

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 March 2020 at 7.00 pm – Inquorate Meeting

Present: Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair) and Shane Ralph

Apologies: Councillors Colin Churchman and Gerard Rice

In attendance: Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Sarah Welton, Strategy Manager
Lucy Tricker, 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.

26. Minutes

As the meeting was inquorate, the minutes could not be approved.

27. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair stated that part of the Committee's remit was to consider business continuity, and asked what business continuity preparations were being put in place to deal with potential disruptions due to Coronavirus. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that Public Health England provided the latest updates on their website every day at 2pm, and currently 373 people had tested positive for the virus, and 6 people with underlying health conditions had passed away. She added that the Portfolio Holder, Directors Board, and Group Leaders were being provided with daily updates of the situation, with all Members receiving weekly updates on a Friday. She added that the Essex Resilience Forum and Thurrock Council had already considered the business continuity plans for a normal flu pandemic, and the impact it could cause for service delivery and the wider workforce. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services explained that due to Coronavirus all services were currently in the process of reviewing their business continuity plans. She added that the Council already ran an agile workforce, with many staff members having the ability to work from home, and a list of critical services had been compiled which may need support from other services during a potential Coronavirus pandemic. She clarified that the Communications team were signposting residents to the government and Public Health England's websites to ensure they were provided with the most up-to-date information, but the UK were currently in the containment phase. She summarised and stated that the Communications team, Public Health England, and the Emergency Planning team were currently working together to monitor the situation, and were working hard to

ensure that business continuity plans were up to date.

The Chair asked what the process was for reviewing business continuity plans, and asked when they would be complete. He felt particular concern for critical services such as adult social care, as the service helped the most vulnerable residents. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that most services had business continuity plans and the review would hopefully be finalised by the end of the week. She stated that the adult social care department was a priority for the emergency planning team, and work would be ongoing to minimise the impact of Coronavirus. The Chair asked if Coronavirus was likely to have a disproportionate impact on some frontline services, and asked what plans were in place to ensure these services received the necessary support. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service responded that if necessary, staff members could be trained to work for other services, or a cross-service working policy could be implemented.

Councillor Ralph questioned the policy that was in place for homeless people if Coronavirus became a pandemic. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that she did not have the detail, but this would be covered in the housing business continuity plan, but the service would continue to support homeless people throughout a potential pandemic. She stated that as homeless people were considered vulnerable residents, they could be prioritised and a triage support system was already in place for the service. The Chair asked what was being done for frontline staff to ensure they were aware of the necessary precautions, particularly those working with more vulnerable residents, and asked what the process was for cascading this information to vulnerable residents. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that frontline staff were being signposted to Public Health England's website for the latest information, and could then cascade this information to service users. She added that social workers and other teams working in care facilities were also being kept up-to-date with information, and were often more ready for flu pandemics due to the type of residents they worked with, for example elderly people who were more vulnerable to illness. She added that the Council were also working with Thurrock's Community and Voluntary Services (CVS), but no particular issues had been raised to date.

28. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

29. Quarter 3 (Month 9) Corporate Performance Report 2019/20

The Strategy Manager introduced the report and stated that she felt it was positive as 85% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were on target, and 60% were better than in 2018/19. She highlighted that some KPIs had not reached their target, but more detail was provided within the report, with a 'route to green', which focussed on plans in place to ensure the KPI met its target, and any issues were mitigated. She also highlighted the success of the

apprenticeships KPI, and stated that the apprentice levy had now been successfully embedded into the Council's policy, with the end of year apprenticeship target being met in January. She thanked the Committee for their support on this target, including inviting the HR team to discuss apprenticeships in 2019.

The Chair congratulated the team for the positive KPIs and direction of travel. He felt it was good to see the 'route to green' being included, and congratulated the team on the successful apprenticeships KPI, which he felt had been championed by Members of the Committee. He drew the Committee's attention to page 28 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the percentage of waste recycled, reused and composted, as he felt the 30% outturn was low, compared to target. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that the target had not been met partly due to the ongoing impact of the recent wet weather, as this impacted on the amount of waste being composed, as residents were not out gardening or cutting grass and therefore not putting their brown bins out for collection. She stated that the missed target was also due to issues such as recycling in flats and issues regarding access. She explained that following a pilot scheme, a programme was being launched in May 2020 to tackle recycling in flats, and the Waste Management Working Group were currently consulting residents on their opinions regarding recycling and how to improve it across the borough. She added that there was also detailed analysis and engagement regarding recycling communications, and stated that the message was currently focused on metal recycling, and had previously tackled plastic recycling. She described that the communications team were trying to simplify the message around recycling, as it could be quite a complex topic for residents to understand. She added that the council were also engaging directly with schools to spread the recycling message.

Councillor Ralph stated that he was part of the Waste Management Working Group, and one of their main focusses was education regarding recycling. He added that the team had also worked on a new bin sticker campaign in flats to increase the recycling rate, and help continue to maintain low contamination rates in bins. He added that a public consultation was currently underway, and lots of residents were taking part. Councillor Ralph then questioned the KPI on page 24 regarding the number of young people who reoffend after a previously recorded offence, and stated that the KPI was significantly better than the national average. He felt that crime rates around Thurrock continued to rise, and asked how the data relating to the KPI was collected, and how much the police influenced reoffending rates. The Strategy Manager replied that due to the data collection, the data was in arrears every quarter, but was a specific KPI that related to intervention in young people, rather than the overall crime level.

The Chair stated that as the meeting was inquorate, the recommendations could not be agreed. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service added that as the report would be presented to Cabinet the following day, comments from the Committee would be included in the Portfolio Holders update.

30. Verbal Update: Overview and Scrutiny Review

The Democratic Services Officer explained to Members the progress that had been made on the review, since Members had last received an update in 2019. She stated that there had been a few delays in progressing the report, such as purdah at the end of 2019, and delays regarding governance. She added that all research for the review had now been completed, as well as the Scrutiny Symposium event, and the first draft of the review was almost finished. She clarified that three main themes had emerged from Members comments and officer research, which included increasing the impact of scrutiny; improving scrutiny's policy development role; and improving Member training.

The Democratic Services Officer moved on and asked for the Committee's comments on the formalisation on the relationship between Cabinet and scrutiny, which would help to finalise the draft Executive-Scrutiny Protocol. The Democratic Services Officer summarised and stated that a meeting between the Leader and the Committee had now been arranged for Tuesday 7 April, which would discuss the relationship between Cabinet and the Executive, and was the final stage in the review process. She clarified that once the comments from this meeting had been included, the review would be signed off by all scrutiny Chairs, as well as the Executive, and would then begin to be implemented.

The Chair thanked the Democratic Services Officer for her hard work on the review, and felt it was positive to see it was nearing completion. He stated that he felt a formal briefing note would be a better way for feedback to get to Cabinet from scrutiny, and asked that comments from Cabinet be reported back to scrutiny, for a circular process. Councillor Ralph added that a verbal update for Cabinet Members might also be necessary as it could open a broader discussion. The Democratic Services Officer clarified that both options could be pursued, and a circular reporting process was being included in the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

31. Work Programme

The Chair stated that as this was the last meeting of the municipal year, there was nothing to add to the Work Programme. He thanked officers and Members for their hard work on the Committee, and wished the Committee luck for the future.

The meeting finished at 7.45 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk