

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 22nd February 2011

Subject: Scrutiny Lead Members Report

Responsible Officer: Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director
Partnership Development and
Performance

**Scrutiny Lead
Member area:** All

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Report from the Scrutiny Lead
Members

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

The report accompanies the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members.

Recommendations:

The Committee is requested to consider the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members and agree the actions proposed therein.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

This report outlines details of the work of the Scrutiny Lead Members.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report

Performance Issues

There are no performance issues associated with this report.

Environmental Impact

There is no environmental impact associated with this report

Risk Management Implications

There are no risks associated with this report.

Corporate Priorities

The Scrutiny Lead Members' responsibilities cover all areas of the council's activity.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny, 020 8420 9387, lynne.margetts@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: ADULT HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Attendees

Councillor Jerry Miles, Chair of Health Sub Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Vina Mithani, Scrutiny Lead Member for Adult Health and Social Care
Councillor Anne Gate, Scrutiny Lead Member for Adult Health and Social Care

Paul Najsarek, Corporate Director, Adults & Housing
Carol Yarde, Head of Adults and Housing Transformation
Fola Irikefe, Scrutiny Officer

The lead members met on 6 January 2011.

Adults and Housing Budget position

The Corporate Director briefed members on the Adults and Housing budget position.

- £80 million in the revenue budget as
- £25 million in the HRA

The budget cuts for 2011/12 will mainly be in the adult's budget, cuts of £4 million in efficiency savings were presented to Cabinet in December 2010. It is hoped that the savings will not result in a reduction of services for users.

The savings have been made through re-ablement, negotiating better deals with care homes and £1 million of the savings has come out of the agency staff bill. Having queried the impact of the savings on permanent staff, the Chairman and leads were informed that the impact on permanent staff is being monitored and the re-design of services because of re-ablement should mitigate any negative impact.

The division is taking steps to try and ensure that the budget cuts protect front line care workers and savings are being made through back office services. The care funding calculator has been used to make savings and also take funding out of back office services.

Budget savings have also been made by negotiating better deals with care homes that are managed through the West London Alliance (WLA), by the WLA tendering all home care together in order to get a better deal on pricing for west London as a whole. It was explained that the Adults and Housing consultation outcomes may also generate further savings in 2011/12 but more likely in 2012/13. The service is forecasting a balanced budget in 2011/12.

The plans for Public Health coming into the council were discussed in brief and funding may be in the region of around £2.6 million. The council will need to develop a plan for what the funds will be spent on within the remit of community based services to keep people out of hospital. The Corporate Director, Adults & Housing has been meeting with NHS Harrow to discuss.

The Operating Framework of the NHS for 2011/12 stipulates that PCT's will receive specific allocations to support social care. PCT's will transfer this funding to local authorities for spending on social care services to benefit health and to improve overall health and social care outcomes. Transfers will need to be made via an agreement under section 256 of the 2006 NHS Act.

Housing

The Corporate Director, Adults & Housing and the Head of Adults and Housing Transformation briefed members on budget the position with regards to housing. Changes in the revenue budget spent on homelessness and changes to the benefit

system will have an impact on the budget. The grant to manage transition is £600k to prevent homelessness, some of this will go into the housing budget, and the rest will go into contingencies.

Consultation is currently underway with regards to the HRA which includes charging leaseholders more and exploring whether free holders can be charged.

Future investment decisions will be made in the light of government proposals for the future of the Housing Revenue Account.

For action: Head of Adults and Housing Transformation to provide an update on changes to housing policy.

Health and Housing

At the scrutiny leadership group meeting in November 2010, members decided that they would like to address the impact of housing on health. The Chairman and lead members sought advice from the Corporate Director, Adults & Housing on areas that would be particularly useful for scrutiny to address.

The Corporate Director, Adults & Housing advised that scrutiny could address the impact of housing on health by carrying out an impact analysis on the changes in government policy and the effects of this on social capital. There are no longer homes for life and this has been coupled with a reduction in benefits whilst registered social landlords are also reducing social housing units.

