

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2017, 19:00

PRESENT:

Councillors: Charles Wright (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Kirsten Hearn, Emine Ibrahim and Tim Gallagher.

22. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were noted from Yvonne Denny.

24. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there was a late report to be tabled at item 13, which set out a scope for a proposed review of care home commissioning by the Adults & Health Scrutiny Panel.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

26. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

The Committee received a deputation from Rev. Paul Nicholson in relation Cabinet's decision on 14th November, to approve to Full Council the implementation of the 2018/19 council tax reduction scheme (CTRS). In particular, Rev. Nicholson raised concerns that:

- a. Under the 2018/19 council tax reduction scheme, working age claimants of council tax support continued to be capped at 80.2% of council tax liability. Rev. Nicholson set out that since April 2013, 264 of 326 local authorities in England had charged a reduced rate of council tax of between 8.5% and 30% against state benefits.
- b. The level of benefits available to working age claimants had been steadily eroded over recent years. The employment benefit payment for a single adult of £71.10 per week was insufficient and having to pay, even a reduced rate of council tax was an additional financial burden that pushed benefit claimants even further into arrears. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, had set the minimum weekly income standard at £91.80.

- c. Concerns were raised that once residents became in arrears, the Council instigated debt proceedings and the level of debt would then be compounded by court costs. Concerns were also raised with the use of bailiffs, who sought to secure payment against social security payments.
- d. Given the 7 year difference in life expectancy between Northumberland Park and some of the most affluent wards in the borough, Rev. Nicholson emphasised that there were a number of key impacts on health related to low incomes. These included; poor diet leading to diabetes and cardio-vascular disease; cold homes leading to respiratory and cardio-vascular disease; poor nutrition leading to low birth weights; indirect health impacts such as increased levels of stress and depression.
- e. In order to support putting the health and wellbeing of all its residents first, Rev. Nicholson requested that: The additional liability over and above the statutory minimum of 8.5% should be funded from the Council's unearmarked financial reserves; the Council should stop taxing working age benefits from April 2019; withdraw the use of bailiffs; and remit the council tax of all working age claimants.

In response to the discussion of the deputation, the following points were noted:

- a. In response to a request for clarification, Rev. Nicholson requested that the Committee should call-in the Cabinet's decision. It was clarified that the original Cabinet decision was to approve the 2018/19 CTRS to Full Council for adoption and that this decision was subject to call-in, the deadline for which was 10 am on Friday 24th November. Full Council would then consider the scheme at its meeting on 4th December.
- b. In response to a question, officers advised that the cost of funding the council tax reduction scheme last year was around £19m for all categories of exemption. It was estimated that the cost of further reducing the liability for working age benefit claimants would be around £5m.
- c. The Committee considered that there were other boroughs who did not use bailiffs.
- d. The Committee invited Rev. Nicholson to give a deputation to Full Council on 4th December, as they would be taking the final decision on the CTRS.
- e. The Committee suggested that a piece of work should be undertaken in future to look at the enforcement of council tax debt and the use of bailiffs to collect arrears from benefit claimants. **(Action: Clerk).**
- f. The Committee also agreed that it would note the points raised during the deputation and use them to inform a representation to Full Council; specifically around concerns with the method of enforcement and a reminder that there were other options available in terms of the level of reduction available and how this could be funded. **(Action: OSC Members).**
- g. Rev. Nicholson advised the Committee that he thought the key emphasis should be around the impact of low income on health and wellbeing.

27. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the OSC meeting on 16th October 2017 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

28. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

The Committee noted the minutes of the following Scrutiny Panel meetings and approved the recommendations contained therein:

- Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel, 5th October
- Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel, 12th October

29. COMPLAINTS UPDATE

Anita Hunt, Feedback and Information Governance Manager introduced a report which provided the Committee with an update on complaints performance, learning from complaints and the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter. Following discussion of the report, the following was noted:

