

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

13 APRIL 2010

Chairman:	* Councillor Stanley Sheinwald	
Councillors:	* John Cowan (1) † Mrs Margaret Davine * B E Gate * Mitzi Green * Ashok Kulkarni (3) * Jerry Miles	* Mrs Vina Mithani * Paul Scott (1) * Mrs Rekha Shah * Dinesh Solanki * Yogesh Teli * Mark Versallion
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) * Mr R Chauhan Mrs D Speel
In attendance: (Councillors)	* Paul Osborn	Minute item: 709 & 711

- * Denotes Member present
- (1) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Members
- † Denotes apologies received

702. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Anthony Semour
Councillor Janet Mote
Councillor Christopher Noyce

Reserve Member

Councillor Ashok Kulkarni
Councillor John Cowan
Councillor Paul Scott

703. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 15 – Any Other Business: The Village Surgery, Pinner

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 this item.

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 this item.

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.

704. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

- Minute 700, page 386, bullet point 6, the first sentence be changed to read: "Sentencing of criminals was the responsibility of the courts."

705. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put.

706. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

707. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received.

708. References from Council/Cabinet

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references.

RESOLVED ITEMS

709. Customer Services Update

The Committee received a report which detailed the projects within the Access to Services Strategy that had been delivered. The report also outlined the results of the first and second waves of mystery shopping that had taken place since October 2008.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services stated that the quality of the service provided to residents was continuing to improve. He added that an increasing number of residents were interacting with the Council via its website and that the number of available online services were due to be expanded. By encouraging residents to make use of services on the website, the Council could reduce the burden on Access Harrow, reduce waiting times and make considerable savings.

The Director of Business Transformation and Customer Services confirmed that the development of the website was a key activity and that the Council was actively encouraging residents to make use of it. The Council was also progressively moving more services into Access Harrow, had developed a set of Customer Service standards and established a robust complaints procedure. The Council had also achieved the Cabinet Office's Customer Service Excellence standard.

The Committee received a presentation which outlined the results of the first two waves of mystery shopping, during which Members were informed that:

- the mystery shopping exercises had been commissioned to assess the quality of customer service across the Council using major access channels;
- the first wave of mystery shopping had taken place between October and November 2008 and the second wave between December 2009 and January 2010. In total, mystery shoppers had undertaken 46 face-to-face visits, made 255 phone calls, sent 74 e-mails and 26 letters;
- overall, performance in wave 2 had improved on wave 1 across three of the four communication channels, with a significant improvement in responses rates to letters;
- e-mail correspondence had demonstrated an encouraging improvement in performance on response time indicators. However, some issues concerning the provision of adequate contact details remained;

- there had been an improvement in the proportion of letter-based enquiries that received a response. However, a considerable number of letters sent by mystery shoppers in wave 2 had fail to generate a response and not all departments were using the agreed corporate style;
- face-to-face visits made by mystery shoppers had demonstrated that there was a clear improvement on wave 1 regarding waiting times, with 89% of visitors being seen within two minutes and another 7% within five minutes or less. The facilities available in reception areas had been considered good, as were the competencies displayed by staff. However, disabled toilet signage needed to be reviewed and staff needed to be reminded to wear their name badges at all times;
- when dealing with telephone enquires, staff competency had been found to be good, with individuals able to deal with enquiries efficiently. However, qualitative analysis had indicated inconsistency in the way calls were handled across service areas, including a range of different voicemail and queuing systems;

In summary, clear improvements had been made since wave 1, although there was a need to improve the way in which the Council dealt with letters from residents. In order to address all the issues raised by the mystery shopping exercise, officers were working with individual Directorates to develop action plans.

Following questions from the Committee, officers and the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communications and Corporate Services stated that:

- departments within Access Harrow had systems in place to track and monitor progress made following service requests from residents. However, some departments still processed all correspondence manually which meant information was often not recorded. As more services were brought into Access Harrow the Council would progressively standardise the process for dealing with service requests;
- the next wave of mystery shopping would commence in 2011;
- the increase in the use of online services had not created a significant increase in work for staff as the increase reflected a 'communication channel shift', not an increase in demand;
- there were no immediate plans to mystery shop Councillors;
- some of the Council's older IT systems were hard to integrate with new systems and, due to the costs involved, the Council was initially focusing on key areas;
- departments that had been brought into Access Harrow had the ability to automatically respond to e-mails, confirming that a message had

been received and that it would be dealt with in accordance with the Council's timescales. Departments that were not in Access Harrow were not always able to do this, although provided that the query was dealt with promptly, this was not necessarily an issue;

- by logging all complaints, the Council was able to identify recurring problems and take the necessary action. Complaints were monitored by individual departments, the Council's quarterly Improvement Boards and the Corporate Strategy Board. In addition, the Council had recently appointed a Corporate Complaints Officer to oversee the Council's complaints procedure and, in the future, to work with Councillors;
- in order to improve waiting times when contacting Access Harrow by telephone, the Council would need to reduce the length of individual calls. However, it was felt that reducing the length of calls could have a detrimental effect on customer service and therefore managers had to balance the desire to meet targets with the desire to provide a good level of service. Overall it was felt that resolving residents' problems promptly should take priority;
- it was felt that the Council's customer service standards compared favorably with those of commercial organisations. However, it was acknowledged that the Council had a greater duty to ensure its customer service was of a high quality.