Members were briefed on some of the issues in the borough including the fact that in 2008 there was a 12 year wait for a 3 bedroom property in the borough; it will be interesting to see if the changes will have a further detrimental impact on waiting times. It was also pointed out that single people under 35 tend to be most affected by these changes.

Members suggested that the investigation could be carried out by focusing on a specific area e.g. Grange Farm and comparing it with an area that has had a recent re-build.

For action: Scrutiny Officer to carry out research and develop a briefing for members.

Health White Paper/ Public Health White Paper

The Corporate Director, Adults & Housing briefed the Chairman and lead members on the developments and the steps being taken towards implementing the changes put forward in the Health White Paper. As a result of the meeting involving the Chief Executive, Corporate Director - Adults & Housing, Corporate Director – Children's Services, key officer and the 5 leading GPs, a governance structure paper is being developed by the Policy and Partnerships Team addressing how the Health and Wellbeing Board will operate (HWBB).

Another plan is also being developed to address how GP's, NHS Harrow and the council will focus and deliver services. The Chairman and lead members suggested that the voluntary sector should also be represented in the key discussions.

The leads highlighted that the cuts to the Public Health budget for 2011/12 will have implications on Public Health when it comes into the council, this may put a strain on the provision of Public Health services in the council. The budget allocation for Public Health will be coming to the council in 2013 but the council is able to start implementation in advance of this.

For action: Scrutiny to consider proposals and developments in respect of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the council's relationship with the GP consortia/consortium and how scrutiny will fit into this

Adults and Housing Consultation

The pre-consultation for Adults and Housing services has been completed and the MORI analysis survey results show there was more than a 30% response rate. The qualitative information from stakeholders and the multi agency steering group are currently being considered.

The full analysis of the pre-consultation should be available by the end of January and the steering group will be looking at how to embark on the full consultation after this. The initial feedback from the pre-consultation exercise has been generally positive about the process that has been employed so far.

Any actual consultation will begin in March/ April and the proposals will then go to Cabinet in July/ August.

For action: Health Sub-Committee to consider consultation outcomes/ proposals arising in advance of submission to Cabinet.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Lead Members: Councillors Christine Bednell and Krishna James

The Leads met on 19th January 2011. They considered the progress made in respect of

- Teenage placement strategy
- Early intervention and targeted services
- Time taken for initial assessments. It was noted that the requirement for completion had been changed from seven to ten days.

The recently published figures for Harrow from the league tables for Key Stage 4 and GCSE circulated and considered. The question was asked, how many Harrow Schools offer the Baccalaureate? This would be investigated.

The Leads noted that the scrutiny leadership group had determined that any scrutiny of the capital programme issue in children's services would be deferred until later in the year.

The Leads would be interested in examining aspects of the 2011-12 budget when further details were available, in particular how the proposed budget reductions would impact on the work of children's services.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: CORPORATE EFFECTIVENESS

Lead Members: Councillors Jerry Miles and Tony Ferrari

The lead members met on 15th December 2010.

Attendees

- Councillor Jerry Miles, Scrutiny Policy Lead Member
- Councillor Tony Ferrari, Scrutiny Performance Lead Member
- Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny
- Andy Parsons, Head of Service, Business Management
- Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive

General Administration Review

Andy Parsons updated the lead members of the implementation of the general administration review. He advised that the ambition is to professionalise the council's administrative resource by enhancing staff skills and increasing the use of manager self service as far as possible for more straightforward administrative tasks.

The ambition of the project is to establish four administrative 'hubs':

- Children's Services
- Adult and Housing Services
- Community and Environment
- Place Shaping, Corporate Finance, Chief Executive's Department, Legal Services

Processes will be standardised across all but specific professional/service expertise will be maintained where possible.

The benefits of the new model will include:

- Building the organisation's administrative capacity and increasing the flexibility to deal with peaks and troughs of work across the organisation
- Standardisation with a resultant increase in efficiency and economies of scale
- Improved services to customers and to staff reliant on administrative support.

Cllr Ferrari expressed concern that the link between professional/technical staff is being broken and with this some of the valuable knowledge and connectivity will also be lost which could undermine the effectiveness of service delivery. Andy commented that in order to try to minimise this potentially adverse impact, the admin hubs have been set up within directorates and will be co-located within the directorates to try to maintain these links. Tom Whiting also commented that final decisions re line management structures are also still to be made.

Cllr Ferrari commented that whilst poor administrative performance would be improved, good performance might also be lowered as this link to the technical/professional officers is lost. Tom clarified that as part of the professionalisation of admin, managers will increasingly be expected to carry out the simpler tasks themselves e.g. answering phones, booking rooms.

Cllr Miles queried the impact on career development. He was advised that there will in future be a standardisation of the grading structure and a clear administration career structure. However, councillors pointed out that currently, a career which starts in the administration of a technical/professional service, can progress into these technical areas. These opportunities for 'diversity' will potentially be lost.

Andy advised that approximately 33 posts will be released through the review over the next 12 – 18 months. Six of these posts are currently vacant and a further 15 are filled with agency staff. A number of the remaining posts are being considered under severance arrangements. This means that at this early stage of the project, it appears likely that only a small proportion of the posts will need to be considered under redundancy/redeployment arrangements.

Cllr Ferrari enquired as to how the success of the admin review will be measured/monitored. Andy advised that, whilst there will be a number of measures of the technical performance of the new model – e.g. letter response times via CIVICA, it is probable that the overall success of the change will be measured via management/service user perception of performance.

For action

- The outline business case for the project will be sent to the lead members. The full business case will be considered by Cabinet in March.
- Further update on the project will be scheduled for the lead members briefing in May

Mobile and Flexible Working

Andy provided an update on the mobile and flexible working project. He advised that this is building on the investment in the ITO and is based on the need to increase flexibility in service delivery, providing services where residents need them and enabling officers to spend more time in the field than in the Civic Centre and facilitating the delivery of the property rationalisation strategy within the organisation and between external organisations.

Timescale for delivery of the strategy is linked to the delivery of the ITO – outline business case was agreed in July and the Full Business Case will be considered by Cabinet in March.

Whilst Cllr Ferrari fully supported the objectives of the project, he was concerned that a focus on delivery of the ITO was mistaken as it would not engage with the frontline staff who would be expected to deliver services with the new technologies. Andy advised that all of the service areas had been asked for their view on the technology requirements of front line officers. Cllr Ferrari remained concerned that the process was being delivered from the top down and that on implementation, frontline staff may not have been sufficiently engaged in the process to ensure its success. Andy reaffirmed that frontline staff and managers were being actively engaged and this would continue as the project developed. Andy also commented that the technology proposed was fairly standard and should be relatively easy to implement.

Cllr Miles suggested that the shift to mobile and flexible working will also require a change in the management culture. Andy commented that the processes are being offered as options, the project is offering the tools which services can use. It is the intention to build on the areas of strength and use these as exemplars

For action

- Further update to be provided to the lead members in March
- The standing review of the Better Deal for Residents to be asked to consider examining in more detail how effectively the views of frontline staff have been accommodated.

Performance Management

Tom Whiting updated the leads.

Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Comprehensive Area Assessment included the following judgements:

- Area Assessment (not scored)
- Organisational Assessment (scored)
 - Use of Resources (scored)
 - Children's (scored)
 - Adults (scored)

The Organisational Assessment was also supported by the National Indicator Set which included a number of performance indicators that were measured by regular surveys eg Place Survey, Active People and STATUS.

Current Proposals

The CAA has been scrapped and all field work associated with the Area Assessment and Use of Resources judgement has stopped.

There are three pieces of work underway to investigate a replacement:

- Government departments have each been asked to identify their 'top ten indicators for Local Government' in a process to replace the Top 200
- Local Government Improvement (previously I&DeA) is developing its own list of indicators that could replace the NIS
- London Councils sees part of its future as supporting performance assurance and is itself looking to develop / replace the LAPS with a London specific indicator set

The annual processes with Ofsted and CQC continue but are expected to be changed in the future.

Performance Management Process at Harrow

The Performance Management process at Harrow is based on the following:

- Regular monitoring of performance indicators (weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual depending on the nature of the indicator)
- Quarterly improvement boards for individual directorates
- Quarterly CSB performance morning
- Quarterly reporting to Cabinet
- Performance and Finance scrutiny sub committee

The Improvement Board cycle considers the following set of performance information:

- Performance indicators
 - Directorate scorecard performance vs targets
- Project delivery (inc Flagship Actions)
 - Project reporting on Flagship Actions and major projects
- Financial performance
 - Quarterly financial forecast
 - Forecasting compliance
 - Forecasting quality
- Workforce performance
 - Sickness
 - Appraisals
 - Capability cases
 - Agency spend
 - Starters and leavers
 - Representativeness

- Risks
 - Quarterly risk register
- Customer Performance
 - Complaints numbers, timescales to respond, number upheld, lessons learned
 - CRM information on call volumes, avoidable contact, first time resolution
 - Customer service standards

Changes post CAA

Following the abolition of CAA the following elements of the performance management process will change:

- Projects that were designed to fill gaps against Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) that no longer exist
 - Projects will be evaluated as to whether we should still be pursuing. This should be relatively straightforward to evaluate
- Performance indicators that may be dropped
 - A steady flow of changes to performance indicators is anticipated
 - Government is expected to retain a core set of indicators that they will monitor
 - Usefulness of performance indicators will be evaluated by officers

Issues to Consider

The council operates a largely effective performance management process which is not in place to meet a regulatory need.

There are a number of issues with regard to performance indicators:

- The loss of a steady set of indicators with historic data that can facilitate benchmarking with other councils. It takes at least three years to bed in a new set of indicators:
 - a. Time for Government to define
 - b. First year of measurement and baselining
 - c. Time to create comparable information
 - d. Time to understand trend (particularly for annual measures)
- The opportunity to create more local indicators that measure important local outcomes
- The loss of a public survey to measure satisfaction and perceptions of area / services
- Real uncertainty within Children's and Adults' services on future of performance measurement and inspection
- An evolving agenda with regional and national agencies who may look to create performance regimes – a number of bodies eg IDeA, London Councils, Capital Ambition are re-evaluating their own roles going forward

Scrutiny

Tom observed that Scrutiny is undertaking its own review of Performance Management which will support the development of a new indicator set and performance management framework for Harrow. This will help to identify the most meaningful local indicators that the Council could use in place of national indicators.

For Action

- Further update to be provided to the lead members in March

HR Performance

The principle issues to consider around current HR performance:

- Redundancy management A number of proposals are in place to minimize the cost of redundancy:
 - Voluntary Severance
 - Vacancy Management
 - Agency staff

- Agency spend – As a result of redundancy management it is expected that the Council's agency spend will rise in the short term but will decline in the longer term. The Council's fees to agencies are being renegotiated via joint procurement with Hammersmith & Fulham.
- Sickness – performance has improved compared to last year. Overall Council performance is 7.01 days / FTE compared to 7.38 in Q2 2009/10. In the non schools workforce sickness is 9.03 days / FTE compared to 9.43 in Q2 2009/10.
- IPADs – completion rates across the Council are currently 87%.

For Action

- Further update to be provided to the lead members in March

Customer Performance

Contact centre performance is improving steadily in terms of answering calls, reducing waiting times, managing avoidable contact and resolving queries at first point of contact. The key challenges around customer contact include:

- Roll out of Access Harrow – completing the roll out of Access Harrow into other services, remaining elements of Public Realm and Adults services. This is intended to go live between April 2011 and June 2011.
- Complaints – the embedding of learning from complaints is improving but there is still further work to do.
- One Stop Shop - Average waiting times in the One Stop Shop are 14 minutes 31seconds down from 16 minutes 13 seconds in Q1
- Call Centre – The number of calls answered in 30seconds is 86% compared to 85% in Q1.
- Resolution – Resolution at first point of contact is currently 90% compared with 91% in Q1.

Challenges

The principle challenge is performance in Council Tax and Housing Benefits.

