

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 18 FEBRUARY 2016

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 FEBRUARY 2016

CORPORATE PLAN

This Committee considered a report which set out the Corporate Plan for 2016 to 2019. The Corporate Plan was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18 February 2016.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Policy Development addressed the Committee and made the following points.

- The Corporate Plan set out the Council's Strategy to deliver its vision of 'Working Together to make a difference for Harrow'. This would be achieved by building a better Harrow, being more business-like and business friendly and protecting the most vulnerable and supporting families;
- There would be approximately £1.75 billion coming into Harrow. The focus was not just about regeneration but also to build capacity in the community by equipping them with skills, jobs etc;
- Local Government had changed and was changing. In order for the Council to generate income and reduce its cost it had to become more commercial and share services with other authorities;
- A new set of values for staff had been proposed. These included being courageous, doing things together and making things happen;

The following questions were made by Members and responded to accordingly:

- How would residents be involved in the regeneration projects across Harrow?

There was a Harrow Residents Panel which involved local residents and this ensured a continued dialogue between them and the Council in relation to various issues. This Panel met bi-monthly and it had been integral in helping the Council make decisions on its Regeneration plans;

- The Corporate Plan proposed was completely different to the version agreed last year which had purported to cover the period 2015 to 2019. There were significant differences and why was this? Why did the Council not simply adopt a Corporate Plan year on year?

The Council's overall priorities had not changed. However Local Government and various circumstances had changed and it was important for the

Corporate Plan to take account of this. The Council had proposed a 3 year budget and it was important that the Corporate Plan aligned with this. The Corporate Plan for this year focused on how the Council would deliver its priorities.

- How was the Council making best use of digital technology for residents to access services? How would the Council ensure that those who required face to face interaction were still provided with this?

The Council was working hard to increase the number of services who could access services online. The MyHarrow initiative had 90,000 users registered which provided a portal for residents to access services online. The reality was that if residents made greater use of access to services online, this reduced costs for the Council. The Council was trying to get residents who did have use of the internet to go online for services as this would then free up staff to focus on assisting those residents who required greater assistance and / or did not have access to the internet.

- There had been an instance where a Council email account in relation to Council Tax had been closed which meant that issues were required to be made in writing. This was contrary to the objective of trying to get more residents to access services online. What was the explanation for this?

The reason for closing the email account was due to the difficulty in tracking all of the issues given the volume of queries raised. These issues were now required to be raised as a web based form which meant that all information was contained in one form and one response could be provided.

- A press article had said that Harrow was one of the worst places to live in according to a survey of residents. Why did the Council believe that satisfaction levels were good?

The Council obtained its statistics and conclusions through the use of residents' surveys. The Portfolio Holder asked if a copy of the press article could be provided to her so that she could investigate it further.

- How was the Council becoming more business friendly specifically?

The Council was becoming more commercial, had established Trading Companies and new initiatives such as Project Phoenix and the adult social care e-purse which were being developed. The Council had also started sharing services with other authorities in relation to HB Public Law and Procurement, as examples. The Council was looking at all opportunities to generate income and reduce its costs.

The Council was a business friendly organisation as had been reflected in a recent award had been presented to it. The Council was conducting a range of activities to help businesses such as mentoring, connecting with experts, setting up a business den, conducting various workshops and hosting networking events.

The Council's local procurement policy also meant that the Council was investing in services with a greater number of local businesses.

- Residents were still having issues in getting problems resolved by the Council and encountering difficulties in the Council responding to queries. There had also been an issue where a MyHarrow bulletin had revealed the email accounts of all of its users which was a data breach.

The Council could not say that customer services were in a position where it wished it to be. However the Council had a clear plan to get its customer services to the level desired. It was important to recognise that the Council was on the right track and knew what was required to be done. If residents had a bad experience with customer services this would provide them a negative image of the Council. Additionally if a new service had been introduced this naturally took a while to settle down and could raise a number of queries and concern initially.

In relation to the data breach this was caused by human error and the system was being looked at to prevent this from happening again. Legal advice provided had confirmed that it was not a serious breach of data.

- How would the Council attract larger business to Harrow?

It was difficult to attract larger businesses due to the Government's policy which allowed commercial units to be converted to residential flats, a policy which the Council had lobbied against. However the Council would always try its best to attract larger businesses and it was hoped that the Regeneration proposals would contribute to this.

- The Equalities Implications section of the report had alluded to a number of activities referenced in the Corporate Plan as being proposals with business cases still to be developed. Could some examples be provided? Was the e-purse project an example of this?

Officers were happy to provide a list of these relevant activities. These activities would relate to commercial and regeneration and consultation would be held on specific proposals if appropriate.

The e-purse system was an example of these activities but further development was required and exact dates could not be provided.

The Portfolio Holder undertook to provide the list to the Member prior to the Council meeting on 25 February 2016.

- What objectives from the previous Corporate Plan had not been achieved? It would have been helpful to include this information in the proposed new version to give a balanced view and to know if improvements had been made.

The way that the Corporate Plan had been structured was different to previous years. It was decided that greater narrative was required on the

Council's achievements and the previous Corporate Plan and the proposed one were not directly comparable.

A quarterly report was provided to the Improvement Board which provided information on issues where targets and objectives had not been met. This report was also presented to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

- How could the Council be considered to be business friendly when the Portfolio Holder responsible for that area was rude to a local businessman at a recent Council meeting?

It was not considered that the Portfolio Holder had been rude in any way.

- Did the new values referred to in the Corporate Plan replace those which had been adopted previously?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the values had replaced the CREATE values which had been previously adopted.

- What did it mean that the Council wanted to be a values-led organisation?

A values led organisation meant that behaviours would be put into action. It would allow staff and empower them to feed in ideas, work together and take more initiative in their work. It would lead to greater consistency and greater accountability.

- Would opposition Members be allowed to be involved in the Regeneration Board?

This was a question that could only be answered by the Portfolio Holder responsible for that area.

- The Council's aspiration was to be in the top 10% nationally for Key Stage 2 results whereas for GCSE result the Council stated it wished to be in the top 20%. What was the reason for this difference?

In relation to schools it was important to recognised that the vast majority of schools were either rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Ofsted inspections took into account a range of issues including parent's satisfaction. The Council always wished to do better but the Ofsted inspections suggested that parents were happy with the schools and the education being provided to their children.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their attendance.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That the comments from the Committee on the Corporate Plan be referred to Cabinet.

Background Documents:

None

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