

Corporate Resources and Economy Scrutiny Committee - 30 July 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources and Economy Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 5, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 30 July 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Wayne (Chair), Khondoker (Vice-Chair), Chowdhury, Jackson, Ozdemir, Hayes, Ibrahim, Jegorovas-Armstrong, Pandor, Staff and Weekes

Also Present: **Councillors:** Bell-Bradford and Ward

Councillor Nick Wayne in the Chair

- 10** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Apologies were received from Councillors Clarke and Hyde.
- 11** **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
Councillor Hayes substituted for Councillor Clarke.
- 12** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**
Councillor Khondoker declared a personal interest in Agenda Item D1, the Annual Presentation from the Executive Member for Inclusive Economy, Culture and Jobs, noting that she was also a member of the Executive during the previous municipal year, and some aspects of her work would have overlapped with Cllr Bell-Bradford's portfolio.
- 13** **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**
RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 June 2024 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 14** **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**
The Chair commented that Scrutiny Members had attended a useful training session over the past month on questioning skills. The Chair encouraged those members who were unable to attend to review the training materials.
- 15** **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**
None.
- 16** **ANNUAL PRESENTATION - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMY, CULTURE AND JOBS (Item D1)**
Councillor Bell-Bradford, Executive Member for Inclusive Economy, Culture and Jobs, introduced his annual presentation to the Committee.

The following key points were noted during the presentation:

- The Executive Member highlighted the council's progress in securing apprenticeships and employment opportunities throughout its supply chain and in local businesses. The council had supported 4,698 residents into work over the past two years; significantly better than the manifesto commitment to place 5,000 residents into work over four years.
- The Executive Member commented on areas the council was working to improve; 27 more local businesses had been accredited as London Living Wage employers in 2023-24, bringing the total to 329, however it was known that more engagement was needed with Anchor Institutions to encourage them to seek London Living Wage accreditation through their supply chains.
- The council's focus on getting local people into work was working to address poverty through high quality employment opportunities. The council supported people into good jobs, that paid the London Living Wage, and provided one-on-one support to keep people in employment. The service was performing in excess of targets. The Executive Member commented on the potential of new devolution opportunities from the new Labour Government, which may provide local authorities with greater powers to support local employment.
- The Anchor Institution Network was a group of prominent local employers including the Council, Whittington Hospital, London Metropolitan University, Arsenal Football Club and others that sought to take a joint approach to local recruitment and related issues; this including encouraging organisations to pay London Living Wage and take an "Islington first" approach to recruitment. These organisations symbolised the borough and were rooted in the local area.
- The Council was also working to standardise social value requirements in procurement. As an example, the payment for travel time on social care contracts was previously considered to be a "social value" addition, however through persistence in procurement this has since become a standard feature of the contracts. The council was now seeking to guarantee sick pay for care workers through its contracts. There were opportunities for the local government sector to take a joint and consistent approach to this to help shape the local market.
- A member queried how the council supports people into work. The Executive Member explained that efforts were focused on those furthest from the jobs market; this included assigning a jobs and skills coach, providing interview skills training, and matching resident skills to local opportunities. The service provided tailored support to residents with disabilities, who are neurodivergent, or who are from global majority backgrounds. As well as supporting residents, the council also engaged with local employers to help tailor opportunities in the local jobs market.
- A member queried if the service should be setting more ambitious targets for supporting people into work, given the success in meeting the targets earlier than expected. In response, the Executive Member commented that he would like to focus on developing bespoke programmes into local employment for young people; Islington was on the edge of the City of London, with some of the top employers in the world nearby, however working-class young people from Islington did not have established routes into these employment opportunities. The Executive Member also wanted to increase focus on keeping people in jobs and tracking their progression; as well as taking a more granular approach to data, allowing for greater analysis.
- A member queries the statistics on page 65 of the presentation; this highlighted that the council had achieved £2.3m in social value, with six staff employed from under-represented groups, which seemed to be a low number. In response, it was explained that the true number would be higher, however there were challenges with monitoring and data collection, which was not carried out centrally. Work was underway to improve data collection.

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- A member noted the target of 1,000 apprenticeships had not been met, and the council was currently delivering 50 apprenticeships in house per year. It was queried how the council would work to meet this target. In response, the Executive Member noted the target of 1,000 was total opportunities both in the council, in local businesses, and through the supply chain. The council offering 50 apprenticeships in house was considered to be good progress and evidence of the council leading by example. It was hoped to expand on this number in future, and the council was working with local businesses to encourage them to offer more apprenticeships.
- Following a question on the quality of local employment opportunities, the Executive Member emphasised that the council focused on good quality opportunities, and noted that this was a non-statutory service that the council offered because it was the right thing to do and helped to address poverty and inequality in the local community. Officers commented that more could be done to publicise the successes of the service.
- It was confirmed that the council monitored employment placements at 13 weeks and 26 weeks to confirm that the resident was still in employment. The Committee suggested that longer term monitoring, over two or three years, would be valuable.
- A member noted the council's role as an employer and commented that the council's workforce should better reflect the demographics of the local community, particularly in senior roles. The Executive Member for Finance and Performance commented on the work to increase the diversity of the council's workforce, and that the latest performance report indicated that the percentage of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff within the top 5% of earners was now 31%, around 10% higher than the London average. However, it was appreciated that there was more to be done to increase diversity in the workforce.
- A member asked about the availability of affordable workspaces and the need to have premises that could adapt to new and emerging industries. In response, it was advised that an Affordable Workspace Strategy was being developed and it was acknowledged that the council's approach to commercial property would need to adapt to meet the needs of the local economy.
- The Executive Member commented on positive relationships with local employers; noting that some were very motivated by the council's mission to create a more equal Islington and were proactive in collaborating with the council.
- A member asked about barriers to achieving the council's inclusive economy ambitions. In response, it was advised that there were some difficulties in working across London. While some boroughs had similar ambitions, most other councils did not provide the same level of support or investment, or prioritise this work in the same way that Islington had. As a result, it could be challenging to take a coordinated strategic approach across London, particularly when working together at scale could lead to better engagement with major employers. The council was working to develop a model that other councils could adapt and it would hope that this would help to standardise social value asks across London.
- The Executive Member also commented that he would like to see more ward-based business support, offering smaller interventions for local businesses. It was commented that every business in the borough needed to know that the council was on their side. While the council had been successful in building networks, more could be done to clarify the offer of support to local businesses.
- A member asked about how to support residents with English as a second language into employment, while also commenting on the challenges faced by carers and those digitally excluded. It was important to ensure that employment opportunities were accessible to all. It was suggested that a leaflet could be produced for ward councillors to distribute at surgeries, Members also suggested that a comprehensive communications strategy should be developed to promote employment support services.

- Members commented on the potential of collaboration with other boroughs; for example, could Islington offer employment opportunities to residents in neighbouring boroughs, if they also offered opportunities to Islington residents in return. The Executive Member commented that this would need further consideration.

The Committee thanked the Executive Member for his attendance.

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BUDGET OUTTURN 2023-24 (Item D2)

Councillor Ward, Executive Member for Finance and Performance, and Dave Hodgkinson, Corporate Director – Resources, introduced the Budget Outturn report.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Despite financial challenges, the council had a balanced budget at year end, however had made use of contingency budgets to achieve this. Councillor Ward summarised the main financial movements detailed in the report and commented on the overall financial position in local government, which remained challenging.
- A member queried the progress of the insurance claim related to the fires and floods at three leisure centres. Officers advised that negotiations were ongoing.
- A member noted the overspend in the Environment department, in comparison to the underspend in youth and criminal justice budgets, and commented on the importance of ensuring that budget projections are robust. Officers advised of the work to review parking budgets over the past year, and while some overspend was expected in Quarter 1, it was a much improved position in comparison to previous years.
- It was clarified that departments that routinely underspend year on year would have their budget adjusted accordingly, however this did not happen routinely.
- A member expressed concern at the Environment overspend, commenting on the importance of futureproofing the borough against environmental changes, and the need to forecast income and expenditure accurately. It was advised that the parking income account was a strategic risk in that income was volatile and could be impacted by circumstances outside of the council's control.
- Following a question on abuse of the parking system, e.g. the impact of false license plates and vandalism of enforcement cameras, it was advised that an update from the relevant officers would be sought.
- In response to a question, it was advised that the Executive had recently reviewed the budget of the new build programme, and programme budgets would continue to be kept under review. It was commented that national economic conditions had changed the landscape for the new build programme, and while the council could not make guarantees on future progress given the influence of broader economic factors, it was noted that the new government had already changed the financial rules on Right to Buy receipts, which was a positive development.
- Members welcomed that the government was considering multi-year financial settlements, which would provide the council with the certainty needed to plan and deliver services and manage its budget effectively.
- The previous government had asked all councils to identify possible efficiencies and areas for savings. The Executive Member emphasised that it was important for councils to use public money efficiently, and this could involve investing money in new systems, software and processes in order to manage council business more effectively.
- Following a question on the overspend in Adult Social Care budgets, it was advised that this was a national issue and while the service was working to reduce costs through transformation programmes, Adult Social Care was a demand-led service

