

# Overview & Scrutiny Board Minutes

Tuesday 26 November 2013

## PRESENT

**Committee members:** Councillors Alex Karmel (Chairman), Rachel Ford, Donald Johnson, Steve Hamilton, Lucy Ivimy, Harry Phibbs, Andrew Jones, PJ Murphy and Max Schmid

**Other Councillors:** Cllr Nicholas Botterill (Leader of the Council), Cllr Marcus Ginn (Cabinet Member for Community Care)

**Officers:** Kayode Adewumi (Head of Governance & Scrutiny), Craig Bowdery (Scrutiny Manager), Jackie Hudson (Director for Procurement & IT Strategy), Hitesh Jolapara (Bi-Borough Director of Finance), Simon Jones (Director of Communications) and Jane West (Executive Director for Finance & Corporate Governance)

## 85. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

### **RESOLVED –**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## 86. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Loveday and the Chief Executive.

## 87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 88. TEAM WHITE CITY UPDATE

The Board received a presentation and report from the Director of Communications updating on the neighbourhood community budget pilot at White City.

The Board welcomed the progress made at White City and asked whether the Council was looking at ensuring long term sustainability for the project by exploring all options for income generation. Officers confirmed that they were working on building the capacity of Team White City so that they could pursue funding opportunities. The Council was of the view that there were sponsorship and advertising options in the local community, with the hope that initiatives such as the fanzine would eventually be cost neutral.

Members also asked how the Council would be monitoring the success of Team White City and if there was a mechanism to identify whether a decrease in crime for example was the result of the project or part of wider trends in the Borough. Officers explained that there was a robust evaluation framework in place that would monitor the effectiveness of each intervention.

The Board noted that for many residents in White City there was a language barrier with English not being people's first language, and members asked whether the project should be focussing more on improving literacy. Officers acknowledged that language was an issue for many residents and explained that the Council was therefore encouraging more people to sign up for literacy and numeracy classes. Since the launch of Team White City the way this was being approached had been revised to focus on connecting people and inspiring them. As a consequence, the numbers signing up to classes had significantly increased. Officers also highlighted that programmes such as literacy and numeracy classes and IT skills were seen as being just the beginning of targeted interventions to help build capacity in White City.

Members also discussed the virtual crime panel and asked how it was proposed that existing stakeholders such as the Police and Community Wardens would be engaged. Officers explained that the virtual panel was intended to complement existing structures and to enable a broader base of people get involved. Discussions were ongoing with the Police to discuss current issues, with the expectation that the increased spotlight on Police performance would help to improve local accountability.

The Board sought clarification on the funding for Team White City. Officers explained that the project received £170,000 of the total costs of £550,000 from a DCLG grant that would be ceasing at the end of the current financial year. The funding was mainly used to fund a team of four posts. After the DCLG funding finished, it was anticipated that the work would continue with the officer support being mainstreamed into existing Council posts. The DCLG money had been necessary to establish an evidence base and necessary support structures. Now that these were in place, costs for Team White City would be relatively low. For example the website involved significant expenditure on its design, but now this was completed the ongoing running costs were minimal. It was forecast that the project's costs would fall from £250,000 per annum to around £50,000.

The Board observed that many of the projects described in the report and the presentation were substantially overdue. For example the website was originally due to be launched in April 2013, but this had now been revised to

2014. Officers acknowledged that there had been delays and explained that there had been issues engaging with some partners, such as MITIE. A large amount of due diligence had been required and it had taken time to agree an evaluation framework to monitor the projects. Officers also highlighted that Team White City was a long-term multi-generational project, and that the first year was always likely to show little progress as the evidence base was developed. The Cabinet Member for Community Care also highlighted that the project was coordinated nationally in line with a Government timetable, and that it was in fact only six months beyond receiving Government sign-off. He explained that the majority of the planning had now been completed and that the Spring of 2014 would see tangible results and impacts.

One member expressed concern regarding the White City fanzine and reported that some residents had questioned its editorial impartiality. For example, it was stated that the fanzine had not reported stabbings that had taken place and its description of local development read like a Council press release. It was argued that editorial responsibility for the fanzine needed to be transferred to the community as soon as possible if it was to be embraced by residents. Officers explained that the purpose of the fanzine was not to report news but to signpost services and local opportunities. They were in discussion with the social enterprise about handing over responsibility. However it was important that full due diligence took place before any transfer as there could be issues of legal liability for defamation. It was proposed that an editorial panel would be established to minimise the risk and to give guidance to Team White City.

The Board noted the aim to improve employment opportunities for the area, and asked whether there were plans in place to better engage with Westfield. Officers confirmed that Westfield had signed-up to an employment pledge and would give advance notification of job opportunities and apprenticeships at Westfield.

*Cllr Johnson left the meeting at 20:08*

The Chairman noted that there was significant interest from the Board in the progress of Team White City and it was agreed that an update report would be submitted to the Board approximately six months after the Spring 2014 implementation date.

#### **89. FURTHERING THE BOROUGH OF OPPORTUNITY: A SHARED VISION FOR H&F 2014-22 - CONSULTATION DRAFT**

The Board received a report from the Head of Policy & Strategy presenting the draft Community Strategy for the Borough for 2014-22. Members noted that the consultation period on the draft was due to end on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013 and that the new Community Strategy would be published in January 2014.

Members noted the targets for the building of affordable housing in the Borough and sought clarification of the household income required to be

eligible for intermediate affordable housing, which was confirmed by the Leader as being £19,000 per year. Some members argued that the proportion of affordable housing being built at the Earls Court Opportunity Area was insufficient and that the Council's policies were promoting the private rented sector rather than home ownership. The Leader explained that the high cost of housing in the area suggested it was a desirable place to live and that many people currently in socially rented housing could not afford to rent privately or buy. The Council was therefore seeking to increase the amount of intermediate affordable housing available to create a progressive 'staircase' into home ownership. Some members also observed that young and single residents, which Hammersmith & Fulham had a higher than average population, preferred private rented accommodation.

The Board noted that resident satisfaction with street cleanliness and waste collection had increased. Members asked if there were any proposals to revise the current arrangements or comparison data with other authorities regarding weekly waste collections. The Leader reported that there were no proposals to alter collections, and that current arrangements would be maintained. He was not aware of the details of other authorities' collection cycles but explained that very few authorities outside of London had continued with weekly collections.

**RESOLVED –**

That the draft Community Strategy be noted.

**90. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM BRIDGE PARTNERSHIP (HFBP)**

The Board received a report from the Director of Procurement and IT Strategy presenting the performance of the H&F Bridge Partnership (HFBP) in 2012/13.

Members noted that in the benchmark HFBP had scored the maximum score in all areas but one for security and asked what this area was. Officers explained that the only area of concern for auditors was the removal of access rights to the network when employees left the authority. However a new system had now been implemented that kept better track of starters and leavers and the recommendation had now been cleared. Members also highlighted the physical asset inventory referred to in the report and asked for confirmation of how much equipment had been lost. Officers undertook to investigate the issue and confirm the number in writing, and assured members that the new system to track leavers had reduced the amount of equipment lost.

**Action: Jackie Hudson**

The Board also discussed further the benchmarking of the Council's performance indicators and requested the Council's summary report of the performance on the SOCITM benchmark. Officers undertook to circulate a full report after the meeting of H&F performance. Members asked whether the performance of HFBP had been compared against the private sector. Officers

explained that performance was only judged against other local authorities, but that there was some data available from private companies. However for benchmarking to be useful it was important to ensure comparisons between organisations were like-for-like with similar size and functions.

**Action: Jackie Hudson**

## **91. FILMING AND RECORDING AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The Board received a report from the Bi-Borough Director of Law that proposed guidance for the public taking of photographs, filming and recording of Council meetings.

The Chairman noted that the Full Council meeting of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013 had agreed a motion that permitted members of the public to take photographs, film and record Council meetings and he welcomed the commitment to transparency. However he proposed that the word 'may' should be amended to 'will' in point (ii) of the agreed motion. The Board agreed that this should be amended.

Members of the Board asked how the Council proposed enforcing the final point of the guidance that stated that it would request that online recordings be removed should they misrepresent proceedings. Officers explained that the Council would likely seek to reach agreement with the responsible individuals that inaccurate recordings be removed, but that a formal way of dealing with misrepresentations had not yet been developed. Members also noted that the Council would be making its own recording of all meetings, so that should the need arise an un-edited version of the meeting could be published.

The Board also discussed the distinction between the 'larger film crews' referred to in the guidance and other people who wished to record meetings, and the requirement for prior notice to be given for roving film crews. Some members argued that these distinctions could create confusion and went against the Council's desire for greater openness and transparency. However officers explained that the guidance was not a collection of strict rules and that the Council would seek to facilitate public recording rather than restrict it. The Chairman also remarked that larger crews were invited to seek prior permission so that appropriate arrangements, such as clearing necessary space or providing designated seating, could be made.

Members also discussed the guidance that filming and recording would not be allowed when young or vulnerable people were speaking or in attendance. Some members argued that the Council should not seek to restrict recording under any circumstances and that there would be instances when children were present but that it would be acceptable to permit recording. The Chairman explained that he felt that the point should remain as the Council had a duty of care to young and vulnerable people attending meetings, and that to record them would require parental consent that would not always be available. It was proposed therefore that this point in the guidance should be amended to remove the word 'will' and replace it with 'may' to allow for

common sense and an appropriate decision to be made that considers each circumstance.

Members noted that officers would be recording meetings, and asked if there were plans for these recordings to be published online. Officers explained that to publish the files containing the recordings online would have cost implications as they were large files that required significant server space. However if members wanted to pursue the publishing of the recordings, then this could be explored.

**RESOLVED –**

That subject to the amendments detailed above, the guidance proposed in the report be agreed.

**92. SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS**

The Board received tabled reports updating members on the recent meetings of the three Select Committees.

**93. THE CAPITAL BUDGET**

The Board received a report updating on the 2013/14 quarter one capital budget monitoring.

Members noted that a £2.4 million increase had been forecast for the General Debt Fund and sought clarification of the causes for this. Officers explained that the increase was largely due to a slippage in the capital expenditure programme into future years and a change in Government regulations that restricted how housing receipts could be used. The longer-term four year programme however remained in a surplus position.

The Board also requested further details on the risk of the Council breaching its VAT partial exemption limit. Officers explained that the Council was on course to breach the limit but that the Council was now working with HMRC to take mitigating measures, such as an expectation that projects will 'opt-to-tax' where it is available. Officers assured members that projects will not be delayed because of the potential breach and that should the benefits of a project outweigh the costs of breaching the limit the projects will go ahead as planned. HMRC were keen to work with the Council to avoid a breach, but if it occurred there would be a financial cost to the Council.

Members also asked for clarification on the following details, which officers undertook to provide:

- Targets for leasehold income not being met and possible shortfalls
- An additional £1,838,000 expenditure on major refurbishments in the Housing Capital Programme (appendix 4)

**Action: Hitesh Jolapara**

#### **94. PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Board received a report updating members on the performance data for quarter two in 2013/14.

Members asked about the performance of the Council's call centre and whether it was improving or if there were options to alter the contract. Officers explained that the current contract ran until December 2016 and performance was continuing to improve for the call centre. It was however acknowledged that the Housing Benefit and Council Tax call centre was more challenging, although a new system had been implemented that provided more robust data on call patterns.

The Board also noted the sickness targets and queried whether there had been any progress developing sickness targets for individual departments. Officers explained that they had considered department-level targets but directors did not agree that it was appropriate to have different expectations for each department. The focus was ultimately on reducing overall absence rates. Officers undertook to provide details of the options considered.

**Action: Jane West**

#### **RESOLVED –**

That the report be noted.

#### **95. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME AND THE FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Board's Work Programme was noted and agreed.

#### **96. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

The Board noted the future meetings dates as follows:

- Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014
- Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014
- Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014

#### **97. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

#### **RESOLVED –**

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business, on the grounds that they contain the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the said Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption currently outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

**98. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM BRIDGE PARTNERSHIP (HFBP) AND THE ICT STRATEGY - EXEMPT ASPECTS**

**RESOLVED –**

That the exempt aspects of the report be noted.

**99. THE CAPITAL BUDGET - EXEMPT ASPECTS OF THE REPORT**

**RESOLVED –**

That the exempt aspects of the report be noted.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm

Meeting ended: 9.16 pm

Chairman .....

Contact officer: Craig Bowdery  
Scrutiny Manager  
Governance and Scrutiny  
☎: 020 8753 2278  
E-mail: craig.bowdery@lbhf.gov.uk