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London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 29 June 2015

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at on 29 June 2015 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Gallagher (Chair), O'Halloran (Vice-Chair), Court,
Doolan, Ismail, Kay, O'Sullivan, Russell and Andrews
Also Present: **Councillors:** Watts, Hull, Convery and Webbe

Councillor Troy Gallagher in the Chair

- 128** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**
Councillors Comer Schwartz, Klute, Chowdhury and Poyser for absence and Russell for lateness
- 129** **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)**
None
- 130** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)**
- 131** **TO APPROVE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)**
RESOLVED:
That, subject to the following amendments-
Minute 125 – Use of Agency staff - the addition of the following resolutions-
That Councillor Ismail be circulated with details of the % of BME staff employed by the Council by grade
That Councillor Doolan be sent a copy of the current temporary to permanent policy the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 June be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them
- 132** **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Item 5)**
None
- 133** **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 6)**
The Chair outlined the procedure for dealing with Public questions and filming and recording of meetings
- 134** **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 7)**
Pre meetings of the Committee

The Chair stated that from September there would be pre-meetings of the Committee for Members at 7.00p.m. on the evening of the meeting

Order of Agenda

The Chair stated that the order of the agenda would be amended to take the Leaders presentation and the items from the Executive Member Finance and Performance early in the agenda

135 **PRESENTATION FROM LEADER ON EXECUTIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2015/16 - VERBAL (Item 8)**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Watts was present for this item and a copy of the Corporate Plan was laid round.

During the presentation the following main points were made –

- The Corporate Plan sets out the vision for the Council and its priorities and was considered at Council the previous week
- The Council faced an extremely challenging future with the expected spending restrictions on Local Government funding and that with further reductions in other areas of public spending there would be a severe impact on communities
- The consequences of cutting social care and health budgets would impact on an already overburdened health system
- There is serious concern over the increase in youth violence and this is a complex and fast moving situation. There is a looser affiliation of gang membership than in the past and the Council were drawing up a Crime Strategy for consideration at the next Executive meeting with more of a focus on intervention and the Council exercising more community leadership
- There were challenges ahead in terms of proposed Government legislation on social housing and consideration would need to be given to this
- Social care of adults and children accounted for more than 50% of the Council/s budget and Government funding reductions will impact on this
- A Member enquired as to whether procedures were in place to ensure that to deal with mental health challenges for young people and whether this is linked to domestic violence
- Reference was made as to whether the Council had any plans to enter into partnerships with other Councils and it was stated that there were no plans to enter into any partnership of the type East London Councils were looking at and all authorities had different geographies and different issues. However where it made sense this could be looked at and the Council were in partnerships already with a number of other organisations and any devolution proposals would be considered
- It was stated that it was important that Council managers worked together and were prepared for substantial budget reductions and that silos were broken down
- The Leader stated that he was hopeful that the housing borrowing cap would be removed and that he would wish to see GP commissioning carried out in Islington and that a revised property tax system could be provided for London

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted and that Councillor Andrews be provided with the information relating to mental health, as referred to above

The Chair thanked the Leader for attending

136 **NEW SCRUTINY TOPIC - TAX AVOIDANCE - PRESENTATION AND SID - VERBAL (Item 9)**

Steve Key, Service Director, Finance and Property Services Department and Debra Norman, Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and HR) were present for discussion of this item.

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

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- The current Council contractors that we deal with should be looked at in the scrutiny and this should include Commensura and Care UK
- Objective 1 – add the words after the word ‘companies’ – that L.B.Islington deals with or has business links to providing a service to the Council
- Objective 3 – delete the words ‘appropriate tax’ and insert the words ‘ avoid UK tax’

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above amendments the SID be submitted to the next meeting for approval

The Chair thanked Steve Key for attending

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WELFARE REFORMS UPDATE (Item 10)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance and Performance and the Director of Financial Operations and Customer Services, Ian Adams, were present for discussion of this item.

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

- The recent announcement by the Chancellor of a further £12 billion of welfare savings would have further impacts on Islington residents
- Further Government changes will reduce the benefit cap from £26,000 to £23,000
- It was noted that reductions to the benefit cap would impact on 575 families in the borough and over 1000 children
- The Council were assisting families in providing advice to enable them to maximise benefits and remain in their home if they wished to do so
- There would be a new Youth allowance introduced for 18-21 year olds with stronger work related conditionality
- Automatic entitlement to housing for 18-21 year olds is also being removed
- The majority of tenants have opted to remain in their properties and pay the bedroom tax and there had to date been no evictions, however there were rent arrears of £200,000 and Partners had rent arrears of £93,000
- Discretionary Housing payments had reduced the number of evictions to date, however this has reduced and may only be able to assist a smaller number in the future
- The Universal Credit Delivery Pilot trial has been extended in Islington for another 3 months and Universal Credit in Islington would be rolled out more slowly with single claimants of JSA starting in September and couples and families in 2016/17
- Specific work was being carried out at Bemerton and New River Green estates and it was stated that there needed to be discussions as to communicate with tenants/hard to reach groups and that discussions should take place with Councillor Ismail in this regard
- Councillor Hull stated that the high cost of housing needed to be recognised and there were regional variations and that these should be recognised when setting the cap
- The view was expressed that rent levels should be looked at on a ward basis as the rents in areas around the City were likely to be higher than in other wards. The Director Financial Operations and Customer Services stated that this could be taken ‘on board’ following the Chancellor’ Emergency Budget statement and information provided to Members

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Director of Financial Operations and Customer Services have discussions with Councillor Ismail on how better to engage tenants/hard to reach groups on the Bemerton/New River estates

- (b) That information be circulated to Members, following the Chancellor's Emergency budget, on respective rent levels in wards in the borough
- (c) That the report be noted

The Chair thanked Councillor Hull and Ian Adams for attending

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QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT (Item 11)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member for Finance and Performance was present for discussion of this item, together with Lela Kogbara, Assistant Chief Executive Strategy and Partnerships.

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

- Councillor Hull stated that the main changes for the suite of indicators were detailed in paragraph 4.5 of the report
- In addition a set of Equality Objectives were being considered and submitted to the next meeting of the Executive
- The main cause of concern are the community safety indicators, particularly with regard to youth violence and theft from the person. A crime strategy is being presented to the next meeting of the Executive and it was proposed, inter alia, that a youth integration team be established. It was added that because gangs were less of a problem previously in Islington than in other London Boroughs, the Police resources were stretched and they were now being assisted by other officers from the Metropolitan Police
- The reductions in Safer Neighbourhood Policing had it was felt led to an increase crime and resulted in less local intelligence being gathered
- In relation to Adult Social Care there were difficulties with the targets on enablement
- There had been a positive recruitment campaign for foster carers
- There had been an improvement on the employment statistics
- In Environment and Regeneration there was not now funding available for boiler replacement works and different energy saving measures were being looked at
- In Public Health smoking cessation targets were not being met and Councillor Hull stated that he would discuss with officers ways this could be improved
- Sickness absence levels were too high and discussions were taking place with occupational health in this regard. It was stated that future HR reports to the Committee should detail the 3 departments with the highest sickness levels and the reasons therefore
- There is also difficulty in meeting the housing under occupation and overcrowding targets
- A Member stated that signs needed to be erected in housing estate playgrounds to discourage people from smoking there and Councillor Hull stated that he would discuss this with the Executive Member Environment and Transport and Executive Member Housing
- In response to a question it was stated that measures were being taken to ensure there were 50 apprentices per annum and restructure the scheme so that it gives clearer expectations and consideration was being given as to the best time of the year to recruit
- In response to a question as to whether there were 'taster apprenticeship' sessions held it was stated that this was not currently a standard practice, although some events were held
- In response to a question it was stated that consideration may be given to insulation and boiler replacement if funding became available in the future
- A Member referred to paragraph 7.6 of the report and that she would like a response as to the crimes not committed by gangs, what type of detached youth work is in

place, the apparent disproportionality amongst BME suspects and the impact and effectiveness of CCTV on crime. The Executive Member Community Safety stated that he would respond on these issues

- It was stated that there is often a time lag between the PI's and the reality and the PI's tended to focus on areas that the Council has control of however a number of issues required an integrated response
- Discussion took place on paragraph 8.4 of the report and the ACE Strategy and Partnerships stated that she would provide specific details to Members
- A Member stated that although employment statistics had improved there needed to be details of how long people stayed in work, and there should be a measure of how the Council's actions had made a difference. In addition, there should be a measurement on the effectiveness of school careers advice
- A Member enquired as to the gender and race of the residents obtaining employment through the Council and it was stated that this could be provided
- A Member stated that although apprenticeships were obtained there needed to be details as to whether these developed into sustainable jobs after a year or whether these apprenticeships did not lead to eventual full time employment. Discussion took place as to the possibility of obtaining this information and that this information should be provided to Members when available and a report be submitted to the next meeting
- In response to a question the Executive Member for Environment and Transport and that the recycling target of 34.5% is a challenging one, however the Council is still committed, despite the difficulties faced in an inner London Borough to a recycling rate of 50%

