

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY, 30TH APRIL, 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors: Lucia das Neves (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Mahir Demir, Ruth Gordon and Adam Jogee

Co-opted Members: Mark Chapman (Parent Governor representative), Luci Davin (Parent Governor representative) and Yvonne Denny (Church representative)

1. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to item 1 on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting. Members noted the information contained therein.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

6. MINUTES

The following comments were made in respect of the minutes:

- Page 6, point j: The Chair clarified that the Committee had suggested that the categorisation of “general information/service” be changed as this was too broad to be meaningful;
- Page 8, point l: The Chair stated that the action that was agreed was that consideration be given to how the commercial portfolio could be kept and performance monitored.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above mentioned comments, the minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2019 be approved.

7. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

The Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel reported that, during the joint meeting of his panel and the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel to consider the Transitions Project, concern had been expressed at the potential involvement of Ingeus. This had not been reflected in the minutes of the meeting. Rob Mack, Principal Scrutiny Officer, agreed to seek clarification on the role of Ingeus from relevant officers and report back to the panels.

RESOLVED:

1. That the minutes of the following Scrutiny Panels were received and noted and the recommendations contained therein approved:
 - Environment and Community Safety – 11th March 2019; and
 - Adults and Health (joint meeting with Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel) – 19th March 2019;
2. That clarification be provided to members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel and the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel on the role of Ingeus in the Transitions Project.

8. FRONT OFFICE, BACK OFFICE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

Councillor Tucker, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Insourcing, reported that the Front Office, Back Office project (FOBO) had focussed on rationalising how the Council communicated with the public, service users and local businesses. The prime objective was to improve the way that the Council worked rather than to cut services. There was nevertheless the potential to make significant savings, particularly through the intelligent use of Information Technology (IT). The intention was to create the capacity to increase the number of direct interactions with service users and particularly those who were vulnerable or had difficulty dealing with IT.

The savings were to be made from a reduction in staffing and he was therefore glad that the trade union representatives were present at the meeting and therefore in a position to express any concerns. The intention was to maximise retention of the number of staff that wished to stay. Substantial savings could be delivered from not filling vacancies and reducing the number of temporary and agency staff. Consultation was taking place with staff and their representatives and preserving quality jobs and staff welfare were clear priorities.

Andy Briggs, Assistant Director for Corporate and Customer Services and Libraries, reported that the project involved merging front and back office functions. The aim was to make interactions easier so more attention could be focussed on those in greatest need of support, such as people in debt or living in poverty. The objectives of the programme were explicit in the new Borough Plan. These were that people should be able to access the advice that they needed first time and that it was easy to interact with the Council. It was planned that the programme would not only deliver savings identified within the MTFs but also provide a better service to customers. It would take two years and involved three phases. 100 opportunities had been

identified and these had now been distilled down to six key projects. Significant improvements had already been achieved since January. This had included a telephone queue call back system and decision trees on the Council's website, helping residents access information in a much easier way.

Belinda Black, the Programme Director, reported that the opportunities identified had come from staff. They had looked at the whole of the customer journey and focussed on the needs of the 90% of customers that were able to access services on-line. The aim was to create spare capacity that could be used to assist those who were less able to self-serve. £250k of savings had been achieved so far in 2018-19 with no staff cuts. In 2019-20, there would be reductions in staffing levels but half of these would come from vacant posts. Some of the cuts in staffing would be at the higher levels.

Gerard McGrath, Joint UNISON Branch Secretary, reported that many staff affected had been adversely affected by the previous restructuring of libraries and customer services. Although the new proposals aimed to be more balanced in their approach, there were still some concerns. UNISON was seeking to protect jobs and terms and conditions. They also wished to ensure the welfare of those who would be staying. Maggie Griffin, UNISON Joint Central Services Convenor, stated that there was "change fatigue" within the service, with staff constantly anxious about where the next round of cuts were likely to be. There had been an increase in stress levels since the last restructuring and this had been reflected in higher sickness absences. There was a lack of confidence in the ability of the IT structure to deliver the support needed by proposed changes. Current IT systems were unable to communicate with each other. She would welcome the opportunity to see the overall plan for where jobs would be lost. If agency staff were to leave, somebody would still have to cover their workload. It was likely that some staff would choose to leave.

Mr McGrath stated that there had been positive discussions with Mr Briggs regarding culture and management style at the Contact Centre. He felt that the current work environment was toxic in nature and there were now plans to address this. It was not a pleasant place to work and the screens separating staff could result in them feeling isolated. It was agreed that the Committee would visit the Contact Centre and that this would be scheduled to take place before the change programme was implemented.

