

CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Dr Lilly Evans, Richard Kellaway (Chairman), Jack Rankin, Adam Smith (Vice-Chairman) and Simon Werner.

Also in attendance: Cllr D Wilson.

Officers: Andrew Scott, David Scott, David Cook, Andy Jeffs and Andrew Brooker.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Saunders and McWilliams.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020

Alison Alexander, the Managing Director and Strategic Director for Children's Services introduced the draft Strategic Plan. It was noted that it had been agreed that this report would go to all Overview & Scrutiny Panels so Members share their views on the document and as it was also due to go to Council for final approval further comments / amendments could be made..

Members were informed that the report proposed a new draft four-year strategic plan for the Royal Borough. It was noted that the report requested that Cabinet approved the draft plan (included in Appendix A) and allowed it to proceed to Council for consideration on 15 December 2015. The plan had a vision to make the Royal Borough a great place to live, work, play and do business. The plan had four strategic priorities; Residents First, Value for Money, Delivering Together and Equipping Ourselves for the Future.

Directors would be producing delivery plans by the end of February 2016 that would come into operation April 2016.

The Chairman questioned what was meant by 'Council services will be available for Longer' and was informed that by the utilisation of technology the Council was working towards 24/7 service delivery; for those services were this was an option.

Resolved unanimously: The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. It was noted that any comments could be sent to officers prior to December 2015 Council.

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT Q2 2015/16

Andrew Scott, Civic Team Manager, introduced the performance outturns against the key Council priorities for Quarter 2, 2015/16. The Panel were informed that greater clarity had been brought to the report by the introduction of a standard bullet point format and clarity on targets that were not hitting performance.

With regards to the percentage of planning appeals lost target Cllr Dr Evans raised concern that the mitigating action said that officers would be working with Ward Councillors to produce appeal statements yet she had not heard anything from planning regarding her ward. The

Panel were informed that this would depend if there were any planning appeals with her ward and Cllr D Wilson reported that the Planning Inspector took a dim view if Ward Members did not give their views at appeal or DC Panels. The Chairman said that planning needed to co-ordinate with Ward Members regarding this.

Concern was raised about the performance of processing planning applications and Cllr D Wilson informed that he had been concerned about this and was taking action to improve performance; especially against minor applications. They were investigating outsourcing the validation and processing of minor applications and permitted rights. The Council was also investigating delegating planning applications to a local level (to Parish Councils).

Cllr Werner felt that delegation to a local level was an interesting approach and questioned if it was envisaged if there would be an increase in appeals against Parish Councils. Cllr Wilson replied that a planning officer would be present to advise when the applications were determined and the Chairman said that having a neighbourhood plan would support decisions made.

In response to questions from Cllr Smith the Panel were informed that if performance was not improved then the Government had the powers to take over and run the Planning Department, that the interim manager is currently undertaking a review of the department and that there were a lot of Member 'call in' of applications to Panel that puts a strain on resources and can be frustrating when the Member does not make representation to the Panel. Although Cllr Wilson would not like to stop Members being able to call in an item he did recommend that perhaps they should be able to withdraw this call in if appropriate.

The Chairman raised concern that sickness absence was still higher than the private sector average and was informed that strategies and trigger levels were in place regarding absence due to sickness and that this was monitored by CMT and DMT. There was also occupational health as a resource and training for managers to manage sickness.

Resolved unanimously: The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. Whilst considering the item the Panel commented that the Planning Department should co-ordinate with Ward Members on appeal statements (% of Planning Appeals Lost) as they were not confident that this was happening. The Panel noted the performance levels and any mitigating actions being taken where required.

DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Andy Jeffs, Head of Benefits and Business Services, introduced the report due to be considered by Cabinet to approve the revised Debt Recovery Policy. The Panel were informed that the Council had a legal and moral duty to ensure debts are recovered with over £199 million worth of debt billed across the organisation. The revised policy made it clear what the Council's duty and responsibilities were with regards to collection and enforcement.

In response to questions the Panel were informed that there were sufficient resources in place for debt collection and with regards to Council Tax and Business Rates collection rates were around 98.5%.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations.

FINANCE UPDATE

Andrew Brooker, Head of Finance, introduced the latest financial update due to be considered by Cabinet. The Panel were informed that many local authorities were experiencing a spike in the demand for Adult Social Care services that had not dipped post winter 2014/15 as usually

expected. This had resulted in an overspend of £2m for RBWM. A report on mitigating measures that would include additional financial allocation would be presented to Council in December 2015.

(Cllr Werner joined the meeting)

In response to questions the Panel were informed that the forecasted outturn took into account another expected spike in demand for Adult Social Care over the coming winter period and that £2.8 million would be added to the budget. It was not expected that there would be any additional pressures due to the closure of any care homes; there were about 48 home in the borough but if there were closures supply and demand could be an issue.

It was questioned if the additional financial allocation to Adult Social Care, covered by areas such as reduced revenue to capital projects and the business rates windfall, would have a negative impact on our future capital spend. The Panel were informed that there had been three funding successes that would allow additional funds to support Adult Social Care; there was the flexibility we had in supporting our capital projects from revenue, the operations directorate had reported a £600k underspend and there was the additional business rates and MRP funding that was allocated to the development fund. We currently did not have to borrow for capital projects but this may have to be brought forward if the pressures continue.

(Cllr D Wilson joined the meeting)

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. Whilst considering the item the Panel mentioned that the ongoing pressures in Adult Services needed to be reflected in the 2016/17 budget build.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.30 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....