

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

23 FEBRUARY 2010

Chairman: * Councillor Stanley Sheinwald

Councillors:

* Mrs Margaret Davine	* Paul Scott (1)
* B E Gate	* Anthony Seymour
* Mitzi Green	* Mrs Rekha Shah
* Jerry Miles	* Dinesh Solanki
* Mrs Vina Mithani	* Yogesh Teli
* Janet Mote	* Mark Versallion

Voting Co-opted: (Voluntary Aided) (Parent Governors)

† Mrs J Rammelt	* Mr R Chauhan
Reverend P Reece	† Mrs D Speel

In attendance: (Councillors)

* Councillor Paul Osborn	Minute number: 687 and 688
* Councillor Eileen Kinnear	Minute number: 690

- * Denotes Member present
- (1) Denote category of Reserve Members
- † Denotes apologies received

680. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Christopher Noyce

Reserve Member

Councillor Paul Scott

681. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 10 – Final Report of Sustainability Review

Councillor Brian Gate declared a personal interest in that he was a Member of the Citizen Advice Bureau Management Board. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.

Agenda Item 12 - Scrutiny Response to NHS Harrow's "Better Care, Closer to Home - A Consultation on the Development of Accessible, Modern, High Quality Health and Social Care Services in East Harrow"

Agenda Item 13 - North West London Acute Services Review - Scrutiny response to NHS Consultation "Better Services for Local Children - A Public Consultation for Brent and Harrow"

Councillor Stanley Sheinwald declared a personal interest in that he was currently the Chair of the Carers' Partnership Group. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these item.

Councillor Vina Mithani declared a personal interest in that she currently worked for the Health Protection Agency. She would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.

Councillor Mark Versallion declared a personal interest in that he was currently a Non-Executive Director of North West London Hospitals NHS Trust. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.

Councillor Brian Gate declared a personal interest in that he was married to a health professional based at St Peter's Medical Centre. His daughter also currently worked part-time at two medical centres. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.

Councillor Rekha Shah declared a personal interest in that she was currently employed by Brent Council in the Community Health Team. She was also a patient at Northwick Park Hospital. She would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.

Councillor Janet Mote declared a personal interest in that her mother currently lived in East Harrow and her daughter currently worked as a pediatric nurse at Northwick Park Hospital. She would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.

682. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

683. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put.

684. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

685. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received.

686. References from Council/Cabinet

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references.

RESOLVED ITEMS

687. Communications Plan 2010/11

The Committee received a report which outlined the proposed Communications Plan for 2010/11, due to be considered by Cabinet on 18 March 2010.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Head of Communications introduced the Plan. The Committee were informed that:

- Since May 2007 the Communications Plan had contributed to an increase in net resident satisfaction of 18%. Staff satisfaction had also improved. Cohesion indicators had however suffered as a result of the mosque protests in late 2009;
- The number of residents that felt informed about Council services and benefits had increased since May 2007, as had perceptions of value for money. The latest data had been gathered prior to the announcement of the Council tax freeze;
- Overall it was felt that the Council was improving steadily and was focused on the most appropriate drivers of satisfaction for both residents and staff;
- The Council's Communications Plan was operating in the context of delivering better services, learning from complaints and giving better customer service;
- Overall the objectives of the new Communications Plan would remain largely unchanged, although there would be an increased emphasis on targeting specific segments of the community. In particular, the Council would aim to improve communication with residents who felt

moderately dissatisfied, disagreed that the Council provided good value for money or felt that they receive only limited information;

- The Council would develop and improve both new and existing forms of external and internal communication. In particular, the Council was looking to develop and expand the services it offered on its website;
- The Communications department did not operate in isolation and was working increasingly closely with the Chief Executive's Department, Partnership Development and Performance, Access Harrow and Human Resources;
- The data indicated that there was a strong correlation between resident satisfaction and staff satisfaction.

Following questions, the Portfolio Holder and officers stated that:

- In order to target young people, the Council was considering a range of options including the use of social networking websites. However, it was important that the Council utilised these new forms of communication appropriately;
- The Council would progressively invite residents to provide their e-mail addresses so that they could be contacted if necessary. As the Council's online services were expanded, this form of communication would become increasingly commonplace;
- It was accepted that demonstrating causality between communication activity and resident satisfaction was not straight forward due to the number of variables involved. However, cross tabulation and other advanced statistical analysis did allow the Council to demonstrate a certain degree of association between its communication activities and overall resident satisfaction. In addition, the Council regularly utilised the work of MORI, a leading market research company, to gauge the impact of its communications;
- The Council was increasingly engaging in collaborative projects with the Primary Care Trust. This included joint articles in Harrow People, joint research and joint branding. Such collaboration acknowledged that much of the work carried out by local public bodies was interconnected;
- The concept of a Media Score was used to measure the performance of a media team. Each media story relating to the Council was given a point score based upon a number of factors including level of exposure, the popularity of the media carrying the story and the overall tone. The Council actively pushed news stories based upon relevant national issues;
- Positive communication was never used as an alternative to providing good services. It was however used to publicise positive work;

