



It was explained that the clerk would put together detailed information from the sessions to help with the recommendations and the Chair thanked Polly Robbins at Outlandish and Beth Davy-Day at Fashion Enter for their hospitality and insight, the Chair explained they were two very different community-based organisations that worked in partnership with the council in order to provide social value to our communities. The Chair also thanked Natalie Evans from Westminster and Joanna Dahlgren and Adam Sargent from Waltham Forest for their thoughtful and inspiring presentations, which highlighted their local authorities work to achieve social value.

The Chair informed the committee that themes were arising around embedding a culture of maximising social value, the need for a clear plan that outlines what the council wants in terms of social value and the key role of the local authority in brokering and building connections in the community.

The Committee were reminded that a joint meeting of the Corporate Resources and Economy Scrutiny Committee and the Environment, Climate and Transport Scrutiny Committee would take place at 7.30pm on the 23 January 2025.

**48** **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**

Parkview Tenant and Resident Association (TRA) submitted a public question. Councillor Kay, as ward councillor, did not take part in the discussion on this item but joined the TRA in support of their complaint.

The TRA explained there were ongoing concerns regarding the Parkview New Homes. This included access issues, incomplete work, missed deadlines, no communication, and a failure to provide information. They also felt there was no accountability and were disappointed their complaint had not been taken up by successive executive members. In addition, they felt they had received a blanket response from the complaints process and the new build team had not responded to councillor Kay's emails.

The Chair requested the TRA send their statement and the response to their complaint to him and a response would be sought from officers within 14 days.

The TRA wanted it clarified why there was no one responsible for the New Build Team present at the meeting. It was explained that the Committee sets its agenda and its workplan in advance and the officers attend for their items. Certain elements related to New Build, including complaints, fall under the remit of the Corporate Resources and Economy Scrutiny Committee whereas the majority comes under the Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee. There would be officers responsible for the New Build Scheme at the meeting on the 30 January, for the performance report. The TRA were welcome to attend.

**49** **SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT STATISTICS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (Item D1)**

The Executive Member for Finance and Performance provided an update on complaints statistics on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter, 1 April 2023-31 March 2024. The Executive Member for Finance and Performance and The Assistant Director for Access Islington and Complaints explained a lot of work had been done to improve the service but there was still more to do, in particular a culture change was required that ensured teams were well trained and not working in silos.

A number of improvements to the service had been made including enhanced governance and safeguards, team member training, a requirement for Head of Service and Director level sign-off of the complaint response at stage 1 and 2, the introduction of directorate

complaint improvement plans and a new central complaints team, ensuring independent evaluation.

The importance of understanding the resident's point of view and providing a good quality response in good time was highlighted and the benefit of using residents feedback to improve services. The Assistant Director for Access Islington and Complaints said he would be in touch with colleagues regarding the complaint raised by the TRA.

The committee raised and discussed the following main points:

- A committee member asked for assurance that guidance and protocols would be kept up to date and followed by staff. It was explained that although staff were trying their best, they were not always fully trained. It was also sometimes that multiple things were requested, and the response did not answer fully. This would be improved through training and the Directorate Complaint Improvement Plans which would require an assessment of trends in complaints and the development of actions. The Complaints Board would ensure actions were followed up.
- Following a question on blue badge complaints it was explained that work was underway with parking services to understand what changes needed to be made. The service had been reorganised and new staff had been engaged to ensure resident assessments were faster and more responsive.
- Following a question on children, it was explained they would look for the root cause of complaints and there was a dedicated resource to ensure the quality of responses and to prevent escalation.
- The importance of saying sorry authentically was considered.
- A committee member highlighted that a case had received £13,000 in compensation and asked whether there was a different level of consideration given to such a case. They also asked how they could be assured there would not be an increase in complaints due to the current increase in the number of people in temporary accommodation and, what was being done to ensure people weren't reaching the point of needing to complain. It was explained that cases that went to the Ombudsman and that reached a stage two complaint would be considered by senior leaders who would look at the learning and how to avoid it happening again.
- Following a question on timelines it was explained that there was a ten-day deadline to respond to stage one complaints and a twenty day deadline to respond to stage two complaints. The team were currently responding to 98% of complaints within the stage two deadline which had improved significantly on the previous year.
- In considering the Council's financial resilience, a member requested to see average compensation amounts and trends in high compensation amounts. It was explained that a sliding scale was used to determine compensation based on Ombudsman guidance. The committee were informed that approximately 85% of complaints were about housing, particularly repairs. A breakdown of the last 5 years could be provided. The chair requested this to include Housing and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This would be circulated.
- A committee member asked how vulnerable people were supported to make complaints and how it was ensured people weren't digitally excluded. It was explained that handwritten complaints were still received and could be dealt with on the phone. There wasn't additional support to make complaints but it was hoped the call centres and access hubs would help people before there was a complaint.
- A committee member said it was the responsibility of Adult Social Care to look after the elderly and they should challenge other departments that aren't forthcoming with support. He asked how the council monitored whether vulnerable people were receiving support. It was explained that as part of the improvements a vulnerability

aspect had been included on the complaints form. Residents could include whether they had any particular needs.

