

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

20 JANUARY 2020

Chair: * Councillor Kiran Ramchandani

Councillors: * Ghazanfar Ali Honey Jamie
* Nitesh Hirani * Pritesh Patel

* Denotes Member present

34. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

35. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interest made by Members.

36. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2019 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

37. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that there were no public questions received at this meeting.

38. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that there were no petitions received at this meeting.

39. References from Council and Other Committees/Panels

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references from Council and other Committees/Panels.

RESOLVED ITEMS

40. Draft Revenue Budget 2020/21 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23

Prior to the consideration of this item, the Chair varied the order of business. The Children and Families Services Complaints Annual Report 2018/19, and the Adult Services Complaints Annual Report 2018/19 would be taken first. Thereafter, the Waste Services – Performance Issues Report and the Draft Revenue Budget 2020/21 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23 would be considered.

The Chair invited questions from Members of the Sub-Committee on the two reports considered by Cabinet on 9th January 2020. The following questions were asked:

- a) *Citing point 1.41, on page 28 of the Report, on Budget Refresh, Growth and Savings, were savings and growth in the budget setting process for financial years 2020/21 to 2020/22, to be spread uniformly over the whole period?*

The Director of Finance advised that there would be a mixture of approaches over the three years. Tables 5 and 6, on page 29 of the Report, set out the summaries of all savings and growth submitted as part of the current year's budget, as well as previous years. That outlined the total savings growth for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

- b) *Point 1.61, on page 33 of the Report, on Reserves and Contingencies, did not show to what expenditure the remainder of the reserves would be applied. It would be expedient to itemise those expenses. Why were the costs not shown?*

The Director of Finance advised that the money was set aside for specific expenditure, among them insurance costs, litigation, and monies for schools. The costs were not included in the draft report, however, the final version would show them. Furthermore, if there was a desire to include them in the draft versions, that could be done in future reports.

- c) *How would costs be controlled?*

The Director of Finance informed the meeting that in 2021, it was envisaged that some directorates would be unaffected. Nonetheless, the People Directorate (covering children and special needs education, particularly transport) would have increased costs. It was imperative to

strike a balance among various competing needs, however, some cost increases were beyond the Council's control.

- d) *Quoting point 1.13, on page 11, of the Report, which stated: "Until the detailed plans for the new Civic Centre are known, it cannot be determined if the two additional floors at the depot will be required for staff accommodation or commercial rental purposes." If the floors would be for commercial purposes, would the Council's IT services be included for that?*

The Director of Finance advised that the current MTFS included additional rental income due from the two floors being built at the depot, with £473 000 expected in 2020/21. The results of the procurement process for the Strategic Development Partner would not be concluded until June 2020, after which use of the two floors will be agreed.

- e) *How many responses were there to the Report? Where service users and other stakeholders also consulted?*

The Director of Finance stated that there were around 80 responses. Furthermore, each individual saving proposal would be consulted with specific service users and stakeholders is required.

- f) *With Harrow's share of the £1 billion social care funding councils across the country would receive from central Government estimated at £3.48million, would it be possible to lobby/request for more?*

The Director of Finance advised that the allocated amounts were based on a national formula used by the Government, taking into account social care needs of each area. Therefore, requests for more may not be feasible. It was not yet known if it was a yearly sum or a one-off payment.

- g) *Would the shared services with other Councils (Hounslow, Barnet and Slough) be expanded to other areas to reduce costs?*

The Director of Finance advised that it would be prudent to take into account the effectiveness of such services, and management fees, to consider whether in-house options were more cost-effective. There were no current plans to expanded shared services.

RESOLVED: That the Report be noted.

41. Children and Families Services Complaints Annual Report 2018/19

The Chair invited questions from Members of the Sub-Committee on the report. The following points were raised and discussed:

- a) *Citing table 1, on page 96 of the Report, was the difference in time scales to resolve complaints by service area, between stages 1 and 2, from April 2018 to March 2019, due to the non-availability of a Complaints Officer?*

The officer responded in the affirmative. The position was filled about one month ago, and the officer was undergoing training.

- b) *How was the Council doing in learning lessons and practice improvements from section 13, on page 114 of the Report?*

The officer advised that feedback was given in securing and identifying clear pathways for post adoption support. This was done with the Head of Service – Market Management and Internally Provided Services, who fed-back through managers and team meetings, as well as training sessions.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42. Adult Services Complaints Annual Report 2018/19

The Chair invited questions from Members of the Sub-Committee on the Report.

- a) *How were more complex complaints dealt with, and what training was available to care workers?*

The Head of Service – Market Management and Internally Provided Services, advised that senior managers met with the Complaints Team on a regular basis to develop capacity in dealing with complex cases. Furthermore, training was provided to schools, including governors, head teachers and social workers. Services users were also advised of the process of lodging complaints, in order to create a transparent and accountable service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

43. Waste Services - Performance Issues

The Chair invited questions from Members of the Sub-Committee on the report. The following questions were asked:

- a) *What were the current personnel numbers for permanent and agency staff in collections, and what was being done to ensure efficiency in collections as well as reducing the number of missed collections?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services advised that there were around 100 core staff, and none were engaged from agencies. A crew comprised a team of 3, with 1 driver. Each vehicle was fitted with computerised monitoring devices to ensure that no collections were missed, a function that was typically performed by the driver.

- b) *Was capacity being built to the other crew members to operate the devices in delivery vehicles?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services informed Members that resilience was being built in collection teams through training to improve skill sets. This would ensure better utilisation of personnel. Nonetheless, that required the support of all staff and their representatives (unions).

- c) *Would assisted collections continue under new proposals in the report?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services answered in the affirmative. Assisted collections would continue for residents who required them.

- d) *Given the number of complaints on the increase in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) in Harrow, were all of them licensed, and what was being done to ensure compliancy?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services stated that any complaints could be done online and the Council would launch investigations. Furthermore, the discovery of unlicensed HMOs was usually intelligence-led. Moreover, residents that suspected an HMO to be unlicensed could contact Planning Services, who maintained a register of such properties.

- e) *Was the Council collaborating with landlords to ensure that HMOs were licensed? It was hypothesised whether "innocent" landlords would be prosecuted if their tenants converted houses into HMOs without their knowledge?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services advised that investigations would reveal the extent of landlord involvement to determine whether they were complicit. Moreover, tenants found to have broken the law would face the consequences.

- f) *What was being done to tackle fly tipping on private land?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services advised that the standard approach was to establish the status of the landlord, and to determine if dumped waste was localised or from elsewhere. If it was the former, the due process of the law would be followed. In the latter, investigations would be launched to find the culprits, and prosecute them. Given the experiences of other authorities, it was likely that there were around 10 criminal gangs involved in the larger fly tipping in Harrow.

- g) *What was the level of recycling in Harrow? Was there any information about residents' recycling habits at ward level?*

The Interim Director of Environmental Services advised that densely populated wards usually had issues with food wastage. An action plan

was being developed to show a pictorial portrait of various recycling materials, and what to place in specific bins. The plan was currently in draft form and would be presented to Members at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

44. Any Other Business

There was none.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 9.31 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR KIRAN RAMCHANDANI
Chair