

CABINET – 13 FEBRUARY 2020

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11 FEBRUARY 2020

MINUTE 106 - DRAFT BOROUGH PLAN 2020-2030 INCLUDING THE DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN

The Committee received a report of the Chief Executive, which set out a draft Borough Plan for 2020-2030 for consultation and further development during 2020. The report incorporated the Council's Corporate Plan, which set out the Council's role in delivering the broader partnership agenda and the Corporate Priorities for 2020/21.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and explained the need to look beyond the short term and that the Borough Plan provided a 10-year vision and set out the Council's direction of travel. There was a need to address the Climate Emergency by taking the borough on a journey to becoming net-zero carbon during the life of the Plan. Additionally, the Council intended to move to a new Civic Centre. The Leader added that funding streams for Councils had changed and Councils were now more reliant on the tax payer rather than on government grants. He explained that the report before the Committee included two elements: the Borough Plan and the Corporate Plan. The Director stated that the Document would remain a draft throughout 2020.

The Director of Strategy reported on the work undertaken prior to the drafting of the Borough Plan and the Corporate Priorities and explained how the Council and partners had arrived with the set of eight priorities, which included focus areas in which the borough needed to improve (five priorities) and those areas where strong foundations were being built to sustain and support the priorities (three priorities). The Leader explained that he would like to see the five priorities eventually joining up with the three priorities where the Council was doing well. The Director outlined the next steps and the need to take the Borough Plan/Corporate Plan and Priorities forward with partner and resident engagement at which point there would be an opportunity to change the priorities. At present, the Plan did not contain significant detail and a more detailed delivery plan would be submitted to Cabinet and also the Committee.

The Director of Strategy responded to questions relating to the report. The Director explained that the Corporate Plan was the Draft Borough Plan and that the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan would set out details of how the priorities would be delivered. The Corporate Plan Delivery Plan and the short term Delivery Plan would be the same document and would set out how to develop the short term delivery of the Borough Plan. He explained that the Council was embarking on a new journey and would be looking at a 10-year vision with its partners. He explained that the Corporate Priorities were set out in the report and contained a narrative.

In response to a question about the need for the Corporate Plan to align with the Council's budget and whether the report to O&S, Cabinet and Council was compliant with the requirements set out in the Council's Constitution, he confirmed that it was. We would comply with the constitutional requirement by adopting a set of draft Corporate Priorities as, in effect, our Corporate Plan and Council would be asked to adopt those draft Corporate Priorities on 27 February 2020.

The Committee noted that the Borough Plan was ambitious. Members and Advisers sought assurances on the following:

- the terminology used in the report, particularly in reference to the elderly and tackling inequalities. The Director of Strategy agreed to amend the final wording. He added that the amount of money available (£30k) for engagement work would need to be targeted and that the Council would also draw on other engagement work it carried out to help inform the Borough Plan. The Director reported on the cost of the props that were used as part of the 'Let's Talk' consultation exercise which had been approximately £10k. One option the Council could consider would be to commission an external organisation to develop questions around the five priorities where improvements were required which was expected to cost up to £30k to ensure effective engagement;
- how the ambitions such as employment, health and poverty would be addressed. The Director reported that the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan would include such detail and would be reported to the Committee;
- health impacted on every aspect of the Council's work, including the ambitions set out in the report. Did the Council have a health policy? The Member had also observed that developers did not give any consideration to the provision of leisure facilities. The Leader reported that the Borough Plan relied on partnership working and the commitment received from partners would help address such issues;
- nature of support from partners, including the involvement of specific groups, and the criteria set for partners. The Director of Strategy reported that a number of meetings had been held with partners and a further meeting to discuss governance arrangements was scheduled to be held on 27 February 2020. The governance arrangements would set out accountability and a memorandum of understanding, including public accountability. The Director added that he had been enthused by these meetings and the commitment to the direction of travel set out in the Borough Plan. There was an appetite for doing something new and different to help shape the borough for the future. The Council would be looking to engage more broadly and it was intended to involve other groups such as primary/secondary schools and Westminster University. The Director explained that disability groups would be represented through the voluntary sector such as Harrow Community Action;

