

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Yash Gupta (MBE) (Chair), Shane Hebb (Vice-Chair) and Robert Ray

Apologies: Councillors Charlie Key

In attendance: Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive
Sarah Welton, Performance Officer
Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance
Roger Harris, Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning
Ian Rydings, Head of Asset Management
Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services
Natalie Warren, Community Development and Equalities Manager
Matthew Essex, Head of Regeneration
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

15. Minutes

The Minutes of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 11 December 2014, were approved as a correct record.

16. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Gupta declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 6 by virtue that he worked with seven voluntary sector organisations that would be affected by the budget proposals.

17. Mid-year Progress and Performance Report 2014-15

The Committee was informed that 84% of indicators were currently meeting their targets or close to them. This was very encouraging considering the current austerity measures. It was added that although many of the Children's Services indicators were red, they had actually set very high standards which, in turn, had improved performance and Thurrock had received a letter from the Minister of State to commend their work. Furthermore, the Council was outperforming Essex and Southend. For the future the service would continue to stretch targets to hopefully compete with some of the best performing services in the country.

Councillor Hebb felt that the Council could not use austerity measures and savings proposals as a constant excuse for any poor performance and noted that 52% of indicators were still in the red or at amber. Officers assured the Committee that this report only reflected mid-year progress and there were still some months to go for targets to be achieved.

The Committee agreed that a regular report on those indicators constantly in the red would be worth receiving and inviting relevant officers to attend to discuss them.

The Chair felt that performance had improved under challenging conditions and commended officers for their work.

RESOLVED that:

1. **The performance at this mid stage in the year be noted.**
2. **A monthly report of red indicators be sent to Members every month.**

18. Update on Progress against Recommendations into the impact of savings on the Voluntary Sector

A response from CVS regarding joint services was provided at the meeting for Members to read. The Committee asked a number of questions and through the debate it was confirmed or clarified that:

- Any options regarding the outsourcing of service to the voluntary sector would be considered in this current budget round if they were viable and had managed to be considered in time by the Joint Strategic Forum.
- Decisions on giving section 106 money to the voluntary sector went through the Growth Board, which was chaired by the Chief Executive. Therefore, there was no need for a separate executive decision to use these funds in this way.
- Thurrock Giving Initiative was a proposal associated with the introduction of a Fairness Commission whereby donations to community, voluntary and charity organisations could be consolidated and pooled to provide a better impact.
- The Joint Strategic Forum had Member representation, namely Councillors Speight and Roast as the relevant portfolio holders.

RESOLVED: That the above comments be noted by officers and the report is noted.

19. Thameside Complex - Options Appraisal and Savings Target Response

Members learnt that the future of the Thameside Centre was being considered through a two phased approach. Phase one would collect data on the use, cost and any other important information about the building and the

services provided from it. Phase two would then develop proposals for the future of those services based on the information from phase one. The first phase was due at cabinet in February and the second phase was due for completion by late summer.

The Committee felt a task and finish group with representation from all political parties would be useful to the council when developing stage 2. It was agreed that a terms of reference needed to be drafted and considered before a group was finally agreed.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The Committee acknowledges the work already underway and the above comments be noted by officers.**
- 2. A draft terms of reference be brought back to the committee for further consideration.**

20. Asset Management

The Committee discussed a number of issues arising from the report and it was explained that minor but essential IT updates were still needed for the Culver Centre because there was still a service running out of the premises (the Pupil Referral Unit). This service could not be moved until they had new premises and in the interim their IT needed to be updated. In relation to the Graham James site it was explained that the North East London Foundation Trust (NEFLT) were in the process of buying the site and working to improve the health offer for residents in that area.

The term 'nil consideration' was discussed and Members learnt that the Council could give away land for no financial payment but for returned benefits in other ways. For example, the Council could give land to a company for free or at a discounted cost on the basis that they would be employing a large number of local residents. Some Members were concerned at this and felt that all land and buildings were financially valuable. Officers agreed and stated that they would never enter a 'nil consideration' agreement lightly.

Following a request from a Member officers confirmed they would ask the Asset Management working group to check the protocols around disposal again and make sure they agreed with them. It was highlighted that the protocol had already been through the group and had gained support from Cabinet. Any money created from disposals could only be used for other capital projects or to pay off debt. It could not be used to fund other services.

The Committee briefly discussed a proposal to give communities the responsibility for running and maintaining village halls and likewise, with Impulse Leisure, but officers stated this was at a very early stage and no decisions had been taken.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

21. Work Programme

A brief discussion was had on the budget setting process for this year.

RESOLVED: That the work programme is noted.

The meeting finished at 8.01 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**