and there were costs associated with meeting the needs of an ageing population. Members commented on the importance of lobbying nationally for a funding deal for Adult Social Care.

- In response to a question, it was advised that additional staff were brought in to help manage the complaints backlog. This was a temporary measure and the council was now introducing new systems to manage complaints better.
- A member noted the historic debt in the Council Tax and Business Rates collection fund and queried the prospect of recovering these funds. In response, it was advised that the council was considered to have a relatively high collection rate in comparison to other authorities and benchmarked well against other boroughs.
- A member asked if the costs of the Sobell Leisure Centre refit had significantly changed and if it was still planned to open on time. It was advised that there were costs associated with the centre being closed, however the project was expected to be on track. A further update would be sought following the meeting.
- A member queried paragraph 7.19 of the report, which suggested that slippage on fire safety works had been a consequence of delays to planning and internal governance processes. It was advised that clarification would be sought on this point.
- A member queried paragraph 8.4 of the report, which suggested a target that every child in the borough would use the Sobell Leisure Centre in the first year of operation, and asked how this could be monitored.

RESOLVED:

That the Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Provisional Outturn and New Leisure Fees and Charges report, agreed by the Executive on 27 June 2024, be noted.

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CORPORATE PERFORMANCE Q4 2023-24 (Item D3)

Councillor Ward, Executive Member for Finance and Performance, and Rachel Harrison, Deputy Director of Finance, introduced the report.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- A member highlighted the Four Day Working Week trial implemented by South Cambridgeshire District Council and asked if the council would consider implementing a similar trial. In response, the Executive Member advised that he would be interested to review the results of the trial.
- The Committee welcomed the council's work in implementing Voter ID in the recent elections and that very few voters had been turned away at polling stations.
- A member queried the performance of the Member Enquiries process, with only 31% of enquiries responded to in 10 working days. In response, officers summarised the new systems and processes being implemented to address this.
- A member asked if the Executive Member was confident that the council had the systems and resources in place to see a appreciable improvement in performance on member enquiries within the next six months. In response, it was advised that the Executive Member was satisfied with the work being carried out, and improvement was expected, although there would still be further progress to be made.
- It was queried if the council had sufficient staff to manage the volume of casework received. In response, it was advised that system improvements would lead to improved performance, and while there was not thought to be a staffing issue, the council could consider increasing resources in staffing budgets if it was deemed to be necessary.
- A member highlighted that some casework responses were not high quality and asked what could be done to improve this. In response, it was advised that a the

new system would require responses to be checked by a senior manager before they are submitted.

- Following a question, officers summarised the council's framework for appointing agency staff, and highlighted the work to transition staff from temporary to permanent contracts.
- The Committee commented on the importance of innovation and making the most of new technologies to implement efficiencies.
- A member noted a communications issue with the Adult Social Care department; it was advised that this would be raised outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Corporate Performance at Q4 2023-24 be noted.

19 APPROVAL OF SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (Item D4)

The Chair introduced the Scrutiny Initiation Document for the proposed review of progressive procurement.

Officers advised that a reading list of background information would be prepared for members.

It was agreed that the SID would continue to develop and the evidence plan could be revisited as the review progresses.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be approved.
- (ii) It be noted that the evidence plan may continue to develop throughout the review.

20 MONITORING ITEM (Item D5)

Updates from Committee Chairs

Cllr Ozdemir, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, commented that the committee would be reviewing secondary school absence and would also be continuing to consider school organisation issues.

The Chair advised that he had been approached to authorise the use of the urgency procedures in relation to a key decision. The Committee Clerk explained the constitutional rules relating to urgency.

Work Plan

It was advised that a small working group would be held to consider how performance data is presented to the committee. The first meeting would be held over the coming weeks.

Members commented on the use of data in reports and the need for this to be presented clearly.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

CHAIR