

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 17th December 2013

Subject: Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Responsible Officer: Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director,
Strategic Commissioning

Scrutiny Lead Member area:

- Environment and Enterprise
- Resources

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

The report accompanies the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members.

Recommendations:

The Committee is requested to consider the reports from the Scrutiny Lead Members and agree the actions proposed therein.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

This report outlines details of the work of the Scrutiny Lead Members for Environment and Enterprise and Resources.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report

Performance Issues

There are no performance issues associated with this report.

Environmental Impact

There is no environmental impact associated with this report

Risk Management Implications

There are no risks associated with this report.

Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? No

This report outlines the activities of the scrutiny lead councillors; it makes no proposals to change service delivery.

Corporate Priorities

The Scrutiny Lead Members' responsibilities cover all areas of the council's activity.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers:

None

NOTES BRIEFING
SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS ENVIRONMENT AND
ENTERPRISE
Monday 11th November

Present: Councillor O'Dell

Andrew Baker, Head of Climate Change
Venetia Reid-Baptiste, Divisional Director, Commissioning
Services
Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

Apologies None

Climate Change Strategy

This meeting had been specifically arranged to provide councillors with an update on the council's Climate Change Strategy.

The Head of Climate Change provided the councillors with an extract from the draft cabinet report. He advised that the final report will be submitted to cabinet in March and suggested therefore that it should be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in February.

Transport

The Head of Climate Change advised that there has been a reduction in the number of travel plans being produced by schools and that the council is now only monitoring those schools which are actively pursuing a plan. He suggested this could reflect the number of mergers of schools

Cllr O'Dell asked for information on those schools that have stopped producing a plan.

The Head of Climate Change also advised that there has been an increase in the number of charging points for electric vehicles. Cllr O'Dell was advised that these had been located around new development sites. A map of the locations will be provided.

Cllr O'Dell commented that any schemes coming forward in relation to freight were adopted a year ago.

The Head of Climate Change advised that the council had submitted a cycling scheme for mayoral funding. The council is hopeful of success because of the links in the scheme to the tube system.

Cllr O'Dell asked for an update on the number of Faith Sites in the borough which were adopting travel plans

Flooding

No update was available on this.

Waste

The percentage of waste recycled had dropped but is starting to pick up again. There has also been a general reduction in the tonnage of waste being produced at a time when the population is increasing. Waste sent to landfill is also expected to reduce.

More information with regard to cost per household linked to the impact of waste minimisation will be provided at a later date.

Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

No update was available on this

The Council's Footprint/Carbon Reduction Commitment

In 2012/13 the council's carbon footprint increased by 13% following a 12% reduction in the previous year, possibly as a result of the cold winters. Whilst the number of corporate buildings has remained the same, there has been an increase in education sites. There is likely to be a need for more effective use of sites.

Greenhouse Gases are increasing against a target of 4% reduction.

Electricity consumption is increasing and may also be contributing to the increase in GHG. This might be explained by the fact that there are more devices in use across the council.

Street lighting is being reviewed – based on the existing data base of the existing number of sites. The change to LED lighting will be helpful in reducing the consumption

Cllr O'Dell was advised that the terms and conditions review is helping to reduce the 'grey fleet' mileage.

For the future reduction of the carbon footprint, the council is investing £300k pa in corporate buildings; £1m pa in schools; and £1.5m on street lighting

In future procurement process will include performance and minimum expectations with regard to carbon reduction.

Additional funding to support biomass boilers is available from government. A survey of boilers will be undertaken before Christmas. Proposals are being considered with regard to reviewing the 'normal' temperatures.

Refit

The future use of Bedford House is unclear. Hatch End pool development has been cancelled as the investment does not appear to be effective – the council needs to be sure buildings will remain in use in order to justify the expenditure. Officers advised that the Civic Centre library will be brought back into use, with offices on the 1st floor.

Delivering Warmer Homes

Harrow has the highest percentage in London of homes which suffer from fuel poverty (12.7%) the highest area in the borough being Queensbury. Officers will provide councillors with a map showing the distribution of fuel poverty across the borough. There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- The borough has significant number of pre-war properties with solid wall construction
- The borough sits in the wedge which is the coldest part of London.

Note: Because Harrow is a relatively small borough the number of households in fuel poverty is less than for larger boroughs

The formula used for determining the level of fuel poverty has changed from percentage of households which spend more than 10% of their income on fuel to the number of families living on a low income with high fuel costs

Cllr O'Dell asked if there is a correlation between fuel poverty and tenancy type. The Head of Climate Change advised that there is a particular problem with private rented accommodation and that the Housing Service is trying to address this in their private sector housing strategy. The service is bringing to private landlords' attention that they will not be able to rent out property after 2018 which does not meet minimum EPC standards – the borough does not wish to face a shortfall in accommodation.

The council is negotiating with British Gas to deliver an Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funded project which will enable the council to stretch an application for Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) funding. If successful, the total investment would be £3,692k. If successful the bid could help approximately 500 homes. Further detail on the scheme will be available for the Overview and Scrutiny committee in February

Affordable Warmth

There is a possibility of using Public Health funding as match funding for ECO funding for people who don't qualify for support under other funds.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Environment and Enterprise scrutiny leads is on 18th November with the Corporate Director

**SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBER'S ENVIRONMENT AND
ENTERPRISE
Monday 18th November**

Present: Councillor O'Dell, Councillor Teli
Caroline Bruce, Corporate Director, Environment and Enterprise; Philip Hamberger, Divisional Director-Business and Service Development; Lynne Margetts, Service Manager Scrutiny

Apologies None

Improvement Board Papers.

These were tabled by the Corporate Director, subject to their not being shared beyond the meeting as the Improvement Board had not taken place.

There is an anticipated overspend in the Directorate resultant in part from the pause of the PRISM project. Whilst increased parking income may limit this, an overspend of circa £800k is anticipated. Budgets are being closely monitored to minimise any increase in the overspend. In this context, one of the positive outcomes from the Towards Excellence project has been the improvement in performance and confidence amongst managers in particular with regard to budget management.

Cllr O'Dell asked if the additional money from the parking account being identified as a possible solution to some of the budget pressures, was from parking fines or from car park charges. The Corporate Director advised that the increased funding was coming from PCNs. She commented that there is an anticipated increased income from parking and this trend in anticipated income is being built into refreshed budgets to offset cuts in budgets next year.

Cllr O'Dell asked what other methods were being used to fill the budget gap. The Corporate Director advised that standard management approaches such as vacancy freeze, effective procurement, use of temporary staff, effective forecasting and limiting expenditure to essential items only.

Cllr Teli asked what the risk of not reducing the overspend was. The Corporate Director advised that there is contingency within the Council's overall funding, but that the Directorate was doing all it could to keep the overspend to as little as possible and certainly under £1m.

The Directorate has experienced difficulties with the dry recycling contract that was let to the provider a year ago. Rather than receiving an income stream from Virodor there is potential for either no income or a payment to the provider - with a financial impact of up to £1m. The Divisional Director Commercial, Contracts and Procurement is advising to provide more stability with regard to the budget.

Regeneration Strategy

The Corporate Director is sponsoring the development of the strategy and the Head of Economic Development and Research and the Divisional Director of Planning are producing it. The Corporate Director of Community Health and Well Being is also sponsoring the strategy on behalf of the external operations board.

The strategy is one of the boroughs fundamental strategies addressing regeneration in its widest sense – people, places and business. As such it must engage across the organisation. An introductory, high-level brochure has been produced and this has been considered by Corporate Strategic Board and the Major Developments Panel. It will also be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in the New Year.

The Corporate Director advised Cllr O'Dell that behind the introductory document, there will be an action plan with targets and objectives which will be used in discussion with developers. She commented that it will need partners sign off but it is not anticipated that this will be problematic as the strategy will be built on their own objectives, it will pull all of these objectives into one coherent strategy.

Councillors commented that the support of members and through them residents will be crucial to the successful implementation of the strategy. In this regard, the Corporate Director hoped that the principles in the strategy could be incorporated in the plans of all political groups.

It was suggested that a more detailed consideration of the strategy might be built in to the scrutiny work programme for 2014/15

Support for Local District Centres

Cllr O'Dell asked what is being done in this area. The Corporate Director advised that support is being given to local centres insofar as it can contribute to broader economic development. Thus, less resource will be spent on things like Christmas lights and more resource will be given to those projects which can secure 'broad brush' outcomes. With a portfolio holder specifically for business, there is a greater focus on business needs in general.

Towards Excellence

With regard to recruitment, the Divisional Director-Business and Service Development advised

- The majority of staff have now been assimilated into posts
- 63 officers have been ringfenced into 77 posts
- All management recruitment has now been completed.

A transition workshop had been held for managers and this had been very positive. 1-2-1s have taken place with all managers who now have individual plans.

There are still ongoing discussions with regard to the provision of some of the technological solution.

There are two new streams in the programme supported by staff seconded from the Programme Office

- *Operational improvements*
These are looking at improvement to operations as they are currently configured – included at this time are trees management, trade waste and Neighbourhood Champions and the Neighbourhood Investment Scheme..
- *Service Reviews*
These will position the service in readiness for the savings due post 2015.

The Divisional Director-Business and Service Development commented that the service wants to continue to increase its commercial side.

Councillors enquired as to how much the council contracts with Harrow businesses in order to deliver services. The Corporate Director will find out the latest figure and advise the members. She pointed out that a key component of the council's procurement strategy is sustainability, including the sustainability of the local economy.

For Action

Further information to be provided to the lead members with regard to contracts between the Directorate and Harrow businesses

Any Other Business

Cllr Teli asked for a copy of the Environment and Enterprise service plan and budget.

For Action

The Divisional Director-Business and Service Development will provide.

BRIEFING - SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS, RESOURCES WEDNESDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER 2013,

Present:

Councillor Jerry Miles (policy lead member Resources), Councillor Tony Ferrari (Chairman P&F), Councillor Sue Anderson (Vice-chair P&F)

Tom Whiting (Corporate Director Resources), Simon George (Director of Finance and Assurance), Fern Silverio (Head of Collections & Housing Benefits), Martin Randall (Senior Professional Corporate Performance and Planning), Simone van Elk (Scrutiny Officer)

NOTES

The new structure of the Resources Directorate

The Corporate Director of Resources informed members that the new divisional director for procurement is starting in September and will be presenting a report on procurement to Cabinet in October and the Performance & Finance scrutiny sub-committee in November.

Councillor Miles asked about plans to expand the legal services to a third London Borough. The Corporate Director of Resources explained that the decision by a potential partner has been delayed until November.

Debt collection

The Head of Collections & Housing Benefits informed members about a trial process for debt collection for 500 residents who are paying council tax for the first time. Several 'soft' letters are sent as reminders of the required payment before formal letters. If people then haven't paid, they are sent a letter as well as telephoned to inform them about upcoming court order and that they can attend a surgery shortly before court date. At the surgery, Council officers from Finance and Housing will offer advice as well as bailiffs. People have the opportunity to pay at the surgery without incurring extra costs. On the day of court there is another opportunity to pay before the court starts.

Councillor Ferrari asked whether any escalation of cases happens before bailiffs become involved. The Head of Collections & Housing Benefits advised that unpaid cases are cross referenced against the Council's data for adult social care, mental health care, child protection services, etc to check residents' vulnerability. A protocol is being developed about the sharing of this information including criteria to establish the vulnerability of residents. A draft policy will be presented to Cabinet later this year. The new process for collection will combine the Council's principles for the recovery of debt with the vulnerability criteria.

Councillor Ferrari asked whether information could be provided at the September O&S committee that shows the effectiveness of each step in this trial debt collection process.

For Action:

Head of Collections & Housing Benefits to provide the O&S committee with the number of residents that have paid their debt after each individual step in the debt collection process.

Performance of Resources directorate

The quarter 1 performance scorecard for the Resources Directorate was discussed:

Councillor Anderson asked to what extent FOI requests are used to obtain information that could have been obtained in a more conventional way. The Corporate Director advised that requests came from a variety of sources and were generally increasing in complexity but there is a threshold equivalent to 18 hours' work before a charge could be made. The requests were often for data structured in a different way from that in which it was held.

Councillor Anderson asked for more information about the nature of crime included in the performance measure on violent crime and the police response to the increase.

For Action:

The Senior Professional Corporate Performance and Planning provide Members with information about the types of crimes that make up the performance indicator on violent crime.

Councillor Anderson asked about the change in the performance measure on accident incident rate between quarter 4 2012-14 and quarter 1 2013-14. The Senior Professional Corporate Performance and Planning informed members that the measure previously contained the number of incidents (67 in quarter 4 of 2012-13) but is now expressed as a rate per 1,000 employees.

For Action:

The Senior Professional Corporate Performance and Planning provide Members with the new definitions of the performance measure on the accident incident rate and comparable information for quarter 1 2013-14 and previous quarters.

Councillor Anderson expressed concern that only 65% of staff were trained on information security. The Corporate Director advised members that this would be improved once compliance software was working which sends email reminders and warns of sanctions.