

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Thursday, 25th March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Holly (in the Chair); Councillors Bamford, Boriss, O'Neill, O'Rourke, Rana and Wraighte

OFFICERS: J. Rooney (Assistant Director (Information, Customers and Communities), A. Ibrahim (Assistant Director Legal, Governance and Workforce/Monitoring Officer), J. Murphy (Chief Finance Officer), S. Smith (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), R. Huddleston (Corporate Strategic Lead - Transformation and Reform), J. Oliver (Neighbourhoods Directorate), M. Ashworth and P. Thompson (Resources Directorate).

63 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joinson, Mir, Nolan and Robinson.

64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

65 MINUTES

The Chair noted that this would be the last meeting of the Committee, after many years of service, which Councillor Boriss would attend prior to his retirement as a Councillor in May 2021.

Resolved:

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd February 2021 be approved as a correct record.
2. That the Actions List arising from the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd February 2021 be noted.
3. Members of the Committee recorded their thanks and appreciation for the services of Councillor Boriss during his time as a Councillor and as a member of this Committee.

66 CORPORATE OVERVIEW AN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2020/2021, which outlined the programme of reports presented during the 2020/2021 municipal year.

Resolved:

The Committee's Work Programme 2020/2021 be noted.

67 RESOURCES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS DIRECTORATE PLANS 2020/2021: QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee scrutinised a joint report of the Director of Resources and the Director of Neighbourhoods detailing the progress at the end of Quarter Three

2020/2021 (31st December 2020) towards achievements of targets contained in the Resources Directorate Plan 2020/2021 and in the Neighbourhoods Directorate Plan 2020/2021.

In considering the Resources Directorate element of the report, the Assistant Director Legal, Governance and Workforce/Monitoring Officer) updated Members on the actions that were still outstanding at 31st December 2020 and which had received an 'amber' rating.

A Member referred to the Borough Council elections and elections for the position of Mayor of Greater Manchester, both scheduled to be held on Thursday, 6th May 2021 and sought clarification on the arrangements that were currently in place for these. The Assistant Director (Legal, Governance and Workforce/Monitoring Officer) undertook to liaise with the Council's Elections Manager and write to Members of the Committee with the current guidance for the conduct of the elections.

In considering the Neighbourhoods Directorate element of the report, Members were updated on the actions that were still outstanding at 31st December 2020.

Resolved:

1. The Resources and Neighbourhoods Directorate Plans 2020/2021 - Quarter 3 Performance (October – December 2020), be noted.
2. The Assistant Director Legal, Governance and Workforce/Monitoring Officer) be requested to write to Members of the Committee, clarifying arrangements for the Borough Council and Greater Manchester Mayoral Elections, which are both scheduled to be held on Thursday, 6th May 2021.

68 UPDATE ON THE INTRODUCTION OF CHARGES FOR WHEELED BINS

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Director of Neighbourhoods which provided Members with an update on the introduction of charges for new and replacement wheeled bins which went live on 23rd November 2020. The report was submitted for information, further to a request made by the Committee's Members at the last meeting of the Committee, held 22nd February 2021 (minute 52 refers).

Following the submission of a report to the Council's Cabinet on 1st October 2019 on the proposed charges for the supply of waste and recycling bins, a public consultation was undertaken in early 2020. As the introduction of the charge was regarded as being contentious the final decision on implementing the charges was taken by the Cabinet.

A further report was presented to the Cabinet on 25th August 2020 recommending the reintroduction of a charge for new and replacement wheeled bins, both waste and recycling bins. The recommendation was approved and it was agreed the charge would be £20 per bin. The charge went live on 23rd November 2020.

There were a number of exemptions for the charge such as if the bin was stolen or vandalised or if the resident receives an assisted collection. A resident could appeal against the charge and it would be waived if there are shown to be extenuating circumstances.

Thus far the impact of the charges had seen a reduced demand for bins by 56% compared to the same time period in 2019/2020. The income received to date from bin sales was approximately £13,000.

The Chair of the Committee noted that the content of this report was straying into the remit of the Communities, Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, therefore he undertook to liaise with the Chair of that Committee to determine where future discussion of this matter should rest.

Resolved:

1. A further report be submitted to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee of the Council, early in 2022, when a full twelve months of data becomes available including an update on the numbers of requests, appeals and income received since the introduction of charges for wheeled bins.
2. The Chairs of this Committee and of the Communities, Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to determine which Committee should be the recipient of future reports on this matter.

69 1ST & 2ND QUARTER 2020/2021 - CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

The Assistant Director (Information, Customers and Communities) provided the Scrutiny Committee with a summary of corporate complaints and compliments received during the first and second quarters of 2020/2021 (April – June and July - September 2020). The Committee were reminded that a part of the Council's performance management process was to ensure the Authority's ambition to continuously improve services would be realised.

