

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 17 September 2020

Non-confidential minutes of the virtual meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 17 September 2020 at 7.30 pm.

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

Also Present: **Councillors:** Gill

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

210 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillor Khurana

211 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None

212 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

None

213 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 July 2020 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

214 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

None

215 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

216 THAMES WATER UPDATE - PRESENTATION (Item C1)

Simon Moore and Tim MacMahon, Thames Water were present and outlined the presentation to Members. During the presentation the following main points were made –

- Lessons had been learnt from the flooding in Upper Street and Queens Drive
- 2020-25 investment plans mean that bills will reduce by £23 on average. The regulatory final determination is very challenging - 33% less capital funding for improving key targets such as leakage
- Considerable investment will need to be made by shareholders to meet key commitments

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- This is on top of £700m of extra investment over the last 3 years. As a result final agreement of the business plan is expected at the end of September
- The 2020-25 investment plan aims to reduce leakage by 20%, and a 70% reduction in interruptions to customer supplies
- Islington has one of the highest mains replacement rates of any borough Thames Water serves. 4000 smart meters have been installed since 2015 and that Thames were aware of a number of burst hotspots in the borough which require mains replacement to resolve and 7 schemes for mains replacement have been briefed. A further 30 schemes are under review
- Queens Drive/Seven Sisters Road – relining of two sections of Victorian cast iron pipes and this will start in October lasting until Summer 2021 costing almost £7m. Councillors and residents have been invited to online engagement sessions to keep them informed of work
- Thames are working with OFWAT on a further package of work for investment specifically in London water's infrastructure April 2021
- Thames operate 339km of distribution mains and 66km of trunk roads in Islington and have replaced over a third of Islington's water network since 2000. This has contributed to a two thirds reduction in burst rates in the borough since 2008
- Lessons were learnt a lot from the Upper Street bursts in 2016 e.g. a new for old insurance policy, 24/7 customer incident management response team, a clear document for customers for the aftermath of an event, delivered the trunk mains strategy review actions
- In response to a question as to the risks of flooding to residents or loss of supply during the works on Queens Drive/Seven Sisters Road, it was stated that there should be no risk to residents
- In response to a question Thames stated that the Board had been supportive of the proposals as they were long term investors and it was anticipated that they would support the investment plan, as failure to meet targets set would result in a large financial penalty from the regulator
- It was stated that there had been minimal impact due to COVID, and that staff had had lot of briefings, hand sanitisers had been issued and social distancing was in place. Work had been scheduled to respond to reactive repairs rather than planned work
- Thames had a customer hardship plan in place to target vulnerable customers who had difficulty paying bills due to COVID and that there is a Trust Fund that Thames contribute to who can support customers, and they had increased investment in this
- Discussion took place as to the risk areas in Islington and if these were likely to lead to bursts it was stated that a strategy is in place for burst reduction
- In response to a question as to the Sahara system in place in Canonbury ward it was stated that the Sahara system was an advanced method of detecting leaks that identifies problems in the flow of water in the pipe. Replacement of mains pipes are extremely expensive
- Reference was made to the need for better communication between Thames and Council officers/Councillors when works were going on. A Member referred to works on Whitecross Street which went on for a number of weeks, workmen went off site and drilling took place late at night. It was added that the response he had received from Thames was not satisfactory. Thames stated that they apologised for this and that they would investigate this matter, however Thames accepted there was a need for better communication with residents and Local Authorities, and that work needed to be completed as quickly as possible
- Thames informed Members that they were undertaking a large transformation programme on the way that they operated, however this could take 2/3 years to complete

The Chair thanked Simon Moore and Tim MacMahon for attending

217 COVID 19 - STAFFING UPDATE (Item C2)

No pro Linzi Roberts- Egan, Chief Executive was present and outlined the report. Alan Grant Human Resources was also present

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

- From 2 April – 25 August on average up to 60% Council staff were working from home. Currently 48% of staff continue to work from home
- As of 8 September the proportion of staff unable to work is 12%
- The impact on non-critical services has remained similar throughout the period, with an average of 56% of services reporting as performing as normal, and 32% of services reporting performance at a reduced level
- Staff that are working at home, in order to facilitate the Government's social distancing restriction guidelines, have been enabled by the Council's Digital Services department and this will continue
- The Corporate Performance Indicator shows that there has been no loss of productivity, however some indicators have shown a decline because that particular service or function could not be delivered at the height of the pandemic
- Communicating with staff – video conferencing calls such as Zoom and MS Teams have been invaluable, and staff have been supported through any measures introduced, and the shift to home working has seen a significant change in the way managers' support and lead teams remotely
- Noted that the newly established 'Challenging Inequality Programme' sets out an ambitious plan of work to improve race equality, including support for Black and ethnic minority people, and other disadvantaged groups through this time
- All sites are COVID safe for staff who have to work from a Council building, and individual risk assessments carried out
- In anticipation of a second wave, the Council has undertaken a series of lessons learned reflective exercises to ensure it can respond quickly and effectively as possible
- In response to a question it was stated that 4 workforce surveys had been carried out, and the responses had been good, with one survey being responded to by 50% of the workforce
- Reference was made as to whether the Council were able to measure productivity of staff working from home, and the Chief Executive stated that digital services had made managers aware of some instances of poor performance, however most staff were performing well, and more details of the grading system could be supplied to the next meeting
- A Member congratulated the Chief Executive and staff on the arrangements put in place, however working from home is not always efficient
- Reference was made to whether Islington would have a COVID 19 testing centre, and it was stated that work is taking place on this, and it is anticipated that a testing centre would be opened within the next week or so, and that Councillors would be notified when this is to happen
- In response to a question it was stated that a more detailed report on the Be Islington Brand would be submitted to the next meeting

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members be informed when a date is known for the opening of the COVID testing centre referred to above
- (b) That the Chief Executive be requested to report to the next meeting with a report detailing the Be Islington Brand and details of the grading system referred to above

The Chair thanked Linzi Roberts-Egan for attending

218 **2019/20 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT (Item C3)**

David Hodgkinson, Director of Corporate Resources was present and outlined the report. Corporate Directors, Maxine Holdsworth, Julie Billett, Carmel Robinson, Keith Townsend were also present

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

- Noted that COVID 19 had had an impact on the delivery of new homes, however there were 13 schemes on site that were due for completion by Xmas
- Rough sleeping – additional funding has been made available to work with rough sleepers who had received support and accommodation. It was stated that details of the rough sleeping programme could be circulated to Members
- Rent arrears have risen since COVID
- A Member stated that it was good that the new build programme is continuing to provide social housing for rent. However, the Member stated that he was concerned that Housing Associations seemed to be reducing their properties that were available
- The Corporate Director Housing responded that both the Council and Housing Associations lost a number of properties for Right to Buy each year, however the Council were working with Peabody on the Holloway Prison site, however if the Member provided details of Housing Associations that were reducing their stock of social housing for rent she would investigate these
- In response to a question, it was stated that progress of work on fire door safety had been impacted by COVID as contractors had furloughed staff, however work had restarted, and cyclical works had been on site throughout the pandemic. It was stated that details of fire safety works could be provided to the Committee
- Youth Crime – noted that only 7 young people had been given custodial sentences whereas the target was 25, and this is a good improvement on the target figure
- In respect of child care there had been a 70% uptake from low income families due to effective targeting, and there had been a reduction in knife crime injuries
- Robbery and youth violence had reduced during lockdown, however this is now increasing. This reduction was felt to be due to young people not being on the streets as much during lockdown
- Domestic violence had increased during lockdown by 7%, and there had been increased reporting to domestic violence charities for support, rather than the Police
- In response to a question as to the reasons for the high number for fixed period secondary exclusions, and the levels of absence, it was stated that some of the data was out of date, and that there had been significant strategies put in place to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions, as a result of the Scrutiny Review carried out by Children's Services Committee. The number of black/Caribbean boys excluded had been significantly reduced. In terms of absence, work had been carried out with schools, and 93.6% of children were in school during the first week of re-opening after COVID restrictions were changed
- Planning – good performance on processing planning applications, missed bin collections, and provision of on street cycling facilities
- Challenges – provision of on street electric charging points, as it is difficult to find suitable locations. Leisure centre visits were also down due to COVID, and the target for recycling is slightly under target

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- In response to a question, it was stated that it is not felt residents behaviour on recycling had changed as a result of the COVID pandemic
- Public Health – good progress was being made in regard to health checks, and reducing smoking. There is a challenge in regard to reducing substance misuse, especially alcohol and drug misuse completion rates and that these needed to be improved
- The impact of COVID is not known at present, however with regard to rough sleepers, being given accommodation has meant that it is easier for treatments to be delivered
- In response to a question, it was stated that anecdotally alcohol consumption had increased during lockdown, but this is difficult to quantify at present

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Director Housing be requested to inform the Committee of details of the rough sleeping programme, and the fire safety programme

The Chair thanked David Hodgkinson, Maxine Holdsworth, Carmel Littleton, Julie Billett and Keith Townsend for attending

219 **PERFORMANCE UPDATE - WELL RUN COUNCIL (Item C4)**

David Hodgkinson, Director of Corporate Resources and Ayesha Hakim Rahman, Head of Strategy and Change, were present for consideration of this item and outlined the report

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

- Noted that progress is being made in reducing agency staff and that a more detailed report would be submitted to the meeting in December
- Members welcomed the reduction however the Committee felt that there is still more work needed to reduce agency staff

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

220 **UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE (Item C5)**

Robbie Rainbird, Head of Processing were present and outlined the report

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

- There had been a national increase of 5/6 times of people claiming Universal Credit since February, an increase of approximately 3m people
- The DWP project on managed migration taking place in Harrogate that was taking place has been halted
- Members congratulated officers on the excellent report, and enquired the effect that the ending of the furlough scheme would have on Universal Credit claims, and the residents support scheme. It was stated that Housing Benefit staff are aware of UC referrals rising, and that the DWP had confirmed this. With the furlough scheme ending there is likely to be an increase in benefit payments, from the end of October
- In response to a question, it was stated that there will be a great challenge for the Council to provide support for residents, however some Government grant monies had been made available, and about 20500 households had benefitted this year from Council financial relief

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- Members were informed that the Council were looking at ways of increasing the hardship fund, in order to provide some level of support to residents until they received their UC payment
- Noted that the Council resident support team, and voluntary organisations, were available to assist residents. It was stated that the Residents support team e mail address is residentsupportteam@islington.gov.uk if Members wished to contact them
- In response to a question as to the support available to BAME and elderly residents who did not have access to IT, it was stated that the income maximisation team had used the Council database to contact over 400 residents, and nearly £300k had been able to be claimed by residents through Pension credits that they had not previously accessed, and that this had also enabled them to obtain free TV licenses. In addition, the income maximisation team, and voluntary organisations, were looking to do early intervention work

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The Chair thanked Robbie Rainbird for attending

221 FINANCIAL MONITORING (Item C6)

222 MONITORING REPORT/WORK PROGRAMME ETC. (Item)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

223 DISBANDING THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEES (Item G1)

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the PPS(review of oversight and scrutiny of Human Resources functions) Sub-Committee be disbanded with immediate effect
- (b) That it be noted that there will be a formal update on the work of the informal working group at a future Committee meeting
- (c) That the PPS (Transformation Projects) Sub-Committee be disbanded with immediate effect
- (d) That it be noted that the PPS Committee may request further updates on the Digital Services transformation projects or other transformation projects as required

The meeting ended at 10.05 p.m.

CHAIR