

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2012 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Wendy Curtis (Chair), Diane Revell and Yash Gupta.

Apologies: Councillors Robert Gledhill and Danny Nicklen

In attendance: A. Millard – Head of Planning and Transportation
C. Littleton - Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes
M.Hone – Director of Finance and Corporate Governance
J. Hinchliffe - Head of HR, OD and Customer Strategy
R. Harris - Head of Commissioning
R. Waterhouse - Director of Transformation
S. Welton – Performance and Risk Officer
K Martin – Senior Democratic Services Officer
R Evans – Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 16 February 2012

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 February 2012 were approved as a correct record.

2. To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972

There were no urgent items.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

4. Corporate Scorecard Performance Report – Month 9/ Quarter 3

The Committee received a report advising of the key performance issues arising from the delivery of the Corporate Scorecard 2011 – 12. Other Senior Managers then, in turn, presented their focus areas.

Minor and “other” planning applications

The Head of Planning & Transportation explained to Members that ‘minor’ applications were those between 1-9 dwellings, whilst ‘other’ applications related predominantly housebuilder developments.

The Committee were informed that the Council would be taking on additional planning responsibilities with the integration of the Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation. Currently, approximately 65% of major applications were determined by the TTGDC, but from April 2012 they would all come under the Council.

Members were enlighten to the fact of the 125 minor applications determined so far this year only 10 had gone over target. Over the last 18 months a more effective and efficient process had been put in place which had lead to this consistently high level of performance. The scale of performance was highlighted when comparing the Councils current figures with the published figures from the Department of Communities and Local Government that compared all England Authorities, for 2010/2011 the Council’s performance ranked as follows:

- Processing of Minor applications on time (NI157b) = Joint 10th
- Processing of Other applications on time (NI157c) = Joint 2nd

The comparison showed that Thurrock’s performance on processing of planning applications was in the top 3% nationally.

Members queried whether the Council had the capacity to absorb the functions that were being transferred from the Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation as of the 1st April 2012.

The Committee were informed that Officers were confident, that the necessary resources would be available.

% of Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money committed

The Head of Planning & Transportation explained to the Committee that this related to developer contributions given to Local Authority’s planning department as a contribution to the cost of infrastructure improvements.

Members were notified that the section 106 money would never have a 100% expenditure, as this would mean that it would need to be spent immediately after it had arrived from developers.

Members queried whether there was a time limit to spend the money. Officers explained to Members that there were clauses involved and it depended on the clause as to when the money would need to be spent by.

Child Protection

The Head of Commissioning informed Members that this activity measure had been discussed at the last meeting and at Children's Overview and Scrutiny. The measure showed the number of children within care, had dropped since January, however it was still higher than target.

Members queried as to whether the Council had the budget for this issue. The Director of Finance and Corporate Governance assured Members that the Council would always find the money to place a child in care if that was needed, regardless of budget levels.

Capital Programme

The Director of Finance and Corporate Governance clarified to the Committee that the performance indicator looked low as the capital expenditure had not been profiled correctly. For 2012/2013 a system had now been identified to show more accurately profiled what the Council spends.

Members enquired as to who set the target, the Committee were advised that the targets were set within the budget. The Director of Finance and Corporate Governance told the Committee that what appeared to be spillage, had not been profiled accurately.

Average sickness per employee

The Head of HR, OD & Customer Strategy was pleased to report to the Committee that there had been positive improvement in sickness levels, action had been taken across the Council and Managers were now dealing with sickness within their departments.

Members questioned whether incentives for staff had been looked into. Officers informed Members that they had not looked into incentives, however the Council used to have extra annual leave.

The Committee was informed that even though the Council was below other councils within the area, over the last two months it was improving.

The Director of Transformation explained to the Committee that the rate of sickness absence had improved since the implementation of the nurse contact centre and confirmed that it was being funded for a second year.

Housing Repairs

The Director of Transformation updated the Committee with regard to the Morrison Contract. Members were informed that the Council was talking to sub-contractors and had arranged monthly meetings with Morrison to discuss feedback.

The Director of Transformation answered Members questions and informed Members that any queries they may have could be emailed to his team directly.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1.1 Acknowledges and commends services where there is good delivery against priorities in particular processing of planning applications**
- 1.2 Notes the performance in areas of concern and identifies, where it feels necessary, any further areas of concern on which to focus**
- 1.3 Recommends this report to be forwarded to the Chairs of the other service related Overview and Scrutiny Committees for their information**

5. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Working Group – Performance Management

Members were provided with an update on the progress of the Working Group on Performance Management.

The Committee were informed that after seeking legal advice the consultation would take place after the local election.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Committee notes progress so far and agrees to receive quarterly updates on progress at each future meeting**

6. Risk Based Verification Policy

The Director of Finance and Corporate Governance informed the Committee that the Department of Work and Pensions had recently issued a circular allowing Councils to implement a Risk Based Verification.

The Committee were notified that the cost for a three year license was £54 thousand, however Vertex were paying the Council £54 thousand as their staff would be using the system, this in turn was a saving for the Council. Members queried whether jobs were safe for staff and it was clarified to Members that some staff may be moved to the Contact Centre.

Members enquired whether the new process would help to identify fraud, the Director of Finance and Corporate Governance informed Members that that the Risk Based Verification process would assist with identifying fraud as well as identifying the different areas of fraud.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the new process to take affect from 1 April 2012 and to receive a report in December 2012 on the Performance.

The meeting ended at 8.25.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail kmartin@thurrock.gov.uk**