- Calls answered in 30 seconds in Council Tax is 64% in November compared to 66% in October
- Calls answered in 30 seconds in Housing Benefits is 57% in November compared to 50% in October
- One Stop Shop waiting times are 24 minutes 50 seconds for Council Tax in November compared to 27 minutes 46 seconds in October
- One Stop Shop waiting times are 22 minutes 43 seconds for Housing Benefit in November compared to 19 minutes 23 seconds in October

For Action

- Further update to be provided to the lead members in March

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Effectiveness Lead Scrutiny Councillors will take place on:

26th January 2011 5 – 6 pm

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: CORPORATE EFFECTIVENESS

Lead Members: Councillors Jerry Miles and Tony Ferrari

The lead members met on 26th January 2011.

Attendees

- Councillor Jerry Miles, Scrutiny Policy Lead Member
- Councillor Tony Ferrari, Scrutiny Performance Lead Member
- Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

Debt Recovery

The lead members received an analysis of the Council Tax debt recovery performance of London authorities. This suggested that Harrow's performance is in line with that of other authorities. Nonetheless, the lead members remain concerned regarding the number of specific cases which are being brought to their attention where the council appears to be taking an unnecessarily inflexible and insensitive approach to the recovery of debt. Whilst it is accepted that the council should be pursuing defaulters with rigour, the lead members are of the opinion that to do so with no appreciation of some of the specific circumstances in which residents find themselves, is unacceptable and leaves the council reputationally vulnerable.

As such, it was agreed that the Divisional Director - Collections & Housing Benefits and the new Interim Corporate Director of Finance will be invited to a future lead members briefing to discuss the case studies that have been brought to the lead members attention to see if any action to ensure a more sensitive application of the procedure can be identified.

Lynne will also check with the complaints team to establish whether any similar cases are being brought to their attention which could also be discussed with the Divisional Director and the Corporate Director.

For action

- Further intelligence to be gathered and Divisional Director - Collections & Housing Benefits and the new Interim Corporate Director of Finance to be invited to future corporate effectiveness lead member briefing.

Localism Bill

The lead members received a briefing on the Localism Bill which had been published in December. The key underlying theme of the bill is the importance of local need and priority being at the centre of service planning and delivery. As such the need for effective and co-ordinated community engagement and consultation processes is clear. The lead members asked to receive a briefing on how the council organises its engagement and consultation processes. This will be scheduled for the next briefing in March.

The lead members also raised a number of initial enquiries with regard the following issues:

- The implications of the pre-determination rules
- How far the proposals with regard to planning impact upon the Major Development Panel's remit
- The implications of the proposals for planning enforcement

The proposals in the bill are far reaching and the corporate effectiveness lead members requested that further briefings on the different components of the bill be made to the scrutiny leadership group

For action

- The lead members will receive a briefing on the implications of the bill for the council's community engagement and consultation processes
- The Director of Legal and Governance Services will be asked whether guidance on the implications of the changes to the predetermination rules can be provided for all councillors
- Advice on the implications of the planning proposals on the council's planning enforcement service and the remit of the Major Developments Panel will be sought
- A programme of briefings on specific components of the bill will be scheduled for the Leadership Group

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Effectiveness Lead Scrutiny Councillors will take place on:

1st March 2011 5 – 6 pm. This may be rescheduled.

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Lead Members: Councillors Nana Asante and Chris Mote

The lead members met on 7th December 2010.

Attendees

- Councillor Chris Mote, Scrutiny Policy Lead Member
- Reshard Auladin Metropolitan Police Authority
- Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

Cllr Nana Asante sent her apologies.

Impact of the Policy White Paper on Metropolitan Police Authority

Budget issues

Reshard Auladin, Harrow's link member on the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) attended the briefing to provide the lead members with an update on the implications of the Policing White Paper from the perspective of the MPA. Detail of the grant settlement had been received but not the final detail. The MPA is working on the assumption of a 12 -20% reduction in resources over the next 4 years. However, over the next 2 years, it is the Mayor's intention to maintain police numbers in preparation for the Olympics. Policing is being restructured and a number of different ways of working are being considered including working across boroughs. The priority for Safer Neighbourhood Teams and the association of a named officer with a particular neighbourhood will also be maintained at least for 2011 – 12 though there may be changes to deployment.

The MPA is undertaking a review of the Safer Neighbourhood structures which is expected to report in January 2011. Seven years after their introduction, it is time to consider their effectiveness in order to ensure they are being used in the best way possible. It is unlikely that complete removal of the teams would be proposed as it is probable that they are making a major contribution to both crime reduction and the perception of community safety. However, a more flexible approach to the future deployment of the scheme is likely.

In January/February, the detail regarding the budget will be clearer but it is likely that police numbers will be maintained as back office functions are rationalised.

The service has also been considering the effective use of existing resources such as computers and cars and this is likely to see a shift to more efficient use which can help to maintain front line services.

After 2012, the experience of the budget from 2011 – 2012 will be considered in order to determine how to proceed.

Reshard pointed out that any reductions in police numbers should be considered in the context of the significant increases in numbers which had been achieved since 2000 which had seen numbers increase from 20,000 to 35,000. There is likely to be a recruitment freeze which will impact on the numbers of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who are able to move into substantive policing roles. It is also anticipated that the number of officers leaving the force will reduce – though the freeze will have to be lifted if police numbers fall below an acceptable level.

A number of boroughs have considered the option of 'buying' additional officer support with community safety budgets

Capital spend is also restricted, and the service is rationalising its estate to make better use of resources. Unfortunately, resources disposed of cannot be retained within the borough.

Political Context

The Policing White Paper has included the establishment of elected commissioners for policing. This is likely to have limited impact in London as the Mayor already holds this responsibility. However, there will still be a need for a small board to support the mayor and in the context of abolition of the MPA, the GLA will scrutinise the Mayor and his board's actions. Involvement of local boroughs/councils in this process will be defined through the legislation.

Cllr Mote commented that there is still a perception of the level of crime which does not fit with reality and it is clear that this is a common experience amongst low crime boroughs where crimes are more highly visible than in higher crime boroughs.

The future importance of partnership was emphasised, not just at a strategic level but also with residents

It was noted that there has been improvement around domestic violence services and Reshard commented that this is a Metropolitan Police Service priority which has seen more resourcing available to deliver training to officers and the judiciary.

For Action

The financial position of the police service and the impact of changes in the deployment of Safer Neighbourhood Teams will be monitored.

Travellers Strategy

It was agreed to invite the relevant officer to the next Safer and Stronger Communities scrutiny leads briefing to discuss the following:

- the national requirements for the delivery of a travellers' strategy
- housing and accommodation options
- the council's duty under Equality Legislation with regard to the Traveller Community
- size of the traveller community in Harrow and their needs

For action

Best Practice from around the country to be identified and the Head of Community Safety Services to be invited to the next briefing.

Cabinet response to the scrutiny challenge panel which had considered the Neighbourhood Champions scheme

The Overview and Scrutiny committee had received a response from Cabinet to the neighbourhood champions challenge panel report. The committee wished to understand further:

- How will the involvement of ward councillors be incorporated into a revised mission statement and integrated into the scheme as a whole.
- Why has Cabinet decided not to utilise the flagging system as proposed in the report.

As such, the committee had asked the Safer and Stronger Communities leads to investigate this further.

For Action

The Divisional Director Environmental Services will be invited to the next briefing to discuss the recommendations further.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Safer and Stronger Communities leads will take place on:

Tuesday 11th January 9.30 – 10.30

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Lead Members: Councillors Nana Asante and Chris Mote

The lead members met on 11th January 2011.

Attendees

- Councillor Chris Mote, Scrutiny Policy Lead Member
- John Edwards, Divisional Manager, Environmental Services
- Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

Cllr Nana Asante and Finlay Flett, Head of Community Safety Services sent their apologies.

Neighbourhood Champions

The Overview and Scrutiny committee had received a response from Cabinet to the neighbourhood champions challenge panel report. The committee wished to understand further:

- How the involvement of ward councillors would be incorporated into a revised mission statement and integrated into the scheme as a whole.
- Why Cabinet had decided not to utilise the flagging system as proposed in the report.

As such, the committee had asked the Safer and Stronger Communities leads to investigate this further. John Edwards attended the briefing to advise the lead councillors on the reasons for the decisions:

Involvement of ward councillors into a revised mission statement for the scheme and integration into the scheme as a whole

John advised that the portfolio holder had commissioned work on a new mission statement for the scheme and this is currently under development as the number of champions increases. The mission statement will be devised with the champions themselves, but it would be useful to receive input from scrutiny members. There is no intention that the Neighbourhood Champions scheme should replace the responsibilities of the ward councillor however, it is important that the overlap between the differing roles is clarified – it is important to develop connections between the ward councillor and the champions.

Use of the flagging system

The motivation for this proposal from the challenge panel was to reduce the amount of reporting which neighbourhood 'nuisance' can generate. The challenge panel felt that if it can be made clear to residents that an issue has already been reported then the demands on Access Harrow might be reduced. John advised that whilst the sentiments of the recommendation were understood, the practicalities associated with the suggestion meant it is not practicable. In particular, the potential littering of an environment with notices raises issues similar to those with regard to 'flyposting' and the length of time the notices are in situ prior to an issue being dealt with (not all reported incidents will necessarily be treated as a priority) might be reputationally damaging.

However, the merit in the recommendation was recognised and therefore a single reporting point is being developed through which residents can be advised that issues have been reported and through which single service requests might be made. This would also need to incorporate a means of advising those who have reported an issue as to when/how it has been resolved.

For Action

The lead councillors will report back to the Overview and Scrutiny committee and seek the committee's view as to any further action it would like the leads to take.

Travellers' Strategy

John provided background and an update on the development of the Travellers' Strategy. The need for a strategy had emerged during the previous administration when the Mayor of London had indicated the development of statutory targets for the number of traveller sites that each London Borough would be required to meet. However, it had been recognised by the Mayor that the increased provision was not required and that for Harrow there is close to sufficient resource within the borough. However the quality of the provision is dubious, the most likely option, Watling Farm is not formally designated as a site and to do so would require the council to undertake significant improvements. The Housing Service had made an unsuccessful bid to the previous government for funding to deliver these improvements. There is no funding opportunity currently being made available by the Government. There is also some debate as to the suitability of this site and there had been previous objections to this development, particularly from the police. However, if this is not the accepted site, and extra provision is considered necessary, then an alternative location will need to be identified

Cllr Mote questioned whether sites are still the most appropriate means of providing accommodation for travellers as there is a growing move towards providing accommodation in 'bricks and mortar' housing. John agreed and commented that most of the traveller families known to the Council in the borough are accommodated in Harrow housing. However, it is still important to ensure that these arrangements are appropriate and are meeting the needs of the community.

There is no longer an imperative to produce a comprehensive strategy for travellers. However, it remains important for the council to ensure that its existing policies reflect the need of this community. Provision will be considered by the Council's Housing strategy and through the development of the Local Development Framework. Cllr Mote asked for further information as to how the particular needs of travellers are being met. John advised that both the housing and children's services provide resources to meet the needs of travellers and indeed there is a specific officer resource within education with responsibility for gypsy and traveller children's achievement. Similarly the Local Development Framework provides specific policy direction on spatial planning and development in the borough. This framework must be subject to extensive consultation and this must include travellers – it will be important in this context to ensure that the needs of those travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation are identified.

The council also has enforcement responsibilities with regard to travellers and unofficial sites. To date these responsibilities are being successfully implemented.

The traveller community has very specific health needs. It is often the case that travellers are unable to access health services through a GP network and as such place unnecessary demand on hospitals and A&E services. Greater liaison in this area would be helpful.

In summary, whilst there is no comprehensive travellers' strategy, the council's key service areas are addressing their specific needs within a generic policy framework.