- There remained a certain degree of uncertainty amongst residents as to which services the Council was responsible for. As a result, the Council was often criticised for poor services it did not control and, conversely, not credited for good services that it did. However, it was accepted that most residents were not interested in who provided public services, provided they were of a high quality. This was reflected in the Council's desire to engage in collaborative projects with other local public bodies. It was added that perceptions of the Council often lagged behind performance;
- During the purdah period the Communications Department would continue to adhere to Local Government guidelines. During this period the Communications Department would ensure that potentially sensitive information, especially concerning prospective candidates, was not published;
- Littering was a significant problem for most authorities and it was hoped that the problem could be eased by educating residents about the issue. The Council was continuing to run articles about littering in Harrow People and had encouraged local schools to discuss the topic with students;
- The Council did not provide free publicity to local businesses in the Harrow People magazine as there was a danger that residents would think that the Council was endorsing specific businesses. However, the Council had reviewed its procurement processes to allow local businesses to better compete and had also produced a guide for local businesses to help them deal with the financial uncertainty that the recession had caused;
- There were occasions when media outlets would not run Harrow related stories, despite the Communication Team's best efforts.

A Member of the Committee stated that many young people did not engage with the mainstream media and the Council would need to consider utilising alternative forms of communication if it was to successfully target specific groups.

Another Member stated that the report used the wording "focus on neutralising critics" and queried what this meant. The Head of Communication explained that the purpose of the Communications Plan was not to neutralise critics, but to listen to concerns and take appropriate action. He stated that the choice of wording in the report was confusing and would be changed.

The Chairman stated that he would like to see the Communications team publicising the work of the Council's Committees as good work often went unnoticed. He stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had played a key role in the commissioning of an acute stroke unit at Northwick Park Hospital but that little publicity had been received. Another Member added that he recalled a media protocol being agreed by the Committee and queried whether this was still being adhered to. The Head of Communication stated

that the Communications Department was expected to monitor Committee agendas to pick out any potential stories and that he would ensure this continued to take place.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the Communications Plan be noted;

(2) the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be referred to the meeting of Cabinet on 18 March 2010.

688. Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Committee received a report which set out the Council's results for the First Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), published on 9 December 2009 by the Audit Commission. The report also detailed the follow-up actions that the Council intended to take.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services and the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance introduced the report, during which the Committee were informed that:

- The CAA had replaced the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Under the new CAA regime, Harrow had moved up to an overall score of 3 out of 4 for the Organisation Assessment. This was the highest score the Council had achieved under CAA or CPA;
- The results of the final CPA had been published in March 2009 and, whilst the Audit Commission had stated that the Council was improving well with noticeable improvements across directorates, the Council's overall rating had remained 2 stars. However, in the same year PricewaterhouseCoopers had named Harrow as the second most improved Council in London and sixth best performing;
- The improved score had been achieved through good leadership, improved understanding of residents' needs, better performance across a number of services and a strengthened financial position;
- The key strengths identified in the CAA had been the Council's approach to economic issues, good educational achievement, good recycling rates, the use of a multi-agency approach to improving the environment, low crime levels and good community safety;
- The key challenges identified in the CAA had been the need to narrow the gap in respect of educational and health inequalities, the need to tackle climate change and congestion and the need to improve skills and learning opportunities for adults. The Council was looking at the work required to achieve 4 stars, with action plans being drawn up to address the challenges identified.

Following questions, the Portfolio Holder and officer stated that:

- Challenges identified in the Area Assessment had been forwarded to the appropriate directorate or organisation. The Harrow Chief Executive Group would monitor progress whilst the Harrow Strategic Partnership Board maintained overall responsibility;
- The Audit Commission could apply red or green flags to particular elements in the Area Assessment. The Council intended to learn from authorities that had achieved green flags and were in dialogue with the Audit Commission to ascertain what would be expected of Harrow;
- It was felt that the Audit Commission were tightening the criteria by which green flags were awarded and that achieving one would become increasingly difficult.

