

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 November 2018 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester and Andrew Jefferies
- Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman and Mike Fletcher
- In attendance:** Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Detlev Munster, Assistant Director - Property & Development
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer
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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.

17. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 September 2018 were approved as a correct record.

18. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

19. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

20. Long Term Investment Strategy

The Director of Finance and IT presented the report and explained that this was a brief update on the council's investment strategy, but could not be too detailed as many investments were commercially sensitive. He went on to say that investments had always taken place within the council and was a daily process for officers. He described that the council had built in delegations to be able to invest, and the investment strategy went to Full Council once per year to re-evaluate the strategy. The Director then drew Member's attention to Section 5 of the report which outlined the Council Spend Review that had taken place in October 2017 and the fact that the council continued to save money and increase income through investing. He stated that the finance

department consider a range of investments, and how some may be simple, for example through credit or reference checks, but that other investments could be more detailed. He added that as the council had a balanced budget for the next four years, services could be enhanced or new services could be procured, and gave the example of new police officers now working in Thurrock. He summarised and stated that the current investments were short or medium term, but this had bought the council time to consider their approach to investments, and were now considering 10-40 year deals which were at due diligence stage, as well as other property investments.

The Chair began discussions by stating there was lots of unanimity across the council in support of investments, which reduced the need for spending cuts. He questioned how many of the current investments were time limited, for example 5 year deals at £10 million, what would happen once they ended, and if new longer term investments would cover this timeline. The Director of Finance and IT stated that he felt confident new investments could cover the timeline, and directed Members attention to 6.3 of the report and used the example of the Swindon Solar Farm, which although was only a 5 year deal, would be standing for 25 years and as such the contract was renewable. He added that the finance team were looking at existing investments and if there was a possibility for their renewal.

The Chair then questioned the types of investments the council were making, and if these were a balanced portfolio which supported the council's core purpose. The Director of Finance and IT once again drew Members attention to the example of the Swindon Solar Farm and how this combated fuel poverty and created partnerships which opened other opportunities. The Chair asked a follow up question regarding how the council were mitigating risks when investing, to which the Director of Finance and IT answered that all investments were asset backed. He pointed out 4.3 in the report and stated that the council often sought advice from UK and global experts that considered due diligence on the council's behalf. He stated that they looked at the entire investment for example, its security, longevity and performance. He added that the finance team also monitor investments, which optimized outputs and considered the effect of changing interest rates. The Chair asked if the finance team was the right size and shape, or if specialists should be bought in-house. The Director of Finance and IT answered that no in-house specialism was needed as he felt outside bodies did the work well. He added that when Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) began to develop, further support would be given to the team.

Councillor Duffin then questioned, that although he understood the deals were confidential, if the council were aspirational and asked how much the investments were worth. The Director of Finance and IT replied that although investments were currently not aspirational, the Treasury Report coming to December Cabinet would set out the levels of investment. He added that the Medium Term Financial Strategy Report would show targets and returns, and the Treasury Management Report would be coming to the Corporate O&S Committee in January. Councillor Duffin then asked if anything had been holding investments back, for example politics or time, as he felt the council

needed to move forward with investing. The Director of Finance and IT answered that politics was not holding investments back, but that they take time as the council could not rush into them, and it could prove difficult to find new ones and develop existing ones. Councillor Duffin then drew attention to 3.4 of the report, and asked if the figure of 1000 homes could be up-scaled. The Corporate Director Place replied that shareholder meetings between TRL and the council were happening regularly, and stated 1 development was already on-site, 4 were in the planning stages, and 20 were in the pipeline, which totalled 2000 homes depending on feasibility. He added that following a review of the council's assets, there was scope beyond 1000 homes in 5 years.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The Committee considered the report and commented on the contents.

21. Mid-Year/Quarter 2 Corporate Performance Report 2018/19

The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services opened the report and described how this was the mid-year performance report which covered the previous six months. She highlighted that although the report stated 70% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been hit, this figure had now increased to 71% as new data regarding the number of delayed transfers of care on page 22 had been released. She also highlighted the number of volunteers within the council and new apprenticeships had increased, which she felt was very positive. She also explained that where some KPIs had not met their targets, commentary was provided within the report.

The Chair opened the debate by stating that he felt it was very good to see an increase in the number of volunteers, particularly as this was such a large increase, and felt this was a testament to officers who engaged with volunteers. He asked how the council had managed to encourage volunteers and how the momentum could be continued. The Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health replied that volunteers were always wanted within the council, but this rise was due to an increase in co-ordination between different departments, for example receiving volunteers applications and then undergoing reference checks. He congratulated Natalie Warren, Mykela Pratt and the recruitment team on their hard work on this matter. He added that there was always a high turnover of volunteers as they found paying jobs, or moved on.

