

PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

11 DECEMBER 2017

Chair: * Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillors: * Richard Almond * Pritesh Patel
* Phillip O'Dell * Mrs Rekha Shah

* Denotes Member present

100. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

101. Declarations of Interest

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

102. Reasons for Lateness & Urgency

RESOLVED: That the reasons for lateness and urgency of the two supplemental agendas be agreed.

103. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

104. Public Questions & Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that none were received.

105. References from Council and Other Committees/Panels

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

RESOLVED ITEMS

106. Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2017/18 - Quarter 2 as at 30th September 2017

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Finance which set out the Council's revenue monitoring position as at Quarter 2, 2017/18 (30 September 2017).

Following a brief overview of the report by the Director of Finance, Members made the following comments and asked the following questions and officers responded accordingly:

- Page 42 savings RES 16: Had the service review of communications taken place? What was the outcome of the review? How would this affect communications from the Council?

An officer advised that no formal review had taken place. The comment in the report referred to reviewing the saving and ultimately the impact on the service of taking more money out of it. It was agreed with Members that the nature of the demand on the Communications Team for 2017/18 was such that the impact of taking £57k out and reducing it by more than a post would significantly reduce the impact of what the team could provide. Therefore in the light of this the £57k has been assumed as a pressure within the Strategic Commissioning Division for 2017/18, and this was being covered. For the future, options were being considered around how further external income could be delivered which would help offset the overall costs of the service.

The Member asked how the above impacted on residents.

The officer advised that within the Strategic Commissioning Division (where the Comms budget sat) they were in receipt of £85K from the Home Office for the Prevent programme. These monies were being used to fund an existing post within the Section as well as supporting bringing in additional capacity, which meant that there was a surplus of circa £30k, which was being used to support other pressures in the Divisional budget. There was also a vacancy in the Policy team which had arisen as a result of the reduction in work from the voluntary sector which amounted to £75K saving in the MTFs.

- Did the forecast £164M, which was 83% of the total Capital Programme have contingencies built into it?

The Director of Finance advised that when the budget was set, there was no assumption that funds would be drawn down. The contingency and reserve funds sat outside the budget and would be used to cover

unforeseen costs such as the recent works at Pinner Wood School to make it safe.

- Were the figures in Table 10 on page 30 of the agenda relating to carry forward accurate?

The Director of Finance undertook to check the figures and amend the table if they were incorrect.

- At the previous meeting of the Sub-Committee Members had requested that the impact and implications of any slippage on the Capital Programme be set out in the report. Why had this not been done?

The Director of Finance apologised for this oversight and undertook to ensure that this information was provided in all future reports. She added that a large number of cases, there was no revenue impact of any slippage.

- Why had officers' view of the Infinity project changed over time?

The Director of Finance stated that savings related to the project had already been slipped a year and, considering the certainty of income due and the overall financial position of the council, the decision has been taken to remove the saving from the MTFs. In the future, in light of the Council's overall financial position, there would be more robust oversight of innovative projects such as Infinity before inclusion in the budget. The product launch would be in March 2018 and it was not possible at this stage to predict how much income it was likely to generate. Because budgets were extremely tight, it was preferable not to include items such as the Infinity project in the budget as they carried higher risks of not being achieved, and would be more difficult to mitigate against as contingencies were low.

- Had the E-purse been considered too speculative to be included in the MTFs (Medium Term Financial Strategy)? How soon would the MCEP (My Community E-purse) be included in the budget?
- How would the Infinity project, even though it was not included in the budget, be continued to be prioritised?

The Director of Finance responded that officers had hoped that it would generate higher income than it had to date. Any income generated by the MCEP would be treated as a cash windfall in year and built into the budget in the following year. Work on the development and marketing of Project Infinity continued and it was estimated a product would be ready for launch in March 2018.

The Sub-Committee urged that officers follow up progress on the Infinity project and report back to the sub-committee.

- Page 43 PA_08: What was the average wait time for clients? What effect had this saving had on discharges from hospitals? The cost of

clients spending more time in residential and nursing units? Who was bearing this cost? And how was it affecting the quality of life for the people?

The Director of Finance advised that she was awaiting information regarding waiting time and undertook to circulate this information after the meeting. She added that discharges were carefully monitored. Hospital discharge costs were borne by the NHS whereas those from residential care were borne by the Local Authority.

The Member stated that he had submitted his questions ahead of the meeting in order to allow officers to gather information and collate their responses. He requested that relevant officers attend future meetings of the Sub-Committee to respond to Members' questions at the meeting.

- Page 45 CE_9 what was the target set for the Selective Licensing Scheme? Has this been met in Edgware Ward or Wealdstone ward? If not in either or both what effect will this have on tenants in such homes not licensed in terms of their health and Well being?

