

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 November 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Leslie Gamester (Vice-Chair), Ben Maney and Graham Hamilton (substitute for Jack Duffin)

Apologies: Councillors Jack Duffin and Martin Kerin

In attendance: Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Natalie Warren, Community Development and Equalities Manager
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.

15. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 19 September 2017 were approved as a correct record.

16. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

17. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

18. Quarter 2 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 Strategy & Performance Officer continued to advise the Committee overall 69% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had met their targets. It had therefore been decided by director's board that more information be provided to Members on the failing KPIs and those items which were in focus.

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers for the in depth report. He continued by stating the additional information covered a wider range and was helpful for Members. He then enquired as to the gap between the performance and the target for Focus 8, at 3.3.8 of the report and whether it was likely the department would get back on track. The Committee heard that 70% was a very stretched target and the reality was that the cohort was relatively small meaning the outcome of one or two individuals had a notable impact. The Strategy & Performance Officer understood that the service anticipated better outcomes moving forward but would seek further information for Members around more exact details.

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to Focus 9 as the direction of travel was worse. He questioned whether more should be done to ensure targets were met and what the financial implications were of failing to meet the target. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service assured Members that the matter was being taken seriously. Data for the rounds affected and challenging materials was being analysed to allow for targeted communications focusing on particular issues in particular areas. There were also particular issues at this time of year as certain types of waste reduced which impacted upon targets. The Director of Finance and IT continued to advise that figures were showing pressures around waste disposal costs and there had been significant issues with trade waste, which would be discussed at the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however, much had been done recently at the Civic Amenity Site to mitigate. The Chair suggested exploring other routes to improve recycling rates by incentivising local communities.

The Chair continued to Focus 10, with a worse direction of travel again. He asked when it was expected that the target would be met. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service confirmed that the Service was looking at specific issues and rounds, such as access problems due to resident parking which also raised concern around access for emergency vehicles. Target communications work was underway. A new fleet had also been procured. The Director of Finance and IT confirmed that Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive a report in December around route optimisation. The Chair asked if the report could be circulated to Members of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide additional background information and stressed the importance of solving the issues for residents.

Councillor Hamilton questioned whether it was fair to hold the service accountable if the issues were caused by blocked access by other vehicles, outside the control of the Council. Members heard that ultimately the collection was still missed, regardless of reason. The goal was to work with residents and communities to help them understand what they could do to facilitate the process.

He continued to ask whether there were any issues around the definitions of re-used or re-cycled. The Committee was advised that the performance indicator had been long standing and was in line with DEFRA standards.

Councillor Maney referred to Focus 3, which highlighted a dip in complaints turnaround. He expressed a personal concern regarding the complaints process and asked what had led to the dip. The Strategy & Performance Officer advised that there had been a change in internal targets which had been introduced in August 2016, which had led to some operational issues in some areas. The target had deliberately not been reduced to strive for positive outcomes. Councillor Maney highlighted that the decision had been a top-down decision and queried why the changes had been introduced with no real assessment, given the impact it was having on the service. If the target was not being met it defeated the object, in his mind. The Committee heard that the decision was assessed at the time, with input from Directors' Board. While the target was challenging it was hoped that figures should improve with time.

The Chair sought reassurance that the Council was on track regarding Capital spend. The Director of Finance and IT assured Members that Cabinet were updated quarterly on the Council's Capital position and the outturn, which provided more commentary. The Council did not currently operate full and detailed commitment accounting, so the figures showed what had been paid out, and did not recognise the value of work completed up to that quarter and therefore money the Council owed. This raised the question of what exactly the KPI provided as the Director of Finance and IT was confident that the 30% target had been met, in terms of work completed, but some invoices were still being processed and therefore did not show in the figures. The Chair echoed the questions raised around the relevance and use of the KPI and suggested reviewing its inclusion in the framework. The Committee were advised that KPIs for the 2018/19 would be reviewed in February.

RESOLVED:

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

19. Voluntary Sector Corporate Grants Programme

The Community Development and Equalities Manager presented the report explaining Thurrock's Voluntary Sector Corporate Grants Programme was an established and recognised source of funding for key, strategic voluntary sector partners supporting communities in Thurrock. Members heard the current programme was due to end on 31 March 2018.

It was highlighted that in 2016/17 the programme, totalling just over £300,000, levered in a further £1.4million into Thurrock as a result of external and match funding. Officers further explained the report considered the process for administering the grants programme from March 2018 and sought comments on the proposal to continue the agreement for Thurrock CVS to administer the

programme and maintain the existing split of funding 80% for existing groups and 20% for new groups.

The Chair of the Committee commented that the total funding was £342,425, however there was £316,080 ring fenced. The Community Development and Equalities Manager explained that funding had been reduced and was smaller than previously awarded. She continued to explain that the figure £342,425 took into account if the CAT budget was to move.

It was queried if feedback was received from organisations who received funding as to how their areas of operation might be affected. The organisations were concerned about the potential impact however they welcomed the opportunity to have set amounts for three years, which allowed for more long-term planning. This ability was also more attractive to external funders. There would be collaborative working with the sector to increase funding moving forward for new initiatives.

Councillor Gerrish raised concern should there be funding reductions to voluntary organisations and the impacts this could potentially have. Officers assured Members that discussions around funding risk were had with all voluntary organisations receiving funding. It was confirmed that should reductions in funding be required, early engagement would be taken at least 3 months before any impact would be caused. Officers assured the Committee that processes were in place for any such situation.

During discussions Councillor Maney sought to know who was monitoring the use of funding, as the organisations were not accountable to the Council. The Community Development and Equalities Manager notified members that the Council collected information from voluntary organisations seeking funding as to what the money would be used for, however it was the panel who had the overall discretion as to who funds were awarded to.

Councillor Gamester queried whether there was any monitoring in place regarding the moneys awarded in proportion to the number of service users. Agreements around funding began with requests from organisations as to their requirements, so the individual organisations were responsible for outlining their funding requirements and each business model would be very different.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Commented on the proposal to continue the administration of the Voluntary Sector Corporate Grants Programme with Thurrock CVS from April 2018 – March 2021 with the option to extend by one year if required; and**
- 2. Commented on the proposed process and criteria set out in Section 3.**

20. Local Council Tax Scheme 2018/19

The Director of Finance & IT addressed Members of the Committee notifying them the current Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme had been implemented on 1 April 2017. He continued to explain Thurrock Council had agreed its current scheme through a public consultation exercise informed by cross party Members working groups. The resulting scheme was agreed by both Cabinet and the Council.

Members heard that the proposal for 2018/19 was to continue with the current Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. Officers had considered this in light of no planned changes to Housing Benefit legislation for April 2018/19 and that the current scheme was reasonable and fit for purpose.

The Chair questioned whether there had been a review of whether more could be done for certain groups, such as care leavers and those impacted by the new Universal Credit system. Officers had worked closely with colleagues across Essex and systems were all fairly similar. At present no groups had been identified but if it became apparent that certain groups did require additional support that could be resolved moving forward. A report would be presented at Full Council regarding support for care leavers. The Chair stressed the need to look at various avenues to support care leavers as an area of investigation. The Director of Finance and IT agreed it would be useful to identify groups in need of more support.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the proposal that there are no changes to the Local Council Tax Scheme for 2018/19.**

21. Council Spending Review (CSR) - 2018/19 Budget Setting Update

The Committee heard that the report summarised the main changes to the MTFs for the period 2018/19 through to 2020/21 and the proposals being considered to close the current budget gap.

The Director of Finance & IT explained where growth and cross cutting proposals had provisionally been allocated to services, these had been outlined out in Appendix 3 so as to inform Members of overall changes to Directorate budgets.

The Chair highlighted how useful the information was to Members, for them to understand the scale of the challenges faced by the Council and what could be done to address them. He felt that the investment approach was correct and would continue to support the approach. The Chair queried why figures showed such a large increase in Prudential Borrowing and Treasury Management. The Director of Finance and IT advised this budget held the Council's interest costs. Prudential borrowing funded large aspects of the Capital Programme, such as the procurement of a new waste management

fleet. The council equivalent of depreciation also needed to be included. The impact of capital expenditure, especially those schemes with high expenditure and short-term life, always impacted the following year.

The Chair suggested greater break down of information would be helpful in future. He continued to highlight the demographic and economic pressures and stressed it was imperative to keep increasing costs under control, despite the challenges within services. The Director of Finance and IT noted that the information had been summarised and he would take the suggestion on board.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Note the revised MTFS position; and**
- 2. Commented on the proposals currently being considered to close the budget gap.**

22. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Members discussed the Work Programme for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

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

- Update on the CWG set up at the September meeting – March 2018**
- Q3 Performance Report – March 2018**
- Civic Offices Business Plan – March 2018**

The meeting finished at 8.25 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**