

CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2016

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden, David Burbage (Vice-Chairman), Dr Lilly Evans, Lynne Jones, Ross McWilliams, Eileen Quick and Colin Rayner (Chairman)

Also in attendance: Cllr D Wilson and Cllr Dudley.

Officers: Rob Stubbs, Anna Trott, David Scott, Jacqueline Hurd, Jennifer Jackson, Andy Jeffs, Russell O'Keefe and David Cook.

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received. Cllr McWilliams and Cllr Burbage both reported that they would be late.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2016 were approved as a true and correct record.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Panel considered the Cabinet report that set out the Council's financial position to date in 2016-17. The report showed a projected £430,000 underspend on the General Fund which was an improvement of £298,000 from the previous monitoring report. The Council had a combined General Fund Reserves of £6,490,000 which was above the level set by Council.

The Panel were informed that the Adults, Children & Health Services were reporting a projected outturn figure for 2016-17 of £57,469,000 against a controllable net budget of £57,311,000, an overspend of £158,000. This was a decrease of £154,000 on the overspend previously reported.

The Corporate and Community Services directorate were reporting a similar outturn position as last month with a projected underspend of £28,000 on the net budget of £4,195,000.

The Operations and Customer Services directorate were reporting a further improved projected underspend of £555,000 on the directorate 2016-17 approved budget of £21,686,000, £148,000 up on the last reported position.

Cllr Jones mentioned that with regards to the cash flow we were borrowing to help fund development projects and she questioned if we would have to borrow to maintain resources. The Panel were informed that the Council would be able to maintain resources for short term cash flow and capital projects.

The Chairman sought clarification from the Head of Finance regarding financial risks and was informed that there were no unknown risks and that current concerns were under control.

Cllr Jones asked a question regarding the interest being paid on loans and how confident the authority was in meeting the costs of future high needs placements in Children's Services.

The Panel were informed that interest payments depended on the length and terms of loans however the Council did get favourable rates. With regards to high needs cases these were projected in the budget calculations but a single case could have an impact.

The Chairman asked if there had been any impact on business rates and Council Tax collection since the vote on leaving the EU and was informed that there had been no ramifications and collection rates remained high.

Resolved unanimously: That the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations.

The Chairman sought clarification from the Head of Finance regarding financial risks and was informed that there were no unknown risks and that current concern were under control.

PLANNING PERFORMANCE

The Panel received a presentation on planning performance, budget and staffing following concerns raised by Members on poor performance.

The Strategic Director , Corporate and Community Services, gave the presentation on planning performance compared to the level of resource committed. The presentation contained a table that showed the total number of planning applications processed, the percentage of major, minor and other applications processed in time against the national targets and the level of budget committed. The figures showed that from Q1 in 2015/16 to Q2 2016/17 performance across the IPMR measures had improved with significant improvement from Q1 2016/17 onwards.

It was acknowledged that performance had been poor but was now improved and further improvement was expected. There had been streamlined process implementation, better customer service and recruitment of the right staff even though we faced stiff competition from London boroughs who paid up to 40% more.

The Panel also informed that following a recent fundamental review of the service an improvement plan was put in place. This resulted in a range of changes and further changes where planned. The changes included improved processes, staffing and technology. Three new Principal Planning Officers were to be recruited with each one being aligned to the three area teams.

Cllr Dudley mentioned that it had been difficult to resolve the issues with the departments performance but is was now fit for purpose. He asked if the changes were future proof and was informed that the recruitment of principal planning officers would help support the major development projects and the department would be seeking additional resource.

(Cllr Burbage joined the meeting)

The Chairman mentioned that he supported the Planning Department and understood the challenges ahead, however he had heard about staff leaving the department, maternity leave and staff being on long term sickness and thus he was concerned about resilience.

