

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON Thursday, 17th December, 2015, 7.05 - 9.45 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Charles Wright (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Yvonne Denny, Kirsten Hearn and Adam Jogee

Co-opted Members: Yvonne Denny

Also present: Councillor Jason Arthur, Tracie Evans (Chief Operating Officer), Jackie McGeachie (AD Human Resources), Brett McKee (Business Infrastructure Programme Manager), Neville Murton (Lead Finance Officer (Deputy CFO)), Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense (Legal), Christian Scade (Scrutiny) and Felicity Foley (Clerk)

67. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein.

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ayisi, Chukwuemeka Ekeowa and Kefale Taye.

69. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

NOTED that the Chair varied the order of the agenda in order to take item 11 after item 8.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Connor declared a general personal interest (not specifically related to any items on the agenda) by virtue of her sister working as a GP in Tottenham.

71. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

72. MINUTES

NOTED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2015 were not yet available, and would be reported to the next meeting on 25 January 2016.

73. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

NOTED the minutes of the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 16 November 2015.

74. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES AND CULTURE

RECEIVED a verbal update from Councillor Arthur on aspects of his Cabinet portfolio.

NOTED:

- Customer services – officers have developed an online solution which will allow residents to perform key transactions via a dedicated secured website ('My Account'). The first phase was due to be launched in January 2016 and will contain two key areas – benefits and council tax.
- Works were progressing on the redesign of Marcus Garvey Library, with constructors now on site.
- Budget – it was a challenge when dealing with the scale of the cuts required (£24m), and to change delivery models at the same time. There would be an overspend in the Adults and Childrens services, and it was hoped that this would be mitigated by using reserves, but this would have to be monitored by officers to ensure that the overspend was reduced by the end of the financial year.

In response to questions from the Committee:

- *Joint working with other boroughs* – Councillor Arthur was due to attend a shared services meeting with Camden and Islington in January to explore the possibility of joint working with regards to ICT. The Council currently utilised a number of pan-London / regional procurement frameworks, and was currently looking at ways where joined up working could work, however it would not be easy and would only work if Members were comfortable following that route.
- *Other ways to raise finances* – there were discussions around raising the Council Tax by 2% to plug the Adult Social Care budget, however this would only raise around £1.2m. The most obvious way for a Council to make money would be through growth. The Autumn statement changed the rule that Councils could not sell capital assets to raise revenue, this may be a conversation that Members may have in the future.
- *Spending cuts in Adult Services and the impact on service delivery and service users* – further information to be provided on the long term impact on services users of cuts to services such as day centres, and whether closing services now would have an effect on funding available to the Council further down the line.
ACTION: Chief Operating Officer
- *Council tax rise* – there were a number of factors to consider, and the obvious benefit would be the increase in funds, however it was noted that Haringey had one of the highest council tax rates in London. A decision would be taken by Cabinet and Council in February 2016.

- *How effective were the council at paying bills?* – The Council currently could be doing better at paying bills. A new payments system was introduced in 2014, and was meant to improve the payments. However due to teething difficulties, it meant that at one point the Council owed around £30m. This figure had since been reduced to £16m, £11m of which were invoices from the past 30 days, and £5m was in dispute.
- *Council tax collection* – it was important to strike the right balance. Support was offered to those who were unable to pay, but it was also important that more was done to collect the tax owed.
- *Muswell Hill Library* – a report would be taken to Cabinet in February 2016 with regards to all libraries in the Borough. Muswell Hill Library would be included in the report, along with options appraisals. Any decisions would be taken in consultation with library users.
- *Culture strategy* – a report would be taken to Cabinet in March 2016, with recommendations to adopt the cultural strategy for the Borough.

The Chair thanked Councillor Arthur for attending, and noted the update.

75. UPDATE FURTHER TO THE SPENDING REVIEW

RECEIVED an update from Neville Murton on the spending review.