- The committee considered the effectiveness of the complaints system. Some members felt obligated to use the complaints system because they were not getting a response to their casework queries from some teams within the council. There was concern that departments were considering complaints in their own area and these were not independent evaluations but tick box exercises. The Assistant Director for Access Islington and Complaints requested that any responses like that be forwarded to him as that should not be the case.
- The committee considered the new case work system for councillors, it was felt the new system was inefficient.
- A committee member asked what could be expected when the report returned next year. It was hoped that timelines would be at 100% and that there would be far less complaints.
- The TRA informed the committee that a sincere apology would have helped their frustration but they didn't feel any empathy from the council.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) To note the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review letter 2023-24 dated 17 July 2024.
- (b) To note that, of the 26 cases investigated, there were 22 upheld decisions with the remaining 4 cases not upheld.
- (c) To note that, 5 out of the 22 upheld cases received a satisfactory remedy before the Ombudsman's involvement.
- (d) To note the 100% compliance with Ombudsman recommendations during the reporting period.

**50**

**SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PROGRESSIVE PROCUREMENT (Item D2)**

The Committee received a presentation for its scrutiny review from the Director of Inclusive Economy and Jobs, the Assistant Director of Strategic Commissioning Age Well ASC and the Director, Strategic Commissioning and Investment ASC. It was highlighted the presentation was an example of partnership working with the Adult Social Care team and the social value they integrated.

The Committee raised and discussed the following main points:

- The committee asked for clarification around occupational sick pay, it was explained that six out of nine providers would be providing occupational sick pay, three had already implemented it, and three were in the process of implementing.
- Following a question on how the council could adequately scrutinise a number of smaller providers, it was explained that the number of providers had reduced, as they had previously spot purchased from over 40 providers.
- On building relationships, negotiating social value and being empowered to turn down suppliers that didn't meet social value expectations, it was explained that providers could be held to account for the social value they had committed too but the council could not set a non-negotiable condition that was not in the providers tender. Adopting social value and good practice would be encouraged and discussions would continue at monthly transformation meetings.
- A committee member asked about the environment and social value. It was explained that it was encouraged to have providers in the locality and working in local patches - which would effect the modes of transport of staff. Providers also had to pay travel time and five had committed to helping with travel costs.
- A committee member asked about the provision of culturally appropriate and sensitive services. It was explained that all providers would be expected to provide

culturally sensitive and appropriate services however it could be difficult to meet specific requests e.g. only male or female workers or someone fluent in a particular language. They would work with providers to help them recruit a diverse workforce and there were back up providers that offered more options. Residents could also opt for direct payments to recruit their own care worker.

- The committee considered the tension between obtaining social value and the resource necessary to achieve those aims. It was explained the team had achieved most elements of the ethical charter, with the only outstanding element being the occupational sick pay, which would cost the council more money. There needed to be a fair rate for providers, and it had to be affordable to the council. Early engagement with providers was important and being clear with the market about the council's values. It was highlighted that the national insurance commitments would make the next year more challenging, but Islington had set a high bar for their expectation of outsourced services.

**RESOLVED:**

To note the presentation.

**51**

**Q2 BUDGET MONITOR 2024-25 (Item D3)**

The committee received an update on the 2024-25 budget monitor from the Director of Finance. It was highlighted that the net position had worsened by £3.600,000, since quarter 1, with the main pressure being an increase in temporary accommodation demand and costs. The mitigations were available in the November Executive Paper.

The committee raised and discussed the following main points:

- A committee member raised that Future Works and Littering, Fly Tipping and Commercial Waste income were not making the anticipated savings. It was explained that the Council had committed to making the best use of its buildings and it was anticipated this would be a savings delay rather than undeliverable saving. On Littering, Fly Tipping and Commercial Waste littering had been reduced, the contractor had been issuing fix penalty notices but there had been an issue in collecting payments. They were looking at an enforcement restructure and a planned increase in officer enforcement activity.
- A committee member asked about the amalgamation of the call centres which was meant to save money. It was explained that although providing one seamless service that gave the right support to residents at the right time was the right thing to do they were not currently making the savings they had anticipated.
- A committee member queried a £700,000 overspend on energy bills. It was explained that the funds were allocated from the inflation, energy and demand contingency to offset the £700,000.
- A committee member informed the committee that there were almost 100 council properties in the borough that had been vacant for over 12 months and requested a review of those properties and what could be done to get them back into use. Additionally had all options to reduce charges from temporary accommodation and for government funding been explored. The Executive Member said a review should be carried out and he would look into it.
- A committee member asked about Sobell Leisure Centre. It was explained the leisure centre should be reopening in Spring 2025 and they were pursuing the shortfall in rent through their insurers.

**RESOLVED:**

To consider and note the enclosed Budget Monitoring 2024/25 Quarter 2 report, agreed by the Executive on 28 November 2024

**52** **AUTUMN MTFS UPDATE (Item D4)**

The committee received the Autumn MTFS update from the Director of Finance. The proposed budget would be published on the 8 January and the report set the context for the budget setting process.

The following main points were raised and discussed by the committee:

- A committee member raised the £4,000,000 budget pressure that would be caused by the increase in national insurance contributions. It was explained that the government had committed to funding the rise in national insurance contributions, but the details of the commitment were uncertain.
- A committee member queried whether it was a concern that the council had low reserves. It was explained that the council did not draw down its reserves as much as other councils, but the sum was comparatively low compared to other London Borough's. It was highlighted that the external auditors had said that due to the council's track record on delivering savings they had no significant concerns.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) To note the latest Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) assumptions contained in Section 3 of the report and the changes since the Summer MTFS Update.
- (b) To note the latest General Fund revenue reserves forecast over the medium term. (Section 4)
- (c) To note the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) update. (Section 5)
- (d) To note the 2025/26 budget setting timeline. (Section 6)

**53** **MONITORING ITEM (Item D5)**

The meeting ended at 21:52

**CHAIR**