

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	27 July 2010
Subject:	Scrutiny Work Programme
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director Partnership Development and Performance
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Not applicable, report concerns all areas.
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out proposals for the scrutiny work programme for 2010/11

Recommendations:

Councillors are asked to:

- I. Consider the context within which the scrutiny function will operate going forward
- II. Consider whether to operate a more flexible work programme which leaves space to pick up issues relating to transformation as they arise
- III. Consider whether or not they wish to undertake more in depth or longer term projects and if so
- IV. Identify which longer-term projects it wishes to undertake

Section 2 – Report

Development of the work programme so far

The Overview and Scrutiny committee in June received an initial report outlining the kinds of projects it might wish to pursue during the coming administrative year and potentially beyond. This list of projects included:

- items handed over from the previous administration
- items suggested by the scrutiny team
- items suggested following discussions with the council's corporate strategy board.

At its meeting in June, the list of proposals was further modified as below:

- **Pinner Village Surgery** – a result of the consideration of the closure of the surgery at the Health sub committee meeting on 16th June. Designed to consider the detail behind the closure, in particular how effective PCT's performance management structures are in anticipating such significant changes. This is particularly relevant in the light of proposals for GP commissioning outlined in the new Health White Paper. Challenge panel has been scheduled for 22nd July.
- **Smartwater** – A challenge panel to consider the effectiveness of the Smartwater scheme will take place in the autumn.
- **Single Equalities Scheme** – as part of the consultation on the development of the scheme. A challenge panel has been scheduled for 6th September.
- **Neighbourhood Champions** – the committee has agreed to reconsider the findings of this challenge panel which took place during the last administration. A report as to how to resolve the issues is on the agenda for this evening's meeting.
- **Anti social behaviour strategy** – to consider how well the strategy is responding to changing anti social behaviour context, in particular the impact future budget cuts may have on police and council spending on the prevention of anti social behaviour and to explore how changed 'neighbourhood responsibility' might offer solutions. Probably an in depth project.
- **Young People and Citizenship** – As suggested during discussions between Children and Young People lead councillors and the Corporate Director for Children's Services. This could also link to the anti-social behaviour strategy work.
- **Budget review** – Councillors have expressed a wish to continue the work of the budget review.
- **Transitions** – to pick up work previously identified by the Overview and Scrutiny committee which was scoped during the previous administration.

- **Integrated Strategic Plan** – Following the election, there have been significant changes in the development of health services. Health Care for London proposals had been implemented across the borough and broader proposals with regard to the future of the acute hospital services were anticipated in this strategic plan. Time was being reserved within the scrutiny work programme to consider these proposals. However, for the most part, the Healthcare for London proposals have now been suspended and the committee is now unlikely to need to spend time on this aspect of health provision. A white paper on the future commissioning arrangements has now been published and a verbal update will be given to the committee on this.
- **Involvement in art and sport** – The original proposal for this project was to focus specifically on the wellbeing of residents through increasing involvement in sport. This also has potential benefits for the council in terms of the Better Together stream of the Better Deal for Residents programme – see below. During discussion at committee in June, it was agreed to extend the scope of this project to accommodate the arts.
- **Kier Contract** – This project was deferred from the 2009/10 work programme
- **Civic Centre renewal** – Decisions regarding the redevelopment of the civic site to be subject to consideration by scrutiny – possibly as agenda items or perhaps a challenge panel
- **Recession monitoring** – incorporating the town centre and districts development

The committee also noted the general need to consider the projects emerging from the Better Deal for Residents Programme and proposed efficiencies.

The changing context for scrutiny

Before making final decisions with regard to the work programme, the committee must consider the context within which scrutiny now finds itself.

On entering office, the new government made clear its intentions to reduce the public sector deficit and announced £6.2bn of savings to be made across the sector during this financial year, Harrow public sector's share of these savings amounted to £3.95m (Area based grant cut by £1.3m (of which £1.1m relates to Education), Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) funding cut by £350k, Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) abolished, Local Area Agreement (LAA) Reward Grant cut by 50% or £2.3m). Following this, the spending review, which will report in the autumn will set spending limits for every Government department for the period 2011-12 to 2014-15. Departments will be required to deliver approximately 25% savings in their budgets. In terms of the council's funding, although the position changes on a daily basis, dependent upon the movement of such economic indicators as the rate of inflation and interest rates, it is anticipated that the council will be required to find in the region of £43m over the next 3 years, including between £16 – £18m next year, 2011/12. Whilst the council has already delivered significant savings - £50m over the last 3 year – the context within which these savings must be found is challenging – demand is

expected to continue to rise as demographic changes continue and the council has limited reserves upon which to draw

Nonetheless, the council has already put in place the Better Deal for Residents programme, designed to transform the delivery of local services by changing our relationship with residents and our partners and by ensuring that maximum efficiencies are achieved in the delivery of our services.

Scrutiny does not and cannot operate outside this context and scrutiny is subject to the same stringent test of relevance and value-added as all other services. As such, if seriously limited resources are not to be wasted, then scrutiny must ensure that it is addressing those issues of most importance to the council and that it is adding value to the council's improvement process. It is therefore arguable that scrutiny's role should be to:

- Consider how the organisation defines and maintains its core business in such difficult times
- Investigate the impact of efficiencies on local people
- Consider how to engage/ convince the community of the need to transform services and service delivery process and to work with residents to identify their own responsibilities
- Pick up some of the projects which cannot now be resourced by the organisation but which are critical to transforming how the council works

In the context of building more effective links with our residents, it may be feasible for scrutiny to operate as the honest broker, articulating both the context within which the council must now deliver services whilst at the same time working with residents to ensure impact of change is proportionate and reasonable and that the council is responding to the real, not assumed, priorities for residents. A stronger focus on looking outwards into the community and truly engaging with constituents may represent a change in approach for scrutiny but it is one which can help to deliver a real change in relationships for the council and it will ensure that scrutiny is properly engaged in the process of transformation

It is within this context that decisions must be made with regard to the scrutiny work programme. At the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting on 24th June, the scrutiny lead councillors and the chairmen and vice chairmen of the committees agreed that, rather than determining a complete programme of work that it might be a more useful approach to have a more flexible programme which can respond to issues as they arise. The committee could identify perhaps one cross cutting, strategic project which it wishes to undertake and which could add value to the transformation process and leave space to consider issues that arise during the programme thus making scrutiny more responsive to the needs of transformation. It was also agreed that the context as outlined above, will be the core consideration in determining what scrutiny spends its time on.

With all of this in mind it is recommended that the committee considers:

- (a) whether it agrees to operate a more flexible work programme which leaves space to pick up issues relating to transformation as they arise
- (b) whether or not it wishes to undertake a more in depth project and if so
- (c) which longer-term projects it wishes to undertake.

In the autumn, a further report will be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny committee outlining the future role and responsibilities of each of the scrutiny committees and how they can contribute to the Better Deal for Residents programme, both adding to the body of evidence needed to make decisions and also challenging these decisions and safeguarding the best interests of residents. Within this report will be include further detail on the role of scrutiny within placed based budget setting – the Local Government Association has recently published a ground breaking policy document outlining its views on the future governance of local public services in the context of place based budgets. This document argues that significant efficiencies can be delivered through a radical programme of devolving public spending and also emphasises the role of scrutiny in this ‘councils have well established scrutiny arrangements, the reach of which is being extended to other public services and across local authority boundaries’¹

Financial Implications

The scrutiny budget like all budgets across the council will be subject to ongoing monitoring to ensure it is being used to best effect. As with other budgets it is also subject to reduction in the light of the serious budget situation. The programme adopted must acknowledge this as all projects must be delivered from within existing resources.

Performance Issues

There are none specific to this report.

Environmental Impact

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk implications associated with this report.

Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? Yes (✓) No ()

An initial screening has been undertaken and this suggests there is no need at this time to undertake a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

Corporate Priorities

Please identify which corporate priority the report incorporates and how:

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

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report

¹ ‘Place-based budgets - the future governance of local public services’ Local Government Association

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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Background Papers: None