- a. The Committee was advised that the process for learning from complaints had been revised, which comprised of the following key stages: FIG circulated quarterly reports which set out Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints as well as details of upheld Ombudsman complaints; services considered those reports at internal senior management team meetings; services fed back to FIG on the actions, changes and learning that had been incorporated; SOG would then receive a quarterly report on the learning and actions.
- b. The Ombudsman expressed concern about Haringey's timelines in implementing remedies. The implementation of a regular formal report to Council on all ombudsman investigations where fault/ maladministration was found, was being put in place.
- c. The Committee sought assurances around a shortage of qualified officers and high volumes of complaints which had led to a backlog. In response, officers advised that following a recruitment drive, Revenues currently had all of its posts filled. The Benefits team currently had 8 vacancies, which was compounded by the fact that it took 9 months to train a Benefits Officer. In order to mitigate staff shortages, the service had recently taken on a 3rd party provider to provide additional staffing resources. However, the service was no longer employing temporary staff. Officers also advised that overall, there was a clear strategic impetus towards a digital channel shift.
- d. The Committee raised concerns with response times to urgent enquiries and queried whether there was anything that could be done to improve the process, particularly with the advent of a number of new Councillors in May. Officers responded that there was an urgent enquiry procedure in place and advised that Member Enquiries marked as urgent should illicit a response that day.
- e. The Committee sought assurances around the ratio of managers to staff and overall staff levels, in response officers advised that this seemed to be managed quite well.
- f. In response to a query around what could be done to improve performance around complaints further, officers advised that the key was continued performance monitoring and ensuring that individuals and services took ownership for responding to complaints and developing learning points.
- g. The Committee sought clarification on the additional staff being provided by the third party company. Officers responded that the 8 vacancies were being covered by 7 people from the external company who had been in place since

- May. The backlog of complaints pre-dated the utilisation of the third party company and a significant improvement in performance was anticipated.
- h. The Committee requested that it be kept informed of complaints performance and suggested that regular reports be submitted to the Committee. The Committee also proposed that an annual report be taken to the Executive and that this should include an assessment of Ombudsman investigations where fault/maladministration was found. The Committee was advised that the most appropriate forum for this report was Corporate Committee. **(Action: Clerk/Feedback and Information Governance Manager.)**

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the information contained in the report.

30. QUARTER 2 2017/18 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

Oladapo Shonola, Principal Accountant for Financial Planning introduced a report which set out the 2017/18 Quarter 2 financial position for the Council. It was noted that:

- a. The Council was projecting an overspend by £6.6m in 2017/18 against a £255m budget. The overspend consisted of £2.1m in Children's Services (P1), £3.4m in Adult Social Services (P2) and £0.8m in Temporary Accommodation (P5). There were also smaller overspends in P3 & P5 and a projected underspend by around £400k in Priority X.
- b. There was an improved variance in Priority 1 from the first quarter of 2017/18 by around £1.1m.
- c. There was a worsening variance in Priority 2 from the first quarter of 2017/18 by around £2.1m.
- d. There were also improved variances in Priority 3 & Priority x.
- e. The HRA showed an improvement by £0.6m giving an overall net favourable movement by 0.2m from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2.
- f. In relation to the Capital Budget there was a significant underspend forecast of £108m, which consisted of £89m on the General Fund and £19m on the HRA.
- g. The MTFs savings target for 2017/18 was £20.6m. As at Quarter 2, services were projecting that £10.17m (49%) of planned savings would be achieved compared to £13.8m (67%) at Quarter 1. The most significant adverse movement related to savings within Adult Social Services.

Following discussion of the report, the following points were noted:

- a. In response to a query around the use of General Fund reserves, the Committee was advised that the approved budget for 2017/18 included a planned use of £8.8m of reserves from the General Fund, which would reduce the overall level of reserves in the General Fund to £6.2m. The minimum level of General Fund reserves recommended by the S151 Officer at the time of setting the budget was £15m.
- b. The Committee sought reassurance around the General Fund reserves, given their reduction to £6.2m and a projected overspend of £6.6m at Quarter 2. The Committee questioned what was being done to manage this. In response, officers advised that budget recovery plans were being drawn up corporately to mitigate the projected overspend and that there were other activities being

- considered, such as a redesignation of ear-marked reserves to the General Fund.
- c. Members enquired how confident officers were that sufficient additional revenue or other sources of funding would be found to meet the funding gap. In response, officers advised that they were reasonably confident of meeting the shortfall this year, but acknowledged that meeting the underlying gap of £15m would be dependent upon increasing revenue levels.
 - d. In response to a request for clarification, officers set out that the achievement of savings under the MTFs was included within the overspend forecast of £6.6m and that this combined with the £8.8m from General Fund reserves left a funding gap of around £15m.
 - e. The Committee was advised that Finance had met with the lead officers for each Priority to discuss areas of additional savings and additional revenue streams, such as increased grant income.
 - f. The Committee queried about the extent to which the cost of interims and temporary staff had an impact on the budget deficit. The Committee also requested that an assessment be done around the effectiveness of outsourcing and whether there were any long term savings involved in bringing services back in-house. The Chair suggested that the Veolia contract would be an obvious candidate for reviewing the efficacy of bringing the service back in-house. The Committee agreed that it would look into the Veolia contract as part of the budget scrutiny process. **(Action: Clerk/Environment & Community Safety Panel).**
 - g. The Committee raised concerns with a significant underspend in Temporary Accommodation, given the pressures on that service. In response the Principal Accountant suggested that part of the reason may have been because of difficulties in acquiring specific types of property. The Principal Account for Financial Planning agreed to provide the Committee with a response on the reasons for the underspend in temporary accommodation. **(Action: Oladapo Shonola).**
 - h. The Committee noted its concern with the significant underspend in the Capital budget.

