

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 28th February 2012

Subject: Scrutiny Work Programme Update

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

Scrutiny Lead All

Member area:

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report updates members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee of progress on the 2011/12 work programme.

Recommendations:

Councillors are recommended to:

- I. Consider the content of the update
- II. Approve and comment on action being taken – in particular, agree the scheduling of the Safeguarding Children project

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

This report updates members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on the delivery of the scrutiny work programme.

In designing its work programme, the Overview and Scrutiny committee acknowledged the need to build flexibility into the programme in order to respond swiftly to particularly pressing needs and issues. The council and partners are facing significant challenges and if scrutiny is to effectively champion the needs of local people then it is critical that councillors are able to consider issues as they arise. As such, the committee did not publish an annual work programme but rather has built flexibility into its programme in order to be a more responsive service.

This report provides members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee with an update on the projects which are currently underway.

Current Projects

Standing Review of the Better Deal for Residents

The first phase of this project, which focussed on the project management process used across the council, has completed and its recommendations were broadly accepted by Cabinet and have been implemented.

The second phase of the project is considering the impact of the programme on local people and whether or not the programme is achieving its ambitions. To support its work it has been agreed that regular information regarding new projects will be provided to the review group from the VERTO system. Since commencing its second phase, the review has considered

- the potential of the VERTO system
- the outcomes from 'Reabling Focussed Care' project
- the outcomes from the 'Concessionary Travel' project

Subsequent review meetings have scheduled consideration of the outcomes from the Libraries and Public Realm projects.

Regular reports are being submitted to both the Overview and Scrutiny committee and, where necessary, to Cabinet.

Standing Review of the Budget

This review is considering the policy environment in which budgetary and financial decisions are being made. The first three meetings of the group have considered capital funding and the Housing Revenue Account in the context of self financing. The review has agreed to consider the following over the coming months:

- Further consideration of the HRA
- Management of major contract renewal
- Business Rate Retention Scheme
- Strategic use of capital funds to develop the 'place'

- Localisation of Council Tax Benefit
- Fees and Charges
- Localism

Regular reports are being submitted to both the Overview and Scrutiny committee and, where necessary, to Cabinet.

Engaging Young People Review

The final report from this project is being drafted and is due to be presented to 15th March meeting of the committee.

Debt Recovery Challenge Panel

The first phase of this project is completed and a response from officers will be discussed at Cabinet on 8th March. The review was able to make a number of recommendations with regard to the identification and approach to vulnerable debtors. However, the panel also felt there may be scope for a greater centralisation of debt recovery processes in order to make the process more streamlined and efficient. Insufficient time was available to the panel to pursue this part of the project. The panel was advised that the Interim Director of Finance has herself commissioned work to consider the potential for further centralisation of the functions and as such the panel will reconvene when this work is available to consider its recommendations.

Private Sector Housing

The Overview and Scrutiny committee has agreed to include this project in its work programme in order to assess the capacity and quality of private rented housing in the borough. The first meeting of the project took place on 14th February and a draft scope for the project is included elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

Customer care

The Overview and Scrutiny committee has agreed to include this project in its work programme in order to assess the quality of the customer journey through the council. The scoping meeting of the project is likely to take place towards the end of February, it is anticipated that field work will begin in the spring.

Safeguarding Children

The Corporate Director of Children's Services has approached scrutiny requesting an investigation of the effectiveness of Children's Safeguarding services. In the wake of the death of 'Baby P', NHS London surveyed all London Boroughs/health providers to assess their performance against a number of key issues. The subsequent report into Harrow has identified a number of issues and the scrutiny lead councillors for children and young people and adult health and social care, together with the scrutiny leadership wish to assess progress against the subsequent recommendations. Overview and Scrutiny committee's endorsement for this is sought. A draft scope for the project is included elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

Completed projects

The Snow Clearance and second phase of the Performance Management reviews have completed and been reported to the Overview and Scrutiny committee and Cabinet since the last report.

Anticipated projects

Ealing NW London Hospitals Merger – potential Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Health and Social Care scrutiny sub-committee considered this issue on 7th February. Following an informal joint meeting of the three boroughs with commissioners it became apparent that there is a different view emerging across the area. It has been agreed that each will submit their own independent response to proposals to the Senior Responsible Officer for the project by 20th February. It can then be included in the Full Business Case which will go to NHS Brent and Harrow's board meeting on 29th March. The Health and Social Care sub will finalise the response at its meeting on 19th April.

NW London Commissioning Plan – 'Shaping a Healthier Future'

NHS NW London is also preparing to consult on their strategic commissioning plan 'Shaping a Healthier Future'. On 7th February, the Health and Social Care scrutiny sub-committee agreed, in principle, to join a JOSC when set up with the other eight West London boroughs in the cluster to consider the implications of the proposals. This would be subject to the agreement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Full Council.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report as all projects will be delivered from within the existing scrutiny budget.

Performance Issues

It is anticipated that all of the current projects will contribute to improved performance.

Environmental Impact

There are no environmental impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? No

The projects outlined in this report are investigating various components of service delivery and each project incorporates the consideration of equalities issues. However, where proposals for change are made, it will be the responsibility of the relevant service area to undertake equalities assessment if proposals are endorsed.

Corporate Priorities

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe
- United and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need
- Supporting our Town Centre, our local shopping centres and businesses

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers:

None