

MINUTES OF MEETING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER, 2019, 19:00

PRESENT:

Councillors: Lucia das Neves (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Erdal Dogan, Adam Jogee, Khaled Moyeed,

Also Present - Mark Chapman, Luci Davin, Lourdes Keever and Ruth Gordon

ALSO ATTENDING:

6. 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.

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Jogee.

Cllr Dogan advised the Chair that he had to leave the meeting at 19:30 due to a conflicting appointment.

8. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to Item 8, Councillor Moyeed declared an interest having represented the traders in his professional capacity as a solicitor. The Councillor agreed to not be present for Item 8, when the Scrutiny Review of Wards Corner would be under discussion.

10. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

11. SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO WARDS CORNER

* Clerks note - the Chair decided to vary the agenda to take the item on Wards Corner first. The minutes reflect the order in which items were discussed rather than the order on the published agenda. Cllr Moyeed left the room at this point in the meeting. *

The Committee received a report which sought approval for the amendments made to the scrutiny review report as a result of the comments received from third parties and the Assistant Director responsible for the Planning Service. The Committee welcomed the amendments made to the report and commented that these reflected factual corrections rather than any changes to the recommendations or the report's focus.

RESOLVED

- I. That the amendments outlined in track changes to the Wards Corner scrutiny review findings (which was attached as Appendix 1 to the report) be approved.
- II. That approval be given to publish the updated review report; and for Cabinet to consider and respond to the findings and recommendations.

12. MINUTES

** Clerk's note – Cllr Moyeed returned to the meeting at this point. **

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the 14th October be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

13. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the following Scrutiny Panels were agreed and any recommendations contained within were approved:

- Adults and Health – 5th September 2019
- Environment and Community Safety – 3rd October 2019
- Housing and Regeneration – 12th September 2019

14. COMBINED COMPLAINTS, MEMBER ENQUIRIES, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST AND OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT 2018/2019

The Committee received an annual report and analysis of complaints, Ombudsman cases, Member Enquiries and FOI requests for the 2018/19 municipal year. The report was introduced by Andy Briggs, AD Customer Services and Debbie Darling, Acting FIG & Business Support Manager as set out in the agenda pack at pages 123-136. The following was noted in discussion of the report:

- a. The Chair set out that the classification of reasons for a Member Enquiry of general information/service requests needed to be better explained and reflect the fact that many Member Enquiries were requesting a service because there

had been an initial failure the deal with a problem. In response, officers acknowledged these concerns and advised that management were planning to upgrade the Respond system and would give some further consideration on how to implement this. Action: **(Andy Briggs/Debbie Darling)**.

- b. The Committee noted that the Information Commissioner was pushing back on local authorities who did not meet the 90% response time target.
- c. The Committee also noted with concern the fact that Haringey had the highest number of upheld Ombudsman cases and one of the highest number of cases in total. In response, officers acknowledged this and advised that the establishment of a partnership reporting group would help the organisation to learn from complaints across the Council and that Corporate Board had agreed to its establishment at a meeting earlier in the week.
- d. The Committee sought assurances around what was being done with staff on the ground to ensure learning from Ombudsman cases and learning from Stage 1 complaints before they escalated to Stage 2. In response, officers advised that learning was captured and feedback across the Council through directors and that the FIG team offered onsite training with teams across the organisation. It was suggested that the partnership group would hopefully drive learning from complaints and provide an impetus at a senior level.
- e. In response to a follow-up question around whether there was sufficient capacity within the service to implement the learning from complaints, officers acknowledged that they were stretched at present but set out that in future they were aiming to have a much more proactive service offer and shift their focus towards learning from complaints. The Chair set out that the role of culture was important in all of this. As an organisation, the Council needed to make sure that it listened to its residents and their complaints.
- f. In response to concerns that Children's Services had the highest number of upheld cases by the Ombudsman, the Committee sought assurances about what review mechanisms were in place to improve performance. In response, officers advised that the service needed to get a good understanding of the context of the individual cases and understand the year on year performance to understand whether improvements were being made. The AD for Customer Services and Libraries agreed to feedback to the Committee an update on what was being done around review mechanisms, to ensure that under-performing services were being monitored and improvements were made. **(Andy Briggs/Debbie Darling)**.
- g. The Committee enquired about the structure of the partnership reporting group and whether it was cross-service. In response officers acknowledged that it would be made up of representatives across different Council services and would include relevant Heads of Service, and Assistant Directors where that was felt appropriate. Officers also advised that they were working on ensuring that service ambassadors and learning champions were central to the process.
- h. In response to concerns around the number of complaints around staff and what was done as a result, officers advised that these were investigated in the same way as any other complaint and that where fault was found cases were usually remedied with an apology and further training.

Clerk's note – Cllr Dogan left the meeting at this point.

- i. The Committee raised concerns about proposals to remove paper forms and delete postal address details, in favour of an online compliant system as this would unduly affect older residents and those without internet access. In response, officers acknowledged this and advised that paper forms would still be available. The Committee drew officers attention to Paragraph 3.3 of the report where it was expressly stated that paper forms had been removed from public access points. Officers agreed to look into this and update the Committee. **(Action: Debbie Darling)**.
- j. The Committee requested a breakdown of complaints received ward by ward and that this also include information on trends. **(Action: Debbie Darling)**.
- k. In respect of the 1433 FOI requests outlined in the report, officers clarified that this represented the number of requests rather than the number of people who had submitted an FOI request, and that it was highly likely that a number of people made more than one FOI request.
- l. The Committee raised concerns that the 95% response target within 10 days for Member Enquiries had not been met in four years. The Committee commented that they were keen to understand the performance for those cases that did not meet the ten day target and how late those cases were. Officers agreed to send the Committee further details of the 8% of cases in 2018/19 that missed the target time and how many days each case took for a response. **(Andy Briggs/Debbie Darling)**.
- m. The Committee enquired whether there was a way to prioritise urgent Member Enquiries so that a response could be received much sooner. Officers advised that there were no plans to reduce the target, or to introduce a two tier system, at present. Haringey was one of very few London local authorities that had a 10 day target time. Officers were not aware of any other London authorities that had a lower target response time than this. Instead, officers suggested that they were working to upgrade and improve software and the Respond system used by the FIG team. Officers suggested that if a response was urgent then the relevant director of the service should be copied in.
- n. In response to a question, officers advised that the 10 day target was a maximum and that a number of responses were done before ten days. Officers also emphasised that there was a balance between the speed of response and the quality of that response. The Committee requested that future reports also include details of how many Member Enquiries were responded to before the ten day target time and that a breakdown of those cases and the number of days taken be provided. **(Action: Debbie Darling)**.
- o. In respect of Ombudsman cases and the fact that 69% of investigations were within benefits and tax, the Committee sought assurances about what was being done to link up with HfH around Universal Credit and ensuring that information was being shared. Officers acknowledged these concerns and advised that this would be covered as part of the wider impetus on learning from complaints.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the proposed next steps.

15. IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT ACROSS HOMES FOR HARINGEY

The Committee received a report on the impact of Universal Credit on Council tenants in Haringey. The report was introduced by Tracey Downie, Interim Head of Income Management for Homes for Haringey as set out in the agenda pack at pages 137 to 141. The following was noted in discussion of the report:

- a. The Committee welcomed the report and noted with concern that the picture portrayed in the report was significantly worse than the Committee were led to believe during the previous discussion held on the subject in July. The Committee were advised that there were 1529 tenants in receipt of Universal Credit (out of a total of around 17,000) and that it had a significant impact on residents' income. Furthermore, research had indicated that residents in receipt of Universal Credit were twice as likely to be in rent arrears. Arrears tended to be worse for tenants that routinely moved in and out of work.
- b. The Committee raised concerns that some of the people who were worst impacted by Universal Credit did not have secure tenancies in social housing, but rather lived in private-rented accommodation or were housed in Temporary Accommodation.
- c. In response to a question, officers advised that the total debt owed to HfH from 1622 tenants on Universal Credit was £971,400. The Committee noted that there were around 20 new HfH residents that transitioned to Universal Credit a week.
- d. In response to a question around how arrears were monitored, the Committee was advised that HfH were able track arrears from the date of a tenant transitioning to Universal Credit to where they were now and that, residents routinely accrued rent arrears particularly during the transition period.
- e. In response to a request for further information around staffing resources available to support tenants on Universal Credit, the Committee noted that the whole income support team provided a level of support and that a number of engagement events took place for tenants on this. There were 2 welfare advisors within HfH that provided an array of support and considered whether there were additional benefits that the tenant was entitled to. There were 3 dedicated officers who dealt with Universal Credit, as well as other officers who worked on the bedroom tax and the benefit cap. In total, it was noted that there was a team of six or seven staff who provided dedicated support in one aspect or another.
- f. The Committee raised concerns with online applications and the equalities considerations inherent within this. In response, HfH acknowledged these concerns and set out that the online application process was a policy decision taken by the DWP which had created a real challenge in some cases. Particularly, as recipients were expected to maintain an online journal and provide responses to the DWP through that online journal. Support facilities were offered by HfH and through Haringey CAB but these services often had to be booked in advance.
- g. The Chair commented that, in light of the update received, the Committee needed to give further consideration to how the system worked, the increasing tendency towards arrears and how this could lead to a debt trap.
- h. The Committee also expressed concern about the knock-on effect created by increased financial stress, particularly around mental health and wellbeing and the impact on children's school work. The Committee requested that a further update be provided around support services and what signposting was available for mental health support, including local community organisations.

The Committee requested that this should also include some case studies on the impact of transitioning to Universal Credit for individual families. The Committee further requested figures for all of Haringey that also reflected private sector tenants rather than just HfH tenants. HfH advised that the DWP should be able to provide that information. **(Action: Tracey Downie/Phylis Fealty/Helen Hili).**

- i. The Chair expressed significant concern about the lack of a single point of contact or a lead officer on Universal Credit in the Council in light of this report.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the contents of the report.

16. PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee received a Borough Plan 2019-23 Priority Performance update, which was the second update relating to the new Borough Plan priorities, outcomes and indicators. The report reflected the latest data available as at September 2019. The report was introduced by Charlotte Pomery AD Commissioning as set out in the agenda pack at pages 143-150. The following was noted in discussion on the report:

- a. In response to a question, officers acknowledged the Committee's concerns around decreasing performance in relation to GCSE results and highlighted differential attainment starting earlier as key concern.
- b. The Committee sought further information around apprenticeships and how much money was generated through the apprenticeship levy. In response, officers agreed to give this some further consideration and circulate a briefing to OSC on the apprenticeship levy. **(Action: Charlotte Pomery).**
- c. The Committee requested further figures around the total number of rough sleepers in the Borough. Officers advised that there was a count due later that week and that the numbers would be circulated to the Committee shortly. **(Action: Charlotte Pomery).**
- d. The Committee considered the broader service offer around homelessness and suggested that more needed to be done to understand what was being offered, including supported accommodation, and to whom. The Committee suggested that this would be something for the Housing and Regeneration Panel to pick up. **(Action: Chair, Housing and Regen Panel).**
- e. The Committee sought further information around the Citizens Panel and its composition. Officers advised that the Policy team were leading on this as part of the implementation of the Borough Plan. The Chair requested that an update be provided at the March meeting as part of the consultation and engagement report. **(Action: Clerk).**
- f. The Committee sought further information in relation to the school exclusions data and questioned when it would be updated. Officers advised that there was a 12 month lag in the data which was national DFE data and it had been updated recently. The Chair advised that this was something for the Children's Panel to consider further. **(Action: Chair - Children's Panel).**
- g. The Committee set out that there should be some monitoring and tracking of performance data for schools where BAME children performed well. This item was referred to the Children's Panel to consider further. **(Action: Chair - Children's Panel).**

- h. In response to a query around how performance was being monitored on the Council's pledge to build 1000 new homes, officers advised that there was a strategic indicators on housing completions and that this was reported up to the relevant priority board.

RESOLVED

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- I. Noted the high-level progress made against the delivery of the strategic priorities and targets in the Borough Plan as at the end of September 2019, the second update on progress against specified outcomes in the Borough Plan 2019-2023; and
- II. Noted that measuring progress would continue with quarterly reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee against the new measures via the new Priority Dashboards published on Haringey's website.

17. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Review on Business Support had been paused in light of the Review on Wards Corner. The Committee noted that the final report for the review into Fire Safety was pencilled in to come back to the March Committee.

The Committee noted that the draft terms of reference for the review into High Road West would come back to the Committee in January to allow further comments from the panel Chair.

RESOLVED

- I. The Committee noted the work programmes for the main Committee and Scrutiny Panels at Appendix A of the report and agreed any amendments as appropriate.
- II. The Committee agreed the draft scoping document and terms of reference for the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel Review on Adult Social Care Commissioning, as set out in the second dispatch agenda pack.
- III. The Committee agreed the draft scoping document and terms of reference for the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel Review on the High Road West regeneration site as set out in the second dispatch agenda pack.

18. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

19. FUTURE MEETINGS

The future meeting dates were noted as:

- 14 January 2020 (Priority X)
- 23 January 2020 (Budget Scrutiny)
- 12 March 2020

CHAIR: Councillor Lucia das Neves

Signed by Chair

Date