

**Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 25 July 2022**

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 25 July 2022 at 7.30 pm.

**Present:**      **Councillors:**      Kay (Chair), Ozdemir (Vice-Chair), Jackson, Clarke, Heather, Staff, McHugh, Nargund, Pandor, Weekes, Ibrahim and Russell

**Councillor Jenny Kay in the Chair**

**11      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**

Councillors Graham, Chapman and Chowdhury.

**12      DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**

None.

**13      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**

None.

**14      MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 June 2022 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

**15      CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**

The Chair reported that Operose Health were invited to the meeting to discuss Operose Health in Islington, the GP Services contract, and about how the significant issues identified in the BBC Panorama investigation will be addressed. While Operose Health were unable to attend, a new date will be arranged for members to meet with Operose Health.

**16      PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**

None.

**17      EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (Item A7)**

None.

**18      SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT - COST OF LIVING CRISIS (Item C1)**

The Chair introduced the Scrutiny Initiation Document, covering the topic of the Cost of Living Crisis.

Members made the following comments:

- The review needs to understand where the need is, so the review can best support residents with evidence gathering.
- The resilience of the economy, with a focus on resident employment
- Including The Resident Voice across the scrutiny review
- Community groups who work in renewable energy will be invited to the relevant meeting and members will be hoping to attend a community organisation that is related to food poverty
- The Relationship Between the Cost of Living Crisis And The Climate Crisis

RESOLVED:

Members agreed the Scrutiny Initiation Document, noting the comments that were to be edited into the document.

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**SCRUTINY REVIEW WITNESS EVIDENCE - COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME (Item C2)**

Robbie Rainbird, Assistant Director Community Financial Resilience, with Paul Clarke, Director of Finance, was present for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the committee.

Members raised the following topics:

- How CTS is funding nationally and locally. The government makes a relatively small grant contribution to CTS, with the vast majority of the funding coming from the council's budget;
- Changes to the CTS to allow payment on two homes in certain circumstances;
- The number of Islington residents being supported by CTS. Islington had a relatively generous scheme in comparison to other councils. Members welcomed that that Council had prioritised Council Tax support and provided one of the most generous schemes in the country, in spite of government cuts;
- How the CTS scheme compare London wide and nationally and how much Islington Residents pay in Council Tax.

The Committee saw promise in further discussions about the pros and cons of a banded scheme A banded scheme would simplify and automate the process more, as doing away with the need to administer change of circumstance requests may be more efficient.

The chair invited Paul Clarke, Director of Finance to present on Council Tax Arrears and the impact on residents.

Members raised the following topics:

- How residents in arrears could access CTS. The total value of arrears was around £3.9m for those on CTS.
- The impact of council tax errors on residents. Officers were confident that any errors were resolved quickly.

- How and when enforcement agents are used in non-payment of council tax. The council's policy is not to use enforcement agents for those on CTS. For all residents, repayment plans are available for those in arrears, and these will consider affordability.
- The council tax hardship fund is an additional discretionary scheme that is used in sensitive cases involving domestic violence or emergency accommodation.

The chair thanked officers for the presentations and summarised the actions from member questions, requested ahead of the October meeting:

- The Committee requested data on how many people receiving Universal Credit are in council tax arrears, the breakdown of the arrears and how this is affecting residents
- Best practice on eligibility and scheme structure from other local authorities - with examples of improved outcomes
- Modelling the pros and cons of a banded scheme
- Further consideration of how to treat resident assets when not in a bank account
- How the Council could better advertise the Council Tax Support scheme, including best practice from other local authorities;
- Further consideration of how enforcement activity is being used for different cohorts of residents in arrears, i.e. what level of enforcement is appropriate for those on universal credit and lower incomes;
- Comparison of legacy benefits vs Universal Credit, and how that affects eligibility.

The Chair also identified an action for members:

- Consideration be given to seeking academic research on the outcomes of Islington's historically more generous Council Tax Support Scheme in comparison to other local authorities.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the presentations.

## 20 **REVIEW TOPICS FROM THE COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (Item C3)**

Jonathan Moore, Committee Services Manager, was present for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved.

The Chairs in attendance made the following comments:

- Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee will be holding its scrutiny review on the Circular Economy and Jobs.
- Housing Scrutiny Committee will be holding its scrutiny review on Overcrowding.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

**21 MONITORING ITEM (COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN / SCRUTINY UPDATES / COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME) (Item C4)**

RESOLVED:

Members noted the reports.

**22 QUARTER 4 / END-OF-YEAR 2021-22 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT (Item C5)**

Ayesha Hakim Rahman, Head of Transformation, with Julie Foy, Director Human Resources, was present for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved.

Members raised the following topics:

- What the council could do differently in reviewing corporate performance; if the indicators could better reflect the strategic plan;
- Ensuring council KPIs are resilient to global events
- What KPIs are statutory or nationally required

A discussion was had on historical trends and if it was possible for annual reports to indicate levels of performance against historic targets and long-term trends.

The council has begun tracking the career progression of those on Islington Council on apprenticeships. Less data was held on apprenticeships brokered by the council. It was noted that this data will be reported to the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

The chair thanked officers for the presentations and summaries the actions from member questions:

- Further information on how the Fairer Together partnership plans to measure their impact to be reported back to Committee;
- An informal member working group to discuss KPIs and Council Performance Reporting and data management to be arranged.  
Further data on the impacts and outcomes of apprenticeships on career progression in the medium-term to be reported to the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

RESOVLED:

Members Noted the Report

**23 PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2021/22 (Item C6)**

Paul Clarke, Director of Finance, was present for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved.

Members raised the following topics:

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- Energy prices forecast for the council. It was noted that prices are extremely volatile and the council was seeking expert advice;
- The Local Government Pay Award was yet to be confirmed;
- Work was underway to resolve ongoing issues with the increasing cost of Care UK services;
- Sharing best practice from schools on good financial performance
- Future scrutiny opportunities across 2022/23, particularly related to the financial impact of the cost of living crisis.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

**CHAIR**