

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 20 July 2017

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 20 July 2017 at 7.30 pm.

Present:	Councillors:	Greening (Chair), Jeapes (Vice-Chair), Debono, O'Halloran, Gallagher, Heather, Williamson, Smith and Champion
Also Present:	Councillors:	Hull and Watts

Councillor Richard Greening in the Chair

367 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillors Khan, Doolan, Chowdhury, Klute, O'Sullivan and Perry

368 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None

369 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

None

370 TO APPROVE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the following amendment in minute 366 – Youth Crime – bullet point 2 – delete the word 'being' and insert the word 'beginning', the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 July 2018 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

371 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Item 5)

None

372 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 6)

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

373 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 7)

The Chair informed Members that the meeting of the PPS Committee scheduled for 29 March 2018 was the evening prior to Good Friday and therefore with the permission of the Committee he would request Director of Law and Governance to seek an alternative date

The Committee concurred with this proposal.

374 SCRUTINY REVIEW - FLOODING - FINAL REPORT (Item 8)

The Chair presented the draft report and recommendations in relation to the flooding scrutiny.

Members congratulated the Chair on the excellent work he had undertaken and amount of time he had spent on dealing with this review.

Following consideration of the report it was -

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the following revised recommendation (t) – page 13 of the report to read – ‘That the Mayor, GLA and the London Boroughs support the campaign for the Fire Brigade to become the statutory Emergency Response service for flooding, as recommended in the Pitt Review in 2008. This is in view of recent major bursts resulting in severe flooding, and given the fact that such occurrences are more likely to occur in future, given the ageing Victorian trunk mains network across London’

the recommendations and report be referred to the Executive for approval

375 LEADER'S PRESENTATION ON EXECUTIVE PRIORITIES (Item 9)

Councillor Richard Watts, Leader of the Council, was present and during his presentation the following main points were made –

- The Leader stated that the priorities of the Council were to deliver employment opportunities, deliver affordable housing and support opportunities for young people. 1000 residents had been supported into work in the past year and 120 apprenticeships had been created. In addition, there had been the highest number of new Council houses built in the last 30 years and residents have been assisted in reducing their energy bills through the Bunhill Heat and Power initiative and further measures were planned to assist other residents through the Community Energy programme
- The borough has also achieved the highest GCSE level pass rates ever and is now one of the 20 highest achieving Local Authorities in England
- The recent OFSTED inspection of Children's Services Department had been good and that both Members and staff deserved credit for this
- Islington has been proud of maintaining its youth facilities and out of hours schools offer in the face of Government funding restrictions
- The Leader stated that one area of concern was the issue of Fire Safety, following the Grenfell Tower disaster and that the Council were taking steps to ensure that all buildings were safe and where necessary urgent action taken., on the advice of the London Fire Brigade. The Leader also stated that he would like to place on record his appreciation to the staff who had assisted in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower incident, the recent incident at the Finsbury Park Mosque and in Camden

- The Leader expressed the view that the building regulations in force at present were not suitable for purpose and that there were questions to answer in relation to this for the Government and the construction industry
- The Leader informed Members of the exceptional community cohesion that had taken place following the Finsbury Park Mosque incident and that the community had responded effectively
- The Leader also referred to the fact that there is a need, following Government funding restrictions on public services, to ensure that public services can meet residents needs and that this tragedy led to better outcomes for residents in the future
- In response to a question as to funding for the works that would be necessary for buildings in Islington, due to the Grenfell Tower disaster. It was stated that the Council could choose to borrow funding to carry out the necessary works, however the Government had made promises about funding for the works necessary and it will be interesting to see if these promises were kept. The Leader added that the Council would be campaigning to ensure that the Government kept its promises in this regard.
- In response to a question as to the need to improve housing repairs, the Leader stated that there had been problems, as a result of bringing the service back 'in house' however the previous Kiers contract had been problematic. The Leader stated that he did think the situation is improving on day to day repairs, however major works contracts did have difficulties due to the few number of major contractors who bid for Local Authority work, especially across London and this needed to be looked at
- In relation to housing repairs training and investment were taking place for operatives to try to get repairs right first time, which would involve making a good initial assessment of the works required and that details of the number of repairs completed first time could be provided for Members
- A Member stated that there was a need to take decisions on Fire Safety in a rational manner and to look at the recommendations of the enquiry and learn lessons into the fire in Southwark, where the recommendations had not been implemented. This included the checking of fire doors and these types of safety checks could be put in place immediately
- The Leader stated that work is taking place to ensure buildings are safe and that fire safety inspections were being carried out. There would be problem areas such as in corridors where residents often stored pushchairs and prams etc. and this would need to be looked at and discussions would also need to take place with leaseholders in order to carry out any necessary works
- In response to a question it was stated that whilst there had been a delay in the new build Council Housing programme the overall timescale for completion is still on schedule for 2019. The Leader stated that he would provide Members with details of the latest position
- The Leader stated that the Council did have an emergency plan in place for major incidents and this would involve where there is a major incident utilising the GOLD response, in conjunction with other London Boroughs, where it was not possible for a Borough to deal with the incident on its own
- A Member expressed concern that Partners were not working effectively for tenants and their repairs service was unsatisfactory. It was stated that whilst the Council shared this frustration Partners had a contract until 2024 and it was difficult to be able to take any effective remedial action against them
- In response to a statement the Leader stated that he would welcome the Government ending PFI contracts

RESOLVED:

That the Leader be requested to inform the Committee as to the number of repairs completed first time' and the estimated completion dates and progress in relation to the Council new build housing programme

The Chair thanked the Leader for attending and his presentation

376 SCRUTINY REVIEW - TAX AVOIDANCE - 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (Item 10)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present and was accompanied by Steve Key, Service Direction Finance.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and Steve Key for attending

377 FINANCIAL UPDATE (Item 11)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present and was accompanied by Steve Key, Service Director Finance.

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

- It was noted that there had been a £1.5m overspend but this had, as a result of the proposed clawback of £1.5m from departmental carry forwards, resulted in a break-even position for the Council's budget for 2016/17
- It was noted that the Council had been able to spend 100% of the capital programme monies
- In response to a question it was stated that there is currently no Council policy not to fill vacancies and that in relation to NNDR there is a lot of transitional work taking place at the moment through Councillor Shaikh. However, at present it is not possible to state if there will be an effect of businesses moving out of the borough
- Reference was made to the non - achievement of savings in some areas in Public Realm. It was stated that this was due to a number of factors and these savings would hopefully be achieved over time, however this is an area of challenge for the department
- In response to a question as to whether, if the cost of hall letting charges were reduced, this would result in increased lettings and more income actually being received, Councillor Hull stated that he would look at user statistics and investigate this matter

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety be requested to investigate the issue of hall lettings and hire charges, as requested above

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and Steve Key for attending

378 **PERFORMANCE STATISTICS (Item 12)**

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present for this item.

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

- Members were informed that a number of additional indicators had been added and that comparisons can now be made on a year by year basis and the Committee concurred with those amendments, as outlined by the Executive Member
- A Member expressed concern at a recent incident that she was aware of where the Police response to such incident had been unacceptably slow, and that in her view this should be included in future reports. The Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety stated that this was a Police issue. However, the Mayor of London has also raised this as an issue and the issue of communication is being looked at in terms of the recent merger of Islington and Camden Police forces
- In relation to the average length of sickness per employee, a Member enquired whether the 7.5 day figure stated was a mean or median figure. The Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety stated that he would ensure that both figures were included in the next report to the Committee
- Reference was also made to the reporting of ASB and that residents were getting conflicting advice in relation to 101 calls. It was stated that there had been an increase in the calls to the Council's ASB hotline which is putting additional pressure on the service. There is a need to manage expectations as to the level of service that the ASB team can provide
- In response to a question, as to the reasons for the varying levels of sickness in departments, it was stated that manual work employees, because of the nature of the work, tended to have more sickness, however return to work interviews were conducted with staff returning from absence and various disciplinary measures could be introduced, if necessary
- Reference was also made to the levels of sickness in Resources and that the reasons for this should be looked at and whether stress at work is a significant contributory factor in sickness absence levels. Details should be included in the update report on agency staff that is due to be considered by the Committee later in the year
- A Member referred to a recent incident where she had had problems with getting assistance from the ASB hotline and also with housing staff that she had contacted. It was stated that the Assistant Director of Environment and Regeneration, Jan Hart, should attend a future meeting to discuss the issues raised and contact Councillor O'Halloran concerning the specific incident that she had raised
- Concern was also expressed that no prosecutions had taken place in relation to incidents at the Finsbury Park Mosque and it was stated that there needed to be an improvement from the Police in this regard. The Committee expressed the view that the Chair should write to the Borough Commander to this effect

RESOLVED:

- (a) That sickness figures be reflected in mean and median formats in the next report to the Committee and details of sickness of staff relating to injuries at work also be provided
- (b) That figures be included for staff who are absent due to stress at work

- (c) That the Assistant Director of Environment and Regeneration be requested to contact Councillor O'Halloran about the specific incident that she referred to above, and this issue also be taken up with the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services in respect of the response from housing staff
- (d) That the Assistant Director of Environment and Regeneration be requested to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss issues raised on the ASB service and response that are of concern to Members, as referred to above
- (e) That the Chair be requested to write to the Borough Commander expressing the Committee's concern at the lack of prosecutions in respect of incidents of Islamophobia at the Finsbury Park Mosque
- (f) That the Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety be requested to provide details of Domestic Violence sanction and detection rates to Councillor Russell and if these are to be subject of review

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for attending

379 USE OF AGENCY STAFF (Item 13)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present and was accompanied by Liz Haynes, Law and Governance.

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

- It was noted that there had been a reduction in the use of agency staff and Islington compared favourably with other London Boroughs, especially given the number of directly employed manual staff that Islington had
- The highest number of agency assignments took place in Environment and Regeneration and Housing and Adult Social Services, and this reflected the need to employ staff due to the responsive nature of these services
- It was noted that a number of departments were below target for the use of agency staff and this showed that progress is being made
- Considerable work is being carried out to provide management information to show Corporate Directors and managers their use of agency workers
- It was noted that a new contract would be in place by January 2018 and it is anticipated that this will reduce spend costs on agency staff
- Members enquired as to the number of vacancies that the Council currently had and that this information should be provided to Members. Members also expressed concern that agency staff were employed in Contact Islington and that alternative measures of filling such posts should be investigated
- In response to a question it was stated that the campaigns are underway to recruit to permanent and fixed-term contracts and projects to explore different ways of working
- Reference was made to the fact that the high level of budget reductions that had to be made over recent years, as a result of Government funding restrictions, had resulted in consequences for staff and in staffing reductions and increased workloads and stress for staff, especially in non- frontline services, such as IT and HR. It was stated that the Council had made the decision to protect front line services
- Members were informed that following the introduction of IR35 it is hoped that this will lead to a reduction in agency workers
- The view was expressed that future reports should show details of the overall number of agency staff employed by department over a period of time to show if it is

reducing and also the average length of assignment and where assignments have taken place for over a 12 month period

- In response to a question it was stated that monitoring did take place to ensure that all staff employed through an agency were paid the LLW

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members note the improvement in reducing agency staff
- (b) That the next report on agency staff to the Committee include the following –
 - The overall number of agency staff employed on a departmental basis with a comparison with the previous year and the average length of assignment, and where assignments have taken place for more than 12 months
 - The number of vacancies that the Council currently has to be filled
 - The number of staff in the past 12 months who have had time off for work related stress conditions

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and Liz Haynes for attending

380 APPROVAL OF SCRUTINY TOPICS 2017/18 - VERBAL (Item 14)

Members were informed of the proposed scrutiny topics for 2017/18 and following consideration it was –

RESOLVED: That the following scrutiny topics be approved for 2017/18 –

Children Services Scrutiny Committee – One of the following to be chosen by Children's Services Committee – The Child's Voice, Children placed in care 20 or miles away from Islington, Vulnerable Adolescents, County Lines Drug Dealing, Fatherhood
Housing Scrutiny Committee – Fire Safety and Effectiveness of Communications
Health and Care Scrutiny Committee- Air Quality and Health
Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - Recycling

The meeting ended at 9.55p.m.

CHAIR