Page 23 of the agenda was the next point of discussion for the Chair as he stated that the percentage of timeliness of response to complaints had seen some progress, but he felt was still adrift of target. He asked how the target could be met to get the KPI back to green. The Director of HR, OD and Transformation replied that this KPI was now being reported back to Directors Board on a monthly basis, and was closely monitored through leadership group. She mentioned that a common complaint was because bins were

being missed for collection; work with the crews had improved this position and this should reflect a reduction in the number of complaints. The Chair then discussed the percentage of refuse bins emptied on the correct day and how this seemed to be falling behind every quarter. For example, it had fallen behind because of snow and then industrial action, and asked if the team had looked at the underlying causes for the missed KPI, as this was now the third quarter targets had been missed. The Director for Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that a detailed action plan was in place, which included the training of drivers, increased flexibility, solving access issues, and using shunter drivers during peak hours. She explained that the service was now starting to see an impact due to this detailed action plan, and the figure for October was 99.6% of refuse bins being collected on the correct day, which was the highest performance this year. The Chair welcomed this news and hoped this figure could be maintained now the colder weather was approaching.

Councillor Duffin stated that although the percentage of housing repairs completed was within target, he felt that some work completed was not done to an acceptable standard, and asked if one staff member should be allocated to check all repairs. The Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health replied that the council had a quality assurance team which checked 15% of all repairs completed, and he worked closely with the Tenants Excellence Panel and wanted to get more up and running. He added that a meeting occurred with contractors and other groups on a monthly basis to deal with issues. Councillor Duffin then discussed the percentage of tenant's satisfaction, but felt it was good to see the actions being taken on page 24, and hoped this would move the KPI in the right direction. The Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health replied that more detailed KPIs regarding this was brought to the Housing O&S Committee twice a year, and a deep dive had been commissioned regarding concerns over repairs done by contractors. He added that although there had been a slight improvement in the KPI, it was still below the 70% target, but if the 'fair' result had been included, the KPI would have been over 90%.

Councillor Duffin then congratulated the team on the number of apprenticeships, and hoped they could be turned into full staff members in the future. The Chair echoed his sentiments and stated that he felt this was very encouraging. Councillor Jefferies added that it was good to see the high number of apprenticeships, and asked if another Apprentice Recruitment Day would be held after the success of the previous one in July. The Director of HR, OD and Transformation replied that another Apprentice Recruitment Day would be held, and this formed part of the apprentice strategy.

The Chair commented on the missed KPI of the percentage of 'good' or 'outstanding' schools, and understood this was partly due to Herringham Primary falling from 'good' to 'needs improvement'. He asked what was being done to support schools in the borough. The Corporate Director Children's Services added that council's had a reduced role in academies such as Herringham, but were introducing a new School Effectiveness Framework, and were having annual conversations with academies regarding their

performance. He added that the team were now identifying 'vulnerable' schools which were at risk of falling into the 'needs improvement' category, before they were rated by Ofsted. He commented that the council were becoming less reactive to problems regarding schools, and more proactive in helping potentially 'vulnerable' schools. The Chair then questioned how many schools the council had identified as 'vulnerable' and if the council were getting to schools quickly enough to stop their Ofsted rating dropping. The Corporate Director Children's Services replied that this had proven to be an effective method so far as schools were reacting positively to the advice being given to them.

The rate of sickness absence was the next item for discussion, and the Chair commented that this was the same missed target as the previous year. He commented that he knew this was a challenging target, but asked how close it would be to green by the end of the year. The Director of HR, OD and Transformation replied that the current indications were that the outcome would be similar to last year. Following a report to Directors Board, a more robust approach was now being pursued with additional resources being recruited to monitor manager compliance to ensure standards are applied, absences appropriately managed and staff supported to return as soon as possible.

The Chair finally drew the Committee's attention to page 23 of the agenda and the percentage of household waste being recycled, and the difference in target between quarter 1 and quarter 2. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that targets are seasonal as during the summer months there is lots of brown garden waste, compared to the winter months. The Chair then asked if this seasonal profiling could be used for the percentage of NEET KPIs, as there was work to do around this figure.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The Committee noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which are off target.

2. The Committee identified any areas which require additional consideration.

22. Grays South Regeneration Project: Civic Offices Update

The Assistant Director Property and Development began by describing the Grays South Master Plan which included high quality places to live and visit. He described that work on this project would include repurposing the Thameside complex; and a new underpass for the railway line; increased housing near the town centre; a new Grays Shopping Centre; and the new Civic Offices building. He explained that the new Civic Offices building was critical as it set the tone for development and opened up governance

processes, as well as promoting resident self-service and releasing land for housing. He added that in 2017, Cabinet had agreed for the proposal to go to the design stage, and the council had procured a consultancy team to do this. He mentioned that the hope was for the new plans to be submitted for planning in spring 2019 and would include consultation with South Essex College and St Peter and St Paul's Church among others. He felt this was an elegant building and would be a bold civic presence in the high street.

The Assistant Director Property and Development then talked through the designs starting with Page 40 of the agenda and the foyer of the new building, which would be a large, adaptable space primarily used as a reception and customer services areas, but could also be used as a venue to hold meetings, display museum exhibits, or launch activities. He added that a homeless waiting area would be separate from the foyer to maintain people's dignity and give some privacy. A café was also included in the designs which would be for use by residents, visitors and members of the public. A registry office was also being included, as this would move registry services from the Thameside complex, to open it up for cultural development. He then described the plans on Page 41 and the separation between Members and the public, as Members would have their own entrance. In addition, the Council Chamber was laid out so everybody could see the Mayor, and the public would feel as if they were part of proceedings. He added that there would be views of the church, and could be used after hours for use by the public as it was a very large venue. He then mentioned that Committee Room 1 could also be used for weddings or other ceremonies, and this could bring in extra revenue for the council.

The Assistant Director Property and Development then discussed the plans on Page 42 and how the Mayors Parlour would hold a sense of gravitas as the balcony would have views over the river, Grays town centre and the Church. Additionally, Members would be able to look into the Council Chamber from the second floor to give a sense of open democracy. He described how the Council Chamber would frame the Church, and provide a link to the heritage of Grays, as well as having views of the river and the square below. He described how the windows would be glazed so at night people can see in to give a sense of open democracy, and bring life to the street as residents could see people working, bringing activity to Grays particularly during winter time. He felt that the new designs were modern, open and airy, but could be used for other functions too. The Assistant Director Property and Development then turned the Committees attention to Page 47 and other precedents set, and how the final façade could look, for example the vertical emphasis and use of brickwork to link to Grays' heritage through the use of materials and textures. He then talked Members through the emerging model on Page 49 and the bold statement the Civic Offices would make for people exiting the train station, as well as the new railway underpass modelled. He summarised by stating the Committee was asked to comment on cost options in Table A.

The Chair opened discussions by stating that the Committee was not decision making on this item, but simply understanding the plans and passing

comments on to Cabinet to make the decision. He asked what the project would look like moving forward and what timelines were in place. The Assistant Director Property and Development replied that the report, including Committee comments, would be going to Cabinet in December, before entering into Non-Statutory Public Consultation in January. It would then go through the planning application process in Spring 2019, before awarding the design and building contract in Summer 2019, with the hope to be on-site at the end of Summer, with construction work lasting approximately 2 years.

The Chair then outlined the costs in Table B, and stated that he felt this was a point of principle as it was a decision of where to invest resources, and asked where the capital could be invested if not for this project. The Assistant Director Property and Development answered that this scheme increased opportunity as it unlocked potential for residential housing in CO1 and unlocked development at Thameside. He added that the funds had already been committed for this scheme, and had received previous approval at Full Council. He commented that the money invested in this would enhance the community and the reason for the additional capital was because of issues that arose at the detailed design stage, for example the slope of 2.6metres between the ground floor of CO2 and the new building. The Director for Finance and IT added that no other projects had been refused because of this project, and the total number of bids would be agreed this year and come back to the Corporate O&S Committee in January.

The Chair then considered the move of registry services from Thameside to the Civic Offices and how this move would open opportunity. The Assistant Director Property and Development answered that the registry services currently use a very large space in the Thameside Centre, and if the service was moved, Thameside could be used as a cultural hub with multi-use facilities. It would also increase effectiveness and efficiency, and increase revenue into the council.

Councillor Gerrish asked if the full business case had been considered as the perception and reality of this project may be different. He felt that as the council could not deliver all the services that residents wished for, but could regenerate the Civic Offices, it may not send the best message to inhabitants in the borough. Councillor Duffin expanded on this point that £205,000 was being spent on what was described in the report as a grand entrance, and residents may see this and the increase in their council tax and feel they are not getting value for money. He felt that the Civic Offices regeneration may not matter to residents and asked if this was a priority for the council. The Assistant Director Property and Development replied that the entrance would be simple and bold, and that the offices would be designed for residents to utilise as a community asset. He wanted residents to be proud of the new offices, and as a seat for democracy in the borough. He felt that the visitor experience was important, not just for trade but as a space for residents that could enhance the transactional nature of the building. He mentioned that the team was considering the foyer area being open 24 hours as a study space for students or as a place for people to work, and used the example of the Barbican centre which was regularly used by residents as well as visitors. The

Director of Finance and IT outlined to Members that this was a capital project, and was not due to the increase in council tax.

Councillor Duffin added that some residents only interaction with the council was paying their council tax and many people do not engage with the Civic Offices building as transactions are completed over the phone or online. He felt that many residents would not use the new building, and although 24 hours opening was a good idea, public transport did not run 24 hours to match this. The Assistant Director Property and Development replied that there had been a positive channel shift to online and phone interactions with residents, but the space created would be multi-use which people could utilise in different ways.

The Chair asked how people would be encouraged to move south bound over the railway line, as there were currently businesses situated on the corner which enticed people. The Assistant Director Property and Development described the anchor tenant model and how people would move between them. For example, the Thameside Complex would be the cultural anchor tenant at the north end of the High Street; the State, the Shopping Centre and Morrisons would be anchor tenants in the middle of the High Street; and the new Civic Offices and the college would be the civic anchor tenant at the south bound end. He mentioned that the new underpass would also be more conducive to movement over the railway. He continued and stated that as activities and events would be taking place within the Civic Offices it would become a place to go and would create draw. In addition, talks were currently underway with the Thames Clipper to introduce a river bus stop in Grays, although this was in the very early stages, but this could draw people through to the river.

The Chair asked if the CO1 site would also have capability for communal areas or events. He also felt that as the new building would primarily be for administration work, although it would be busy during the week, it would become quieter outside of working hours. The Assistant Director Property and Development replied that the CO1 site would be for residential use only. He stated that the multi-use committee rooms in the new building it would also be busy outside of working hours, and would generate revenue. He added that as CO1 was for residential use it would increase footfall through the town, would support local businesses, and enhance the vibrancy of Grays. The Chair asked if discussions had taken place with the current occupiers, which would be displaced because of the new building. The Assistant Director Property and Development replied that the council needed to keep its commercial integrity so were following processes set out by external advisers. He explained that the council had engaged with the freeholders of the area and discussions were ongoing, and that leaseholders would be kept informed through the freeholder. He added there was a commitment to engage in more detailed discussions before the acquisition of the land.

Councillor Duffin felt that the designs looked good, but wanted to ensure this was sold positively to residents as they may only look at the headlines, rather than all the good points outlined by the Assistant Director Property and

Development. The Corporate Director Place stated that it would benefit both residents and visitors, and although they were currently only in the initial phases, during planning and consultation residents could understand in greater detail.

A discussion then began on the detail of the Council Chamber including how many seats would be available for the public; how residents would be able to speak or present petitions during meetings; and the layout of the Chamber itself. A debate began between Councillor Duffin and Councillor Jefferies over whether an adversarial style Chamber was the way forward, or if a horseshoe shape design would work better.

The Chair summarised points made during the discussion and stated the Committee felt concern over the spend of the project and wished to see the full business plans, including how it could benefit residents, services and the borough as a whole. He stated that the Committee had given detailed feedback on the design of the Council Chamber and the benefit to residents as a venue.

RESOLVED: That:

1. Commented on the cost options set out in Table A

2. Commented on the report and the Cabinet recommendations which are:

1.2.1 Note the designs for an extension to CO2 presented at Appendix A of the report

1.2.2 Agree the cost options set out in Table A at 3.4 below and agree capital of £1.8m in addition to the £380k agreed previously

1.2.3 Authorise officers to submit the following:

i. a full planning application for an extension to CO2 based on the emerging designs contained in appendix A

ii. And an outline planning application for up to 120 new residential units on the CO1 site

1.2.4 Authorise officers to begin a procurement process for the appointment of a main building contractor

23. Work Programme

The Chair suggested that an item on Customer Services Update be added to the January meeting, and an item on Councillor Spillman's Full Council Motion regarding the overview and scrutiny processes also be added to the January

meeting. Councillor Duffin asked that Councillor Spillman's Motion report also include effectiveness options to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny.

The meeting finished at 8.44 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**