The total target for Selective Licensing Scheme was £420k which covered both the staffing costs as well as the income target set in the MTFs. It was forecast to be fully met from Edgware and Wealdstone wards in 17/18. There were 3 dedicated residential licensing officers and a support officer covering housing related licensing work and processing applications respectively. There was no health & safety impact on non-licensed premises as the requirements on the selective licensed premises were around environmental and ASB management mainly. Other aspects such as fire and safety were covered under legislation for private rented accommodation, including the housing health & safety risk rating system, and would be applicable if a licence was in place or not.

- Page 47 CHW 12 What were the improvements that were due to take place at Bannister Centre? What was the income targets for the Centre? If these have been missed who bears this cost? A how are residents of the borough affected by this?

The works planned at Bannister Sports Centre included improvements to grass pitches and the installation of a 3G artificial pitch, the funding for which had been secured via a S106 agreement relating to the development of Harrow View West. The income budget for Harrow Leisure Centre was approximately £1m per annum. The non-achievement of MTFs target of £100k in 17/18 was being mitigated by additional income in other services areas within Cultural Services. The existing leisure centre would remain in operation whilst the new centre was built, so the impact should be minimal. Plans for the Byron Quarter site included an enlarged separate gymnastics centre for Harrow School of Gymnastics which was very oversubscribed. The delay in the development as a whole would mean that this over demand was not met for longer.

- Page 45 CE_9: What target had been set for the Selective Licensing Scheme? Had this been met in Edgware Ward or Wealdstone ward? If not, in either or both what effect would this have on tenants in such homes not licensed in terms of their health and Well being?

This had been designated as an Amber saving and officers were forecasting it would be achieved in full.

- Page 47 CHW 12: What improvements were due to take place at the Bannister Centre? What was the income target for the Centre? If these had been missed who would bear this cost? How were residents of the borough affected by this?
- Were the Bannister Sports Centre and the Hatch End pool included in the Leisure Contract? The effects had not been specified in the Public Health programme?

The Director of Finance undertook to seek this information from the relevant directorate and circulate it to Members after the meeting.

- Was there a mechanism whereby items marked as amber or red were allocated high priority status in an effort to resolve them? How were Directorates encouraged?

The Director of Finance advised that the Council's auditors had stated that the monitoring of those savings flagged as red or amber during the year should be reviewed at year end to ensure their achievement / reversal was not overlooked as the new financial year started. This was actioned in the 2016/17 Outturn Report.

- What precisely had the auditors meant by more robust processes?

The Director of Finance advised that the auditors felt that there should be processes in place to monitor and deal with any savings flagged up as red and that these should be made more visible and explicit.

- The Children's Capital Project Team was working to resolve a number of building defects with the Council's contractor, Keepmoat. What, if any, financial penalties could the Council invoke in this case?

The Director of Finance advised that there was a legal process in place and the case was likely to go to court.

- What was the reason for the overspend in Children's Services? Why had this not been foreseen? What could Harrow learn from other local authorities with regard to this?

The Director of Finance responded that the unprecedented growth in Children's Services as a result of increased demand, which is difficult to predict, had continued after the 2017/18 budget had been set. A pan organisation spending freeze has been implemented at the start of the financial year and officers within the Children's division have and

continue to implement a number of actions, both recurrent and one off, to reduce cost pressures. The level of demand is showing signs of levelling off and a review of forecasting methodologies had been undertaken. Another officer added that the phenomenon of increased pressures on Children's Services was a London-wide issue with demand at its highest in London and the South East.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

107. Annual Equalities Report 2016/17

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning, which set out the Council's performance and work towards advancing equality of opportunity, and helped evaluate the equality of service provision. It also considered whether that work was benefitting local communities in Harrow and looked at ways work had been undertaken to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between the different communities in Harrow.

Following a brief overview of the report by an officer, Members made the following comments and asked the following questions and officers responded accordingly:

- How did the Council monitor whether work carried out as part of the plan was delivering benefits to the wider community – please give examples and evidence.
- What action was being taken to improve the portion of BAME and disabled staff at a Senior level? And what are the series of actions that CLG have taken to improve this? Please give examples and evidence.

An officer advised that the Plan tried to bring together a number of different activities across the Council. For example, 10 members of staff in Access Harrow had received training in the use of British Sign Language. The DisabledGo website, which was aimed at disabled people, provided information, advice and listings of social events and premises. The website had almost doubled the number of hits it received in 2017/18. A number of other events, such as Holocaust Memorial day, were commemorated annually.

He added that officers on the Corporate Leadership Group (which consisted of the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Divisional Directors) acted as role models and championed initiatives such as Stonewall, Diversity etc. The Council had also had discussions with CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting) regarding how to recruit staff from under-represented groups.

A Member asked what CEG, CRM and CLG and CCPH stood for. He requested that in the future, all acronyms used in reports should be clearly explained. This request was noted by officers.

An officer advised that CEG (Corporate Equalities Group), CRM (Customer Relation Management Software), CEG (Corporate

Equalities Group), CCPH related to the SAP infrastructure which supported the MY Harrow account.

