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London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 31 October 2016

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2016 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Greening (Chair), Jeapes (Vice-Chair), Chowdhury,
Court, Debono, Gantly, O'Halloran, O'Sullivan, Russell,
Wayne, Heather and Champion
Also **Councillors:** Hull
Present:

Councillor Richard Greening in the Chair

264 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillors Doolan Perry and Debono (lateness)

265 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None

266 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

None

267 TO APPROVE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 September 2016 be confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings and that the Chair be authorised to sign them

268 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Item 5)

Quarter 1 Performance Report – Minute 261

The Chair stated that he had not received the information requested on the number of calls handled by Contact Islington and it was stated that this would be provided to him as soon as possible

269 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 6)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions and filming and recording of meetings

A Member of the Public enquired whether the Chair was happy with Member attendance at scrutiny review committee meetings. The Chair stated that he has been encouraging scrutiny work in alternative ways, rather than just gathering evidence at Committee meetings, and that in his view attendance was satisfactory, as evidenced by the large number of Members attending the meeting that evening

270 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 7)**

Revised Time of Meetings

The Chair stated that, in order to finish meetings at an earlier time, no later than 10.00p.m., he was proposing to commence future meetings of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee at 7.00p.m., rather than at 7.30 p.m., as at present, with effect from the 20 December meeting

Members of the Committee concurred with this proposal and the Chair stated that he would make the necessary arrangements with the Chief Whip.

271 **PRESENTATION EXECUTIVE MEMBER - FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY (Item 10)**

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the Committee thereon.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- The Executive Member is responsible for Finance, Resources, Democratic Services, Customer Services, Performance, Transformation and Community Safety
- There was a balanced budget delivered for 2015/16 and the annual accounts were signed off with no qualification or issues
- The 2016/17 budget was agreed delivering a further £24 million savings, as a result of Government cuts, meaning that the Council has now had to, in response, reduce the budget by £174million since 2010
- Developed the Council's budget strategy through the medium term financial forecast
- Revenues and Benefits – maintained Council and Business Tax collection rates, generating over £130m of revenue for the Council
- Collected almost £1m since September 2015 in backdated debt, through target project. In addition, implemented Council Tax Support scheme
- Continued to run one of the best performing Housing Benefit administration services in London
- Continued to fund the Resident Support scheme, despite Government cuts to grants, to support the vulnerable in crisis or in need of additional support
- Continued advice sector funding at the highest level in London
- Continued to convene the Islington Debt coalition and retained Universal Support locally and maintained the cap on Council Tax support at 8.5%, despite the loss of Government support
- Agreed a new Procurement Strategy and the Commissioning and the Procurement Board provide support and challenge all procurements to reduce costs and increase effectiveness
- Training delivered on how to win Council business to local small and medium sized enterprises and the voluntary sector

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- Established a programme of work to generate £3m of additional income/savings through building rationalisation and increasing commercial lettings
- Working with Housing and VCS colleagues to review the use of community centres to ensure optimal use
- Restructured the property team and enhanced security at the Town Hall
- Successful challenge to TfL's plans to close Caledonian Road station for 8 months
- Successful partnership with TfL to resist the application to judicially review the Archway Gyratory system
- Assisted the Family Justice group in providing innovative ideas to help families and reduce the need for Care Proceedings
- Dealing with in sourced litigated insurance work
- Human Resources – new online recruitment system implemented, Voluntary Redundancy exercise implemented, successfully re-accredited by Timewise, Payroll Giving Quality Mark Award 2016 achieved, coaching capacity expanded, new Occupational Health provider procured, Inspiring Leadership programme for BME staff started to address under-representation at senior levels
- Digital – New Council website launched in September 2016, making content and transactions easier to find. Digital Inclusion programme now underway and plans to use libraries as digital hubs
- Introduced guest wi-fi in council buildings and improved remote working capabilities for council staff, established security arrangements to protect the Council's networks, and progressed the shared ICT services with Camden and Haringey, with a new shared Head of IT
- Democratic Services- implemented changes to increase public involvement in full Council meetings, supported the establishment of iCO, supported a busy scrutiny programme, and significant re-organisation across the department
- Registrars – increased performance levels and all national performance targets exceeded, income target of £1.2 million achieved, over 75% of appointments booked online, marketing website achieved over 130,00 hits in the last 6 months, new income generation pilots introduced, and currently the Registrars Manager is shared with Hackney and the City of London, bringing in revenue to Islington
- Elections – delivered GLA elections and EU referendum within 7 weeks of each other and the EU referendum hit historic highs with 19,265 applications to register to vote, and over 5,000 new postal voters added. Canvassing with tablets took place, one of the first in the UK, and there were also two Business Improvement District elections delivered, together with a Youth Council election, HMP Pentonville Prison Council election and Barnsbury Ward by-election
- Performance – reviewed and refreshed the Council's corporate performance indicators, setting new challenging targets, which involved Scrutiny Chairs
- Introduced new arrangements for performance reporting to scrutiny, each Committee will have responsibility for monitoring and challenging performance for those areas within its remit
- Monthly performance Panel meetings, focusing on key priorities with Corporate Directors and Executive Members, and tracked progress against the wider Corporate Plan, publishing headlines on the website and posters across the Council
- Risk – re-let the internal audit contract with six other London Councils delivering volume discounts, completed the internal audit plan for 2014/15 with high levels of implemented recommendations. Prepared and embarked on fully consulted, risk based plan for 2015/16. Revised corporate anti- fraud strategy and policies to maximise the benefits from corporate anti-fraud risks and rolled out revised corporate risk management framework. Achieved a reasonable assurance following an audit by the ICO and have implemented all the post audit recommendations and established a Data Protection sharepoint site for handling 'subject access requests' and improved FOI handling

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- Transformation – Income Generation – established the Commercial Board, new income generation opportunities, iCO established with several services now trading through it. Shared digital services with Camden and Haringey and asset optimisation e.g. accommodation review to vacate Northway House and the CCG coming into Laycock Street. Digitisation – more services being put on line and this has reduced call volumes and visits to Contact Islington by 10% and 7% respectively last year
- Community Safety – Successful launch of the multi -agency Integrated Gangs Team based at Islington Police station. New Safer Islington Partnership launched and there has been a reduction in repeat callers for ASB to the Council. Significant decrease in burglary offences and there are increased numbers of prolific adult offenders now in Education, Training or Employment. There is also more effective handling of high risk Domestic Violence cases
- Fairness – Continued leadership on the LLW and LBI the first accredited LLW local authority in UK. 100% of LBI staff and 98% of contractors receive at least LLW and 110 other Islington local employers have been persuaded to pay LLW, and the Council is to become a Living Wage Friendly Funder Promoted awareness of IDAHOT, Transgender Day and Bi- Visibility Day in support of the LGTB community. Launched Islington Council's 'Tough Choices' anti-cuts communications campaign. Established and led Red Lines campaigns pan-London against cuts to youth funding and adult social care. Supported Fairness Commissions to tackle inequality, nationally and internationally
- A Member made reference to the Hate Crime week and the excellent staff who had attended and Councillor Hull stated that he would feed this comment back to the staff concerned
- A Member referred to the recent appointment of a consultant, as a result of the re-organisation of the top structure of the Council, and that this should not have been necessary if the departure of certain Chief Officers had been dealt with in a different manner and this showed a lack of planning
- In response to a question it was stated that the Council did try to support and develop a package of support for SME's and the voluntary sector
- Discussion took place as to the proposed business rate retention and that it would be useful if Members could be provided with a briefing note in this regard. It was stated that some businesses in Islington would be facing an increase of 43% in business rates as a result of the Government's re-evaluation
- Members expressed the view that, wherever possible, SME's and the voluntary sector should be assisted in bidding for contracts as it is important to keep money in the local community. Members requested that information should be provided to Members as to how successful the Procurement Team have been in assisting SME's and the voluntary sector in winning contracts
- In response to a statement Councillor Hull stated that he would circulate copies of the Council's policies on lone working to Members of the Committee

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation be noted
- (b) That a briefing note be circulated to Members of the Committee detailing the implications of the business rate re-evaluation and business rates retention proposals for the Council
- (c) That copies of the Council's policies on lone working be circulated to Members of the Committee
- (d) That Members be informed of how successful the Procurement Team has been in assisting SME's and the voluntary sector and in winning contracts

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull for his presentation

272 **FINANCIAL UPDATE (Item 8)**

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present together with Alan Layton, Director Financial Management

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- The Committee noted the General Fund anticipated forecast outturn position for 2016/17m, as at August 31, and that there will be a net overspend of £0.9m after a £3m drawdown from the contingency reserve
- It was noted that the HRA is forecast to break even over the year
- It was noted that the £116.5m of capital expenditure will be delivered in 2016/17
- Concern was expressed at the overspends in certain departments, especially Environment and Regeneration, and that the savings envisaged were not being realised, especially in relation to the Village principle, which has still not been implemented
- Councillor Hull stated that there had been problems in implementing the Village principle but these were being looked at and it was felt that these savings will eventually be realised. He stated that he would request the Director of Environment and Regeneration to inform Members of the detailed reasons for the delay
- Reference was made to paragraph 4.6 of the report, the long standing structural issues in Environment and Regeneration, and the non-achievement of savings and delays in implementing service changes. Councillor Court, the Chair of Environment and Regeneration stated that the Director of Environment and Regeneration would be attending the next meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and that the Committee would be questioning him on the reasons for the non- achievement of savings and the long standing structural issues that need to be resolved
- Reference was made to the Data Circuit savings in paragraph 4.77 of the report and it was stated that this is in relation to selling wi-fi and that it will now benefit the HRA rather than the General Fund as most of the sites were on housing land
- Councillor Hull referred to the fact that Islington was in a healthier financial position than a number of other Local Authorities and that L.B.Haringey were facing a £26m projected deficit in their budget, whereas the Council were projecting a £0.9m deficit, after the additional contingency funding
- Reference was made to paragraphs 4.7.1 to 4.77 of the report and that the Director of Environment and Regeneration and Executive Member for Environment and Transport should provide an explanation of the reasons for the overspends/non-achievement of savings
- Councillor Hull informed the Committee that there is additional funding being generated through the Parking account and the modelling used for future income generation is a realistic one
- Councillor Hull stated ;that he felt that the lack of achievement of income generation savings only tended to be addressed at Budget time and that this needed to be dealt with in more detail in future years
- Reference was made to the projected increased pupil numbers and that of children's placements and that the Council needed to have improved demographic information in order to plan and budget for these increases more effectively and that ways of doing this were being investigated

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- In response to a question it was stated that Adult Social Care were anticipating a break even position over the financial year in addition to Public Health

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That the Director of Environment and Regeneration be requested to inform the Committee of the reasons for the non- achievement of savings, overspends etc. as detailed above

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull for his presentation

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WELFARE REFORMS UPDATE (Item 9)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present and outlined the report to the Committee.

Ian Adams, Director of Digital and Processing Services was also present.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- It was noted that Appendix A to the report outlined the changes introduced in the Welfare and Work Act 2016, including a further reduction in the benefit cap, and the timetable for implementation of outstanding reforms
- The proposed changes reinforced the Council's decision to maintain a strong advice team and the Policy in Practice document identified opportunities and the implications of the reforms on Islington residents. There is also the opportunity for Policy and Practice to develop the work and report on the effects of the changes in 12 months
- It was noted that some parts of the borough would be particularly adversely affected by the changes, such as Finsbury Park ward
- Members expressed the view that a short briefing document should be prepared for Members and voluntary organisations and that a briefing meeting should also be held to inform them of the changes and implications that are coming into place that would affect residents
- A Member expressed the view that it would be more difficult for Members to assist residents, as a result of the introduction of these Government changes, as they had been able to do on the Bedroom Tax
- Reference was made to the fact that given the complexity of the changes the Government were proposing it will be difficult to help them understand the potential effects and the report showed that over 30,000 households could be affected
- Discussion took place as to the implications for the private rented sector and the number of evictions and it was stated that whilst these figures could be looked at these would not be complete as the Council did not have all this information
- Reference was made to the need to share the information across departments and the additional problems related as a result of the introduction of the Housing and Planning Bill and Universal Credit and other changes. It was stated that data protection issues may well affect sharing of data with partners/other organisations, although some discussions were taking place with Help on Your Doorstep
- Members expressed regret that the previous Coalition Government had introduced a number of these reforms that would adversely affect residents in the borough

RESOLVED:

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(a) That the report be noted and the Director of Digital and Processing Services be requested to arrange a briefing session and prepare a short briefing note for Members/Voluntary sector organisations, on the implications of the forthcoming legislation changes

(b) That the report be noted

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull for attending

274 MONITORING REPORT (Item)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 9.50 p.m.

CHAIR

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