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

- I. Noted the Q2 forecast revenue outturn for the General Fund of £6.6m overspend, including corporate items;
- II. noted the net HRA forecast position of £0.2m underspend;
- III. noted the latest capital position with forecast capital expenditure of £ 101.59m in 2017/18;
- IV. noted the risks and mitigating actions identified in the report in the context of the Council's on-going budget management responsibilities/savings as set out in Appendix 3(a) and 3(g);
- V. noted the measures in place to reduce overspend in service areas; and
- VI. note budget virements set out in Section 6 and Appendix 4 of the report.

31. CORPORATE PLAN 2015-18 PRIORITY PERFORMANCE UPDATE ON BUILDING A STRONGER HARINGEY TOGETHER- JUNE 2017

Margaret Gallagher, Corporate Performance Manager introduced the report which set out performance against the outcomes and strategic priorities in the Corporate Plan 2015-18.

The Committee commented that the priority dashboard was not easy to find through the website and suggested that it should be made more accessible. The Corporate Performance Manager agreed to feed that back. **(Action: Margaret Gallagher).**

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the progress made against the delivery of the priorities and targets of the Corporate Plan, Building a stronger Haringey Together.

32. BUDGET SETTING PROCESS

Oladapo Shonola, Principal Accountant for Financial Planning gave a verbal update on the budget setting process.

- a. The Committee was advised that the national picture was a further reduction in funding from central government. Funding from the Revenue Support Grant was down by 63% from 2010 levels.
- b. Officers commented that work was ongoing to better manage demand led pressures and that a variety of options would be considered including a transfer of some costs from the revenue to capital budget.
- c. Officers advised that that the underlying budget gap would remain from 2017/18 to 2018/19.
- d. There would be a report to Cabinet on 12th December and the budget would go through the Scrutiny Panels and back to the Committee on 29th January. Final budget proposals would be submitted to Cabinet and approved by Full Council in February 2018.
- e. In response to a request for clarification on the transfer of costs from revenue to capital, officers advised that this was a standard accountancy process and was not related to funding redundancy costs.

33. ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY PANEL - FINAL STREET SWEEPING REPORT

Cllr Tim Gallagher, Chair of the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel introduced the Scrutiny Review on Street Sweeping to the Committee. The following was noted during the discussion of the report:

- a. In response to a question about how to manage expectations going forwards, the Committee considered that expectation levels were partially determined by existing litter and detritus levels. It was acknowledged that street sweeping should be targeted at where the problems were, not necessarily where the largest volume of complaints were received.
- b. The Chair of the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel advised that the focus of the review was frequency of sweeping and that in-house versus outsourced delivery models were not considered as part of the review.

- c. The Committee considered that there were examples of other boroughs who had an in-house street sweeping service that was separate from its waste management service. The Chair of the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel agreed to consider the relevant merits of bringing the street sweeping service in-house, and to question the Cabinet Member on this proposal at the next panel meeting. **(Action: Cllr Gallagher).**

RESOLVED

That the Committee approved the report and its recommendations and that it be submitted to Cabinet for response.

34. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme update as set out.

Cllr Pippa Connor, Chair of the Adult and Health Scrutiny Panel tabled a late item to the Committee which set out the scope for a proposed review of care home commissioning by the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel.

It was noted that the overarching aim of the project was to ensure residents in Haringey received high quality care in care home settings (residential and nursing) and that contracts incentivised care homes to provide high quality care. The review would examine Haringey's current care home offer, with consideration given to both the user / carer experience and workforce support and planning.

In response to a query, the Committee was advised that the care homes were not in-house and that clients were placed into commissioned care homes, including some in neighbouring boroughs.

The Committee commented that improving personal choice in Haringey's Adult Social Care should be a key consideration in determining future service provision.

RESOLVED

- I. That the Committee noted the work programmes for the main Committee and Scrutiny Panels, as set out in appendices 1,2,3,4 & 5.
- II. That the Committee noted the verbal update, concerning the Care Home Commissioning scrutiny project, from the Chair of the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel.
- III. That the Committee agreed the scoping document for the Care Home Commissioning scrutiny project.

35. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

36. FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the future meeting dates;

16th January 2018

29th January 2018

26th March 2018

CHAIR: Councillor Charles Wright

Signed by Chair

Date