



MEETING	DATE	ITEM
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	21 December 2011	6

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: LIVING AMBITIONS TOPIC
GROUP**

SUMMARY

This report contains the findings and recommendations that have emerged after the Topic Group scrutinised the subject selected by the Committee in July 2010.

The environmental, equalities & social inclusion, financial, legal and HR implications and risks are addressed, where appropriate, within the topic group's report.

This report is resubmitted to the Committee in a slightly revised and expanded form following initial feedback from Cabinet members. Should Members agree the recommendations shown below, it is intended to submit the report to Cabinet at its meeting in February 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members:

1. Agree and endorse the report of the Living Ambitions Topic Group (attached).

2. Decide whether to refer the recommendations of the Topic Group to Cabinet.

REPORT DETAIL

At its meeting on 6 July 2010, the Towns & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to continue with a topic group to review the Living Ambitions strategy.

Attached therefore is a copy of the Topic Group's report. The report includes details of the scrutiny work undertaken by Members in reaching the recommendations set out.

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Cheryl Coppel
Chief Executive

Background Papers - None



**REPORT OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
LIVING AMBITIONS TOPIC GROUP**

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its meeting on 6 July 2010, the Towns & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to continue a topic group to scrutinise the Council's Living Ambitions section of the Havering Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- 1.2 The following Members formed the topic group at its outset: Councillors Linda Hawthorn (Chairman) Wendy Brice-Thompson and Garry Pain. Councillor Fred Osborne also joined the group for part of its scrutiny.
- 1.3 The topic group met on three occasions and carried out a total of five site visits.

2.0 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW (Agreed 28 July 2010)

- 2.1 To focus on specific activities and programmes available for younger people that are provided by Culture and Leisure services and to establish that these activities and programmes have, where possible, specific learning outcomes.
- 2.2 These activities and programmes would include:

Sports Development Team (coaching)
Libraries Services (literacy and reading groups)
Havering Music School
Parks Apprenticeship Scheme

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Health and Sports Development Service

Officers explained that the aim of the Health and Sports Development Service is to provide opportunities for all members of the community to participate in sport and physical activity allowing each individual to achieve their full potential.

The Health and Sports Development Service works in partnership with a wide variety of organisations including NHS ONEL, Sport England, Governing Bodies of Sport, Pro Active East London, Havering Community Sport and Physical Activity Network, local School Sports Collective, voluntary sports clubs and the private sector.

The Health and Sports Development Service provides structured activities for all the community including both universal and targeted activity programmes for adults, children and young people.

The main areas of work are:

- Adult Physical Activity Programmes including seasonal programmes (e.g. 'Spring into Action') targeted physical activity programmes (specific demographics) and the Healthy Walks Scheme
- Physical Activity Referral Scheme (in conjunction with NHS ONEL)
- Sports activities for children and young people including holiday sports programmes, football coaching in schools and the MEND programme
- Co-ordination of teams for Inter-borough events e.g. Balfour Beatty London Youth Games, Panathlon and 5 Your Way
- Events e.g. 'Here Come the Girls' (activity day for women and girls) and 'Havering Active for All' (inclusive sports day)
- Promotion of 'Inclusive and Active 2' (the Mayor's sport and physical activity strategy for disabled people in London)

3.2 Libraries Services

The Topic Group visited Hornchurch Library and spoke to members of the reading group. There were 14 reading group members present.

Reading groups have been in existence for many years but they have recently enjoyed an enthusiastic revival in many public libraries and the media in general. Indeed, many groups in Havering have proved very successful and been oversubscribed. Library based groups aim to provide a fun and relaxing environment where readers can enjoy and share each other's opinions and experiences of books. Refreshments were provided at the Hornchurch Library group and everyone was welcome.

The reading group members were very enthusiastic and explained that they were like-minded people, who were able to socialise, read books

that they might not have done otherwise and then discuss the book at length.

The reading group were very supportive of the services that the library provided and their only concern was of any danger of the group closing down.

Other points raised during the visit included

- Sometimes the group needed large print books and these were not always available in sufficient numbers to allow the visually impaired members of the reading group to each have their own copy of the group's current book (see recommendation 4.1).
- On occasion members needed to keep the books for longer than was permitted by the library.
- There used to be a member of staff in attendance but now the group was co-ordinated by members. While this was in accordance with national initiatives such as "The Big Society" and reading group members appreciated this, they felt that there were still times when further support was needed from the library service itself (see recommendation 4.2).

3.3 Music Schools in Havering

The Topic Group made two visits to music schools in the borough.

Havering Music School

The school has over 80 full and part time teaching staff who teach over 3,500 pupils per week in primary and secondary schools across the borough.

All primary schools received Wider Opportunities teaching to allow another 2,500 pupils per week access to music lessons. This is a Government programme to allow all primary school pupils who wish to, the opportunity to learn a musical instrument.

Lessons are provided to pupils of all abilities from beginner to advanced on most orchestral instruments plus voice, drum kit, keyboard and piano. In secondary schools the lesson times rotate to avoid pupils missing the same lessons, as music lessons are usually taught during the day.

Pupils can work towards graded music examinations. Exam results count towards university entrance and are valued by employers. Pupils are also encouraged to play in bands, choirs, orchestras and ensembles at evening and Saturday Music Centres.

Classes at the music school include brass, woodwind and percussion where a former pupil was the teacher. Fees vary between £19 and £37 per term according to what was being taught and the length of time spent at the school.

The Topic Group also met with the friends of the music school who helped out in the café who spoke very passionately about the school and how the children enjoyed attending. Both the teachers and the friends of the school were concerned about any possible withdrawal of funding in the future which could force the school to close (see recommendation 4.3).

Abbs Cross Music School

This music school buys into the Havering Music School services which provide teachers and the instruments needed.

Members observed a viola lesson that only one pupil attended and were impressed by the standard of teaching and noted the advantages of one-to-one tuition.

The pupils started at the intermediate level and worked through the grades from level one to level six with exams taken at regular intervals. All pupils were however accepted to the school regardless of musical ability. School assemblies and an Art Week were used to encourage natural motivation (see recommendation 4.4).

3.4 **Parks**

Visits took place to several parks in the borough including Cottons, Harrow Lodge and Raphael. Although not in the original scope of the review, the topic group did also wish to bring to Cabinet's attention the position with the following areas of Parks operations:

Apprenticeship Scheme for the Parks Service
Inter-Active playsite at Raphael's Park
The Standard of Park Signage
Improvements made that have led to a Green Flag award for Cottons Park

Cottons Park – Green Flag

Improvements noted by the topic group included:

- Resurfaced paths for wheelchair and pushchair use
- The introduction of a totem poles feature dedicated to the memory of people, including four children, killed in a World War 2 bombing near the park
- Ecology features including beds for butterflies and insects and a special planted area where the grass was allowed to grow naturally to encourage the growth of wild flowers

- A wall that had been prone to graffiti had been planted with prickly shrubs in front of it
- The introduction of a skateboard area and play areas for younger people including an outside gym for all
- Signage in the park was considered good as the wording was angled making it easier to read and the wording included a history of the park. The signage was pleasing to the eye and did not include too many “don’t’s”. Members felt signage of this type could be adopted in other Havering parks (see recommendation 4.5).

Raphael Park – Interactive Playsite

Improvements noted by the topic group included:

- Equipment to suit all ages of children had been introduced including swings and roundabouts and a dedicated roundabout for disabled children
- The installation of various wooden block shapes and tree trunks for imaginative play
- The site had been fenced off in an appropriate way to ensure children’s safety

The signage in the park was however not as good as Cottons Park as there was no history of the park in the wording. The group felt too many of the notices were of a small size and the signage material was easy to graffiti.

A particular problem noted by Members was that there were no toilets located in the vicinity of the play area. Parents explained that they often had no alternative but to use nearby bushes as toilet areas for their children. The topic group was extremely concerned by this and felt that the lack of toilet facilities in this park was in danger of undermining the considerably improved facilities for children that had recently been installed (see recommendation 4.6).

Apprenticeship Scheme

The Topic Group met with Parks staff who explained that the apprentices undertook several months hands on work followed by college attendance for two months after which they return to work. Members had the opportunity to speak directly with an apprentice at Harrow Lodge Park who gave extremely positive feedback about their experiences since joining the scheme.

Staff suggested that day release to college would be more effective as the current two month release system was quite intensive (see recommendation 4.7).

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That the Library Service consider increasing the range and stock of large print books available in the libraries.
- 4.2 That support be provided by the Library Service to assist and facilitate reading group members who wish to take on the running of the groups themselves.
- 4.3 That Cabinet ensures that current funding for the music schools is continued as far as is possible.
- 4.4 That Cabinet endorses the “buy-in” system of music school services as seen at Abbs Cross Music School.
- 4.5 To consider changing the signage in the Borough’s parks to match that of Cottons Park and to include the history of the relevant park in all entrance signs.
- 4.6 To consider funding the introduction of new toilets in the vicinity of the interactive playsite at Raphael Park.
- 4.7 That consideration be given to the provision of day release training for the Parks Apprenticeship Scheme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The topic group would like to thank the following people for their assistance with this review:

Margaret Campbell (Sports Development Team)
Isobel Liebman (Havering Music School)
Ann Rennie/Ruth Gedalovitch (Libraries/Reader Development Team)
Simon Parkinson (Head of Culture and Leisure Services)
Martin Stanton (Havering Parks)

Head of Service Comments:

Comments from the Head of Culture and Leisure Services.