In answer to a question, Mr Briggs stated that lessons had been learnt from the last restructuring. The current process had been led by staff with a limited amount of external support. There would be no reductions in staffing levels until the new systems were embedded and functioning to plan. He stated that the concerns regarding IT systems were understandable. Services had a lot of legacy IT systems and the change programme cut across many of these. A key part of the programme was the development of a new digital platform. He commented that not all of the savings were based on reductions in staffing. For example, a large amount of money was spent on printing and it was now intended to become paperless. Consideration was being given to making savings from changing the way the service worked in the first instance with reductions in front line staffing only being looked at when all other options had been exhausted.

Ms Black reported that staff had been engaged in workshops but she was not aware of the exact number who had been involved. Staff had also been engaged in work to design the new services. All had been given an opportunity to be involved. In answer to a question regarding assistance in accessing services for people whose first language was not English, Mr Briggs agreed to consider the matter further and report back.

Mr McGrath stated that he hoped that staff would be supported during the implementation of the changes. Some staff had not experienced a job interview for a long time and were likely to find such processes challenging. In addition, UNISON also wished to ensure that those who want to stay were supported.

Ms Black reported that the programme aimed to save £1.5 million in 2019/20. However, savings other than those from not filling vacancies were not required to be made until October. Services involved had approximately 500 staff in total. Reductions of 20-25% in staff had originally been envisaged but this had now been revised down to 62 full time equivalent in total. A significant number of staff did not work full time. It was therefore not possible to be exact regarding the number of people affected. However, temporary and agency staff would be the first to go. Offers of reduced hours were being discussed with staff who had expressed an interest. The Council's Human Resources team were looking at what the implications of this might be for individual staff.

The Cabinet Member commented that staff had stated that they would like the routine side of their jobs reduced so that they could spend more quality time with clients and finding solutions. Restructurings had not always been managed in the best way and staff needed to have confidence in the current plans. Engagement with the trade unions was key to this.

In answer to a question, Ms Black stated that the new roles had been created to reflect what staff were doing rather than the need to make savings. There would be a greater emphasis on work that "added value". There would be new job descriptions and these would be evaluated. It was intended to make savings in a way that improved both services and the working life of staff. She was open to suggestions on additional ways that staff could be involved in the process.

Mr Briggs reported that the intended savings of £4.2 million was set in the Medium Term Financial Strategy of two years ago. Many areas of improvement did not involve any savings being made. Improvements to communications was an example of this. If the projected savings were delivered, it would help to protect other vulnerable services from cuts. It was likely that there would be elements of the new arrangements that would not work well and, if so, they were happy to revisit them and exercise flexibility. Ms Black commented that they had been relatively conservative in the savings that were projected. Some initiatives were likely to over deliver.

Ms Griffin stated that she was not against progress but there would still be a need for some work to be done manually, such as preventing fraud. IT could not deliver all of the services. If the number of staff were reduced, the work would still need to be covered.

RESOLVED:

1. That a further report be made to the Committee in July and that this include:
 - Details of engagement with the trade unions and how staff were informing the process;
 - Support provided to staff who wished to remain;
 - Lessons learnt from previous reorganisations;
 - Arrangements for providing assistance in accessing services for people whose first language is not English; and
 - Clarity on the number of staff required to cover workloads.
2. That a visit be arranged to the Council's Contact Centre and that this be arranged to take place before the proposed changes have been implemented.

9. MEMBER ENQUIRES

Elaine Prado, Head of Business Change, reported that the number of Member enquiries had risen in the past year. The accompanying e-mails had increased as well. Performance levels had improved despite this, with 93% being dealt with within the ten day target. Benchmarking had been undertaken with other boroughs and Haringey was one of ten with a ten day target. However, it was important that Members were also satisfied with the response that they received. The ten day time limit allowed scope for matters raised to be investigated if required. It was anticipated that the FOBO programme would facilitate improvements. The team was working at full capacity though. They nevertheless wish to have sufficient capacity to be able to gain learning from the issues that were raised.

Committee Members commented that the ten day target seemed too long. However, they had been unaware that there were only three staff involved in preparing responses and we appreciative of their efforts. They felt that levels of satisfaction could also be monitored and used as an additional benchmark for performance. Residents had often been passed around different parts of the Council before contacting Councillors.

Mr Briggs commented that it was important to bear in mind that the process was about local constituents. He acknowledged that the Council did not always do itself justice in the responses that were made and there was a need to change the culture. However, achieving a 93% response rate within ten days was good and they were committed to hitting the target of 95%. The target was the maximum number of days though and significant numbers could be dealt with more quickly.

Ms Prado stated that they worked closely with Homes for Haringey (HfH) and there was a joint post. In addition, officers from HfH had come to sit with the Member Inquiry team. Enquiries regarding housing benefit could be fast tracked if need be. The service was looking to invest in improved IT. In addition, training was being arranged with responding officers and action taken to raise the profile of the service. Councillor Amin, the Cabinet Member for Civic Services, commented that some services were very good at responding quickly but some took much longer. Mr Briggs stated that if the acknowledgement of receipt could be automated, the possibility of reducing the target time could be explored.

The Committee raised the issue of the quality of responses, which could vary considerably. It was felt that better quality responses was likely to reduce workload in the longer term. It also appeared that not all respondents understood the role of Councillors. The adequacy of current staffing levels was also queried. They thanked current staff for responding effectively to the increase in enquiries. They felt that the current IT system was outdated and in need of updating.

The Cabinet Member stated that improved performances from services reduced the pressure on officers who dealt with enquiries. Ms Prado stated that the improved IT system would improve efficiency. This would release staffing resources to spend more time looking at quality and performance. Complaints and Member Enquiries were received because services had failed to deliver though and it was important that work was done to focus greater attention on the needs of customers.

The Cabinet Member stated that the service was under enormous pressure. It had nevertheless striven to maintain the quality of the service. There was a need for learning to be incorporated from enquiries. There was also a need for Member learning including managing the expectations of residents. In addition, it was important that a shared understanding of what was urgent was developed.

10. UPDATE ON THE FAIRNESS COMMISSION

The Cabinet Member for Civic Services reported that the Fairness Commission had been launched last summer with the aim of developing a fairer borough. There had been an extensive engagement process with a range of meetings where residents were able to give their views. A report had been put together summarising the feedback that had been given and five areas identified as priorities. These were:

- Engagement with Public Services;
- Housing;
- Children and Young People;
- Communities and Neighbourhoods; and
- Communities and Neighbourhoods.

Further work would be undertaken on how these would be taken forward. Commissioners would be leading on specific area and a work plan would be developed. Recommendations would also be made on how improvements could be made in each area.

In answer to a question, the Cabinet Member stated that health and social care had not been mentioned as much as other areas. There was also a review of adult care taking place which would consider how to address issues relating to it and they did not wish not to replicate this process. The Committee felt that there gaps that had been identified such as respite care and fair and equitable access and these needed to be addressed. In addition, they also suggested that engagement with residents could take place on line.

Joanna Sumner, Assistant Director for Strategy and Communications, reported that a key consideration on taking issues forward was whether the Council was in a position to respond. The work plan that was produced would highlight how this would be done.

The Fairness Commission constituted a different way of engaging with the community. The aim of the communication process was to bring stories to life so that they could be acted upon. The Cabinet Member commented that the feedback constituted a very powerful document and contained a good mix of experiences. In answer to a question, she stated that Special Educational Needs and Disability had come up and they had met with sendPACT.

11. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee noted the matters that had been raised during the recent “Scrutiny Stocktake” event and suggested as areas for further action by Ann Reeder, the external adviser who had facilitated the event. Theses included:

- The need to promote greater understanding amongst Members and officers of the role and value of scrutiny. This could be facilitated by the development of a new protocol;
- Discussing with Cabinet colleagues how scrutiny could work best with them;
- Prioritising the areas where scrutiny could add the most value and ensuring that agendas did not become too cluttered with standing and/or information items;
- Developing a more iterative approach to performance management and budget scrutiny;
- Undertaking more work outside of formal meetings; and
- Improving communications.

A report would be made to the next meeting of the Committee on how this would be taken forward.

The Committee also noted that work on the review on Access to Parking for Disabled People and Blue Badges would begin shortly.

RESOLVED

1. That the work programmes for the main Committee and Scrutiny Panels be noted;
2. That the outline recommendations arising from the “Scrutiny Stocktake” regarding the development of working methods for Overview and Scrutiny be noted and a full report be submitted to the next meeting; and
3. That the draft scope and terms of reference for the review by the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel on Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People and Blue Badges be approved.

12. VOTE OF THANKS

It being the last meeting of the Committee for the current Municipal Year, the Chair was thanked by the Committee for her work as Chair. The Chair thanked Members and officers for their kind assistance and co-operation.

CHAIR: Councillor Lucia das Neves

Signed by Chair

Date

This had included a telephone queue call back system and decision trees on our website helping residents access information in a much easier way.