

Overview & Scrutiny Board Minutes

Tuesday 4 March 2014

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Alex Karmel (Chairman), Rachel Ford, Donald Johnson, Steve Hamilton, Andrew Jones and PJ Murphy

Other Councillors: Councillors Nicholas Botterill and Mark Loveday

Officers: Craig Bowdery (Scrutiny Manager), Hitesh Jolapara (Bi-Borough Director of Finance), Peter Smith (Head of Policy and Strategy) and Jane West (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Governance).

111. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

RESOLVED –

- i) That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record
- ii) That the implementation of actions presented in appendix 1 be noted.

112. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ivimy and Schmid and Nicholas Holgate, Chief Executive.

113. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

114. RESULTS FROM THE ANNUAL RESIDENTS SURVEY

The Board received a report from the Head of Policy & Strategy outlining the headline findings of the most recent Annual Residents Survey. Members noted that the results were largely positive with increasing levels of resident satisfaction for most services, with the exception of sport and leisure facilities which had experienced a spike in satisfaction in 2012 and were now returning to 2011 levels.

Members of the Board observed that the figures presented were to some extent open to interpretation, citing discrepancies where responses to the same questions indicating satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels had both decreased. It was asked whether there was any way to analyse the results to gain a better understanding of ongoing trends. Officers explained that a fuller report (which would be available on the Council's website) assessing the results of the survey would be available in April which would be able to present a more detailed commentary. Noting the decreasing satisfaction in sport and leisure facilities, Cllr Loveday explained that the Cabinet was also concerned by this and had been informed that this was a trend across London where satisfaction levels had experienced a boost by the positivity created by the 2012 Olympics, but were now reverting to pre-Olympic levels. It was therefore not necessarily a reflection on Council services but of the national mood.

The Board also discussed the methodology used to conduct the survey and the issuing of 4,000 postal surveys, and asked whether online methods might attract a higher response rate. Officers explained that the methodology used was the same as that used in 2008 by Ipsos-Mori for the last Place Survey. In order to identify reliable baseline data and trends the Council had continued to use the same methods since. For the preceding two years the survey had also been replicated online, but the results were kept separate from the rest of the responses. They were still analysed and reported, but because it was harder to achieve a representative demography and to verify that responses came from inside the borough, it was felt that including them with the postal responses could skew the results. The response rate to the postal surveys had remained steady in recent years, with around 1,100 responses to the 4,000 surveys posted.

The Board asked how issues identified in the survey would be followed-up. Officers explained that 'Listen and Learn' reports would be prepared on the basis of comments received from respondents and fed back to departments to assess whether further action or an alternative approach was required. Some members suggested that the results of the Annual Residents Survey could be linked in some way to the bonuses of senior officers.

RESOLVED –

That the results of the Annual Residents Survey 2013 be noted.

115. UPDATE ON THE TRI-BOROUGH MANAGED SERVICES FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

The Board received a presentation from the Bi-Borough Director of Finance updating members on the Managed Services project. Officers reported that the project would now not be going live on 1st April 2014 as originally intended. It had been agreed in December 2013 that the project would be delayed to start either on 1st September or 1st October as there were a number of systems that were not functioning properly.

Members asked for details of the cost implications and who would be responsible for them. Officers explained that the six month delay would halve the savings anticipated for 2014/15 to £200,000 for the Finance & Corporate Services department. The savings had been found elsewhere in the department's budget so there were no additional costs for the year. It was also reported that the Council and BT would likely share the costs as both parties contributed to the reasons for delay. Officers described how when testing was conducted the system had a high failure rate and crashed. Members therefore questioned how the delay was not the responsibility of BT and officers explained that there was an issue of clarity regarding the Council's initial requirements. It was also acknowledged that the Council did not have sufficient project management in place in the early stages of the project. The Board noted that the FCS department had made a realistic budget allocation for the project team that made a contingency for delays. The only costs not budgeted for were therefore the reduced savings, but these had been found elsewhere. Officers also highlighted that similar IT projects, such as the adoption of Oracle software by a number of London Boroughs, were also experiencing delays due to the complexity of the systems involved.

The Board asked how officers could be confident that the identified problems could now be resolved to prevent further delays. It was explained that the project now had a much more complete project plan with clear milestones that would allow both parties to know exactly how the project was progressing. Officers acknowledged that they did not have absolute confidence that the project would not experience further delays, but they were confident the project plan was sufficiently robust.

Members questioned why there was ongoing uncertainty regarding the practicalities of the new systems and why it was that the day-to-day operation was not addressed during the procurement and tendering process. Officers explained that the competition process was judged on the high-level outputs of each submitted tender, rather than the day-to-day systems. The Council went out for tender for a basic, vanilla system that could then be sold to other authorities, which would then amend the system for their local needs.

The Board noted the intention for Strategic HR to be retained in-house, with other HR functions being commissioned to external providers. Members asked for clarity on what was meant by Strategic HR functions. Officers undertook to investigate the issue and provide full details.

Action: Bi-Borough Director of Finance

The Board thanked officers for their presentation and agreed that a further update would be required at the July meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

116. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Board received a report from the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Governance updating members on the agreed performance indicators.

Noting the percent of calls answered in the target time for H&F Direct, the Board asked for further information on why the Assessments calls scored so low. Officers explained that the target was to answer calls within 25 seconds, but that this was not always possible as the team dealt with very complex queries that took up a lot of officers' time. Members noted that the targets were to be revised for 2014/15 so that the target answer time would be five minutes. Actions to speed up response times were also being taken, such as a same-day call back service and webchats. The Board agreed that the current performance indicator did not accurately measure the quality of the service and that the customer experience needed to be captured. Members suggested that customers were more concerned with how long it took for a query to be resolved, rather than the length of time it took for a phone call to be answered.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

117. SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Board received reports from the Chairmen of the three Select Committees updating on recent meetings. It was highlighted that the Transport, Environment and Resident Services Select Committee had discussed traditional pubs in the borough and recommended that the Council adopt a pub protection policy. The Board welcomed and fully supported the recommendation.

RESOLVED –

That the Select Committee reports be noted.

118. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME AND THE FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme for the remainder of 2013/14 be approved.

119. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The date of the next meeting was agreed as:

- 8th April 2014

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 8.05 pm

Chairman

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