

RESOURCES AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 25 JANUARY 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Rahul Tarar (Chair), Vinay Manro (Vice-Chair), Claire Crilly, Steve Heyes, Jenny Jefferies, Nick Martin and Adorabelle Shaikh.

Also in attendance were: Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills), Councillor Robert Jandy (Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence) and Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance, and Waste Service).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Oladapo Ibitoye.

13. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

14. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

15. Public Question Time

There were no public questions submitted.

16. Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Budgets

The Committee considered a report, which provided an update on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's budgets. Mr Mick Bowden, the Corporate Director of Finance and Assets, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The overall summary of the key financial issues arising from Covid-19 which, though predominantly a public health issue, has had financial implications for residents, businesses and the Council.
- The type of spending the Council has undertaken, along with the funding received from Government, which can be broken down in to four main areas as follows:
 - Where the Council has acted as an agent on behalf of the Government to apply business rate relief, along with a number of various other business grant schemes, throughout the course of the pandemic.
 - Service related pressures, the most significant being the grant from Government to fund the programme of work by the Public Health Team (which has been leading the Council's response to the pandemic). This has included the work done on test and trace, and communications with residents, partners and employee organisations across the Borough.
 - Supporting the other financial pressures faced as a result of the impact on the Council's income from Covid-19. There are two strands to this support, the first being the Government scheme to reimburse proportionately losses

on the general sales, fees and charges income (up to 75% of lost income above the first 5% which the Council is expected to meet). The second strand is a scheme relating to the Collection Fund (where Council collects business rates income for those who do not have relief and council tax income from residents), which will largely follow the same 5% / 75% principles as set out above. The Committee noted that where the Council has less income than might have been anticipated normally there would be an ability to spread those losses over three years, but there will also be a degree of support to help meet those shortfalls.

- Cross-council funding received to address all other pressures (income types not caught by the sales, fees and charges scheme, and other service related pressures, particularly in social care, listed in the report) of which the Council has received £16.7m in total so far.
- That specific Council budget issues are not being predicted as a result of Covid-19 this financial year, which has been based on current forecasts, the pressures being faced, and the funding the Council has received.
- Looking forward, the Government has announced a funding package, which includes a grant of £5.7m for this Council for the next financial year (2021/22). The sales, fees and charges scheme will continue into the first quarter of the next financial year (up until 30 June 2021).
- That it is still uncertain as to what the pressures will be in the next financial year at both a national and local level. The Government has stated its intention to keep its support under review, which gives reassurance to local authorities in terms of any ability to plan normal council budgets whilst recognising the timing and extent of pressures from covid. The Council will be looking to work with other authorities on putting a case to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which will subsequently put a case to the Treasury.

Following the introduction of the report the Committee discussed the following matters:

- How the vaccination programme should not have any significant impact on the Council's funding since it is the NHS leading on that.
- That no funding announcements are expected for the remainder of this financial year, and it currently being unknown whether the impact of this most recent lockdown may trigger additional payments.
- That the impact on the Council's budget as a result of Covid-19 is broadly neutral at the moment, with further funding expected in the current financial year from the existing schemes to recoup for lost income. The Committee noted that should matters become worse on non-income matters and the Council incurs unexpected additional costs, then claims would be submitted to Government for extra funding.
- That the Hardship Fund is specifically for residents, with £150 additional support for council tax support claimants having been automatically credited to accounts and some of the fund having been set aside for social inclusion. There are a number of other schemes for businesses covering business support grants and business rates relief.

Resolved – To note the funding received to meet the COVID-19 financial pressures faced by the Council.

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on key progress in the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD) service, including the Covid response and how HROD has supported staff. The report set out how the service has been supporting the organisation through Covid response and into recovery whilst maintaining business as usual activity over the last 12 months, and highlighted some areas that had been deprioritised across the Council as a result of Covid, any potential impact of that and forward plans to mitigate this. The report also gave a brief overview of performance, priority projects for both last year and the forthcoming year, and the progress made on initiatives relating to the workforce.

