teachers' Centre is run. Members views are now sought regarding changes to the fees and charges schedule and the continuation of the Review in its current form.

11. **Background Papers**

- 11.1 None

12. **Author**

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