

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

24 NOVEMBER 2011

Chairman:	* Councillor Jerry Miles	
Councillors:	* Sue Anderson * Tony Ferrari (2) * Ann Gate * Susan Hall (4)	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane * Paul Osborn * Victoria Silver * Sasi Suresh (4)
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) † Mrs A Khan

- * Denotes Member present
- (2) and (4) Denote category of Reserve Members
- † Denotes apologies received

205. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Kam Chana
Councillor Sachin Shah
Councillor Stephen Wright

Reserve Member

Councillor Tony Ferrari
Councillor Sasi Suresh
Councillor Susan Hall

206. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 4 – Question and Answer Session with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in that she was employed by NHS Harrow. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon unless public health was discussed and she would then leave the room.

Councillor Ann Gate declared a personal and prejudicial interest in that she was an employee of the Pinn Medical Centre. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon unless the interest became prejudicial and she would then leave the room.

207. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 16.

RESOLVED ITEMS

208. Question and Answer Session with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and Interim Director of Finance to the meeting and outlined the process to be followed for the asking of questions.

The Leader of the Council gave an introduction outlining the Council's achievements, innovations, and challenges. The Chief Executive identified some of the positives of the previous six months including Children Services and the Adoption Service as well as the success in dealing with the summer riots. Resident and staff satisfaction was continuing to improve whilst staff sickness was reducing. These achievements had been made in a difficult context. The Leader of the Council stated that whilst this coming budget would have a Council Tax freeze this was not something that, in his view, could be continued indefinitely.

Members asked a series of questions which were duly responded to as follows:

- *Was there any potential for whole place budgets to be implemented in Harrow? What do you think the implications might be, particularly in the context of the budget difficulties being experienced in health?*

The Leader advised that the Council was working closely with the police and that work was being done to develop front line partnership. The Chief Executive responded that better horizontal working needed to apply across the whole public sector. If the near £2b public sector

spend as a whole was considered, synergies could be made and he referred to the success of reablement.

The Chief Executive advised that there was an opportunity to co-locate services and that there were 147 public sector buildings in Harrow. There were also potential opportunities such as Access Harrow dealing with not only Council services but GP bookings and non emergency police enquiries which would give rise to a more holistic service. The Member expressed concern at what seemed to be a lack of progress in terms of the number of public sector buildings in the borough. The Leader responded that a lot of work was being done in terms of reducing Council buildings as staff were being moved into the Civic Centre.

- *In the context of the whole borough community budgets, what has the Council's work around the top 100 families entailed? How successful has our work been and how is success measured in this context?*

The Chief Executive advised that, to date, work had started in October and that the council had applied to be a pilot for community budgets. Many of these families had multiple issues including domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse and exclusion issues. Multi agency teams were being put together to identify and consider these families. It was necessary to ensure that the Council had the capacity to deal with the issues and had the necessary financial resources as well as being able to get partners involved. Success was about improved outcomes for these families, establishing a focus on early intervention, co-ordinating assessments and interventions across partners and Better Value for Money from the resources used. A Member expressed concern at what seemed to be a lack of progress of this issue.

- *How will the commissioning panel process which had been implemented as part of the budget and service planning process this year help the Council to identify the £60 million savings required over the next 3 years? How well had the panels worked?*

The Chief Executive advised that a commissioning panel approach had been put in place for the first time (previously challenge panels). Looking at the Council's vision for the next 3 years, consideration was given as to how services could be delivered with 30% fewer resources. To date, £17m savings out of the £30m required for the next three years had been delivered through this process. In terms of learning, it was possible to do better on the needs analysis and developing the skill set needed for this new approach. In terms of financial management, he was keen in the future to look at budgets around the person for example, personalisation not around the department. The Chief Executive confirmed that all the papers that went to the commissioning panels would be made available to Members.

- *In the context of the Council's priority to be a council that 'listens and leads' did the Leader or Chief Executive think there was any scope for the development of neighbourhood level community budgets in Harrow*

Council? In this context, what was the Executive's view of more localised decision making as envisaged in the Localism Bill?

The Leader confirmed that wards would be able to do things differently and that there would be pilot schemes.

The Leader stated that residents wanted varying levels of involvement but that resources could be restrictive. The Member questioned what the Leader envisaged the role of scrutiny to be if the Council chose the total/community type budgeting route. He responded that scrutiny could support the policy development. The Chief Executive advised that, if the community budget route was chosen, it would enable scrutiny to focus on outcomes and how they were arrived at and a move away from scrutinising individual organisations. There was an opportunity to look at how any new governance arrangements would work. He reminded Members that the Council and scrutiny were particularly important in this process as they were the only democratically elected part of the public sector.

- *How many staff had been lost from the public realm service?*

The Member provided the answer, 45. The Leader stated that front line services would be defended and enhanced.

- *How many staff would the Council be losing from Children's Services?*

The Leader advised that he did not have the figures but that cuts had been made whilst at the same time innovative solutions to minimise the reductions were made. The Member advised that the answer was 7 and questioned the amount of savings in Children's Services. The Interim Director of Finance advised that the savings were approximately £2m.

- *As a result of the summer riots and the evidence that suggested there was a link between poor health and youth offending, will Public Health be working across all directorates to deliver the best possible health outcomes for all residents?*

Councillor Sue Anderson left the room whilst both this question and the next were put and discussed.

The Chief Executive advised that in the proposed new structure, Public Health had been placed in the centre of the organisation as part of the Community, Health and Well-being directorate linking Adults, Housing and Leisure. He also recognised that there must also be links to other areas within the council including Environmental Health and Youth Offending. He was, however, concerned that there would be less money available than was needed for Public Health. At the moment, the budget for Public Health which was currently based on historic spend (rather than needs based spend) was 40-50% less than he felt was required. We could therefore be inheriting an insufficient public health budget. He advised that he was leading on a piece of work

across West London as to how public health could be discharged in the most efficient way mindful of the resources available.

- *How much influence do you expect the shadow Health and Well-being Board to have on the provision of urgent/emergency care in Harrow?*

The Leader advised that it looked as if the merger between North West London Hospitals Trust and Ealing Hospital Trust was going ahead and that if emergency services were to move to Northwick Park Hospital, he wanted to ensure that there was sufficient space and staff. The Health and Well Being Board must be able to challenge proposals. He added that Scrutiny could be well placed to monitor this.

- *At the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 22 November, the Interim Head of Procurement had estimated that there was £8-£11 million savings in relation to the Enterprise Mouchel contract. Could you explain the situation in relation to this contract and whether this was a good use of Procurement's time?*

The Chief Executive advised that the actual savings achieved would soon be known on this contract. He agreed that it should be the exception not the norm to roll forward contracts and not test the market. He also felt that we should be challenging our big suppliers even before the contract ends for better deals. On low level spend, some officers had been using suppliers not currently on contract and a big effort was being made to improve compliance in this regard.

- *How would personalisation and commissioning fit together?*

The Leader stated that, in his view, personalisation was better and was done in partnership with social care providers. The Chief Executive added that it gave people choice and control and enabled them to plan their support. It had a significant impact on quality of life. In providing a personalised budget, a needs assessment and a support plan were put in place in agreement between the Council and user. Checks were done to ensure all spend was lawful and met the user's needs and the budget was reviewed annually with that in mind.

The Member stated that the user could use the cash budget to, for example, hire someone to take them on holiday. The Chief Executive advised that personalisation provided flexibility as long as it was in accordance with the needs assessment and support plan and did not impact on safeguarding. Each plan was reviewed annually between the user and Council to ensure it was achieving its objectives.

- *Would you consider commissioning new research from the transformation budget to look at localised decision making as the 'Better together' research was out of date?*

The Leader responded that whilst residents wanted to be involved they did not necessarily want to run services. Pilots were being done and it was hoped the results would be helpful.

- *Are you aware that a number of computers are not working in the Council's libraries?*

Yes, these are going to be replaced and wi-fi put in.