Cllr D Wilson, Lead Member for Planning, replied that there had been long term sickness and staff leaving the department; however senior staff did have to give 3 months notice. The Council had entered into an agreement with an external company to validate submitted planning applications as this process was time consuming when the applicant failed to provide all the necessary paperwork. A monthly update was provided to the administrating party's group meetings on the department.

Cllr Dudley mentioned that some people say that the poor performance was due to resources being diverted to the Borough Local Plan and it was important to dismiss this myth. The Panel were informed that there were two separate teams the Development Control team and Planning Policy. The teams had a different set of planning officers and the Borough Local Plan had been supported by specialist contractors. The only officers whose work cut across the two teams was the Borough Planning Manager and the Strategic Director.

The Chairman mentioned that it would have been interesting to see which applications required a lot of officer time and whose fees did not cover this resource. The Panel were informed that it was the minor applications that lost the authority money. It was noted that the fee structure would be reviewed as part of next years budget build.

Cllr Quick mentioned that it was good that the review of the department had looked at best practice. As some of the complaints were historical and performance had improved she expected that the level of complaints to Members to decrease.

Cllr Jones mentioned that it was pleasing to see issues in the departments performance being addressed and asked when the department was expected to be fully staffed. The Panel were informed that staffing levels will always be flexible depending on the level of major applications. Current vacancies were being recruited to and it was dependent on the level of notice required by the right candidates.

The Panel noted the presentation and the Chairman thanked Cllr D Wilson for attending the meeting to address the Panels concerns.

DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY - ICT

The Part I cabinet report was noted with further discussion taking place on the Part II appendix.

CHANGE TO COUNCIL TAX EMPTY AND UNFURNISHED EXEMPTION

The Panel considered the Cabinet report regarding the removal of the discretionary one-month, 100% empty and unfurnished exemption in line with many other local authorities, with effect from 1 April 2017. This was the last discretionary discount / exemption offered by the council. The proposal would be ratified at full Council.

The Chairman asked for clarification on the exemption and was informed that it was currently for one month and that table 2.2 in the report provided the position with regards to a number of neighbouring or close authorities and showed that a number had already removed their exemption. The Chairman also asked how many exemptions were in place and was informed that it was about 3,000 per month.

Cllr Dudley asked if the single person discount was discretionary and was informed that this discounted was protected by primary legislation and thus could not be removed. The Panel noted that there were about 18,000 SPD in place and if this was removed the Council would collect about £4 million more in Council Tax.

Cllr Jones asked if there would be any negative impact by removing the discount and was informed that it would only be detrimental on those who currently claimed it.

Resolved unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Chairman mentioned that he was pleased to see that we were changing our exemption which brought us in line with our neighbouring authorities.

DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY - FUTURE PROVISION OF CUSTOMER AND LIBRARY SERVICES

The Panel considered the Cabinet report regarding the proposal to create a modern, first-in-class customer facing, high performing service with three access channels, 24/7 digital, face-2-face and telephone.

The Panel were informed that it was planned to merge the functions of Customer Services and the Culture, Libraries, and Registration Service into new hubs in Maidenhead and Ascot, and Windsor. It was planned that the combined service would go-live on 1 July 2017 and keep the traditional library service, but over time, it would deliver the majority of council services locally to residents seven days a week.

Cllr Jones asked where the efficiencies of the proposals came from and would there be a need to expand the libraries. The Panel were informed that the efficiencies would come from the merger of the teams creating efficiencies of scale and that there would need to be some re-organisation of library layout.

Cllr Burbage said that the report mentioned the need to increase services accessed digitally as well as increasing physical visits which seemed contradictory. The Panel were informed that face to face interaction would increase as services became more accessible whilst it was expected that the number of phone calls to the Council would decrease as more services were made available digitally. The Panel were also informed that there would be workshops in libraries to show residents how to access services digitally.

Cllr Quick mentioned that the proposals seemed to be beneficial to our residents but asked what the impact would be for our staff. The Panel were informed that libraries were currently open 7 days per week but when implemented all those concerned would be expected to work 7 days per week over a 4 week period.

Cllr Jones asked about the volunteers in the library service and was informed that there would be clear accountability.

Resolved unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations. During deliberation on this item it was noted that customer face to face contact was still an option for our residents. The Chairman wished the library staff to note his thanks for adapting their role that would result in more services being accessible at our libraries.

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK QUARTER 2 2016/17

The Panel considered the Cabinet report regarding the Council Performance Management Framework for quarter 2 reporting.

The Panel were informed that a new format had been introduced to streamline and be more focussed on highlighting strategic priorities. Changes in data collection also ensured qualitative analysis and benchmarking. The infographics was added as a new section and the report had been designed to provide business intelligence to aid better service delivery for our residents.

The tables at paragraphs 2.12 and 2.13 showed performance of KPI's by directorate and by lead member / principal members. Appendix A of the report details current performance and gave commentary on those targets that were not being met or where they were new KPI's where data was not currently available.

(Cllr McWilliams joined the meeting)

Cllr Dudley asked how performance was disseminated and improved and was informed that it was recommended that the Policy Team, Lead Member and officers meet when a KPI is off target with improvement plans being put in place. Performance was also a standing item on lead Member briefings and performance was part of staff appraisals. Cllr Dudley recommended that when an indicator was off target and a service improvement plan was in place that these be added to the RBWM website after Cabinet.

Cllr Jones mentioned that she had not seen any of the service improvement plans at scrutiny meetings.

The Panel were informed that there were a couple of measures relating to the quality of care homes and schools ratings that the Council had little influence over; they had been included in the report as they were important to residents.

Cllr Jones raised concern that target ACH10 % of care leavers in education, Employment or training was reporting 'Red' when the commentary showed that the Council had little or no influence over 9 of the 13 cohort off target.

Cllr Burbage mentioned that some of the indicators had been included two or three times and also questioned why some of the indicators were not benchmarked. The Panel were informed that some of the indicators were easy to benchmark whilst some were bespoke to RBWM and thus difficult to compare. It was also a new performance framework and there would be further benchmarking in Q3.

The Chairman recommended that when indicators were reporting Red then the responsible Member should attend the Corporate Services O&S Panel to explain why and what remedial actions are in place.

Cllr Burbage mentioned that we should have public health data as a shared service and he also raised concern about the level of permanent exclusions. The Panel were informed that the Council had limited control over exclusions but officers did work with schools and exclusion should always be the final option. Cllr Quick mentioned it would be useful to see the length of exclusions.

The Chairman said that as we had a responsibility for educating young people up to date data on exclusions should be available. He was informed that Education Services would hold this data but if reporting to Panel it would have to be Part II as there was a small cohort.

Cllr Jones raised concern about the % of all RBWM schools inspected by Ofsted receiving an 'Outstanding' or 'Good' judgment target as there was new more stringent criteria and reduced funding for schools.

Cllr Quick recommended that the infographic should be on the RBWM website and in Around the Royal Borough.

Resolved unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations.

The Panel requested an additional recommendation that when an objective had been off target (reported red) for two consecutive quarters the Lead Member / Principle Member should attend the Corporate Services O&S Panel and other appropriate scrutiny panels covered by the objective to present the service improvement plan, for example the Chairman requested that the Lead Member for Children's Services attend a future meeting of the Corporate Services O&S Panel and the Children's Services O&S Panel to explain concerns about a number of targets not being met.

It was noted that at Cabinet the Leader / reporting Member would be adding to recommendation 2 that the service improvement plans for objectives reporting

off target would be added to the RBWM website after Cabinet. The leader mentioned that it was important that lead Members took responsibility for their strategic objectives and supported that they should report to scrutiny when objectives were not met.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Derek Wilson, Lead Member for Planning, for attending the meeting and explaining why performance indicators for the planning team were not being met.

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 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 7.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....