

Housing, Health And Adult Social Care Select Committee Minutes

Tuesday 21 January 2014

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Lucy Ivimy (Chairman), Andrew Brown, Daryl Brown, Joe Carlebach, Stephen Cowan, Peter Graham and Rory Vaughan

Co-opted members: Patrick McVeigh (HAFAD) and Bryan Naylor (Age UK)

Other Councillors: Marcus Ginn and Andrew Johnson

Officers: Melbourne Barrett (Executive Director of Housing & Regeneration), Liz Bruce (Tri-borough Executive Director of ASC), Kathleen Corbett (Director of Finance & Resources, HRD), Prakash Daryanani (Head of Finance, CSD), Mike England (Director Housing Options, Skills and Economic Development), Sue Perrin (Committee Co-ordinator), Jane West (Executive Director of Finance & Corporate Governance) and Rachel Wigley (Tri-borough Director for ASC Finance)

42. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 November 2013 and 08 January 2014 were approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

RESOLVED THAT:

A draft response to the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust Foundation Trust consultation would be circulated to members for comment, and the Chairman was authorised to approve the final response.

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Oliver Craig and Peter Tobias.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45. REVENUE BUDGET 2014/2015

The Council's revenue budget for 2014/15 was presented by Jane West and the department budgets by Rachel Wigley (Adult Social Care) and Kathleen Corbett (Housing and Regeneration).

Mrs West outlined the Central Government grant process, whereby funding was expected to fall by £14 million (10% in cash terms and 12.5% in real terms) in 2014/2015.

There were major concerns in respect of the business rates retention scheme, whereby the Council continued to lose out by £4 million per annum, arising from the appeals against rateable values set by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and, in particular those relating to Westfield Shopping Centre. In addition, a £3 million tariff was payable to the Government.

A Council Tax reduction of 3% was proposed for 2014/2015.

Mrs West responded to members' queries that it was believed that the baseline business rates would not be reset until 2018/2020. The Leader had made representation in respect of the late information and the Council had also contributed to the submissions by London Councils and the Society of London Treasurers.

Mrs West outlined the budget assumptions in respect of pay and price inflation and levels of fees and charges, the identified growth proposals and savings, the budget risks and the increase in earmarked reserves.

Mrs West responded to Councillor Carlebach that there were no savings or growth items for the Public Health budget and the ring fenced allocation had been rolled over.

Members queried the growth proposals of £1.4 million in Centrally Managed Budgets. Mrs West responded that this item related to overheads which could not be posted across other departments and primarily the Housing Revenue Account, where, for example, there had been a significant reduction in staff and a corresponding reduction in Human Resources costs which could be re-charged. There had been significant shrinkage in Centrally Managed Budgets but there was a time lag.

Councillor Andrew Brown queried whether the expansion of Westfield Shopping Centre would bring business rates into balance across the site. Mrs West responded that it was hoped that this would be the case and the VOA would not make the same mistake again.

Councillor Cowan queried the growth proposals for Regeneration and Housing. Ms Corbett responded that the £1.5 million related primarily to an

additional allowance for bad debt for direct payments and additional bad debt in terms of the overall benefits cap.

Mrs West responded to Councillor Carlebach that the identified savings were in proportion to the departments' overall budgets. However, by the end of the process, the percentages might differ as various savings applied only to certain departments, for example adjustments in respect of pay for staff who had opted for flexible working.

The percentage savings across departments would be confirmed in writing.

Action: Jane West

Mrs West agreed to provide a written answer to Councillor Graham in respect of the amount received in New Homes Bonus.

Action: Jane West

Mrs Wigley presented the Adult Social Care (ASC) Department Budget for 2014/2015.

The presentation set out the Service Vision for the ASC Tri-borough to support integrated partnership working and to gain an overview of outcomes across the whole health and social care economy. To achieve this a common set of eight outcomes had been developed.

Mrs Wigley outlined: the 2014/2015 budget headlines for ASC; the cumulative savings for the Council and for ASC alone; the Better for Less strategy; a classification of savings; delivery of the savings and risks. The ASC Gross Spend Plan demonstrated that 77% was spend directly on services to customers. It was not proposed to increase either Home Care or Meals Service charges.

Councillor Vaughan queried the budget proposals in respect of: reduced admissions into residential and nursing homes through better support in the community; review of high cost placements, supported at home packages and direct payments; and procurement of learning disabilities supported living contract.