The Chairman stated that he would be interested in receiving further information on how Camden Council had achieved a green flag for improving the quality of life for older people and how Harrow might emulate this success.

A Member stated that she was disappointed that Ofsted had not appreciated the positive work that had been achieved in Childrens' Services through the Coram partnership. She stated that the partnership was unique in the way it operated and that it had proved very successful.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the outcome of Harrow's first Comprehensive Area Assessment be noted;
- (2) the proposed actions to address issues highlighted in the Comprehensive Area Assessment be noted and endorsed;
- (3) the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee receive a report at a future meeting to review the detailed improvement plans.

689. Final Report of Sustainability Review

The Committee received a report which set out the recommendations of the Sustainability Review which were due to be referred to Cabinet. It was explained that the review had been commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny to explore how far the Council had progressed with incorporating sustainability into its objectives and priorities.

The Chairman queried how the Council and the Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to assist individuals that were struggling to pay their Council tax. A Member of the Review Group explained that when collecting Council tax, the Council had to adhere to statutory guidance and, to some extent, this limited the assistance the authority could provide. The biggest challenge facing Harrow's Citizens Advice Bureau was that its grant had been reduced at a time when its services were in high demand due to the recession.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the observations of the Scrutiny Review Group be noted;
- (2) the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Group be noted and endorsed;
- (3) the report of the Scrutiny Review Group be referred to the meeting of Cabinet on 18 March 2010;
- (4) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue the work of the sustainability review in the next municipal year by monitoring the effectiveness of current projects, plans and the longer-term impact of the recession.

690. Neighbourhood Champions Challenge Panel Final Report

The Chairman stated that some Members of the Review Group felt that the report being presented to the Committee did not accurately reflect their views. The Chairman proposed that the report be referred back to the Review Group for reconsideration and resubmitted to the Committee at a future meeting.

In response, the Chairman of the Review Group stated that the report had previously been sent out in draft form and that all Members of the Challenge Panel had had the opportunity to provide comments, although none had been received. She added that, if the report was sent back to the Challenge Panel for reconsideration, the document would not be considered by Cabinet before the end of the municipal year and would subsequently lose its relevance. She also stated that the Committee had not previously been given the opportunity to consider the Neighbourhood Champions Scheme before it was implemented and that it was important that Scrutiny Members were given the opportunity to make their views known.

Following discussion on the matter, a vote took place on whether the report should be referred back to the Challenge Panel.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be referred back to the Challenge Panel in light of Members of the Challenge Panel not being able to reach a consensus;
- (2) a further final report be referred back to the Committee after further consideration by the Challenge Panel.

691. Scrutiny Response to NHS Harrow's "Better Care, Closer to Home - A Consultation on the Development of Accessible, Modern, High Quality Health and Social Care Services in East Harrow"

The Committee received a report which set out a draft response from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the consultation by NHS Harrow on a polysystem of primary care for East Harrow. An officer explained that the consultation had commenced on 9 December 2009 and was expected to close on 17 March 2010. Representatives of NHS Harrow had previously

attended meetings of the Committee to discuss the proposals. The response had been compiled taking into account these previous discussions and evidence gathered outside of the Committee by the Scrutiny Lead Members for Adult Health and Social Care. The Committee was requested to agree the proposed response so that a written submission could be provided to NHS Harrow ahead of the 17 March 2010 deadline.

A Member stated that, whilst she was happy to endorse the response, she wanted it noted that Kenmore Clinic remained in a poor state of repair and that she and many residents would like to see the site reinstated as a health care related development. A number of other Members supported the request.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the scrutiny response to NHS Harrow be noted and approved for submission;

(2) the Council's Chief Executive be asked to write to the Primary Care Trust's Chief Executive to ensure that the Committee's concerns were made clear.

692. North West London Acute Services Review - Scrutiny response to NHS Consultation "Better Services for Local Children - A Public Consultation for Brent and Harrow"

Members received a report which set out the draft response from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the consultation by NHS Brent, NHS Harrow and Northwest London Hospitals Trust on local paediatric services.

An officer explained that Scrutiny Members from both Harrow and Brent had come together to hold a joint Challenge Panel to question NHS colleagues on the proposals and the consultation process. The Challenge Panel had been held on 10 February 2010 and consisted of 8 Members, four representing Brent and four representing Harrow. The Committee were requested to agree the Challenge Panel's response to the NHS so that a written submission could be provided ahead of the 4 April 2010 deadline.

RESOLVED: That the draft response be noted and approved for submission to NHS Brent, NHS Harrow and Northwest London Hospitals Trust.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 11.29 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman