

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 16 FEBRUARY 2017

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 FEBRUARY 2017

CORPORATE PLAN

This Committee considered a report dealing with the Corporate Plan refresh for 2017. The Plan was scheduled to be discussed by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 February 2017.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Customer Services, briefly introduced the report, outlining the Leader's additional priorities related to equalities and enforcement, and stating that performance was holding up well in spite of a number of challenges, particularly with respect to budget pressures.

Members raised a number of questions and received responses as follows:

Was Cabinet satisfied with the level of performance and the quality of performance data? For example, recycling rates appeared to have fallen to 38% against a 2020 target of 50% and a previous 2015-16 performance at 43%, and there was no data for Quarter 2 of 2016-17, nor any commentary on these matters.

Cabinet was satisfied with both the overall performance set out in the plan and with the data. The latter was underpinned with a more detailed corporate performance report which was monitored on a quarterly basis by Cabinet. In the case of recycling, performance had been impacted by a national change in the classification of wooden materials which had affected all local authorities. Environment staff would be consulted on the framing of future targets in view of such developments.

How could it reasonably be claimed that there had been "improvements" in the garden waste service when the implementation had been flawed?

The Corporate Plan did refer to the problems associated with the implementation (Page 11 of the Plan), but these had been resolved.

Did Cabinet agree that a staff training rate of 14% for equalities training was unacceptable?

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Customer Services considered the performance unacceptable, but she was aware of certain mitigating factors such as the requirement for face-to-face training for some staff without ready access to computers, and the fact that some staff had only recently passed the two-year threshold for their accreditation and needed to complete the course again. Nevertheless, it was accepted that there had to be considerable improvement and there was a current drive to increase course completions.

What was the basis for the Leader's statement in the plan that there was a 10-year life expectancy gap between the poorest and most affluent parts of the Borough? Figures in the plan suggested that this figure should be 6 years for men and 5.6 years for women (Page 13 of the Plan).

It was understood that the statement was based on information from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and national indicators of multiple deprivation. It reflected some significant differences within the Borough, such as between Pinner and Wealdstone, and was intended to demonstrate the extent of the gap in respect of the areas with highest and lowest rates rather than the averages cited in the body of the plan itself.

What was the basis for the £15m figure given for the anticipated income from commercial activities and did this figure refer to the period to 2019 or to 2020 since information in the plan was ambiguous on this point.

Information on this was available in the report to Cabinet on the Council's 2017-18 budget, but income was expected from a range of areas such as legal services, HR services, procurement, Project Phoenix, school improvement services, Wiseworks, etc.

How reliable was the expected income from Project Infinity, particularly given that it represented the largest element of the proposed contributions from commercial activities? Beyond the "My Community" e-purse, were the other projects and products within the scheme little more than vague concepts with speculative assumptions about income?

There was a table of information in the report to the Cabinet on the Council's 2017-18 budget which set out information on the various commercialisation projects. The £15m figure was intended to relate to the period to the end of March 2020. The MCep product in the My Community e-purse project was being re-platformed and marketed by the Council and IBM; the other elements were in the development stage and it was therefore inevitably the case that the financial projections would be targets and estimates rather than anything more concrete. Assumptions had to be made about such matters as the composition of care packages and product take-up. All the projects had been reviewed and the targets revised accordingly; a more detailed briefing could be provided to Members if this was required.

An income figure of £640,000 had been associated with a "Community Wrap" project, but there had been no other information for Members on this scheme – could this be explained?

It was agreed that the Corporate Director, Resources and Commercialisation and the Director Adult Social Services would brief Members with more detail on these projects.

How did the Council propose to accommodate the needs of the increased number of children and very elderly people in the Borough arising from the new housing units included in regeneration plans? Had the Council not taken account of the considerable additional cost which could arise?

With respect to school populations, these had been projected and factored into expansion plans. There were modeling tools for adult social care needs and it was understood similar tools were used for assessment of children's special needs. The Council was taking account of demographic growth pressures in their budget plans.

Did the Council consider that the additional housing would bring considerable benefits to local people?

The Council was clear and committed in its objective to address the local housing crisis by providing significant numbers of new affordable homes in the Borough; this was part of a plan considered to be both ambitious and achievable.

How was the Council proposing to assist those people in the private rented sector faced with homelessness following eviction?

The Help to Let scheme had proved successful and the Council was acquiring properties to expand the stock of homes for social rent, with some 50 properties already transferred. Further information could be provided.

What were the governance arrangements for the letting of these new properties? Were the directors of the private company involved officers of the Council, and if so, how did their remuneration operate?

The Council had established a company limited by share (Concilium Business Services Ltd.) with the Council as sole owner. Its Directors were four officers of the Council, but they acted in the interests of the company in that role and did not take instructions from the Council. A Shareholder's Agreement was in place with set the parameters for the company's activities and an annual agreed plan formed the basis for its work; ultimately, it was in the control of the Council as sole shareholder. The Directors were remunerated and expected to carry out their company duties in addition to their substantive Council roles with additional hours being worked; the company's accounts would set out these figures.

How had the requirements of legislation about registering people with significant control or influence been addressed in the case of Concilium Business Services Ltd.?

Officers would report back to Members on this matter.

Had the Council established any threshold or policy which might limit any losses being incurred by its local authority company? What was the target date for the letting of 500 homes by Concilium Business Services Ltd.?

The company reported to the Council on a quarterly basis and while there was no target or threshold in terms of financial position, the Council was ultimately in control and could take any appropriate action in response to performance, including

cessation of trading if that were deemed necessary. A new business plan for the company's activities in the following year was currently in preparation and Cabinet would receive a report on this

Should the work of Concilium Business Services Ltd. be included in the Corporate Plan given uncertainties over its place in the private residential lettings market?

The reference in the Corporate Plan reflected the original plan for the company, when the intention was to source properties to let from the private market from Council's properties temporary accommodation and from those acquired by the Council for social rent. Cabinet would be able to review the project and the company's activities in the light of the new business plan.

How could the Council deal with cases of drivers parking on footways causing damage to grass verges?

This would be raised with the appropriate Portfolio Holder. The Council had secured new resources for enforcement in this area.

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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