

**REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND
FINANCE SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	25 March 2010
Subject:	Scrutiny annual report 2009/10
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director, Partnership, Development and Performance
Scrutiny Lead	All
Member area:	
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix A: Draft annual report – Performance and Finance section Appendix B: Performance and Finance Committee – protocol for agenda planning and operation

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out details of the sub committee's activity in 2009/10 for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report, for consideration of the sub-committee. Members are also invited to evaluate the effectiveness of the sub committee since its inception.

Recommendations:

1. That the sub committee agree its section of the annual report.
2. That the sub committee's report on its activities be included in the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13 April 2010.

Section 2 – Report

Background

Appendix A of this report outlines the activities of the Performance and Finance scrutiny sub committee in 2009/10, for Members' consideration. It is intended that this report be included in the scrutiny annual report for 2009/10, which is prepared in accordance with article 6.03 (d) of the Council's constitution.

Appendix B of this report is the sub committee's protocol for agenda planning and operation. The sub committee was introduced in July 2007, when the decision was taken to move away from a system of a main committee and thematic sub-committees. It was envisaged that the sub committee act as "a key driver of the scrutiny function's work programme and the body responsible for monitoring the performance of the council and partners in relation to their stated priorities."¹ Given that the current administration is drawing to a close, Members are also invited to evaluate the effectiveness of the committee in fulfilling its functions. Members may wish to draw any conclusions reached to the attention of future scrutiny Members through the annual report.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Performance Issues

This report deals with the performance of the sub committee in 2009/10 throughout.

Environmental Impact

There are no implications.

Risk Management Implications

Not applicable to this report.

Corporate Priorities

The work of the sub committee cuts across all of the council's corporate priorities.

- Deliver cleaner and safer streets
- Improve support for vulnerable people
- Build stronger communities

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report.

¹ O&S, Reconfiguring Scrutiny, 10 July 2007. Agreed by Council on 12 July 2007.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer, 020 8420 9203,
heather.smith@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Reconfiguring scrutiny, O&S, 10 July 2007

[http://www.harrow.gov.uk/www2/Published/C00000276/M00003751/AI00038350/\\$Reconfiguration.docA.ps.pdf](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/www2/Published/C00000276/M00003751/AI00038350/$Reconfiguration.docA.ps.pdf)

Protocol for Agenda Planning and Operation, agreed at P&F 29 October 2008

<http://www.harrow.gov.uk/www2/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=817&MId=4189&Ver=4&J=7>

APPENDIX A

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Report from Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee

2009/10 has seen the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee consolidate its experience as the engine room for scrutiny, undertaking detailed performance investigation and escalating matters for further examination by O&S.

The system of chairman's briefings has continued to drive the agenda setting process for the committee. Considerations made by the chairman and vice-chairman at these meetings, where scorecards are interrogated, are reported to the sub committee to ensure transparency. Where necessary, on an exception basis, further examination has taken place in the committee setting. Where the committee has felt that further in-depth scrutiny is warranted, matters have been escalated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This year the committee has considered a range of items including progress on achieving healthy schools status, integrated budget and service planning, revenue and capital monitoring, preparations for and outcomes of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, the staff survey and the Strategy for People.²

We escalated the issue of the housing revenue account negative subsidy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a challenge panel was undertaken. The results of the panel formed part of the council's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government's (CLG) review of council housing finance and rents policy.

A particular area of interest has been the efforts of the chief executive to change the culture of the organisation. We have paid particular attention to matters such as SAP utilisation by managers and the committee supports drives to raise compliance in areas such as budget monitoring. Such improvements will ensure that the organisation develops a stronger and more accurate understanding of its financial standing. Other related areas of focus have included workforce sickness and absence, making the most of Comprehensive Area Assessment and the council's Better Deal for Residents programme.

Our focus on housing has continued, particularly with regard to the recent pressures in the area of housing responsive repairs. We considered escalating the matter to O&S for detailed investigation, but the committee subsequently felt that a larger piece of work on the Kier contract should be considered. We recommend that our successors give the Kier contract serious consideration because of the contract's impact on a wide range of services delivered to our residents.

We have also monitored progress on past reviews including delivering a strengthened voluntary sector, the review of obesity and right to manage.

² At the time of writing this item is scheduled for consideration on 25 March 2010.

Reflecting back, looking forward

Harrow scrutiny function remains one of the few local authorities in the country that uses performance information to inform decisions about work programming. Many restrict interrogation of performance information to scrutiny of scorecards within the committee setting rather than integrating it into the planning of scrutiny activity. This is a key strength which must be maintained and strengthened going forward.

For the future we feel that there is potential to further improve our ways of working, in particular by engaging lead members to a greater extent in the identification of areas for monitoring and investigation, thereby forging links between consideration of policy and performance. There is also the potential to extend financial scrutiny and the consideration of financial matters alongside service performance.

We are pleased that the committee is growing in confidence in fulfilling its role and we hope that by doing so we can continue to support the council in strengthening its performance in delivering services to residents and meeting local priorities.



**Councillor Mark Versallion
Chairman, Performance and
Finance
Scrutiny Sub Committee**



**Councillor Brian Gate
Vice-Chairman, Performance and
Finance
Scrutiny Sub Committee**

Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee

Committee meetings	4
Attendance by Leader	None
Attendance by Portfolio Holders	Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing (1) Councillor Paul Osborn, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services (1)
Attendance by Chief Executive	None
Review meetings	1 (HRA challenge panel)