For action

The lead councillors will continue to monitor this issue.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Safer and Stronger Communities leads will take place on:

Tuesday 8th February 9.30 – 10.30

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' REPORT: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Note of the scrutiny lead member briefing – 24 November 2010

Attendees:

Councillor Sue Anderson, Scrutiny Lead
Councillor Stanley Sheinwald, Scrutiny Lead
John Edwards, Divisional Director, Environmental Services
Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer

Briefing

The Divisional Director introduced the work of his division, which includes public realm, transport and highways, climate change, community safety, environmental health, environmental protection and enforcement.

Lead members were advised that the council receives approximately £3m in funding from Transport for London (TfL).

London Permit Scheme (LoPS)

Lead Members referred to the LoPS scheme. Joining LoPS will enable greater control and regulation over street works and allow the council's network management team to become self-financing through the generation of income from permits. Fixed penalty notices (FPNs) will allow street works noticing offences to be effectively enforced. Harrow will be joining the second tranche of the scheme. Lead Members agreed to maintain a watching brief on LoPS.

West London Waste – disposal sites

The Divisional Director advised that West London Waste is a statutory waste authority established by primary legislation. The upcoming Cabinet decision regarding disposal sites refers to a procurement exercise to develop facilities for waste disposal within West London. Potential advantages of securing a site could include regeneration of industrial sites through attracting businesses that process and recycle waste. Harrow's only possible suitable site is the Central Depot.

Climate change

The Lead Members were advised that the Climate Change Strategy is scheduled for approval by Cabinet in March 2011. Responses to the consultation have tended to be either technical in nature or from interested groups. There is therefore potential for scrutiny to consider the resident perspective on the strategy.

There have been some important national policy changes since the original strategy was developed in that there were plans to enable local authorities to offer an incentive in the form of lower Council Tax to residents; businesses were also to be offered financial incentives. A positive policy development is that there are plans to enable local authorities to receive payment for contributions made to the grid arising from any over-provision from electricity generated.

With regard to council energy efficiency, there is scope to share best practice with other local authorities in that issues faced in improving efficiency are similar; for example schools use half of the energy used by the authority but are not suited to techniques for improving efficiency that would be used for other buildings such as offices. Under the Carbon Reduction Commitment scheme the council will need to

buy carbon allowances for carbon emissions within the scheme; this will amount to approximately £300k but this figure could be reduced in future.

Snow

In response to a question regarding readiness for bad weather, the Divisional Director advised that the stock of grit had been replenished and that the new council vehicles had worked well last year. Given that in recent years severe weather had been short-lived provision was considered to be cost effective.

Performance management

The Divisional Director highlighted the decision to abolish the National Indicator set. While there were some indicators that the directorate did not want to retain, there were others of importance that needed to be retained or adapted to Harrow circumstances, particularly in relation to resident satisfaction and to enable benchmarking with other authorities.

The Scrutiny Officer alluded to the scrutiny review commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the development of a local performance management framework and the Lead Members agreed to refer the information on to the chairman of the review.

TRANSPORTATION

Update

The Lead Members are scheduled to receive a briefing on the draft consultation Local Implementation Plan (LIP) on 16 February. Any relevant matters that O&S should take into consideration when the committee receives the LIP will be passed on to the committee by the Leads.

PROPERTY

Update

Having received a briefing in September, the Lead Members agreed to maintain a watching brief on the property area. There is no longer a specific property disposal/capital receipt programme report going to Cabinet in February as originally envisaged. A series of Cabinet reports will be submitted in 2011-12 seeking authorisation on a number of different properties. The Corporate Finance report on capital will make reference to forecast capital receipts over the next 3 years.

The Lead Members propose maintaining a watching brief on this areas and will request a briefing when more detailed proposals become available.

HOUSING

Update

A briefing for the Lead Members on leaseholder charging and the recent Lean review is in the process of being set up.

FOR ACTION:

That the Lead Members:

- Maintain a watching brief on the impact of the London Permit Scheme.
- Maintain a watching brief on the council's property programme.
- Receive an update from the Divisional Director, Environmental Services on discussions with schools to improve energy efficiency.

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Consider examining the resident perspective on the Climate Change Strategy.