A number of Members stated that they had concerns about the quality of the service provided by the Council Tax department following complaints from residents and personal experience. A Member added that he was also unhappy with the way in which the department phrased certain correspondence, stating that some letters were difficult to understand. The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services stated that he was not aware of any issues, although he would be happy to investigate any specific concerns. He added that the Council Tax department was a busy service and that this sometimes resulted in longer waiting times for callers. In relation to the phrasing of correspondence, an officer stated that the Council had a legal duty to include certain wording, although all letters should be clear.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report and the outcome of the mystery shopping exercises be noted;
- (2) Members be provided with details of the percentage of e-mail and letter correspondence received by the Council that was successfully dealt with in accordance with the Council's timescales.

710. Draft Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10

The Committee were informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was required to present an annual report of its activities to Council and that the draft report was being presented to Members for approval. An officer explained that, as this was the final Scrutiny Annual Report for the current administration, the report did not include work programme proposals for the next municipal year.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Scrutiny Annual Report be approved;
- (2) the Scrutiny Annual Report be referred to Council.

711. Draft Scrutiny Member Induction/Development Programme

The Committee received a report which set out the initial proposals regarding the Overview and Scrutiny Member induction and development programme for 2010/11. An officer explained that the report was being presented to the Committee in order to seek Members views on the proposals, particularly the way in which the induction evening would be conducted. It was explained that the induction evening would be run by Council Officers, although future training might utilise external experts, such as Health Professionals, to speak on specific issues.

During a discussion on the proposals, Members made the following key points:

- it was important that the induction evening was used to raise the profile of Overview and Scrutiny and to highlight the Committees recent work;
- it should be made clear that successful Scrutiny required cross-party collaboration and that the three political parties should be equally represented on the evening;
- whilst the induction evening was open to all Councillors, allocations to Committees would have already been decided. As a result, officers would need to consider how to 'pitch' the evening as it was likely to be more relevant to some Councillors than others;
- the initial induction evening should aim to cover the basics rather than advanced issues;
- it was important that the 'Overview' aspect of Scrutiny was highlighted, particularly the need for Portfolio Holders to keep the Committee informed of key issues.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services stated that the Council's Constitution was currently being reviewed

and one of the proposed changes was to properly define the remit of Scrutiny Lead Members and incorporated into the constitution.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the Committee's comments be taken into account when planning the induction evening.

712. Standing Scrutiny Review of NHS Finances

The Committee received a report which summarised the work of the Standing Scrutiny Review of NHS Finances. It was explained that the Standing Review Group had been established in order to consider the impact of NHS financial difficulties on the services being provided to local people. The review had concluded in 2009 but, due to a delay, the report was only now being presented to the Committee. An officer stated that, whilst some of the recommendations made by the Standing Review Group were no longer relevant, the work undertaken had set the foundations for many of the current discussions surrounding Total Place and partnership working. The officer added that feedback had been provided to NHS Harrow as the review had progressed.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the recommendations of the Review Group be approved;
- (2) the report be referred for future consideration by the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

713. Report from the Chair of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee provided the Committee with a verbal report. Members were informed that:

- the Sub-Committee had recognised that much progress had been made in relation to the extended schools strategy, although some schools could do a little more;
- the draft Strategy for People had been considered and the Sub-Committee had supported its implementation;
- overall it was felt that the Sub-Committee had undertaken some important work during the course of the administration.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Chairman and Members of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee for their hard work.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

714. Minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee Meeting held on 25 March 2010

RESOLVED: That the actions arising from the minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 25 March 2010 be noted and, insofar as necessary, agreed.

715. Scrutiny Lead Members Report

Adding to the report, the Lead Policy Member for Adult Health and Social Care stated that she was concerned by the results of the National GP Patient Survey which had suggested that satisfaction with out-of-hours GP services in Harrow were amongst the sixth lowest in the country. She informed the Committee that a letter had been sent to NHS Harrow requesting information on how the situation would be addressed and that the response was included in the report. The Lead Performance Member for Adult Health and Social Care stated that the Hyper Acute Stroke Unit at Northwick Park Hospital had been well received and feedback from users had been positive.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Policy and Performance Lead reports be noted and the recommendations contained therein approved.

716. Any Other Business

Village Surgery, Pinner

An officer informed the Committee that a letter had recently been sent to patients of the Village Surgery in Pinner, informing them that the surgery was due to close. However, the reason for the closure was not made clear and it was proposed that the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Lead Members for Adult Health and Social care write to the Director of Development and System Management at NHS Harrow in order to seek further clarification. The matter would be picked up by the Leads in the next administration and, if necessary, brought to the Committee. The officer stated that a draft letter had already been produced but requested input from the Committee.

During a discussion on the matter, members requested that the following questions be raised in the letter:

- Had consideration been given to the way in which older patients, or those with limited mobility, would access services at the Pinn Medical Centre?
- What impact would the transfer of patients from the Village Surgery to Pinn Medical Centre have on waiting times and appointment availability?

- What was the total capacity of Pinn Medical Centre and how much capacity was left following the transfer of patients from the Village Surgery?
- What long-term plans did NHS Harrow have in order to deal with the closure of the Village Surgery and what were the arguments for and against any proposals?
- Did any consultation take place between patients and NHS Harrow prior to the closure of the Village Surgery?
- What steps did Harrow NHS take to monitor GP partnerships and had the closure of the Village Surgery been expected?

A Member stated that most general practitioners were self employed and held contracts, either on their own or as part of a partnership, with their local primary care trust. As a result of these arrangements, if the relationship between two partners were to break down, local services could suffer. He stated that this was an inherent problem with the current GP system.

RESOLVED: That the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Lead Members for Adult Health and Social care write to the Director of Development and System Management at NHS Harrow in order to seek further clarification on the future provision of GP services in Pinner.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.40 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman