

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2016 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors John Kent (Chair), Jack Duffin, Aaron Watkins, Kevin Wheeler and Tony Fish (Substitute) (substitute for Steve Liddiard)

Apologies: Councillor Steve Liddiard

In attendance: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Matthew Essex, Head of Regeneration and Assets
Rebecca Price, Community Development Officer
Charlotte Raper, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Charlotte Raper, 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.

1. Minutes

Observing that no current Members of the Committee were present at the previous meeting, the Committee agreed to note the contents of the Minutes for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 March 2016.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Fish declared Non-Pecuniary Interests in relation to Item 6: "Community Asset Transfer Policy" in that he was the Director of the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and a Board Member of Chadwell Centre Community Hub. The Chair noted that since the item would discuss Policy rather than a specific case, it was likely there would be no conflict of interest. Councillor Fish was welcomed to participate in the debate.

4. Terms of Reference

The Officer presented the current terms of reference to the Committee and outlined that they were currently being updated by the Monitoring Officer.

The Chair asserted that the current terms of reference were not appropriate, and requested they come back in September once updated.

RESOLVED:

The Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be updated and brought back to the Committee in September 2016.

5. Community Asset Transfer Policy

The Head of Regeneration and Assets and the Officer presented the report outlining the proposed policy for efficient use of publicly owned buildings and Spaces in Thurrock, particularly in terms of leasing or selling property to a Voluntary Community of Faith Sector (VCFS) organisation. The report also highlighted the importance of a simple, transparent and consistent process which would be fit for purpose to deal with every type of organisation and every type of asset.

Councillor Wheeler explained that he had been contacted by an angling club with a query which he believed was relevant to this item and asked what types of organisations could apply, and whether they had to be voluntary.

Members were advised that there would be an assessment of the eligibility of organisations when they apply, however if they were a club charging fees then they would be running a commercial organisation and as such would be ineligible. The officer continued to express that it would be difficult to give an exact answer without knowing the organisation's specifics.

Councillor Watkins asked what plans there were for promoting the policy to communities and the expressions of interest process. The Officer outlined that reasonable awareness had already been raised through the consultations carried out but there was also hope that relevant training would be introduced.

Councillor Watkins continued to seek clarity on the expressions of interest process, particularly circumstances of several organisations showing interest in one asset.

The officer described an historic case whereby two organisations wanted use of the same property and the outcome had been an agreement where one organisation became the subtenant of the other as neither wanted use of the property at the same time as the other. The Committee heard that it could only be assessed on a case by case basis, but there would be sufficient advertising to ensure the Council would not be open to complaints or challenges suggesting unfair advantage. In every case there would be an

assessment of broader community benefit versus commercial benefit to the Council and the matter would be put to the Member Property Board.

Councillor Watkins then addressed the Member Property Board proposal and whether it would be flexible so that Ward Councillors could be included in cases directly affecting their ward.

The Committee was assured that the Panel would be constituted to reflect the specific asset in question and as such membership would vary from case to case.

Councillor Fish drew the Committee's attention to existing examples in which there had been significant delays and was concerned that this might show the policy and the process weren't working as they should.

The Officers recalled the examples in question and the delays had been on the part of the organisation obtaining the necessary documentation, but Officers were aware that banks were proving particularly slow in providing references.

The Head of Regeneration and Assets agreed with Members that the process needed to be smooth and that it would be refined as time progressed. Currently organisations had showed possible discomfort at being asked for so much documentation but at the same time showed understanding of why it would be required. The Committee was assured that if it became apparent that the Policy or the process was not efficient it would be reviewed.

Councillor Duffin asked for an estimated figure of cases per year, and whether there was a predicted or target timeframe for completion of cases. Members heard that it would be difficult to put a number on how many cases were to be expected, however the consultation process had generated interest. It was also highlighted that the Policy set out certain properties which would not be eligible due to commercial value to the Council or broader regeneration plans. It was expected there would be a spike in interest initially that would subside, to around 6 cases a year, the officers suspected.

The Committee was then informed that there would be an 8 week target from the expression of interest to the end of advertising for that asset. There was to be no target timeframe set for the overall process as some organisations may require additional support with business plans, documentation etc. and the Council did not wish to penalise smaller organisations.

Councillor Wheeler requested an initial point of contact to feed back to interested organisations. The committee heard that assessments would go through the Corporate Property Board, and as such they should be the initial contact.

The Chair asked the Head of Regeneration and Assets as to whether he was the Chair of the Corporate Property Board.

The Head of Regeneration and Assets clarified that he had taken responsibility for managing the Board, but was not the Chair. He insisted he was keen to review the Board and that it would need to be re-drawn; in future it would not be chaired by him but he would be responsible for its coordination.

The Chair suggested that this might be necessary before the Committee could support the proposal. The Committee heard that it would not be necessary as the proposal was in line with the Council's Constitution.

The Chair also referred to Officers' statements that anything above £500,000 would go to Cabinet and the fact that it was not explicitly mentioned within the report. Officers agreed that the Policy would be amended to be more explicit on this point.

The Chair finally raised concern that Member involvement was not explicit within the Policy either and proposed that Cabinet reflect upon the balance of Members to Officers within the decision making process.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Committee acknowledged the work of the Thurrock Community Assets and Management of Assets (COMA) Partnership supported by Locality.**
- 2. Members commented on the Community Asset Transfer Policy.**

6. Corporate Performance Framework 2016/17 and End of Year Corporate Performance Report 2015/16

The Head of Strategy, Communications & Customer Services led a presentation outlining the overall performance framework to give context to the report, before presenting the report itself. Within the presentation she highlighted the Council's priorities and objectives, the performance management path, the Corporate Plan and KPI framework for the year ahead and the new reporting process.

Councillor Wheeler enquired as to whether there was a nationwide comparison of Councils to give Thurrock an overall rating. The Chair explained that there had been the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) but it had ceased to exist in 2010.

The Corporate Director for Adults, Housing & Health continued to explain that there were no overall performance assessments on a national scale, but national frameworks remained within certain individual service areas.

Councillor Wheeler asked if there were any comparative assessments in place and whether they took into account the wealth, size etc. of the Authorities in question. The Committee heard that there were "Comparative

Groups” which grouped Authorities of similar size and population to facilitate benchmarking.

Councillor Fish raised concern about the change from Red, Amber, Green (RAG) to Achieve/Fail as the amber served as a warning of services which might require attention though not necessarily urgent.

The Corporate Director for Adults, Housing & Health outlined that the RAG system would continue to be used internally to act as an early alert, and there would continue to be some level of tolerance within internal operations. The Achieve/Fail system was for information to be sent to Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet and Council.

The Head of Strategy, Communications & Customer Services also reminded Members that there is also a “direction of travel” assessment regardless of the tolerance which would also serve as an indication of services which are declining.

Councillor Duffin sought clarity regarding targets, as in some work sectors achieving 50% of targets would be unacceptable, however within Councils it seemed to be a different picture. The Chair emphasised that within Local Authorities the figure was promising, but also expressed that Thurrock had always preferred “stretching” targets above “safe” targets.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Members commented on the activities for the upcoming year within the Corporate Plan 2016/17.**
- 2. The Committee commented on the performance framework for 2016/17 and supports a full and thorough review of existing KPIs and other performance tools in 2016 in line with recommendations made by Corporate Overview**
- 3. Members noted the progress and performance against the corporate priorities for 2015/16.**

7. Work Programme

The Chair asked whether Members were happy to note the Work Programme, and if there were any additional items to request.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the Work Programme.

The meeting finished at 7.50 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**