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Councillor Hull discuss with the Executive Member Environment and Transport and Executive Member Housing the possibility of erecting no smoking signs as referred to above
- (b) That regular reports be submitted in future to the Committee on the sickness levels in departments and the reasons therefore and Councillor Doolan be sent this information in the interim
- (c) That the Executive Member Community Safety be requested to inform Councillor Ismail of the crimes not committed by gangs, what type of detached youth work is in place, the apparent disproportionality amongst BME suspects and the impact and effectiveness of CCTV on crime
- (d) That the ACE Strategy and Partnerships be requested to inform Councillor Kay of the details requested in relation to paragraph 8.4 of the report, as referred to above
- (e) That the ACE Strategy and Partnerships be requested to circulate details of the gender and ethnicity of residents being employed with Council assistance
- (f) That information be circulated to Members as to how many apprenticeships had resulted in full time sustainable employment, as referred to above and a report be submitted thereon to the next meeting

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APPROVAL OF SCRUTINY TOPICS 2015/16 - VERBAL (Item 12)

RESOLVED:

That the following scrutiny topics be agreed for 2015/16

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee – Tax Avoidance, Crime

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – Alternative Provision

Housing Scrutiny Committee – Capital Works, Responsive Repairs

Environment and Regeneration Committee – Smart Cities and one off sessions on

Quietways consultation process, Recycling, CCTV on estates, Community Infrastructure levy

Health and Care Scrutiny Committee – Health implications of Damp Properties – one off session on Hospital Discharges and Provision of GP premises

140 REGRAIDING OF CHIEF OFFICER POSTS (Item 13)

Councillor Andy Hull, Executive Member Finance and Performance was present for this item together with Debra Norman, the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and HR).

Additional information was laid round for Members.

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

- A Member enquired whether the date in the third column of the laid round information was the date when the evaluation was completed or the date when the new grading was applied. The ACE indicated that she would respond to Councillor Doolan thereon
- A Member expressed the view that copies of the evaluations carried out should be made available to Members and the ACE indicated that this could be provided to Members who were interested
- A Member enquired as to the regradings of the Head of Repairs and Maintenance and Head of Tenancy and Estates and the operative dates and the ACE stated that she would respond with more detailed reasons for these variations to Councillor Doolan. Councillor Doolan expressed the view that the transfer of Kiers to the Council added additional duties to the Head of Repairs and Maintenance but enquired the reasons for the re-evaluation of the Head of Tenancy and Estates
- In response to a question as to whether any market supplements had been consolidated into Chief Officer posts it was stated that there was only one Chief Officer who received a market supplement and this was the Corporate Director Children's Services. This had been agreed some years previously, The ACE Governance and Human Resources stated that she was unsure if this was a consolidated payment but would check
- A Member enquired whether a clause could be inserted into Housing Chief Officer contracts restricting them from joining private contractors/partners for a certain period of time if they left the Council. The ACE stated that she would investigate this and inform Members
- In response to a question as to the cost of evaluations of grades of posts by Hay consultancy, it was stated that Chief Officer evaluations had always been carried out by Hay (other than the Public Health one referred to in the report evaluated by another authority). as it was independent and this was the cost charged. The ACE stated that she would provide information on the last occasion that Chief Officer grades were reviewed by the Personnel Sub Committee
- In response to a question it was stated that the ACE would supply Members with dates of Chief Officers near retirement age
- Reference was made as to whether there was information kept in relation to new recruits showed if they had been recruited from private/public sector organisations and their previous salaries. The ACE stated that this information was not kept centrally but would be on the individual application forms submitted where they were retained

RESOLVED:

That the ACE Governance and HR respond to the above points and Councillor Doolan be requested to submit the questions in writing with any additional information that is required

The Chair thanked Debra Norman for attending

141 **MONITORING REPORT (Item)**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 10.00p.m.

CHAIR

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