

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE – 22 September 2011

Response to the Implications of the HAVS Investigation Challenge Panel Report

Reference from the meeting of Cabinet held on 8 September 2011

Cabinet received a report of the Corporate Director Community and Environment responding to the recommendations of the 'Implications of HAVS (Harrow Association of Voluntary Services) Investigation' report from the Scrutiny Challenge Panel. Cabinet also considered a confidential appendix containing the Audit report.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel on the 'Implications of HAVS Investigation' addressed Cabinet and thanked scrutiny officers for their professionalism in delivering on this piece of work; a skill base which required a careful balance between providing advice and recording Members' views which the Chairman of the Challenge Panel recommended ought to be deployed across the Council. She thanked all participants for their contributions in ensuring a successful scrutiny and hoped that Cabinet would accept the recommendations in their entirety. Particular thanks went to the Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for his suggestion and resolve in buying-in the skills of internal audit to ensure a comprehensive scrutiny and strengthening the evidence base available to the Challenge Panel.

Cabinet was informed that the Challenge Panel did not look at HAVS itself and it had been accepted that the title given to this Challenge Panel was misleading and this aspect had been taken on board by Scrutiny as a lesson learnt when naming future Challenge Panels.

The Chairman of the Challenge Panel:

- stated that the investigation related to streamlining the support given to local organisations across the Council and referred to the need to consolidate processes in the delivery of the grant giving function across the Council. It was essential that the principles behind the Council's CREATE values, particularly 'Actively One Council', were applied universally across the Council and she hoped Cabinet would take this comment on board. It was crucial that information was available on what overall support was provided to organisations across the Council;
- added that the review had been undertaken to help clarify the operation of the grants process and acknowledged that many changes had been made following the 'Delivering a Strengthened Voluntary and Community Sector for Harrow' review. The grants process had previously lacked clarity and a number of changes had been made under the previous administration and which were now being taken forward by the current administration. The Council's reputation was always at stake as mistakes made were often not forgotten;

- welcomed the timelines set out in the response to the recommendations and the assurance that work would progress. Moreover, it was important that reputable and joined-up approaches were in place where all those involved were aware of the various aspects of the grant giving function, such as the Compact, a mutual agreement between those who decide to endorse its principles and commitments to action, which had unfortunately not been revised since 2009. She acknowledged that this matter was on the 13 September Grants Advisory Panel agenda for consideration. Also on the agenda for the GAP meeting was a proposal to return to a single grant application form, which was proposing one application form instead of the three that had, previously, been agreed. She was concerned that the proposal contradicted what had previously been agreed;
- reported that training of personnel was another issue that needed addressing and it was unsatisfactory to merely make statements about training without it being followed up. It was essential that training on the Compact was given to all those concerned. Recommendation 7, 'Members should be involved in every grant award', of the Challenge Panel did not necessarily apply only to the grant giving function but resonated across other Directorates to ensure accountability. This recommendation was therefore crucial and ought to be given due consideration. Learning from other best practice in other boroughs was also essential;
- stated that the Council needed to value its own whistle-blowing policy and sets an example to the Voluntary Sector, which ought to be encouraged to have such a policy in place;
- was of the view that with regard to internal audit's role, as set out in recommendation 22, it was important that regular reports were submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out the progress made in implementing those recommendations. Additionally, the Council needed to re-examine its communication channels and how changes and decisions are communicated to those whose grant applications had been agreed and those that had been rejected. Moreover, the ability to track decisions to ensure transparency was also important.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services thanked the Chairman for her presentation and the Scrutiny Challenge Panel for its work to help shape future processes, and assured Cabinet that the majority of the recommendations of the internal audit report had been adopted. The Portfolio Holder added that a number of responses to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel were being progressed. The Compact was being looked at with a view to strengthening the relationship with the Voluntary Sector. Moreover, a training programme for officers was being developed and training for Members would be undertaken through the Member Development process. He expected a further report to the October meeting of Cabinet on the Third Sector Investment Plan.

The Leader of the Council stated that the involvement of Members was being looked at through the commissioning process and the Chief Executive would examine how all parties could be engaged.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the response to the recommendations outlined at Appendix 1 to the report be noted;

- (2) it be noted proposals for the future of main grant funding would be presented to Cabinet later in the autumn and would provide further detail to address relevant recommendations.

Reason for Decision: To respond to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel report on the implications of the future of HAVS.

FOR INFORMATION

Background Documents:

Minutes of Cabinet

Report considered by Cabinet

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