

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 September 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Leslie Gamester (Vice-Chair), Jack Duffin, Martin Kerin and Ben Maney

Apologies: Councillors Tunde Ojetola

In attendance: Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Matthew Boulter, Deputy Monitoring Officer
John Knight, Assistant Director of Housing
Julie Rogers, Assistant Director of Environment
Sarah Welton, Strategy & Performance Officer
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior 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.

8. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 29 June 2017 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- The additional items listed in the agreed recommendations on page 12 be included within the Work Programme;
- The following sentence "Councillor Maney echoed his thoughts that sending the report to Full Council was unjust." Be reworded to:

Councillor Maney echoed his thoughts that sending the report to Full Council was unnecessary.

9. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business

10. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

11. Quarter 1 Corporate Performance Report 2017/18

The Strategy & Performance Officer introduced the report which provided a progress update in relation to the performance of Key Performance Indicators (KPI), including a focus on some of the specific highlights and challenges. Members were advised that senior Officers were in attendance for any questions within particular directorates.

The Chair enquired as to the in focus item of street cleanliness and whether the reason the KPI was in focus was due to the change in methodology. Officers explained throughout the year the whole borough was inspected in tranches of three wards at a time. This year was the first year Keep Britain Tidy had undertaken the inspection, on behalf of the council. It was commented that a key difference was council officers had local knowledge when completing the tranches, and so knew when land was publicly or privately owned. Keep Britain Tidy did not necessarily realise which pieces of land are privately owned and therefore may score slightly higher.

It was sought as whether the change in direction of travel would be visible before next year. Officers commented that the direction of travel should be visible after each tranche visit. It was further commented that officers were hopeful the KPI would remain stable.

Members remarked the KPI for household waste which was refuse, recycled or composted was disappointing, especially following feedback from residents. The Assistant Director for Environment advised Members the impact of the new route optimisation had been successful. She continued by commenting the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be discussing any issues at their next meeting.

The Committee was advised it only required one household in a street to contaminate a whole recycling collection as when arriving at the refuse centre the waste would be refused. The Assistant Director for Environment further commented a lot of work was being done with the Communication Team to encourage residents to recycle more. Councillor Gerrish remarked he felt it would be helpful for residents if the reason, should their waste not be collected, were explained to them. Officers explained to Members if they knew of any bin collections which had not been collected to email the Assistant Director for Environment as officers were willing to make site visits and speak to residents.

Councillor Kerin congratulated Officers and Schools on the KPI on the percentage of schools being judged 'good' or 'better; with 37 out of 38 of Thurrock's schools being judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Councillor Duffin mentioned a graffiti case, where the resident reported the incident via the Report It app, only for it to be closed without any work to clean the graffiti being completed. The Assistant Director for Environment commented with the case in question there was confusion with the address, so the report was closed following an inspection of a different location.

It was raised by Councillor Maney whether a recycled rate per ward was available. Officers advised it was difficult to compile a Ward by Ward breakdown however they were able to provide a day by day detailed result including recyclable and garden waste.

Discussing refuse waste collections, it was remarked that missed collections in Aveley appeared to be increasing. The Assistant Director for Environment advised officers were looking into missed collections with the possibility of sweep collections being completed.

During discussions the Director of HR, OD & Transformation advised there was a comprehensive action plan for sickness management. She commented that the direction of travel over the last year was slightly below that of the last 12 months.

The Committee was further advised that just over one thousand members of staff, which was under 50%, had no sickness absence at all. For longer term sickness, which was over 20 days, there were 168 incidences for the last financial year which was under 8%.

Councillor Gerrish observed the high number of service charges for council tenants and asked whether it would have a positive or negative impact on satisfaction. The Assistant Director of Housing commented that other plans to improve with different projects within Social Housing and with the Council's contractor Mears were currently ongoing.

He continued to advise that although some of the changes being made were reasonably small changes, they could affect satisfaction scores from residents. The Assistant Director of Housing advised members that anti-social behaviour also affected satisfaction and this was something that officers were working on, including how to collect such data.

The Chair raised a question in relation to the overspend of the General Fund in that was there a plan to mitigate the situation. The Director of Finance & IT commented officers were working alongside Portfolio Holders and wider Directors Board.

He continued to state at this time of the year officers were looking at the pressures and any built in savings. Members were advised Officers were not looking at areas to affect front line services, however this was also not a guarantee.

The Director of Finance & IT commented that there had been improvement within the treasury position. It was mentioned that the Annual Election budget had been used as a built in saving, since there was no election this year. He further observed in his opinion of definition of forecast the councils position at end of year would be break even, however officers had shown what would happen if the council didn't take mitigating action.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To note and comment upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators in particular those areas which are IN FOCUS, and;**
- 2. To identify any areas which require additional consideration.**

12. Call-in to Cabinet Decision 01104421 Communication Strategy

The Chair of the Committee introduced the report to Members stating that at the last meeting Members had decided to refer the Call-In to Full Council, however following advice from the Monitoring Officer which was detailed within the report this was not completely possible.

He continued to highlight within the report the Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service had proposed a number of changes in that sections 3.23 and 3.25 of the covering report, which were also included within the Communication Strategy, be removed and replaced with the wording outlined within the report at 3.2 to 3.4.

Councillor Gerrish mentioned that he felt the amendments addressed the concerns raised by the Committee at the previous meeting. He advised Members that they were not to re-discuss the Call-In but to move the report forward. Councillor Gerrish then stated he thought the report should be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

Councillor Duffin remarked that he was still not happy with the amendments noted within the report, as he had seen press releases from the Communication Team which did not follow the strategy.

Councillor Kerin commented he was sympathetic to Councillor Duffin's comments, however following the advice from the Monitoring Officer, he felt the report should be referred back to Cabinet.

Councillor Maney stated the situation was embarrassing. He continued to comment that he remained of the thought that the report should be referred back to Cabinet and for them to take into consideration the Committee's concerns.

The Chair then proceeded to take a vote on referring the Call-In back to Cabinet for reconsideration:

Favour: Councillors Gerrish, Gamester, Kerin and Maney (4)

Against: Councillor Duffin (1)

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the procedural advice received from the Monitoring Officer at paragraphs 4 of the report.**
- 2. That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the potential revised wording of the relevant section of the Communications Strategy 2017-2020.**
- 3. That the Committee can, following the legal and procedural advice from the Monitoring Officer, either, refer the recommendation (decision: 01104421 Communication Strategy) to Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns.**

13. Establishment of a Task and Finish Group in relation to Public Participation at Council Meetings

As Chair of the Committee, Councillor Gerrish presented the report to Members commenting he felt there was high scope for Members of the Public to be more involved in the meetings held by the Council. He stated he thought this was a good opportunity to improve public participation at Council meetings.

The Chair further commented that he would like to see the Task and Finish Group investigate early notice of agendas. Councillor Kerin agreed that he would like to see an increase in public participation at meetings.

During discussions, Councillor Duffin suggested that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor be included within the membership of the Task and Finish Group. He mentioned that, as they chair Full Council meetings, he felt it was important they sit on the Group.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed the Committee the Task and Finish Group could invite the current Mayor and Deputy Mayor along with any past mayor still serving as a councillor to a question and answer sessions. Completing this would enable Members to receive advice from the people who chair Full Council meetings. It was explained that the Membership of the Task and Finish Group would be sought by Democratic Services emailing Group Leaders for their nominations. The Membership would have to be appointed in accordance with political proportionality.

It was enquired as to the potential timeframe of the Task and Finish Group and whether it was possible to speed up the process. It was stated by Officers that if a Task and Finish Group took 6 to 12 months then it would be taking too long. Members were advised, depending on the topic, a Task and Finish Group should take around 3 months.

Officers further explained the process of setting up a Task and Finish Group. Once agreed by the Parent Committee the clerk would seek nominations from Group Leaders and once confirmed the first meeting could be scheduled. It would be at the first meeting that Members could decide as to what research

or site visits they may wish to undertake. Members were advised throughout the whole process the Group would have continuous support from Democratic Services.

Members were notified that there were some actions that could be completed sooner, such as agenda items published on the forward plan. Officers were looking into whether that information was accessible enough to residents.

It was explained that Officers, including the Monitoring Officer, had met with Members of the public and Group Leaders to discuss the concerns held by the public when speaking at Council Meetings.

Councillor Maney enquired if the Task and Finish Group was a Sub-Committee of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was explained this was not the case, as the Task and Finish Group would have any three Elected Members not only Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

During discussions it was raised as to whether it would be better to call a meeting of the Constitution Working Group to complete the review into Public Participation as they were able to report directly to Full Council. It was explained that Overview and Scrutiny Committees could make recommendations to the relevant Executive committee; either General Services, Cabinet or Council. Officers advised that the Constitution Working Group was an ad-hoc committee in that one was organised as and when it was required.

Members observed the comments on the speed of the work to be undertaken; remarking that, if possible, the relevant group should aim to have the review completed within the next few months. It was mentioned that Committees and reviews took time. The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that following the last meeting of Full Council, the General Services Committee had met and decided the natural route was to ask the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee to investigate.

It was commented Members of the Committee felt the suggested process of setting up a Task and Finish Group was a long and drawn out process, when there was a Group which could be set up and were able to report directly to Full Council.

The Chair sought confirmation from the Deputy Monitoring Officer that the Committee were able to call on the Constitution Working Group. It was advised that Members could do so, dependant on the agreement of Group Leaders.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to call on the Constitution Working Group to investigate into Public**

Participation at Council Meetings should this not be constitutionally allowed to:

- **Establish a Task and Finish Group into Public Participation at Council Meetings**

2. That the terms of reference (attached as appendix 1) be adopted for the Constitution Working Group or the Task and Finish Group.

14. Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme 2017/2018

Members discussed the Work Programme for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the following items to be included on the Work Programme:

- **Update on the Communications Team and their decision making processes**
- **Key Performance updates throughout the municipal year**
- **Update on internal and external apprenticeships**

The meeting finished at 8.13pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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