

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

28 FEBRUARY 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillors:

* Sue Anderson	* Paul Osborn
† Kam Chana	* Victoria Silver
* Ann Gate	* Sasi Suresh (4)
* Barry Macleod-Cullinane	* Stephen Wright

Voting Co-opted: (Voluntary Aided) (Parent Governors)

† Mrs J Rammelt	* Mrs A Khan
Reverend P Reece	

In attendance: Minute <insert no.>
(Councillors)

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

229. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Sachin Shah

Councillor Sasi Suresh

(The meeting adjourned from 7.40pm – 8.44pm to enable the conclusion of the business of the Call-In Sub-Committee which was scheduled on the same evening).

230. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 8 – Strategic Approach to the Future Provision of the Library and Sports Service

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a personal interest in that she was a member of Unison and library staff would be affected by the proposals. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane declared a personal interest in that his sister was employed in a Harrow School and would be affected by the proposals. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Agenda Item – 12 – Scrutiny Work Programme Update

Councillor Sue Anderson declared a prejudicial interest as an employee of the Primary Care Trust. She left the room whilst the meetings with the NHS were considered and voted upon.

231. Minutes

Members agreed to consider the minutes of the Special meeting held on 31 January 2012, as a matter of urgency, as they had not been available at the time the main agenda had been printed and circulated due to obtaining the necessary clearances.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2011 and of the Special meeting held on 31 January 2012, be taken as read and signed as correct records.

232. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 17, 15 and 16 (Part 4B of the Constitution) respectively.

233. References from Council/Cabinet

None received.

RESOLVED ITEMS

234. Strategic Approach to the Future Provision of the Library and Sports Service

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director of Community, Health and Well Being which set out information on the strategic approach to the future provision of library and leisure services. The report set out the strategic background to Cabinet's decision of 19 January 2012 and the next steps.

The Divisional Director of Community and Culture outlined the content of the report and responded to questions and comments from Members as follows:

- The majority of residents that had participated in the Let's Talk 2 consultation had indicated that they would prefer an external organisation to manage leisure services and the Council to run library services. A Member questioned the source of the savings and suggested that it would be beneficial to have a cost breakdown. Another Member expressed surprise that consideration was being given to prioritising libraries for commissioning purposes. The Divisional Director advised that there was potential for staff savings if the library contract was delivered across three boroughs and that all of the consultation results had been considered. There would, however, be staff implications and therefore Human Resources input would be required. In terms of the current Leisure contract, it was currently delivering reasonably well.
- A Member sought clarification in terms of governance and was advised that whilst sovereignty issues were a concern, officers would seek to learn from the experiences of other Councils.
- The Divisional Director advised that the one-off revenue budget allocation referred to in paragraph 2.6.1 in her report included the £50,000 investment referred to at paragraph 2.5.1.
- Referring to paragraph 2.2.2, a Member stated that, for example, John Laing PLC was delivering more for Hounslow than was being sought by Brent, Harrow and Ealing and questioned whether there was an opportunity cost by concentrating solely on leisure and libraries rather than also including parks and heritage services. The Divisional Director advised that there were many different models for service delivery and that one size did not fit all. In terms of contracting out arts and heritage services, the Council was not in a position to do this at the moment but it had not previously gone well in Harrow. The Member challenged the restriction that Harrow appeared to be placing on itself by not considering the commissioning of arts and heritage and was advised that whilst these areas were considered, the partners that the Council wished to progress with were not in a position to tender for their arts and heritage services.
- A Member questioned the reasoning behind the short length of the leisure contract which was due to expire in 2013 and stated that he would prefer to see the cashable savings separately. The Divisional Director advised that the benefits set out in paragraph 2.7.2 were

cashable and that paragraph 2.6.1 should indicate £200,000 per annum.

