

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 21 March 2013 at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillors Richard Speight (Chair), Barry Johnson, Wendy Curtis, Yash Gupta, Terry Hipsey and Charlie Key

In attendance: M. Hone – Director of Finance & Corporate Governance
S. Clark – Head of Finance
J. Hinchliffe – Head of HR OD & Customer Strategy
L. Magill – Director of Environment
R. Harris – Head of Commissioning
K. Adedeji- Head of Housing, Investment and Development
C. Littleton – Director of Children’s Services
S. Welton – Corporate Performance Officer
M. Essex – Head of Regeneration
S. Cox – Assistant Chief Executive
L. Richards – Policy Officer
A. McLellan – Business Information Analyst
M. Boulter – Principal Democratic Services Officer

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 May 2013 were approved as a correct record.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

3. CORPORATE SCORECARD PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee opened the debate by discussing how budget savings affected the performance of the Council and it was replied by officers that the Council had performed well, or as good, with fewer resources but they wished to maintain this performance. There was an aspiration to go beyond the normal targets which had been fairly constant for the last few years.

In relation to stress related sickness absence, the Committee learnt that the average sickness level (including stress) for 2012/13 had reduced to just

under 9.5 days per employee, which was a further improvement from previous years. Stress absence was still a challenge and the work the Council had done to raise stress awareness had led to an increasing reportage of stress among the workforce. There were no particular teams or departments that suffered stress more than others and incidences were spread across the Council and were caused by a variety of individual circumstances.

Councillor Key felt that the performance on stress and the payment of invoices should be worked on as a team and that senior managers needed to work together to ensure the targets were met. Officers recognised that those performance issues that relied on performance across the whole council were a lot harder to manage but the Performance Board took rigorous measures to monitor all performance across the council and ensure heads of service were accountable for any dips in performance within their sections. Any performance that was continually failing or declining in performance was referred to Directors Board for action and focus.

Officers responded to a query on council tax collection by stating that bailiffs would only be sent to collect monies after a resident had been sent two or perhaps three letters of reminder.

The Committee discussed those targets that were not directly controllable by the Council and officers agreed that although the performance of issues such as anti-social behaviour and school exclusions could not be directly controlled by the Council, the Council could influence these issues and could take leadership to improve their performance. Therefore, these targets were shared targets with other partners.

It was clarified that housing repairs satisfaction targets had not been changed and that the backlog in repairs would be cleared by the end of July. Officers highlighted that the satisfaction survey was an independent survey and was not always linked to the number of repairs appointments kept but took into account a variety of other factors.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The committee acknowledge and commend services where there is good delivery against priorities.**
- ii) The Committee notes the performance in areas of concern.**
- iii) The Committee recommend the areas In Focus to be circulated to other relevant overview and scrutiny committee chairs.**

4. CORPORATE PRIORITIES DELIVERY PLAN AND CORPORATE SCORECARD 2013-14

Officers introduced the report highlighting that in future the Committee would receive a narrative mid-year progress report on various performance indicators alongside the data itself. It was felt that this would give Members a better picture of the performance issues.

It was briefly explained that growth hubs, referred to in the report, were a number of key areas within Thurrock that were due to develop in future years.

Resolved: That

- i) The Committee notes the year 1 Corporate Deliverables as detailed in appendix 1.**
- ii) The Committee notes the elements within the Corporate Scorecard which will be monitored during 2013-14 and their targets as detailed in appendix 2.**
- iii) The Committee notes the approach to monitoring the progress against the Corporate Priorities and objectives as set out in paragraph 3.10.**

5. CENSUS 2011 RELEASE UPDATE

The data from the 2011 census had been released over a number of months and was continuing to do so. The percentage of the population who were four and under and 0-14 year olds had increased significantly. The age bracket of 60-64 had also increased significantly.

Officers commented on the impact of these figures and a number of observations were made:

- The population would become increasingly more educated. As the current education attainment filtered through.
- The main industries in Thurrock would remain but it was important for the Council to encourage better education so that local residents could take more of the higher paid and managerial roles.
- The increase in the elderly population drove the Council to create new homes for people who needed assistance but did not want to go into residential care homes.

The Chair noted that allowing only a small number of industries to monopolise the local work force could be dangerous if any serious economic events occurred to affect these trades. Similarly, he felt that the inequalities within the borough still needed focus.

Other Members commented on the need for community harmony among different cultures and also the request for more research on how Thurrock would change in the future.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The Committee notes the main findings in the census 2011 release and the relevance for strategic planning.**

- ii) **The Committee recommends the report to other Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs to explore how the census data might impact on service delivery.**

- iii) **Census data be used to inform Thurrock profile and ward profiling.**

6. NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES – POOLING OPPORTUNITIES

The Committee was informed that the Council had the opportunity to retain more of the business rates it collected by pooling with other local authorities. The report presented a number of options and different combinations of councils surrounding Thurrock. Alongside the pool options presented it was noted that work had recently commenced on a Greater Essex pool but there were no results available at the time of the meeting.

The Committee debated the issue and it was clarified that the level of need of each council was based on a complex calculation that included deprivation, unemployment, flood defence and many other factors.

Officers stated that the basis of distribution of the pooled funds would need to be agreed between the councils participating in the pool and it could range from an even split to a proportional distribution on the basis of who was collecting the most business rates. It was stated that Thurrock collected a sizeable business rate compared to other neighbouring councils.

Members explored the various pool options and some members felt that it would be good to collaborate with councils next to Thurrock so that the additional pooled funds could be used in areas where Thurrock residents could also benefit from improved facilities or transport links. Conversely, some Members recognised that the opportunity to make the most money from this arrangement was to pool with the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. Ultimately the Committee concluded that the Council should seek to enter into whichever pooling arrangement delivered the greatest direct cash benefit to Thurrock. The Members noted that the pool resources could be used by the pooled councils on mutually beneficial projects for both their residents or could be strictly divided and kept by each individual council for use on their own specific projects.

Officers recognised this was a good opportunity for the Council and would be treated like a capital grant and not worked into core budgeting as its future continuation was not guaranteed.

RESOLVED that the committee acknowledge the work which has seen completed to date the comments on the various pooling options identified be forwarded to Cabinet.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

Members listed the following items they wished to see on the work programme:

- Stress Management
- Fair Debt Programme
- Equality in Thurrock (including 16-24 year old provision)
- Pooling of business rates

The meeting was finished at 9.00pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**