

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held on 11 September 2012 at 7.00pm**

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

In attendance: Councillor L Worrall – Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Community
B. Brownlee – Director of Housing
S. Cox- Assistant Chief Executive
M. Hone – Director of Finance & Corporate Governance
G. Farrant – Chief Executive
C. White – HR Strategy and Policy Officer
R. Harris- Head of Commissioning
A. Millard – Head of Planning and Transport
D. Bull – Director of Planning and Transportation
J. Hinchliffe – Head of HR OD & Customer Strategy
C. Stephenson – Corporate Performance Manager
M. Boulter – Principal Democratic Services Officer

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March and 26 June 2012 were approved as a correct record.

10. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reminded the Committee that they had received an urgent item relating to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and this would be considered after the Living Wage item.

11. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

a) Interests

No interests were declared. Councillor Johnson did raise that he worked for Barking and Dagenham Council but it was confirmed that Item did not affect his position there.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

12. PAY: BECOMING A LIVING WAGE EMPLOYER

The report set out proposals for the Council to ensure all staff, including agency staff, were paid a local living wage. Officers stated that the living wage rate was currently set at £7.20 an hour but was due to rise in November. The additional cost of introducing this scheme in April 2013 was estimated at just under £100,000 for the first year. After the first year it was difficult to estimate the cost in subsequent years as to become an accredited living wage employer the Council would need to ensure on a phased basis that its contractors applied the wage, and because the rate was likely to increase year-on-year which at this stage was not quantifiable .

It was clarified that the agencies that worked with the council through Comensura would not have a choice of refusing to pay staff the living wage once the council adopts it, because of legal requirements to make sure their pay is equal. However, it was still to be negotiated who would bear the cost of the difference, the council or the agencies. In the costings in the report, it assumes that this will be the council initially.

The Committee discussed the wages of apprentices and officers stated that they could explore whether the currently accredited councils paid their apprentices at the living wage and if so, how many apprentices they had as a comparison. It was also stated that group working with other councils through the Living Wage Foundation could be explored..

The Committee learnt that the scheme would be implemented if it was agreed at a subsequent full council meeting. If it was agreed it was likely that in year 1, band 1 on the pay scale would disappear and any living wage employee would by default, effectively be employed at a pay point in band 2. There would be further cost implications in the future as the Council would need to adjust higher bands to maintain an appropriate differential in pay scales, but this would be considered when configuring a new pay structure as part of a wider pay review which would not be likely to impact the council's pay policy until 2014/15.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The report be noted and recommended to Council.**
- ii) The proposal to phase implementation be supported.**
- iii) The research around apprentices forms part of the final report to Council.**

13. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Committee was informed that 13,000 households claimed benefit in Thurrock. Of these 5,000 were pensionable households, the

remaining 8,000 were residents who were of employable age who either did not have a job or were in jobs with low income. The latter was estimated at around 2,500 households.

The Council needed to implement a new benefit scheme to accommodate a central government reduction in its grant to the council, which for Thurrock was estimated at around £1.5 million. The Secretary of State needed to sign off the Council support scheme by January 2013 or a central government default scheme would be introduced.

Officers set out some of the main issues of the proposed scheme, which included not changing the benefits received by the pensionable or vulnerable households. The Council was also required to incentivise work and so it proposed to set a higher income threshold to encourage residents to seek employment and not to be unfairly penalised if that job reaped a low income. The Council also needed to consider whether to accept child benefit and other benefits as an income.

A task and finish group was scrutinising the issue and the portfolio holder and officers had started a series of roadshows to inform the public. In response to a question officers stated that residents who attended the roadshows had not as yet given a strong indication of their views, although officers expected this to come forward when more concrete proposals were in place.

It was clarified that the Police and Fire Authorities were consulted on the scheme because any reduction in collection rates from a new scheme would affect their income as they took a percentage of council tax for their services.

The Committee felt that all councillors needed to be more informed about the proposed scheme as they would be voting on a significant policy that would affect thousands of people. Officers agreed to contact group leaders and offer a presentation at respective group meetings, or a possible member briefing.

It was also clarified that the Council had already sent letters to 13,500 residents informing them of the proposals, which had created 398 responses.

RESOLVED: That:

- I) **The report be noted.**
- II) **Officers seek to inform all Members of the Council of the scheme through a member briefing or group presentations.**

14. ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12

The Annual report represented the totality of the Council's performance data. Members were given an updated report and it was highlighted that the data tables in the previous version had been taken out to

simplify the document. The data tables would still be available as a background document on the website. The report itself would be publicised on the homepage of the council website and would be presented as a 'hot book', which allowed users to interact with the document and explore specific areas, rather than as a PDF.

The headlines of the report were that 66% of indicators had met target with 68% improving or maintaining performance.

The Committee congratulated the portfolio holders and officers in delivering some commendable performance, notably in education, landfill and homelessness prevention.