NOTED:

- The report was based on the Autumn Statement and the spending review.
- The results of the Autumn Statement were that national finances had improved. There had been a slight improvement in the trajectory of Local Government cuts. It was intended that Business Rates would be localised to Local Authorities, which would be a huge increase in funding.
- Council Tax – in previous years a freeze grant had been available from the Government. It was now understood that this would not be available in 2016-17. The Council had the power to increase Council tax by 2% for Adult Social Care (but this extra funding would be ring-fenced for Adult Social Care budgets), plus by an additional 1.99% before triggering a referendum. Members would be making decisions on this in due course.
- The overall conclusion was that the accounts were on track in terms of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The following was provided in response to questions:

- *DHP funding* – it was currently unknown how much funding would be available.
- *Capacity for 30 hours free childcare from 2017* – a report had gone to Cabinet in November 2015, which highlighted the need to develop capacity quickly by 2017.
- *Business rates equalisation* – some boroughs earned more through Business Rates, so the Government provided top-ups and tariffs to those who earned less – there would be a consultation on this in 2016.
- *Discretionary grants for residents unable to pay Council Tax* – there was a reduction scheme currently in place for those who were eligible. It was recognised that all of the changes to the welfare system could mean that more

people would be unable to pay, and an exercise was being worked on to find out who the most vulnerable people were.

RESOLVED to note the report.

The Chair thanked Neville Murton for attending the meeting.

Clerks note – there was a short adjournment from 20:55-21:00.

76. WORKFORCE PLAN

RECEIVED the report by Jacquie McGeachie on the workforce plan.

NOTED:

- The first part of the report was the workforce plan itself. The second part of the report was an audit conducted by ENEI – this was currently being reviewed to create a sensible action plan.
- The Staffing and Remuneration Committee were monitoring the workforce strategy and developments. There was still a lot of work to do, but the team were looking at innovative ideas, and working through historical problems.

The following responses were provided to questions:

- *What stops LGBT staff from identifying themselves?* Equalities data was only collected at the application stage. It would be useful to re-collect data once staff had worked within the authority for a period of time, as it may be that people were uncomfortable declaring such information on application forms.
- *Apprenticeships* – there were currently eight apprenticeships in the Council – six of whom were people who lived in the Borough. HR were working with the schools team to look at signing up leavers to apprenticeships.
- *Concerns over lack of ethnic minority staff in senior roles* – it had been identified that ethnic minority staff were lost at around the PO4 level, this would be tackled as part of the action plan.
- *'at risk' posts* – a headcount reduction of 633 needed to be met. Managers were asked to identify posts within their services, and 658 jobs were marked 'at risk'.
- *Haringey Academy* – this was a virtual learning tool which was set up to change the way staff think about learning. The move was more towards a social media setting where users were encouraged to share information and knowledge.

RESOLVED to note the report.

The Chair thanked Jacquie McGeachie for attending.

77. BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE

RECEIVED the report by Tracie Evans and Brett McKee on the Business Infrastructure Plan.

NOTED:

- The plan was originally put together to improve governance in central parts of the organisation. There was a need to automate as much as possible to deliver savings and improve customer services.
- A Shared Service Centre had been introduced and provided a fully automated 'back-office' function, with a self service portal for staff to report issues.

The following was provided in response to questions:

- The projects were on track for the £7.8m predicted savings. The new system had helped in terms of speeding up making enquiries, and feedback has been that people liked the simplicity of the system. The performance data can help to look at where calls are being directed, and can show if more resources are required in one area over others.
- *Capital budget* – some decisions had been made regarding unfeasible projects, which was the cause of the decrease in spend, however, the spend may change further if and when replacement projects were found.

RESOLVED to note the report.

The Chair thanked Tracie Evans and Brett McKee for attending.

78. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

79. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

NOTED the work programme.

80. FUTURE MEETINGS

NOTED the dates of future meetings.

CHAIR: Councillor Charles Wright

Signed by Chair

Date