

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee held on 26 June 2012 at 7.00pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Richard Speight (Chair), Barry Johnson (Vice Chair) Wendy Curtis, Martin Healy, Terry Hipsey and Charlie Key

**In attendance:** Cllr J. Halden  
Cllr R. Ray  
Cllr L. Worrall – Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Community  
B. Brownlee – Director of Housing  
M.Hone – Director of Finance & Corporate Governance  
A. Murphy- Director of Environment  
S. Clark – Head of Corporate Finance  
J. Hinchliffe – Head of HR OD & Customer Strategy  
C. Stephenson – Corporate Performance Manager  
N. Warren – Community Development Manager  
S. Welton – Performance & Risk Officer  
S. Odusina - Senior Democratic Services Officer

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received

**2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

**3. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**RESOLVED** That the Terms of Reference be noted.

**4. CORPORATE SCORECARD PERFORMANCE REPORT – MONTH  
12 QUARTER 4**

The Corporate Performance Manager introduced this report providing members with a summary of performance against key performance indicators, contained within the Corporate Scorecard 2011-12, up to

the end of March 2012. It was noted that at the end of month 12, 60% of these indicators are meeting their target and 65.38% have improved their performance over last year. The data is unaudited data which may be subject to change. The information will be audited and confirmed in the Annual Report and brought back to this Committee later in the year.

Members were concerned about performance in a number of areas, in particular, Housing, Staff Sickness/Absence and the direction of travel on recycling, requesting updates on how performance would be improved in these areas.

The Director of Housing explained that there have been significant issues around the management of the repairs contract and tenants satisfaction with the repairs service. The management of the contract was in a weak position. - it was not managed tightly however this has now improved.

The Client Team structures have now been strengthened, IT systems have been significantly improved and contract management is now more robust. A centralised voids team has been set up focussing on tightening up actions around voids performance and a process has been set up with Morrison where no hand back is agreed until this has been addressed.

Other measures include a new independent survey of customer satisfaction whereby every resident who needs an appointment for repair will receive a telephone call to assess their satisfaction with the service. This will be monitored and will result in a big change in the process of negotiating with Morrison. There will be a person responsible for dealing with complaints from residents and clear penalties will be put in place to address poor performance. Lessons will be learned from how the contract was managed.

There are also changes to the key performance indicators which are included in appendix 1 numbers 31-34 of the next report on pages 80-81 on the agenda [Item 6]. These are more accurate measures which can be contractually discussed with Morrison and can be contractually enforced.

Members felt there was a need to look at the issues of procurement; particularly where local businesses could provide an improved procurement service and the Council should have the conviction to move these processes forward.

Members also requested evidence to indicate structures have been strengthened and whether the major penalties will have a knock on effect on tenants.

The Director of Housing explained that currently there is no evidence but the Council is in a better position to improve the situation and in the

last four weeks 90 voids have come through. Members were also invited to visit and meet the new team set up. With regards to penalties if there is a failure to carry out work, another contractor will be brought in and Morrison will be charged. This will not have a knock on effect on tenants.

Members highlighted the monitoring role of the Task and Finish Group on Housing and queried whether post repair inspections were carried out to evaluate quality of repairs.

The Committee requested that the Director of Housing provide a report at its next meeting on the lessons learned from managing the Housing Repairs Contract.

The Chair invited the Head of HR OD and Customer Strategy to comment on the performance indicators in relation to the number of working days, or shifts lost due to sickness absence per individual member of the Council's workforce.

The officer explained that the end of year outturn for this year is an improvement of more than 1 day average per person on last year's figures. The average sickness absence days per employee increased slightly in month during February and March, due mainly to a huge increase in the incidences of seasonal flu/cold and sickness bugs experienced during those months and while there are some hotspots of sickness within the Council many services have shown much better levels of sickness and are within their individual targets.

Some of the initiatives put in place to improve levels of sickness include: - investment in DHS nurse contact centre since 1 August 2011 where a nurse advisor talks to a member of staff providing immediate medical advice and supports staff through illness; additional resources provided from Premier Occupational Health Service enabling employees to be seen quicker supporting case management resolution; improved data monitoring which highlighted a high level stress related absence; all managers now receive trigger information which if managers do not respond to will provoke follow up requests.

Members queried whether the priority going forward is long or short term sickness. It was noted that the Council is looking at managing sickness generally with particular emphasis on stress related long term sickness.

Members noted and welcomed the reduction in sickness.

The Chair noted that the performance indicator relating to percentage of household waste sent to re-use, recycling or composting would not reach the target of 48% for 2011-12 and considering Thurrock has held itself out to be a green borough it is a worrying trend.

In response the Director of Environment explained that the 48% target set for 2011-12 was an ambitious target, (the previous years target was 45% which was met) - the average for unitary councils is 44% and our nearest neighbours are achieving 38%. The real target for the Council is diverting from landfill which Thurrock is doing fantastically well above the average.

The main reasons for not meeting the target include.