Officers noted Member comments that dates should be added to the report to give residents an idea of when projects such as the London Gateway port would be open and working.

RESOLVED That:

- i) The Committee note the level of performance achieved in respect of both priority and non priority performance indicators for 2011/12**
- ii) The Committee acknowledge and commend service staff where the performance outturn has met or exceeded target**
- iii) The report be circulated to the Chairs of the other overview and scrutiny committees.**

15. CORPORATE SCORECARD PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 1, MONTH 3

64% of indicators met their target. 69% of indicators had exceeded or maintained their performance from last year.

With regards to fixed term exclusions in primary and secondary schools officers explained that this was a particular issue in the early part of last school term and was the result of three particular schools that had caused a spike in exclusions. The situation had improved. It was confirmed that academies were included in the statistics and all schools worked closely with the council to resolve exclusion cases.

Officers highlighted that sickness absence had continued to improve and there was an estimated £100,000 saving. The Council continued to focus on reducing stress related illness and the occupational health service had been reconfigured to speed up referrals. The Committee commended managers and Human Resources for improving this performance and recognised that significant improvements had also been made in reducing sickness absence in the waste team.

The Director of Housing took the Committee through the change in target for the number of vulnerable households living in decent homes in the private sector. It was explained that a national survey was carried out every ten years on housing stock to assess their decency. The recent survey had showed that the data the Council had been working on to decide what homes were decent was significantly out of date. As a result, the target for this indicator had been revised so as to be more realistic.

Officers stated that they did not undertake surveys as it was too costly and time consuming. However, the Council promoted the accredited landlord scheme which required the council to inspect any potential housing and agree it was decent. It was added that there was no difference in the standard of decency between private and council housing.

In response to a question, officers stated there was not a similar performance indicator related to housing associations, although it was something that could be developed.

It was explained to the committee that the number of indicators brought with each report would vary from quarter to quarter depending on when the indicator was measured. Some were annual for instance and would only appear once every year.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The Committee acknowledge and commend services where there is good delivery against priorities.**
- ii) The comments and discussion made by the committee in regard to specific indicators be noted by officers.**
- iii) The rationale and change in target for vulnerable households in decent homes (private sector) be noted.**
- iv) The report be circulated to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee chairs.**
- v) A briefing note on the fixed term exclusions indicator be circulated to the committee members.**

16. SHARED GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BARKING AND DAGENHAM (LBB)

The Chief Executive introduced the report stating that it set out the terms of reference for progressing the shared services of the two councils. Learning from the partnership between Kensington and

Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham Councils, it was important for Thurrock and LBBD to agree governance arrangements as the first step.

The shared services agreement would be an open process and the top three tiers of senior management of both councils had met to discuss whether all or some services could be shared. Senior officers had been tasked with producing headline business cases to demonstrate how each service could be shared between the councils. Following this there would be development of outline business cases and subsequent full business cases for shared services. Officers had been given the option to outline where services could not be shared but as yet, all officers had seen potential in some form of shared service.

The Committee discussed appointments and the Chief Executive confirmed he had been formally interviewed and appointed by LBBD and that the new Head of Legal Services had been appointed by a joint panel of Members. It was stressed that each Council had independently come to a decision to appoint a new head of legal and similarly, the resignation of the previous chief executive at LBBD had meant they had made an independent decision to employ a new chief executive.

With this in mind, officers stated that each Council would make its appointment decisions separately but where they met, shared appointments could be made. It was highlighted that if one of the councils decided it no longer required a particular shared officer, that officer would revert to his or her substantive role in the Council that they held a contract with. For shared officers who had no previous employment links to either council a system would need to be agreed.

The issue of London weighting was discussed and Members learnt that shared appointments would be evaluated on the amount of work they did rather than their location. This meant that salaries would be adjusted in accordance with the role and extra responsibilities rather than the time spent in LBBD or Thurrock.

The Committee was informed that the performance and efficiency of the partnership was set to be realised in five years, although this could be lengthened or shortened if requested by Members.

A brief discussion took place on the Housing repairs contract and it was stated that LBBD was soon to bring that service back in house. It was added that two other partners with the councils, Serco and Elevator, were also working together to see how they could provide a shared service.

Following a question Members were informed that they would be involved in the sharing of services through Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny as well as the governance group consisting of the three group

leaders. Performance data to assess the partnership would also need to be developed.

In conclusion officers confirmed that LBBB was paying 50% of the cost of shared officers as it had a similar population to Thurrock and it would not, by virtue of being a London borough, be paying more.

The Chair requested that the word 'will' in point six of the terms of reference be changed to 'may'.

RESOLVED that the terms of reference for exploring shared services with the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham be noted as set out in the report

17. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that an update on the task and finish group relating to the Council Tax Support Scheme return to Committee in November.

The meeting finished at 8.17 pm.

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**