Mrs Wigley responded that the savings of £475,000 in respect of reduced admissions into residential and nursing homes had been achieved by helping people to remain at home for as long as possible and therefore reducing the number of placements. Ms Bruce added that the overall strategy was to enable people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible through advice and information, prevention initiatives, intensive re-ablement and a new home care offer focusing on flexible support and outcomes. Better support in the community would defer and manage demand away from institutionalised care.

Mr Daryanani stated that there had been a 17% reduction in placements (from 285 to 244 in nursing homes and from 319 to 311 in residential homes) between April 2011 and December 2013. Councillor Ginn added that historically, the Council had been an outlier, with a high number of nursing and residential placements.

Councillor Cowan queried how people were genuinely supported in the community. Ms Bruce responded that there were a range of measures to monitor satisfaction and good practice and suggested that this should be a future agenda item.

Mr McVeigh referred to the review of non-statutory advocacy support services and highlighted an individual case which had resulted in higher overall costs for both health and social care.

Mr Naylor commented that savings could also increase the burden for family carers. Mrs Wigley responded that carers were an important part of the customer journey work. In addition, the Care Bill would introduce statutory duties.

Mrs Wigley responded to the query in respect of the review of high cost placements, supported at home packages and direct payments that there had been a rigorous review of every package to achieve efficient costs and changes to direct payments services to an outcome based operating model to facilitate people staying at home for as long as possible. In respect of the Learning Disabilities supported living contract, this had been re-tendered and the savings achieved.

Mr Daryanani responded to Mr McVeigh's query that there had been a full Equalities Impact Assessment and that the savings did not have a specific impact on any of the protected characteristics.

Ms Corbett presented the Housing and Regeneration General Fund department budget and outlined the growth and savings proposals.

The Housing and Regeneration Department provides services funded by both the General Fund and HRA and discussion of this item was taken with the following item in respect of the HRA.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Revenue Budget 2014/2015 be noted.

46. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND RENT INCREASE REPORT 2014/2015

Mr Barrett introduced the report, which outlined: the management of the HRA; the HRA Financial Strategy, the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy and the HRA Revenue Budget for 2014/2015; and the proposed increase in

dwelling rents for 2014/2015. The broad strategy was to continue with improvement of service quality and cost efficiency.

Mr Barrett highlighted key achievements in respect of the 50% reduction in employee headcount funded by the HRA and the commencement of the necessary rebuilding of reserves, since the return of management to the Council, to create a sound platform for investment in infrastructure, including lifts and fire safety and general estate improvement.

Ms Corbett presented the financial strategy and highlighted financial risks and savings proposals. In respect of income, it was proposed to: increase rent by 5.79%; increase tenant service charges by 3.7%; freeze heating charges; increase water rates by 0.1% to ensure full recovery; and to freeze garages and parking charges.

Ms Corbett responded to Councillor Graham's query that it was likely that the rent increase would have been more than double, should it not have been possible to contribute to stock maintenance through the Expensive Void Disposals Programme.

Ms Corbett responded to Councillor Cowan that rent increases over the previous four years had been in the region of 5/6%. A written response in respect of the exact percentage for both houses and garages would be provided.

Action: Kathleen Corbett

In response to a query from Councillor Ivimy in respect of the re-procurement of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, Mr Barrett stated that, as part of the savings programme, a sole supply contract for Housing Repairs and Maintenance had been awarded to MITIE Property Services (UK Ltd) and that this had achieved circa £2 million per annum savings in aggregate compared with previous arrangements. The sole supply contract had been evaluated against separate contracts for the North and South of the borough and there had been a circa 10% price difference. (There had previously been eight separate contracts.) In addition service improvements had been built into the contract.

MITIE had commenced on 1 November 2013, after a fairly short mobilisation period and were dealing with an average of one thousand repairs a week.

Councillor Cowan considered that the contract was proving to be more expensive because of chronic and repeated failures and that the choice of contractor should be given to the consumer, with possible economies of scale on a tri-borough basis.

Councillor Graham asked for comments on specific implications of appointing a number of contractors. Ms Corbett responded that multiple contractors would be likely to increase costs, as there was no certainty of work; and there would likely be additional overhead cost managing such an arrangement. There would be greater risk in respect of costs and performance and

arrangements would need to be in place to ensure that tenants were able to select appropriate contractors.

Councillor Johnson noted good feedback in respect of MITIE's performance and stated that it was not possible to meaningfully assess a contract which had been in place for only nine weeks. In addition, there were likely to be legacy issues.