The Head of Culture and Leisure Services welcomes the interest shown by the members of the Topic Group and the recommendations that have been

included in their report, where they relate to Culture and Leisure Services (i.e. recommendations 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7).

In relation to recommendation 4.1 the Library service will actively consider increasing the range and stock of large print books, with associated costs covered from existing budgets. Assuming that there is a demand from library users and there is no detrimental impact on the purchase of other book stock, the Library service will definitely purchase more large print books. In relation to recommendation 4.2 the Library service will give support to reading group members who wish to take on the running of groups themselves.

In relation to recommendation 4.5 the new signage that has been installed in all of Havering's 8 Green Flag parks (including Cottons Park) is the standard that the Parks service aims to achieve in as many of the borough's parks as possible. For example there are plans to install similar signage at Raphael Park, linked to the major restoration scheme that will be progressed in 2012. The provision of new signage in other parks will be subject to the availability of additional funding for such investments.

In relation to recommendation 4.6 new toilets will be installed in the immediate vicinity of the interactive play site in Raphael Park, linked to the restoration scheme referred to above.

In relation to recommendation 4.7 the arrangements have changed since the Topic Group considered this issue and the proposed new arrangements are already in place. The apprentices already benefit from a day release scheme, where they can obtain NVQ level 2 qualifications at Writtle College.

Simon Parkinson
Head of Culture and Leisure Services
22.11.11

Comments from the Head of Learning and Achievement

The Head of Learning and Achievement welcomes the interest shown by the members of the Topic Group in the Havering Music School, which sits as part of the responsibilities of the Learning and Achievement Service area.

The service would like to comment about the statement made in 3.3 in relation to the Havering Music School where there is a potentially misleading statement about a possible withdrawal of funding to the Music Service.

For clarification, as part of the Havering 2014 Transformation Programme, services that currently trade with schools have been asked to move towards a full cost recovery model i.e. a model whereby charges to schools and families more fully cover the costs of the service. The Music Service is one of those services. As a result, the Music Service is consulting on a model that suggests making a number of changes to the staffing, the charges to schools and parents, and payments to staff.

The proposals which have just been launched for a 90 day consultation period have been planned to ensure that there is a Music Service for families and schools in Havering. The proposals should give greater flexibility and opportunity to generate additional income providing long term sustainability to the Music Service so that it can build on the very considerable strengths that it already has and give even more young people the types of opportunities that have been afforded to past and current pupils.

In relation to recommendation 4.3, the proposal set out above would ensure that the income currently received for the services provided for the Music School will cover the costs of the service. It is also helpful to note that the Music School also receives government funding and the government currently is planning for this to continue into the future.

In relation to recommendation 4.4, the service welcomes the endorsement of the Topic Group to the arrangements put in place by the Music School for those schools who wish to purchase its support for their pupils.

Mary Pattinson
Head of Learning and Achievement
22.11.11

Financial Implications and Risks:

Clearly the recommendations made in this report need to be seen in the context of the council's financial planning process, and the current adverse financial situation. Specific comments are as follows:-

Recommendation 1

That the Library Service considers increasing the range of stock of large print books available in the libraries.

The Head of Service reports that this will be done, subject to monitoring of the impact on existing budgets.

Recommendation 2

That support be provided by the Library Service to assist and facilitate reading group members who wish to take on the running of the groups themselves.

This can be achieved without additional cost.

Recommendation 3

The Cabinet ensures the current funding for the music schools is continued as far as possible.

The Head of Service reports that proposals are out to consultation on changes to ensure a sustainable Music School in Havering, but moving to a full cost recovery basis. It is also reported the school receives government funding, which is currently scheduled to continue.

Recommendation 4

That Cabinet endorses the "buy in" system of music school services as seen at Abbs Cross Music School.

The “buy in” system is proposed to continue, and as per comment in paragraph above, proposals are being consulted on which will lead to this being more sustainable.

Recommendation 5

To consider changing the signage in the Borough’s parks to match that of Cottons Park and to include the history of the relevant park in all entrance signs.

The Head of Service reports that this is planned for Raphael Park during 2012. Further signage improvement would be subject to resource availability.

Recommendation 6

To consider funding the introduction of new toilets in the vicinity of the interactive playsite at Raphael Park.

This will be implemented during 2012.

Recommendation 7

That consideration be given to the provision of day release training for the Parks Apprenticeship Scheme.

These arrangements are already in place, from within existing budgets.

Conway Mulcahy
Strategic Finance Partner
12.12.11

Legal Implications and Risks:

None

Human Resources Implications and Risks:

None

Equalities and Social Inclusion Implications and Risks:

None

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Background Papers List

None