

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE – 24 JULY 2012

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30 MAY 2012

Redefining Youth Engagement – Report from Scrutiny Review Group

The Chair welcomed Councillor Victoria Silver, Chair of the Scrutiny Review Group, Hannah Nathanson, Chair of Harrow Youth Parliament, Ladan Dirie, Harrow's Member of UK Youth Parliament, and David Howes, Harrow Mencap, to the meeting.

The Chair of the Review Group introduced the report which set out the findings and recommendations from the scrutiny review. The review had explored ways in which the Council could most effectively communicate with young people in decision making and community activity. She emphasised that the report was the young peoples and that they wanted to have an input into policy, have their opinions valued and that they wanted to be leaders. She added that the Council could learn from young people who were questioning whether the right policies and politicians were in place.

The Committee then received a presentation from Hannah Nathanson and Ladan Dirie which set out the background to the review, the process and results and finally, their recommendations. The recommendations related to the Youth Summit, commissioning decisions, Harrow Youth website and the Summer Uni. The recommendations are set out in detail in the presentation which is attached at Appendix 2 to these minutes.

David Howes advised that Harrow Youth Parliament and Harrow Mencap provided a wider view as to the needs of all young people. Young people with learning difficulties had been having a more difficult time than many other young people as they had a higher support need. He stated that report could make a significant difference to the young people of Harrow.

All Members of the Committee congratulated the young people on their report and the presentation. Members then made comments and asked questions of the young people and the Chair of the Review Group which were responded to as follows:

- In response to a question as to the role of parents, schools and clubs in the review, the Chair of the Review Group advised that it was one of the key challenges in gathering evidence. It was a difficult time in Harrow due to many schools converting to academy status and it was hard to establish an integrated view.
- A Member stated that it was important for young people to be aware of what the Council did. He suggested that work experience was invaluable and assisted the development of business acumen.
- The consensus was that young people could be defined as within the 16-25 age range.

- The recommendations on engagement could be taken more generally rather than just specifically youth and a the Member suggested that Cabinet might wish to consider applying them across the Council.
- Referring to recommendation 1, a Member stated that it needed to be clear as to which Councillor was taking the lead.
- Responding to a comment in relation to recommendation 10 on Cabinet meeting with young people, a representative of the young people stated that such a meeting would be more productive if it was on the young people's terms.
- A Member agreed that the Harrow Youth website required work and suggested that it needed a clear focus and mission statement. In terms of social media he had yet to see any good examples of Councils using this effectively. A representative of the young people responded that whilst it would be good to get young people involved in design of, for example, the Facebook page, they also needed face to face contact. The Chair of the Review Group added that young people had stated that whilst they used social media they would not necessarily trust the Council. In terms of the website, the student room had conversation and the Council needed to improve its conversations with young people so that they had more influence.
- A Member questioned how they could be an improvement to the press about young people and a representative of the young people stated that, in her view, bad press was due to young people having nowhere to go. Work needed to be done in order to open up community centres to young people.
- In terms of advertising the positives of young people, Members were advised that Harrow Youth Parliament had a page in the Harrow People and a monthly column in the Harrow Observer. Young people were viewed negatively due to a minority and it was therefore necessary to address the issues facing the minority.
- School assemblies were a good way of reaching young people and could be used to provide information as to the work of the Council. Councillors could also visit schools. This initial engagement may then ensure continued engagement with the Council. For those young people not at school the Youth Summit, if well advertised, could be a good way of reaching those individuals. The representative of Harrow Mencap added that if Councillors were to attend their forum it would encourage young people to attend.
- It was important that the Council made itself appear interesting in order to encourage youth engagement. It was important to gain the respect of young people.
- A Member suggested that as a follow up to the review work could be done to look at the costs of the proposals and to identify any opportunity costs/benefits. The Chair of the Review responded that the review had tried to explore this area but could not get the necessary information although there was other external evidence. She added that awards for young people could generate a step change in the way they were viewed. A representative of the

young people stated that they understood that there were cost constraints but that the balance was that young people were part of the community and if a recommendation was scrapped based on cost alone it could have implications in the future.

- A Member suggested that the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations approved by Cabinet could meet in a community centre in order to engage with young people.

The Chair thanked the young people and the Chair of the review group for their attendance, presentation and responses. He explained that whilst Cabinet would receive the reference from the Committee on 20 June it would not be responded to until their meeting on 19 July 2012.

The Committee, having agreed some additions to the recommendations

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Scrutiny team involve young people in their projects and investigations;
- (2) **the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee be requested to give consideration as to how young people could be involved in the follow up work on this review;**
- (3) the report of the review group be agreed and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration with a request that consideration also be given to officer time and resources, such as meeting rooms, being made available to enable implementation of the recommendations.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Report submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30 May 2012

Draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 30 May 2012

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