- with such ambitions, what would success look like and how would it be measured. The Director of Strategy replied that the Draft Borough Plan would articulate such points clearly and make them tangible and the Council would work with residents to define success/achievements. The Director added that the Borough Plan set out ambitious priorities but there was also a need to manage expectations. Funding levels would become important and the reality would involve making choices and meeting the requirements set by residents;

- was the reference to maintaining low crime levels a measure against that of London or at the level it was now? Additionally, did the target of becoming zero-carbon factor in the use of electric vehicles. The Leader replied that it was important to maintain crime levels against that in London. He added that the use of electric vehicles was likely to be brought forward. The Council had signed up to the London Mayor's Strategy to help reduce the reliance on cars. The availability of funding would be an essential factor in becoming zero-carbon but the Council had put in some measures to help reduce car usage and increased the number of charging points for electric vehicles. Harrow had the highest dependency on cars and this impacted on the environment and tackling the quality of air was important, including the need to change behaviours;

- how would Crossrail help and what powers were available to the Council to attract new Universities. The Director of Strategy explained that the development of Crossrail would help demonstrate that 'Harrow was open for business'. However, recent government announcements had shown that the money for transport infrastructure may be directed towards other parts of the UK instead of London. With regard to Universities, it was important to develop relationships with local Universities first, for example with Westminster University;

- more emphasis was required on education as the achievement of such ambitious priorities would not be possible without children in education. It was important that policies were developed that worked for the long term instead of the short term and the issue of school places currently available at primary level was cited. The Director of Strategy reported that challenges for school places in secondary schools remained an issue although a previous issue at primary level was resolved at that time. There was a clear strategy from the government about how schools had to be developed and he accepted that the ambition of every child having a school place remained a challenge but was one that the Council had an excellent track record on ensuring;

- there were more children with special needs and the changes in the demographic for education needed to be reflected. The Director of Strategy agreed with this sentiment;

- how the role of procurement would be enhanced as indicated in the report. The Director of Strategy provided an example of how this could be taken

forward. He explained that the Council could use its social value policy to provide leverage.

The Chair asked how Members of the Council, as representatives of residents, would be consulted and whether the various Committees of the Council would be consulted. The Director of Strategy stated that he would look at different ways of achieving this instead of using Committees as the fora for Member consultation.

The Chair enquired if the focus on long term priorities would mean the loss of the short term priorities. In response, the Director of Strategy stated that the Delivery Plan would balance the long and short term priorities.

The Chair expressed concern that the large number of ambitions set out in the Borough Plan might not be deliverable and whether these could be narrowed down to provides focus. The Director of Strategy stated that any consultation and engagement would need to be authentic and it was helpful to have the views of scrutiny members. It was likely that the priorities might be eventually linked together. The Leader of the Council acknowledged that a couple of the priorities were highly ambitious but others were achievable. The Council had been successful in bids to help with its work towards addressing health and social care inequality and education attainment level. The Chair was of the view that focus was a key element and that too many priorities, whilst noble, would require concerted efforts across all staff within the Council to achieve.

The Vice-Chair was in agreement that the priorities ought to be reduced and was of the view that the setting of 'vivid' rather than general priorities would be achievable. In response, the Director of Strategy stated that specific measurable points will be set following consultation and he agreed that poor health could be linked with housing.

Another Member was of the view that all eight priorities were strong contenders but how confident was the Council that eight was the correct number. The priorities were ambitious but needs to be specific and he noted that a further report would provide such detail and a statement of intent would help provide a sense of direction. In response, the Leader of the Council stated that the eight priorities would feed into each other and they showed the breadth of the responsibilities of the Council. The Council needed to support its residents and businesses and the Borough Plan set out purpose, focus and ambition for the people of Harrow.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the comments from the Committee on the Draft Borough Plan 2020-2030 including the Draft Corporate Plan be referred to Cabinet;
- (2) the Committee believed that there needed to be greater focus on a smaller number of priorities.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Draft Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11 February 2020

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