- What was the difference between the Corporate Priorities and the Corporate Vision?

The officer stated that the Harrow Ambition Plan set out the overall direction of the Council, and as the Council was required to identify and work to achieve Equalities objectives under the 2010 Equalities Act, that these naturally sat underneath the Corporate Priorities. However, he recognised that the way this was presented in the report could be made clearer and he undertook to clarify this point in future reports.

- Why had only 58% of staff undertaken the mandatory equalities training?

An officer advised that there was a rolling programme of training and staff were expected to complete the online training every 2 years. Most staff based at the Depot did not have access to computers and would be offered classroom based training in the future.

- What reviews of policy had taken place and how effective had these been in increasing the number employees aged under 25? What specific changes in that policy had been undertaken and actioned in the last 12 months?
- Did the Council highlight career pathways in local government to younger applicants as part of its recruitment process?

An officer stated that recruiting younger staff was a challenge facing most local authorities. Some professions such as social work and planning required a degree and other qualifications, which meant that not everyone was eligible to apply. In some cases where staff had left or retired, their posts had been re-graded to a lower grade which had opened them up to younger applicants. The Council was also looking to increase the number of internships, traineeships and apprenticeships that it offered.

- How long would it take to review and strengthen monitoring systems? Had the policy team submitted a request to Sopra Steria to find out the costs? If so how much were these costs; if not would such a request be submitted in the next 12 months?

The monitoring of staff data was carried out through SAP and Sopra Steria were responsible for supporting any other IT packages which may need to be upgraded to support data collection as well as the actual software supplier. However, it was not possible to compel users of My Harrow for instance to respond to diversity monitoring questionnaires and it was important to weigh up the cost and benefits of rolling this out. It should be noted that a low response rate to the survey would provide an incomplete picture and additional investment would be needed to publicise the survey.

- Had work started in order to formalise good practice?

The CEG had undertaken this work, for example, the Council had signed up to the British Sign Language Charter; cross-council learning had been undertaken by the Children's Disability Team; 10 staff in Access Harrow were trained BSL interpreters; best practice was shared with partners and other local authorities. Staff from other authorities had visited Harrow to learn from it. The principle of Social value had been included in the procurement process and the Council was making good progress in this area, albeit with minimal resources.

The Member stated that the Council's commitment to fair trade, the minimum wage should be emphasised to existing contractors, and to new contractors at the pre-application stage.

- Why did Objective 3.1 still appear in the plan?

An officer stated that this was an aspirational objective which had not yet been achieved and he would review whether this should be included in the future in the light of whether this was achievable.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

108. 12 Month Review of Community Involvement in Parks Recommendations

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Corporate Director, Community which provided Members with monitoring feedback in response to the 'Community Involvement in Parks' Scrutiny review report and relevant Recommendations.

Following a brief overview of the report by an officer, Members made the following comments and asked the questions below and officers provided the following responses:

- Had the new booking system for sports pitches been publicised?

An officer advised that there was an online, area-based booking system as most sports clubs were now online. The website also provided information about clubs and groups. He added that most outdoor tennis courts in Harrow were free to use.

- Were there plans to install any more green gyms in the borough?

An officer stated that a green gym had recently been installed in Cedars Park Open Space and another would be soon be installed at the Woodlands Open Space. No further suitable sites had been identified.

- Statistics showed that the level of adverse health indicators in Pinner South Ward was high. Was there any data to show who used the

green gyms and what benefits they achieved? How had they been funded? How had the bicycle stands in parks been funded?

The officer stated that Edgware and South Harrow had been targeted in the first phase of installing green gyms, where the key objective had been to promote health amongst those with diabetes or had obesity issues. These had been funded from Capital funding, NIS (Neighbourhood Improvement Scheme) funds and monies from the local Primary Care Trust. He added that the bicycle stands had been installed next to each green gym and near children's playgrounds had been funded by TfL (Transport for London).

A Member stated that figures showed that life expectancy in Wealdstone Ward was 10 years less than in Pinner Ward. He proposed that green gyms should be installed in other deprived areas such as Wealdstone and Queensbury and specifically in the Whitefriars Open Space, Weald village and the open space by Artisan Place area. He suggested that these could be funded from the 15% of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) which would be received from new development. The motion was seconded and won.

- A Member asked why the Corporate Scorecard no longer listed voluntary hours. Did groups submit information about how they publicised their events?

An officer advised that it was difficult to judge the effectiveness of how groups worked in terms of the number of hours. For example, some local groups had a large membership but did not necessarily undertake a large volume of work. Groups were required to submit information about their projects and events to the Council. This information was monitored in order to help groups achieve their targets.

- What priorities had been set for parks?

The officer stated that there was a more detailed plan in place. Some of the Recommendations from the report had not yet been pursued, for example, the young champions, as currently the focus was on user groups. The existing strategy would be developed further in consultation with the park user groups.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.29 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chair