Ms Sonia Grewal, the Director of HROD, introduced the report and gave a presentation to the Committee (the slides from which are attached to these Minutes). Ms Grewal highlighted the following points:

- The last year has been exceptionally busy for the HROD teams in supporting the organisation and its staff through Covid related activities, as well as continuing to deliver core activities and key projects.
- A priority continues to be the health and wellbeing of staff and ensuring that sickness related absence is reduced.
- The largest demand seen during the last year has been across areas of mental health and wellbeing, with a range of support interventions having been delivered through digital platforms, which have been well received by staff across the Council.
- Significant progress has been made on the complex Pay and Reward project over the last six months. Part of the first phase has been the introduction of an agreed career family structure, and the matching of current roles across to the new framework is near completion.
- 'At Our Best' is the Council's large scale cultural programme, which includes a range of focussed leadership and learning and development programmes at all levels to move the Council's performance towards being as modern, efficient and effective as possible. Digital work on this has continued, but the face-to-face activity is currently paused.
- The Council's new Public Sector Equality Duty Report is due to be published later this month and captures some key achievements such as the introduction of 'All Together', the Council's new internal ambassador group, and the Unconscious Bias training programme that was rolled out across the Council late last year.
- Additional projects planned for the forthcoming year include:
 - The modernisation of HROD processes and systems to ensure they are as efficient and effective as they can be, and to maximise digital opportunities in order to support staff.
 - Resourcing and talent management, which focusses on strengthening the approach to attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining the best talent.
 - Estates optimisation, which builds on previous work around the buildings that staff work from. Every organisation will be facing a shift in the expectations from staff around how they can work in a modern, efficient and effective way, and the future of workplaces will look very different. Officers have started to identify the types of workers the Council has and the approaches needed to ensure that the appropriate work environments, technology and training are available to them.

Following the introduction of the report the Committee discussed the following matters:

- Regular surveys and interventions with staff have taken place to ensure that the staff has remained positive about working from home. Members of staff are missing the interaction with colleagues during face-to-face meetings and training but, on the whole, there has been positive feedback on the way in which IT has been set up and online meetings are being run, and the support provided to staff via webinars.
- How, for the purposes of writing the report, a Diversity Impact Assessment was not required. The Committee was reassured, however, that in terms of the wider work undertaken individual assessments had been completed which capture the requirements of staff.
- The package of support in place to provide additional support to frontline workers, which includes Care First, drop-in sessions, and ensuring that individual assessments are regularly completed which give staff an opportunity to address concerns. There are also a number of Mental Health Champions to whom frontline staff can.
- There has been an increase in the demand for, and uptake in, the support provided around mental health and wellbeing, and the demand for access to Care First has also increased. The trends in demand for these services will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

Resolved – To note the contents of the report.

18. Reviewing 2020 Performance

The Committee considered a report that reviewed performance in 2020 and covered the performance framework, an overview of the Council Pledges, key performance indicators, the impact of Covid-19 on performance reporting, and an overview of key research and consultation undertaken. The report summarised the work planned for the Data Strategy, and set out how robust performance management is crucial to ensuring the Council delivers against the Vision, Priorities and Pledges and delivers modern services in an efficient and financially sustainable way.

Mr Simon Phillips, the Head of Data Performance and Insight, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The golden thread that exists from the Council Plan (which includes Priorities and Pledges) down through to Service Plans, and then to Performance Development Plans for staff, and how this is supported in the performance arena by a suite of scorecards and key performance indicators that are reported at a corporate / directorate / service area level.
- The impact on performance reporting from Covid-19 given the number of additional reporting requirements. Staff members were also seconded to the Public Health Team to help identify and understand the outbreaks occurring within the Borough.
- How progress against the Pledges is largely on track, with some having to be re-baselined in terms of deliverable timescales for a period of roughly three to six months as a result of Covid-19. These typically were for schemes dependent on the delivery of construction where the industry itself has been subject to disruptions.
- Making the performance management process more modern, efficient and effective by introducing a greater sophistication of analysis through new opportunities and tools available in the market place.
- The work being undertaken looking at the current people, skills, technology, policies

and processes at the Council which will instigate a number of further pieces of work developing performance arrangements within service areas.

Following the introduction of the report the Committee discussed the following matters:

- The significant manual input required to report on resident communications on a Ward basis and the difficulties this presents.
- That demand within the organisation for enhanced reporting, such as geo-spatial reporting by Wards, has been recognised and should be addressed as part of the Data Strategy. It should also be easier for staff and members to take a self-serve approach for their information needs in future.
- How members would find it helpful to see a dashboard layout when they log in to view their cases on the system.
- How, as part of the Data Strategy, the information needs of the organisation will be captured to ensure that the tooling, skills and capability are in place to serve requirements.
- How the answering of calls by the Call Centre staff within the service level agreement (SLA) has seen a large increase, with 77.6% answered within the SLA in November 2020 compared to 33.2% in November 2019, the explanation for which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

Resolved – To note the contents of the report.

19. Work Programme 2020-2021

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2020/2021 Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 21st September 2020 and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

The Committee agreed to add the following items to its Work Programme for the March 2021 meeting:

- Investigation in to the impact of Covid-19 on Leisure and the Oasis.
- A review of leisure lease agreements using GLL as a case study.