A member of the public asked for clarity for tenants in respect of performance standards, and referred to problems with a leak in a Community Hall.

Mr McVeigh queried the removal of the spare room subsidy for under-occupancy. Mr England responded that Discretionary Housing Payments had continued throughout 2013/2014. Guidance from the Secretary of State in respect of 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 was expected within the following week.

In response to Councillor Ivimy's query, Mr England stated that, since April 2013, moves to more appropriately sized accommodation had been enabled for 37 households. The Council currently provides incentive payments of £500 per room to under-occupiers who downsize. Given the overall benefit to the Council of securing larger accommodation, it was proposed to increase the payments to £2,000 per room.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

47. HOUSING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Mr Barrett introduced the Key Performance Indicators report for the period ending October 2013 and reported that 21 of the 28 had been met or were within tolerance.

Mr Barrett highlighted the reduction in the average number of sickness days to 4.49 compared to 9.25 at the same time in the previous year, brought about by concerted management action.

The principal area of concern was Rent Collection, which accounted for three of the targets which had been rated red and not improving. H&F Direct had been commissioned to collect housing rents from 1 July 2012, as part of the overall HRA Transformation Programme. A project plan had been put in place by H&F Direct to rectify the situation with improvements being expected by 31 March 2014 and the position was being kept under close review.

The reporting period coincided with the ending of previous repairs and maintenance arrangements, prior to new arrangements coming into place with MITIE on 1 November 2013, and performance on the previous contracts fell back slightly towards the end.

The number of families in Bed & Breakfast was down.

The red rating in respect of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) was a technical issue in respect of FRAs being updated once works were completed.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Report be noted.
2. An update report be added to the work programme for the April 2014 meeting.

48. ADULT SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL CUSTOMER FEEDBACK REPORT 2012/2013

Ms Bruce introduced the report, which provided information in respect of statutory complaints made between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013.

Ms Bruce stated that staff were encouraged to attempt to resolve problems at the first point of contact in line with good practice, but were equally advised to direct service users towards the Customer Feedback Team where an instant resolution was not possible or appropriate or where the service user remained dissatisfied. The Team would seek to resolve complaints within ten working days.

During the year, 4,203 people received a service from the Council and 2% of these service users or someone on their behalf had raised a complaint about a service they had received. In comparison, 18 compliments had been passed to the Team.

The report provided an analysis of complaint outcomes, with the majority of complaints that were upheld being in respect of the quality of service. The ASC teams ensured that, whatever the outcome of a complaint, they learnt from the complaint to ensure that the problem did not recur with other service users.

Councillor Ivimy asked that analysis of complaints which had not reached the Complaints Process be provided to the Committee.

Action: Liz Bruce

Mr Naylor considered that people should be encouraged to complain and that the process should be made easier. Ms Bruce responded that the Tri-borough services promoted awareness of the right to complain and support to complain. The ethos of attempting to resolve problems at the first point of contact was good practice, not a way of avoiding complaints.

Councillor Ginn considered that customer feedback, rather than just complaints, should be encouraged.

Councillor Cowan queried whether the higher number of complaints received at Kensington & Chelsea were attributable to its culture and whether an unique approach could be implemented across Tri-borough. Ms Bruce responded that it would be possible to provide a comparison of approach, behaviour and practice across the Tri-borough.

Councillor Vaughan queried the format of customer satisfaction interviews and the lessons learnt from complaints. Ms Bruce responded that the customer satisfaction interviews were part of the quality assurance system which included reviewing and improving the customer experience. Feedback from customers was sought in a range of ways, including e-monitoring and provider networks and forums. Ms Bruce offer to provide more detailed information in respect of quality assurance and customer feedback.

In respect of lessons learnt from complaints, the key issues identified were in respect of communication standards, provision of information and staff attitude and behaviour.

Mr McVeigh considered that it was possible for people not to know that they were being treated unfairly. Ms Bruce outlined the safeguards, which included legislation and statutory requirements, and the set of principles and values within which ASC sought to deliver services to eligible adults within the community. Ms Bruce added that she was the Accountable Officer for Tri-borough ASC.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

49. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN 2013-2014

RESOLVED THAT:

1. Welfare Reform be added to the February agenda.
2. Housing Repairs and Maintenance be added to the April agenda, and that MITIE be asked to attend the meeting.
3. Housing Performance Indicators be added to the April agenda.

50. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

19 February 2014

2 April 2014

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.30 pm

Chairman

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