- A Member expressed concern that the corporate priority of listening to what residents said had not been referred to in the report and questioned how officers would reconcile the difficult choices that had to be made. The Divisional Director responded that the priority had been referred to and that officers presented options for Members to consider and decide upon. It would also be necessary to seek to views of the public again.
- In response to a Member's question as to the percentage of the £200,000 saving that related to libraries, the Divisional Director advised that the savings would largely arise from the library service in Harrow whilst in Brent and Ealing they were more likely to arise from leisure management. The Member expressed the view that this was potentially a small part of the Council's budget but the reaction from residents likely to arise as a result of the proposals would be significant and he questioned whether it was worth the effort. He added that he would also like to have seen performance issues and non-financial benefits in the report.
- A Member questioned whether it would be possible to have apprenticeships in the library service and was advised that, whilst it was possible, there would be an associated cost. Savings could arise from sharing rather than contracting the service.

The Chair stated that the consensus appeared to be that whilst proposals for leisure services were good there appeared to be no evidence for the proposals for the library service. He thanked the Divisional Director for her attendance and responses.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and Members requested that a further report be submitted to the Committee prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

235. Safeguarding Children - Scope

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which set out the scope for the scrutiny review on children's safeguarding. The officer advised that volunteers were required for the review group.

A Member commented that the role of volunteers in keeping children off the risk register and the savings that arise as a result of their work in community should be recognised in the review.

RESOLVED: The scope for the scrutiny review on children's safeguarding be agreed.

236. Project Scope - Private Rented Sector Housing Review

Members agreed to consider the scope, as a matter of urgency, to enable the timely completion of the review. The scope had not been available at the time the main agenda had been printed and circulated as it was subject to confirmation by the review group and finalisation by the Chair of the review.

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which outlined the scope for the Private Rented Sector Housing Review. The Chair advised that the review group had met and the Chair appointed.

A Member welcomed the review and stated that she was pleased to see a focus on the enforcement role and improving standards. She stated that the needs of residents in private rented accommodation needed to be understood and that the review also needed to consider the views of owner occupiers.

RESOLVED: That the project scope for the Private Rented Sector Housing Review be approved.

237. Report of the Chair of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which set out the report of the Chair of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Sub-Committee outlined their concerns and made particular mention of the rise in crime and acquisitive crime. Concern was also expressed that only 13,000 of the 40,000 SmartWater kits available had yet to be distributed and also that there was little evidence of its effectiveness. In terms of robbery, the figures had not been explored and, in terms of the Olympics, it was stated that crime rates were likely to be affected. The Chair of the Sub-Committee requested that the Safer and Stronger Community scrutiny leads consider these issues.

A Member commented that information received from partners was not always helpful and suggested that a document being prepared by officers in the Policy and Partnership team could be shared with the Safer and Stronger Community scrutiny leads. The relevant officer could also be invited to attend the scrutiny leadership group.

Members suggested that it would be helpful to consider the results of the information tracker at the scrutiny leadership group.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

238. Scrutiny Work Programme Update

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which provided an update on the progress of the 2011/12 work programme.

In terms of the Standing Review of the Budget, Members were advised that additional volunteers were being sought and that there would be field trips to other boroughs. A Member expressed concern in terms of the Housing Revenue Account which would increase the Council's corporate debt by 25%. Whilst a report was due to be submitted to Cabinet in May, scrutiny might not be able to engage in the process early enough.

A Member reported that at the last meeting of the review group of Better Deal for Residents, only two Members and three residents attended for the presentation by a senior officer. Members were reminded that it was important to have a good attendance at these meetings.

Members raised the difficulty in attending meetings with the NHS which were often scheduled at short notice and held in central London. There was a need to attend these meetings and considered liaison was required. It was also suggested that the Executive needed to forward any concerns to scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the action being taken be agreed, in particular the scheduling of the Safeguarding Children project.

239. Report from Scrutiny Lead Members

The Committee received a report of the Divisional Director of Partnership Development and Performance which accompanied the reports from the scrutiny lead Members.

A Member questioned whether the Council was receiving the best value for its disposal of Whitchurch Pavilion as it appeared that although the tender was for 30 years, following a briefing, Members had been advised that it was now 125 years and it was unclear how this change had arisen.

A Member requested that the first tranche of data on children looked after be sought.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the actions proposed be agreed.

240. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4B of the Constitution) it was

RESOLVED: At 9.59pm to continue until 10.10pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 10.04 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman