

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 October 2010 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Wendy Curtis (Chair), Terry Hipsey, Bukky Okunade, Mike Revell and Garry Hague (substituting for Danny Nicklen)

Apologies: Councillors Danny Nicklen and Barry Johnson

In attendance: M. Sinden – Marketing and Promotions Officer
M. Hone – Corporate Director, Finance and Corporate Governance
R. Waterhouse – Corporate Director, Change and Improvement
C. Stephenson – Corporate Performance Improvement Manager
K. Fenton – Performance Officer
A. Jacobs- Principal Inspection and Review Officer
C. Stewart – Head of Policy, Performance and Support
A. Murphy – Head of Environment
R. Harris – Head of Strategic Commissioning and Resources
M. Boulter – Principal Democratic Services Officer

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 5 July 2010 were approved as a correct record.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

Councillor Curtis declared a personal interest in relation to items 5, 6 and 7 by virtue that her daughter works for the Adult Social Care Department.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

8. THURROCK BUDGET – ‘LET’S TALK’

The Committee was informed that nearly 4000 people participated in the consultation, casting over 50,000 votes. 167 new savings ideas were presented by either staff or members of the public. Officers did not know how many of these could be attributed to staff, although the Committee was reminded that some staff were residents in Thurrock as well.

The 167 proposals were currently being analysed to see if they could be progressed and some had already been progressed because they were straightforward and easy to complete. The exercise had received good press and had been featured in the Elected magazine and two councils had already contacted the Council to enquire about the software package.

Some members of the Committee felt that the savings proposals could have been grouped into themes to provide Members with a more accessible report and officers promised to do this in future. Some of the savings proposals would appear in the Overview and Scrutiny budget reports due in late October, once they had been analysed.

Councillor Revell felt that training budget holders in budgeting was a very important proposal that should be progressed.

With regards to other councils being interested in the software, officers clarified that Brentwood Council had been given the software for free and was acting as promotion but also a test for the future. If further councils requested there was a realistic option for charging.

There was a brief discussion on how to prevent people abusing the system by proposing offensive or unrealistic options. Officers replied that there was a moderation process that all submitters were made aware of. 42 proposals failed the moderation process but the majority of these were because of duplication rather than offensiveness.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

9. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2009-10

The basics of performance management were explained to the Committee, namely that there was a data lag whereby performance from last year was not known until now but also, that there were different groups of indicators that the Council focussed on. Regarding the 160 performance indicators (PIs) that the Council measured in 2009-10, 63.8% met or exceeded their targets, 9.48% were in tolerance and 26.72% failed to meet their target.

With regards to Children, Education and Families, officers highlighted that although performance was improving for age 19 attainment in

schools, the overall performance in comparison with other councils was still low. Officers were asked who they compared school results with and it was replied that this comparison was undertaken against geographical neighbours but also councils across the country with a similar profile as Thurrock. Comparison figures for all key stages would be available over the next few weeks.

The PI relating to social care referrals was explained and it was clarified that the PI related to the length of time it took for social care to assess a child for their needs. It was an indicator to show whether partners like the police and hospitals were working well with the Council to identify those children in need of social care.

A debate was had on the school attainment of looked after children. Councillor Revell thought these children, although a very small number, were the responsibility of Councillors in their role as corporate parents. Officers agreed to take the Committee's concerns back to the Corporate Parenting Group for action and discussion.

The Committee noted the good performance of the Environment Department, as well as the Infrastructure indicators and heard about the improvement work going on in both departments to tackle some of the challenges they faced.

Adult social care, culture and housing had an improved and solid performance in 2009-10 although some data was still provisional and would not be confirmed until November 2010. Highlights included the reduction of delayed transfers of people from hospital to social care, hospital waiting times were good and the independence of people with learning difficulties was good.

The dip in performance of maintaining elderly people's independence was discussed and officers strongly believed that the dip in performance would not be as great when the figures were finalised in November. The Council was investing in the re-ablement service to address this performance issue.

With regards to social care assessments, officers stated that this was a challenging PI due to the national shortage of occupational therapists but also, the increased demand for the service. The Community Solutions Team, it was hoped, would ease some of the demand on the service and streamline the assessment process.

There was a short debate on the decent homes standard and what the implications and expectations of this were.

The item finished with the corporate health of the Council and it was highlighted that the administration of benefits claims, the collection of council tax and the dealing of complaints were all improving. There were still challenges around the percentage of women top earners in

the Council and the percentage of disabled and ethnic minority workers but there were difficulties in achieving these goals that were hard to overcome including the current recruitment freeze.

Staff sickness levels were briefly explained and the rise in levels was partly due to the new enforcement of properly recording sickness absence. There had also been an issue with how Vertex and Council staff had submitted and then counted staff absences, which had now been resolved. Data integrity and HR support to managers had improved and long term sickness had been tackled through a dedicated case worker. Many of these staff had returned to work or were now removed from the payroll. A new occupational health service was being piloted and managers were also due to receive more training on managing sickness absence.

The current average sick leave was 11.37 days per member of staff, which included long term sick leave. This put Thurrock in the bottom quartile in terms of performance.

The Committee was informed of the number of performance bodies and frameworks that were being removed and officers stated that the Council did not yet know what the future of the indicators would be. For the Council the key aims were to produce a medium term financial strategy and a new corporate plan, alongside a revised corporate scorecard.

RESOLVED: That

- i) The Committee note the level of performance achieved in respect of both priority and non priority performance indicators for 2009-10.**
- ii) The Committee acknowledges and commends service staff where those performance indicators met or exceeded their target..**
- iii) The Committee notes the actions being taken in respect of areas of under performance.**
- iv) Briefing notes on the Decent Homes Standard and key stage results comparisons be provided to the committee in due course.**

10. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT – JUNE 2010 (Quarter 1)

The key areas for the first quarter performance included the collection of council tax, the finalisation of adult social care indicators in November and the good performance of fly-tipping.

In response to a question officers stated that the current process for paying invoices was being streamlined and improved. Some extra rigour in the process still needed to be introduced which could negatively impact on the indicators in the short term. In the long term there would be a noticeable improvement.

In relation to a procurement indicator officers explained they were looking to reduce costs by entering negotiations with large suppliers. The PI had not been challenging enough and this had now been changed.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The Committee notes the latest performance for the key priority service areas in quarter 1.**
- ii) The Committee notes the improvement activity that is either currently underway or being commissioned in respect of underperforming indicators.**
- iii) The Committee notes the findings of the Benefits inspection at Appendix 2.**

5. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: that:

- i) A briefing note on the recruitment freeze be distributed to Members before the November budget meeting.**
- ii) Sickness absence be made a feature of the performance report due in January 2011.**

The meeting finished at 8.18pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact

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