It was reported that in total, 207 new complaints were received during the first six months of 2020/21 across all services. The majority of these complaints were resolved at Stage One, with only 10 escalating to Stage Two and 2 complaints being dealt with at Stage Three. In addition a total of 135 compliments were received during this reporting period, 19 of which were Council wide and related to the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The numbers reported marked reduction in the number of complaints received during this reporting period compared to the corresponding period in 2019/2020 and 26% of the overall number of complaints received were found to be not upheld.

Members were pleased to note there had been a slight reduction in the overall number of complaints received the year and that the majority of the Council's service areas had received fewer complaints in the reporting period compared to the previous year.

The Committee requested details of information and support that was available to those complainants who took their complaint either to Stage 3 or referred it to the local Government Ombudsman. The Committee was advised that reviews of complaints take place at the start of the Stage 3 process and support was provided if complainants were struggling to articulate their issues. However after Stage 3 the Council's input ceased as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was independent and when approached would act independently providing the necessary support and advice to a complainant as required.

The Committee noted that the Customer Feedback Lead, Mrs Carolyn Whitham was due to retire from the Council in April 2021 and in doing so noted that she had attended meetings of this Committee and its predecessor bodies over the years to present reports on complaints to and about Council services.

Resolved:

1. The report be noted.
2. The Committee expresses its gratitude to Mrs Carolyn Whitham, for her positive contributions to the Committee over a period of many years and wish her sincere best wishes for the future on her impending retirement.

70 DRAFT DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Director of Neighbourhoods which outlined the draft digital experience strategy. The strategy's intention was to set out a clear vision to improve 'our place' and people's lives through digital transformation. Its priorities included becoming a digital place that utilised new technologies and systems and the development of 'digital people' aiming to ensure that the Borough's residents were able to take advantage of new technologies and in doing so better their lives.

The report set out the next steps, assuming that the proposed strategy would be approved by the Cabinet on 30th March 2021. These steps included establishing a partnership working group which will be tasked, initially, with developing a delivery plan which would sit behind the strategy and this was planned to be brought back to Cabinet for approval later in 2021. Members of the Committee requested that the delivery plan be presented to a future meeting of this Committee prior to its submission to cabinet.

Resolved:

1. The Cabinet at its meeting on 30th March 2021 be recommended to approve the Digital Experience Strategy, appended to the Director of Neighbourhood's report, be approved for consultation and as a basis for developing a delivery plan;
2. The Cabinet also be requested to approve the proposed next steps, detailed in the report, which include the establishment of a digital strategy working group, involving key stakeholders from the Council, health service, voluntary and commerce sectors, to develop a partnership delivery plan to enable the delivery of digital priorities.

3. The Committee request that the Director of Neighbourhoods submit details of the digital strategy delivery plan, to be worked on by the working group, to a future meeting of this Committee, prior to its submission to the Cabinet for approval.

71 FINANCIAL UPDATE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer, which provided an update on the forecast financial position relating to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council.

The purpose of the report was to update Members on the use of the emergency Government funding to mitigate the additional expenditure/loss of income resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee was informed that this report had previously been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 25th February 2021.

Resolved:

That the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council and the funding provided by the Government to help mitigate this be noted.

72 FINANCE UPDATE REPORT (PERIOD 10 - 2020/2021)

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer which informed Members of the Council's forecast 2020/2021 financial position as at the end of January 2021. The Committee was advised that this report was due to be considered by the Cabinet, at its meeting on 30th March 2021, where the various recommendations contained therein would be determined.

The report was presented as it was felt that Members of the Cabinet, and of the Scrutiny Committee, should be kept updated on the financial position of the authority, as effective budget management was critical to ensuring financial resources were spent in line with the budget and were targeted towards the Council's priorities.

In considering the report the Committee noted that the payment of Link4Life's Management Fee across the first four months of 2021/2022, to support Link4Life to mitigate the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as detailed at paragraph 4.1.4 of the report was due to be approved by the Cabinet on 30th March 2021.

The Committee also noted that the use of the £170,000 compensation payment received relating to Middleton Arena was due to be approved by the Cabinet, on 30th March 2021, which was to be used to fund related Legal costs with the remaining balance used to replenish the Asset Management Capital Scheme for costs already incurred, as detailed at paragraph 4.6.2. of the report.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

73 GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY - MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Corporate Issues and Reform Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held 9th February 2021, be noted.

74 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:

That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business, in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

Reason for the resolution:

Should the press and public remain during debate on this item there may be a disclosure of information that is deemed to be exempt under Parts 1 and 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

75 PROPERTY INVESTMENTS - PERFORMANCE AND RISK - 2020/2021

The Committee scrutinised a confidential report of the Chief Finance officer that informed Members of the performance of the Council's property investments, and highlight the associated risks.

Resolved:

The Committee recommends that investment activity be suspended pending the submission of a further report, detailing the risks associated with property investments made and proposed to be made by and on behalf of the Council, to the Committee's next scheduled meeting on 22nd June 2021.