- *Have the risks in terms of technology failure been explored, particularly with reference to GPS?*

The GPS system had been tried and tested elsewhere and our contract ensured that the supplier was liable for any failure. All technology came with a risk but enabled services to be provided more efficiently and effectively. Indeed the GPS system in our refuse fleet had reduced costs and improved customer satisfaction.

- *How do we determine the size of the total capital budget? What is the interface between finance and the rest of the Council? The Member questioned how the Council determined what it could afford.*

The Leader advised it was dependent on the finance available and the priorities chosen and that there was currently debate between Members and finance officers.

- *How did the Council weigh social benefit of capital projects against the financial plan?*

Outcomes had been identified via the commissioning panel process and that it was iterative and that the starting point was the initial size of the plan. Different scenarios were being worked through in order to get the best possible mix.

- *In terms of debt recovery, how do vulnerable residents get a voice?*

The Chief Executive advised that it was necessary to make a distinction between those who did not pay when they could and those more vulnerable residents who could not pay. He acknowledged that the Council needed to be even better at dealing with vulnerable people who were unable to pay their debts and that it was necessary to be better at identifying who these individuals were and signpost them to appropriate help to ensure they were getting all the assistance they could. It was important to have a consistent definition of vulnerable across the Council and look at the debts each individual had with the Council so they could be prioritised.

- *Are you comfortable that only 41% of the Council's spend was against a contract and when do you expect to get over 50% of spend against a contract?*

The Chief Executive confirmed that further improvements were needed and that there was work in place to address this issue. He undertook to forward this work to the Member.

- *How do you intend to deal with the inherent conflict between personalisation and how the Council planned day care provision, for example?*

The Chief Executive stated that through personalisation, users had choices (e.g. Shop4support) and that some of the services users may take may not necessarily be provided by the Council. This issue was not as significant in Harrow as it was elsewhere because of the number of services provided externally in this area. In terms of day care, if external providers were getting less demand for their services as a consequence of personalisation, they had to adjust their business plan accordingly. It meant that organisations, including the Council, had to be agile as personal budgets became more extensively used.

- *How do you envisage the progression of a child with needs from Children's Services through to Adult Services working across the proposed new directorates?*

The Chief Executive advised that he had tried to put together a more holistic structure that reflected the Council's priorities, that we moved away from commissioning around directorates to around outcomes and that he hoped commissioning panels would look at pathways, for example, Childrens – Adults.

- *How much does it cost to service capital?*

The Interim Director of Finance advised that there was an interest cost on borrowing. There was also a requirement to set money aside for the life of an asset, for example, 25 years. She would provide the Member with further details.

- *What are you doing to reduce the overall salaries of the Council's senior staff?*

The Leader confirmed that salaries were being looked at. The Chief Executive had already made a commitment to reduce the number of senior managers from 30-20.

- *Are you in favour of 20 storey buildings in Harrow?*

The Leader responded that he had answered this Member's question at the Major Developments Panel.

- *In terms of engaging with residents, are you happy with the way consultation had been handled in relation to the Whitchurch Playing Fields?*

The Leader advised that the Member had received an apology from both the Corporate Director of Place Shaping and Portfolio Holder at Cabinet because it was stated that ward councillors had been consulted when they had not been.

- *What capacity was there left in the Civic Centre to accommodate the Council's partners?*

The Leader advised that there was an asset management plan in place and that he had been advised that the building did still have a large amount of capacity.

- *How was the Grants budget set?*

The Leader advised that it was set in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. It was necessary to look at the Council's vision and priorities and that the budget was not currently set.

The Chair thanked the Leader, Chief Executive and Interim Director of Finance for their attendance, participation and the responses provided.

RESOLVED: To note the responses received.

209. Scrutiny Work Programme Update

Members received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which updated the Committee on the delivery of the scrutiny work programme and identified new projects for inclusion in the work programme.

Members discussed the possible Chairs, including a backbench Member, for two of the projects proposed to be included in the work programme; Private Sector Housing Capacity and Customer Care.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress on the existing scrutiny projects be noted;
- (2) the following projects be included in the work programme
 - merger of Ealing and the North West London Hospital Trusts
 - Private Sector Housing Capacity
 - Customer Care.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.20 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman