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London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 23 January 2020

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 23 January 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Gallagher (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Bell-Bradford, Chapman, Chowdhury, Cutler, Gantly, Heather, Hyde, Jeapes, Khurana, Nathan, O'Sullivan, Poyser, Russell and Wayne

Also Present: **Councillors:** Hull

Councillor Troy Gallagher in the Chair

175 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Councillors Gantly, Wayne and Jeapes for lateness

176 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None

177 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item H1)

None

178 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A3)

A Member referred to minute 173, and requested that Councillor Hull inform Members of the number of posts in the Council occupied by interim post holders. Councillor Hull stated that he would inform Members once this information has been compiled

RESOLVED:

(a) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 December 2019 be confirmed, and the Chair be authorised to sign them

(b) That Councillor Hull be requested to inform Members of the number of interim post holders, as referred to above, when this is available

179 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A4)

The Chair stated that items would be taken in order of agenda

180 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A5)

The Chair outlined the procedure for public questions and the fire and evacuation procedures

181 BUDGET 2020/21 (Item C1)

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 –

- Noted that the combination of central government funding cuts, rising costs, and demand for services, has meant that the Council has already had to make savings of £239m since 2010. Despite these financial challenges the Council is determined to make Islington fairer for all
- Noted and supported Islington's aim to become the best Council in the country for prevention and early intervention, and that there will be continued support for residents through the Resident Support scheme, and free school meals for all nursery and primary school children. Vital frontline services will be protected, including no library closures, youth centre closures, or leisure centres closures over the next 3 years
- Welcomed the proposed package of budget growth in 2020/21, which will help the Council to continue to address some of the pressing issues facing residents, including enhanced services to support victims of violence against young women and girls, increased capacity to tackle anti-social behaviour, extra support for vulnerable young people, and adults, to help them increase skills and to find work and investment, and in tackling homelessness/rough sleeping, plus children's centre outreach
- Noted the Council Tax, and social care increases proposed
- Noted the possible pressures on the budget in the medium term, and that the estimated level of General Fund balances should be adequate to meet the working balance requirements. In addition, this should provide a reasonable level for unquantifiable risks, that are not already covered in the Council's budget, or any contingency sums
- Noted, and welcomed, the proposal to agree that any underspends at the end of the financial year should be used to increase General Fund balances, and/or earmarked reserves, in order to provide resilience going into an uncertain medium term budget cycle
- Noted the agreed balanced HRA 2020/21 budget, and the latest estimates over the 3 year MFTS period, the Capital Programme, and the Dedicated Schools Grant proposals

RESOLVED:

That the above comments be forwarded to the Executive for consideration

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull and Steve Key for attending

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PERFORMANCE UPDATE - QUARTER 2 WELL RUN COUNCIL/CRIME STATISTICS (Item C2)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present for consideration of this item. Jan Hart, Service Director, Public Protection, and Annette Hobart, Strategy and Change Manager, Martin Bevis, Assistant Director Financial Operations and Customer Services, Laura Eden, Children's Services, were also in attendance

The report was outlined for the Committee

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

- Councillor Hull stated that the issues raised at the last meeting had been responded to in the report

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- Reference was made to the Hate Crime figures, and that the sanctions rates were disappointing, and that the Police needed an improvement on these. Council tax and business rate collection was good
- Discussion took place on channel shift, and that whilst there has been a reduction in the number of callers to the Customer Centre, the number of online transactions needed to increase
- In response to a question, it was stated that the reports on sickness and agency staff would be submitted to the next and following meetings of PPS respectively
- A Member referred to the number of people killed on roads, and that in her view this should be a key PI. Councillor Hull stated that he would consider this, however E&R scrutiny committee may have a view
- A Member referred to sickness absence, and that a report was due to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. The Member stated that there was a need to review long term sickness cases, how they are being managed by senior management and trends, possibly reviewing cases of long term sickness absence of 6 months or more
- Reference was also made to the high number of muscular/skeletal injuries in E&R, and that there needed to be a focus by management on reducing these, and to set a zero injury figure, even if this is not ultimately achievable. There was a need to look at what training, action being taken to reduce this figure. Councillor Hull stated that this could be looked at
- A Member also referred to the need to look at trends over a period of time, comparative data with other neighbouring Local Authorities, an analysis of long term sickness, the number of staff in each department, and a narrative of sickness absence from the relevant Director on reasons etc. In addition, there should be an analysis of sickness absence by grade
- It was stated that HR did work with Directors, and senior managers, on sickness, and there is a need to ensure senior management have the capability to address these issues. Staff also needed to be supported in an appropriate manner
- The Chair expressed the view that the figures on stress/mental health/depression and anxiety, also needed to be separated out, as the level of support and other issues would not be the same in each case
- Concern was expressed that the representation of BME staff at senior level is not representative of the workforce or community, and such representation needed to be increased. Councillor Hull stated that the Personnel Sub-Committee were making a number of senior appointments over the next few months, and that hopefully the appointments would increase such representation. In addition, initiatives were being undertaken by the Council to encourage young people to apply to the Council for jobs
- A Member referred to the fact that stress sickness levels were high in some areas of the Council's workforce, and this could be due to a number of reasons, including poor management, and pressures on staff as a result of austerity measures forced on the Council by central Government funding reductions
- In response to a question, it was stated that as PI's were frequently changed, this impacted on the ability to show trends over a long period of time
- Reference was made to the fact that Domestic Violence trends had remained constant over the previous 5 years, however Councillor Hull stated that he had requested the Police to provide information on sanctions rates, as sanction rates were not satisfactory, despite the Council providing more funding for Domestic Violence
- Discussion took place as to the level of agency staff, and it was stated that more detail would be provided in the Agency staff report due to come to the Committee in March. However, there were a number of senior management posts that were being

