

Minutes of the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Panel 2nd December 2013

Present: Cllr Alexander, Cllr Bull, Cllr McNamara (Chair) and Cllr Weber

In attendance: Cllr Bevan, Matthew Gaynor (Corporate Finance), Phil Harris (AD Housing), Katherine Heffernan (Corporate Finance), Mustafa Ibrahim (Stephen McDonnell (AD Environmental Services and Community Safety), Ransford Stewart (AD Planning)

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Gibson and Cllr Bloch.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 None received.

3. Deputations

3.1 None received.

5. Budget Scrutiny 2013/14

5.1 The panel noted that Budget proposals for 2013/14 were contained in two papers:

- Financial Outturn 2012/13 and Budget 2014/15 (as presented to Cabinet in June 2013)
- Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2016/17 (December 2013)

5.2 Items were considered line-by-line for the three service areas covered by the panel which were:

- Planning
- Housing
- Environment

Planning

5.3 The following discussion relate to planning items in the Financial Outturn 2012/13 and Budget 2014/15 (as presented to Cabinet in June 2013):

Savings proposals Dir. Place and Sustainability

#5: Planning Regeneration and Economy – staff budget reduction £135k: The panel noted that the proposed savings related to 1 in 33 posts (3% of staff budget). In this context they were felt to be achievable. There were some concerns voiced by the panel that staff reductions were being made to the service when the economy was improving and where an increase in planning applications may be expected.

#9: Removal of recruitment and retention allowances Planning Regeneration and Economy £12k: This brings terms and conditions into line with other staff. The panel noted that affected staff had been notified, were aware and none had left their post. The job market has also changed and there is no need to have a retention bonus.

#15: Supplies and service reduction in Planning Regeneration and Economy £25k: the panel noted that this predominantly related to printing and stationery and was

achievable on previous years spend (based on a £25k under spend in previous years).

#20: Increase in scaffolding hoarding income £100k: the panel noted that the number of planning applications received by the Council (projected to be 2,500 in 2013/14 rising from average of 1,800 per annum) and subsequent income from planning fees was rising again (peak of £1.6m in 2007, fell to £700k, currently at about £1m). In this context, increased fee income from this source was achievable and generally healthy.

The panel noted that planning enforcement income generally goes back in to the planning enforcement budget. It is difficult to reclaim or secure that income from whom the penalty has been imposed, even when this is through the courts.

At present, planning enforcement income is about £20k, but if this was to radically exceed that (to say £100k), then there would probably be some Cabinet consultation as to whether this income should be retained in planning, or used to support other services across the Council.

There is potential for developing POCA derived income, though the practicalities of receiving this income. Looking to use this income more strategically and to focus enforcement work.

Housing

5.4 The following discussion relate to planning items in the Financial Outturn 2012/13 and Budget 2014/15 (as presented to Cabinet in June 2013):

Savings proposals Dir. Adults & Housing

#9: Supplies and service savings on Housing and Adults £106k: this related to anticipated savings across the directorate and relates to printing and stationery.

#10: Housing Management rationalisation £186k: then panel noted that this related to restructure of housing management and predominantly related to savings with the deletion of three posts. The panel noted that these were not front line services. These changes will be approved by Corporate Committee in January when the management review with Homes for Haringey will be completed. This will reduce number of heads of services from 4 to 3 and reduce other capacity below this. There are risks, particularly in relation to the delivery of services transformation, but it is hoped that this joint organisational review will also create opportunities for new ways of working.

#11: Community Housing Staffing Efficiencies: to delete two posts in this service by £77k
The Panel noted that this related to the deletion of two front-line posts one of which was in the Private Sector Housing Management Team and the other in the Vulnerable Adults team. The Panel noted that the deletion of posts would have impact.

The panel discussed whether fee income could be used to offset or mitigate the impact of this savings proposal. It was noted that fee income from HMO licensing

comes in to the Housing Improvement Team budget, however, income derived from fines and prosecutions are received in to the general fund.

Agreed: The panel indicated that it could not support this savings proposal because:

- It conflicted with other financial proposals in the Medium Term Financial Plan (i.e. growth proposal relating to 'increased resources allocated to HMO licensing due to dramatic rise in private sector renting in the borough');
- There was an evident need to develop and expand enforcement within private rented sector in Haringey;
- The retention of the post in the Private Sector Housing Management Team may potentially increase enforcement income;
- The post in the Vulnerable Adults team relates to advice provided to vulnerable adults who are homeless and the deletion of this post may significantly impact on the work of the remaining team;
- Officers indicated that there may be likely an over-achievement of procurement savings in relation to Item 12 (Housing Related Support – contract efficiencies) which could be off-set against this and negate the need for the deletion of both these posts.

It was noted that Cabinet would be considering the development of the Private Rented Management Strategy to assess what can be done to support higher standards of housing management housing conditions for tenants in this growing sector of the housing market (30%).

Similarly, it was noted that the Council would be considering the introduction of a borough wide licensing scheme similar to that introduced in Newham which could also improve regulation and standards in this sector.

Action: That the department notify the panel on its current position in terms of considering the evidence and models for possible implementation in Haringey.

#12: Housing Related Support Programme: a procurement saving achieved through renegotiation and contract efficiencies with providers of £250k. There is no staff impact within the Council, though there may be some reductions among contractors and suppliers. The panel noted that significant savings (£7m) have already been achieved in this budget and the service is confident that a further £250k can be found. It is hoped to over achieve in this item so not as to implement recommendation 11.

Savings proposals Place and Sustainability

#19: Increased income from Service Level Agreement with Homes for Haringey for Grounds Maintenance £25k. This relates to including inflation in SLA.

#25: Recharge to the HRA of £45k. A fuel poverty post has been redefined which means that the scope of this work can now be chargeable to the HRA account (i.e. they are working solely in Homes for Haringey stock).

Draft Medium Term Financial Plan – Adults and Housing

- #1: Enforcement in Industrial Units (HMO licensing in industrial units) additional investment of £400k. The panel noted that there was unauthorised use of industrial areas for residential purposes and this extra income would be to support HMO and enforcement work being undertaken across these sites.
- #2: Growth item of £994. As a result of the impact of welfare reform there has been a significant increase in cost of securing temporary accommodation and reduced income from rents (bad debts). Item is made up of 1) incentive for landlords in private sector 2) bad debt provision.

Action: Figures on TA different unit costs for types of accommodation to be supplied to the panel.

Since August 2012, joint council agreements securing the cost of securing private rental accommodation to support local housing needs (TA) have been lost. Since April 2013, London Councils are paying much more to secure housing, over and above what can be reclaimed centrally and has had to be met through local sources. There is a shortage of housing supply which has driven up housing costs.

Through the Corporate Delivery Unit, the leader has committed to reduce TA total to 2,800 and continue this trend onward into 14/15 and 15/16 – through joint procurement (LA consortium) and securing rents in cheaper parts of London. Other schemes being considered include inward investment (to secure housing for TA) and the use of containers.

Also in relation to the DHP, the panel noted that £1.35m had been granted to support the tenants affected by benefits cap, though grants given this year to date is £2.2m. DHP grant from central government for the benefits cap will be reduced £700k, creating a £1.5m shortfall.

The Panel noted the increasing cost of temporary accommodation in supporting local residents to respond to welfare reforms. The panel wished to highlight the possible use of Cumberland Road (or other soon to be vacant office buildings) for temporary accommodation. The Panel suggested that should similar accommodation become available, this should be considered for use as temporary accommodation within the planned Property Review currently being undertaken.

Medium Term Financial Plan Capital Programme

- #17: Compulsory Purchase of empty properties £500k. Although this is a growth proposal, the panel noted that this item is self funding as this generally brings in funding through the resale of properties to responsible owners. There is an enforced sale programme where monies are owed to the Council, though this has to be authorised by the Secretary of State.

Housing Revenue Account

Fire Safety: the panel noted that there is a £1m to £3m jump in provision within the HRA. All the improvements coming out of the Coroner's report from the Southwark Council flat fire have been implemented bar 1 (sprinkler systems in sheltered housing).

Decent Homes: The panel noted that funding for 2014/15 (£37m) is last year of the DH programme administered by GLA. Therefore funding for 2015/16 (£33m) is to come from the Councils own resources. There is no DH funding for 16/17 but there will be the Planned Preventative Maintenance (£4m) to contribute to similar type work and a 'DH successor programme' which will provide £25m from the Councils own resources from 2016/17 to improvement of council owned housing stock.

At end of 2013/14 non-decent homes projected to be 26%, though not sure what would be the position at the end of 2016/17 (as this fluctuates). It was unclear what percentage of the housing stock would not be uneconomical for investment through DH.

Action: Further information on the flow of homes in and out of non-decent status each year (trend data).

Environment

5.5 The following discussion relate to planning items in the Financial Outturn 2012/13 and Budget 2014/15 (as presented to Cabinet in June 2013):

Savings proposals Place and Sustainability

#2 & 4 & 6: Staff reductions and vacancy factor in the Parks Service and Single Front Line to achieve £94k, £219k and 3220k of savings respectively. This was marked as amber as this report was compiled in June. Parking savings relates in part to channel shift as more parking services are moving on line and reduced need for back office staff. There is also de-layering within the parking service.

#10: Single Front Line Restructure; saving of £100k. This related to loss of one post (Head of Neighbourhoods).

#17: Contract savings of £20k for car parks: the panel noted that this saving would be achieved through improved contract arrangements. The panel noted that the IT system, CCTV and the car pound (e.g. with Civica and Time) are not run by the Council and these represent small savings on this overall budget.

#18: Efficiencies in the renegotiation of the Veolia Contract t of £250k. The panel noted that this represented 1% of the total contract value with Veolia and the Council would seek to minimise the front line impact of any contract changes. The contract has yet to be renegotiated.

The panel were concerned as to whether there was a contingency to cope with additional demand (e.g. harsh winter). It was noted that in this context, the department would put in a bid to the general contingency fund. The panel noted that the £250k may lead to a reduce performance, but it would be hoped that any reduced service would be mitigated.

Action: The panel is provided with further information on the changes in services provided by Veolia as a result of renegotiation.

Action: Waste Management Group and data that comes to EHSP in the New Year report back on the Veolia contract.

The panel discussed dog excrement and if road sweepers had sufficient resources to deal with this. It was suggested that instead of investing in capital resources to deal with the issue, that increased use of enforcement could be a cheaper option and deliver improved response and greater accountability to regulate poor behaviour.

#21: Increase in Street Works Income of £175k. This relates to the permits income charged to utility companies for works on highways. As penalties have increased, it is assumed that income will increase (25% increase in budget). There is a risk however, as there is a risk of greater compliance by utility companies.

#22: Increase in scaffolding hoarding income £150k. This budget line has been overachieving to this figure for the last couple of years, so this is reflected as additional income.

#23: Increase parking income of £200k. This is to reflect new CPZ in Tottenham and other areas. Incomes relate more to PCN rather than issuing of permits.

#26: Increased enforcement income £75k. This is a 50% increase. The panel indicated that this would support more preventative work.

#27: Fund General Fund salaries in Transport from increased fee income (£330k).

#28: Pre-agreed savings staffing savings of £400k. This relates to the earlier than planned departure of senior staff in the Place and Sustainability Directorate.

Medium Term Financial Plan – Savings proposals

#3: Increased income derived from planned traffic management infrastructure of £100k. The panel noted that this relates to fines from PCNs.

#4: Increased income from extended CCTV monitoring hours in town centres of £50k. This was implemented in Muswell Hill at the request of SNT.

#6: Increased income from HGV weight restriction enforcement of £280k. The panel noted that this in part would relate to HGV enforcement through mobile cameras (not mobile cars, but 6 moveable fixed cameras). Income projection based on other LA usage and Haringey modelling.

#7: HRA funding of disposal costs of waste removed from void properties £100k.

Capital Programme

#2: Investment programme for street lighting of £400k. The panel noted that this is an ongoing programme of replacement columns. The panel noted that there was

guidance in the placing of lampposts near trees (block out light) and should be adhered to more to prevent more costly arboreal work at a later date.

- #3: Investment in carriageway and footway works of £2m. The panel had two ongoing issues 1) The panel noted that there could be improved quality assurance on footways and pavements (There is a loss of white lines after refurbishment) 2) coordination: highway renewal and pavement repair, installation of lampposts.

The panel noted that highways are coordinated where possible and that works are undertaken are based on assessed need.

The panel also noted that temporary white lining is available and used in other boroughs and further enquiries would be undertaken to see if this could be developed here in Haringey.

The panel noted that further information is about to be placed on the web site about pavement repairs to provide more information about how replacement lists are decided and how these are undertaken.

Action: The panel indicated that they would like to invite the new contractor (Ringway Jacobs) to attend a future panel meeting for discussion.

- #4: Investment in Road safety infrastructure of £150k. This was noted by the panel.
- #5: Parking infrastructure of £300k. This was noted by the panel
- #6: Tree planting programme of £65k. This was noted by the panel. The Cabinet member noted that a capital bid to improve some of the infrastructure in Council parks would be put before Cabinet early in 2014.

6. Date of future meetings:

6.1 Dates of the next meetings would be:

- January 28th 2014
- February 24th 2014.

6.2 It was agreed that additional meeting could be held after February to ensure that reports and projects were cleared by the panel for presentation at the final Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 17th March 2014.