- Contamination in flats
- Contamination in houses
- Packaging directive

An action plan has been implemented to address this which includes

- Further monitoring of recycling collections from both flats and houses to monitor levels of contamination and take corrective action as appropriate
- Further reminders to residence in contamination "hot spots"
- Continued promotional message regarding recycling and appropriate contents to all residents planned for 2012-2013
- Recruitment for a Waste Education Officer is underway

As part of the discussion in relation to contamination of bins in flats Members suggested the Council should look into working closer with private landlords.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Governance was invited to comment on the red indicator relating to the percentage of the Council's Capital Programme that has been spent at the quarterly monitoring period in the year. He explained that there is a vast under spend on the capital budget and there needs to be better utilisation of assets. It is down to individual local authorities how they are going to spend the money and when the authority indicates it is going to do things. The Council needs to tighten up on this.

In concluding, members agreed that there is more good news in the report than bad specifically the Council Tax collection rate is improving and educational achievement in the borough is up. overall a 65% improvement rate is good.

### **The Committee**

#### **RESOLVED to**

- i. Acknowledge and commend services where there is good delivery against priorities in particular processing of planning applications.**
- ii. Notes the performance in areas of concern .**

- iii. **Recommends the areas IN FOCUS to be circulated to other relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs.**

## **5. CORPORATE SCORECARD 2012/13**

The Corporate Performance Manager presented the report explaining to the Committee that the Corporate Scorecard is the mechanism by which the council monitors its performance against the Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Organisational Development Plan. Heads of Service have identified the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as those which they feel are the best measures to judge the delivery of key policy & strategic issues in 2012-13, with this being the second year of a three year document.

The Corporate Scorecard is reported to Cabinet on a monthly basis and will be brought before this Committee every quarter. It is the key monitoring mechanism for delivery of the 2012-13 aims.

As part of the discussion members were informed that a number of councils were moving away from benchmarking, however the information obtained is useful to Thurrock in comparing how its services and resources are utilised. Members asked to be informed if more Councils withdraw from benchmarking.

Members noted the report and

### **Resolved to**

- i. **Note the indicators which form the Corporate Scorecard for 2012-13**
  - ii. **Note the relationship between the Corporate Scorecard and the council's Corporate Priorities and Objectives.**
- ## **6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING TO RESIDENTS**

The Corporate Performance Manager explained to members that the previous Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had set up a working group of cross party members to look at how officers and Members could engage with residents regarding the performance of the Council.

As the membership of the Committee has changed there are constitutional issues regarding whether the previous group has authority to continue this work.

After discussion the Committee

## **RESOLVED to**

- i. Note the format and purpose of the working group and**
- ii. Reconstitute the working group in consultation with group leaders providing previous members of the panel the opportunity to sit on the group if they so wish and following current political proportionality lines.**

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee was asked for any suggestions for the work programme. The following issues were raised:

- Report on Lessons Learned from management of the Housing Repairs contract –Barbara Brownlee (Member request)
- Budget – Looking at how smoothly net savings can be identified (Officer suggestion)
- Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) Corporate Scorecard quarterly basis (Member/Officer suggestion)
- Annual Report 2011-12 (Member/Officer suggestion)
- Peer Review (Member suggestion)
- Housing Task and Finish Group- Director of Housing to appear at regular intervals (Member suggestion).
- Living Wage – Council as employer Also suppliers and contractors to the Council and in the borough extent to which they pay a living wage (Member suggestion)
- Asset Management Task and Finish Group – Investment poorly performing in the current climate. Consider how assets / credit union can be used in a better way. (Member suggestion)
- Equality and Fairness in Thurrock (Look at how Islington put forward and tackled equality within that borough. Notes on implementation and how it has happened elsewhere) (Member suggestion)

## **8. COMMUNITY COUNCILS AND AREA WORKING**

The Community Development Manager presented this report with the support of the Portfolio holder for Transformation and Community, informing members that following the adoption of the Community

Engagement Strategy by Cabinet in November 2011 a key ambition is to support area working through the establishment of multi ward community councils.

She explained that Community Councils are a mechanism to support multi ward area working. Overall, community councils will provide an opportunity for residents to take part in conversations about local issues facing their area with officers and ward councillors. It will provide an opportunity for local people to get involved and influence the decisions that affect them, a platform for ward councillors to work collectively across a multi-ward area therefore taking a more strategic approach to common concerns and opportunities and a mechanism for partners to improve their direct engagement with communities.

Members broadly welcomed the report feeling it was a good idea but raised concerns around

- Communication and engagement – querying how it will attract new and more members of the community.
- How the agendas will reflect real issues in the community
- The draft terms of reference does not reflect the ambition in the recommendations. These need to be looked at again and redrafted to provide more detail
- The terms of reference need more coherence and better communication of the ideas
- It will require finance and not just used as a talking shop
- How will these Community Councils avoid bureaucracy and unnecessary costs?

It was **RESOLVED**

Subject to redrafting the terms of reference to

- i) **recommend that Cabinet adopts the Scheme of Governance for Community Councils and Agree**
- ii) **the planned implementation including public promotion of Community Councils, the involvement of Ward Councillors and the role of lead officers.**
- iii) **the proposed dates for September meetings.**

**The meeting finished at 8.52pm.**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIRMAN**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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or alternatively e-mail [mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk)**

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