filled with agency staff at present and this was expensive, however it is hoped that future impending recruitment will assist in reducing this

- In response to a question as to hate crime, Councillor Hull stated that it is difficult to know if the increase is due to an increase in reporting, but in his view there is still underreporting. It was also stated that Faith Hate crime should be broken down into particular faiths

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the sickness report due to be submitted to the Committee in February contain further information as follows-
- Numbers of staff per department so that comparisons can be made of % against numbers of staff
 - Comparative data with other neighbouring boroughs, if this is possible
 - Sickness trends/breakdown of sickness by grade
 - Details of long term sickness (anonymised) that are live – over 6 months with a narrative of reasons, action being taken, support given etc.
 - The separation of stress/mental health/anxiety/depression as these should not be grouped together. This should also be done in the next Corporate PI report
 - Muscular/skeletal injuries in E&R should have a narrative of the training given in relation to alleviating these injuries with a view to a zero target being set even if this is not ultimately achievable
 - Details of the number of DV offences over the past 5 years and Police sanction rates when this is available
 - Faith Hate Crimes – future reports should include a breakdown into specific faith groups
- (b) That the Use of Agency staff report, due to be submitted to the Committee in March, include details of the temporary to permanent strategy and progress thereon

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull, Annette Hobart, Martin Bevis, Laura Eden and Jan Hart for attending

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PERFORMANCE - FUTURE PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION (Item C3)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance, Performance and Community Safety was present and was accompanied by Annette Hobart, Strategy and Change Manager

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

- It was noted that consideration was being given as to the best method for triangulation of information, however this was complex and best used in 'deep dive' scrutiny topics, such as the Universal Credit scrutiny review
- It was noted that it would be useful if future reports could contain some narrative where necessary, to explain why targets have not been reached, reasons therefore etc. and if comparative information could be provided if possible with other neighbouring boroughs
- Reference was made to the introduction of the Housing Dashboard and that this still not been introduced some 2/3 years after promised and this was not satisfactory
- Councillor Hull stated that whilst the Council had a great deal of data, it needed to be more consistent and there needed to be more refined data collection

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the evidence and key findings of the review, as set out in paragraph 4 of the report, be noted
- (b) That the recommendations for improving performance reporting arrangements, and effectiveness, as set out in Section 5 of the report be approved
- (c) That Members be informed of the reasons for delay of the introduction of the Housing Dashboard and when this will be operational

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull and Annette Hobart for attending

184 FINANCIAL MONITORING (Item C4)

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

During consideration of the report the following main issues were raised –

- Noted that there is forecast to be a General Fund underspend on - £2.572m, compared to a forecast underspend of -£0.634m in the previous reported position
- Noted that the HRA is due to break even over the year
- The latest delivery tracker shows that of agreed 2019/20 savings of £13.775m, £12.865m are either on track to be delivered or have been replaced by deliverable alternative savings in the current financial year
- Noted that there were risks in ongoing delivery of some of the 2019/20 savings in future financial years, and a risk based review of the savings programme is currently underway, and will feed into future years budget monitoring reports
- Reference was made to the provision for bad debt in the HRA, and it was stated that this was provision for non-payment of rent to cover the risks of the Council. Reference was also made to the legal costs provision, and it was stated that Councillor Hull would investigate and respond to Members thereon with the detail
- In response to a question, it was stated that in response to the enquiry from Councillor Russell about the number of evictions as a result of non-payment of rent, this may be an issue that the Housing Scrutiny Committee may wish to look into in more detail

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted, and Councillor Hull be requested to respond to Members on the issue raised above relating to legal costs in relation to the HRA
- (b) That the Housing Scrutiny Committee consider investigating the number of evictions, as a result of non- payment of rent, as referred to above

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull and Steve Key for attending

185 MONITORING REPORT (Item)

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RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.

CHAIR