

Decisions of the Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 March 2012

Members Present:-

Councillor Dean Cohen (Chairman)
Councillor Joan Scannell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Brian Gordon	Councillor Hugh Rayner
Councillor John Marshall	Councillor Brian Schama
Councillor Barry Rawlings	Councillor Alan Schneiderman
(substituting for Councillor Alex Brodkin)	Councillor Andrew Strongolou

Also in attendance

Councillor Richard Cornelius, Leader of the Council
Councillor Sachin Rajput, Cabinet Member for Adults
Councillor Daniel Thomas, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Alex Brodkin Councillor Alison Moore

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved that –

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6 December be agreed.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alex Brodkin and Councillor Alison Moore.

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Member:	Subject:	Interest Declared:
Councillor Hugh Rayner	Agenda Item 7 (One Barnet Development and Regulatory Services)	Personal but non-prejudicial interest as director of a company which has property interests in an area adjacent to the Grahame Park regeneration scheme.
Councillor Barry Rawlings	Agenda Item 9 (In-depth Performance Report: Young People Not In Education, Employment Or Training)	Personal but non-prejudicial interest as he was a specialist safeguarding advisor for CommUNITY Barnet

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (IF ANY)

None.

5. MEMBERS' ITEMS (SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 9) (IF ANY)

None.

The Chairman announced a variation to the order of the agenda. Agenda Item 7 (Number of New Dwellings Started on Regeneration Schemes – Performance Update) would be taken before Item 6 (Quarter 3 2011/12 Corporate Performance).

6. NUMBER OF NEW DWELLINGS STARTED ON REGENERATION SCHEMES - PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Cornelius, presented a report to the committee providing an update on the council's estate regeneration schemes.

The report provided details of progress to date and future milestones for schemes located at West Hendon, Stonegrove and Spur Road, Grahame Park, and Dollis Valley.

The committee commented upon the impact of the current housing market and how this may influence the number of houses sold on the regeneration schemes. The committee was advised that the viability of each of the projects is dependent on the performance of the housing market across the development lifetimes with possible implications for the council's Housing Revenue Account. This could result from having to maintain properties on the estates for longer than originally forecast.

The committee received assurances that Barratt, the council's partners in delivering the regeneration schemes, have given assurances regarding their financial stability. The Leader also stated that land would only transfer out of council ownership either at the completion of the projects or prior to completion, but only when certain pre-conditions have been met, including financial due diligence.

Resolved that –

- 1) The committee note the report**
- 2) That the committee will receive ongoing updates on how sales figures compare to targets.**

7. QUARTER 3 2011/12 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

The Chairman, Councillor Dean Cohen, introduced Agenda Item Three Quarter Three Corporate Performance, which he reminded the committee was being reviewed under the new scrutiny methodology agreed by members. Under the revised methodology members had been provided with access to quarterly financial outturn and performance data and invited to identify specific topics and issues for discussion at the meeting.

Councillor Daniel Thomas, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, provided the committee with an overview of corporate performance for Quarter Three before addressing the specific issues raised by the committee.

The first issue identified by the committee related to debt management. The Cabinet Member informed the committee that he was happy with the overall performance of the council in this area. The Cabinet Member drew the committee's attention to the recently published Debt Management Strategy which sets out the council's policies and procedures in relation to the billing, collection and recovery of monies owed to the council.

The Cabinet Member advised the committee that particular attention was being paid to the number of vulnerable adults that were included as debtors to the council noting that the strategy includes the provision of information relating to debt advice and potential statutory benefits and discounts.

With regard to how the council compares to other local authorities and the private sector the Cabinet Member informed the committee that this data was not currently available but that he would instruct officers to forward this information to the committee.

Action: Officers to provide the committee with benchmarking data in relation to debt management and other local authorities and the private sector

The committee raised the issue of the borough's changing demographics particularly in reference to an increasing number of residents over the age of 65 and how this may impact on the council's debt management in future years. The committee enquired as to whether any forecasting had been undertaken to consider this issue. The Cabinet Member informed the committee that officers could undertake some forecasting exercises and report their findings back to the committee.

Action: Officers to provide the committee with forecasting data in relation to an aging population and possible consequences for debt management.

The committee had also requested information relating to value for money and performance indicator 2001 – the percentage of services that are in the high performance/low spend quadrant of the Capital Ambition analysis.

The Cabinet Member informed the committee that although performance had dropped on this target for quarter three the council was still ranked third overall in London behind Kingston upon Thames and Wandsworth. The Cabinet Member also reminded the committee of the variation between London boroughs in reporting standards.

Following discussion on value for money performance the committee next discussed the council's performance in relation to processing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Stephen Evans, the Assistant Director for Strategy, and Aysen Giritli, the Head of Governance, informed members that the council was receiving an increasing number of complex requests requiring a significant amount of resource to be devoted to answering them. However, the committee was informed that the imminent implementation of a new system for processing FOI requests would increase the council's capacity for processing these requests in a timely and efficient manner.

The committee requested that they be provided with an indicative cost for answering a typical FOI request.

Action: Officers to provide the committee with an indicative cost for answering a typical FOI request

The final performance indicators addressed under the agenda item related to Adult Social Care and Health and performance targets relating to residential nursing care.

Councillor Sachin Rajput, the Cabinet Member for Adults and Kate Kennally, the Director of Adults Social Care and Health, responded to the committee's questions noting that the directorate's strategy was based upon supporting more opportunities for people to live in their own homes particularly in relation to disabled people.

The Director informed the committee that the challenges faced in meeting the performance targets are based around demographic pressures including an increasing number of people living with dementia. The Director informed the committee that while caring for the borough's older residents would remain a challenge the council was making significant progress in relation to younger adults.

Resolved that –

- 1) The committee note the responses of Cabinet Members and officers in relation to Quarter Three Corporate Performance.**
- 2) The committee, in consideration of Quarter Four Corporate Performance, receive an in-depth report in relation to CPI-1009: The number of homelessness acceptances.**

8. BARNET HOMES PERFORMANCE REPORT, APRIL - DECEMBER 2011

Pam Wharfe, the Acting Director of Environment, Planning and Regeneration alongside David Thomas, Head of Business Improvement and Elliot Sweetman, Operational Inspector – The Barnet Group presented the Barnet Homes Performance report for April-December 2011. The report provided information on performance against targets agreed between Barnet Council and Barnet Homes as part of the Arms Length Management Organisations business plan.

The committee sought reassurance that mitigating actions were being considered in relation to rent arrears in light of the ongoing economic environment and possible issues arising from reforms to benefits payments. The committee was informed that mitigating actions were being undertaken and that officers have been actively engaging with communities through initiatives such as the promotion of credit unions, direct payments and collaborative work with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Resolved that –

The committee notes the report.

9. IN-DEPTH PERFORMANCE REPORT: YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) (CHILDREN'S SERVICE - CPI 5011)

Flo Armstrong, Divisional Manager Youth Support Service, and Mick Quigley, Assistant Director for Schools and Learning, presented a report detailing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The report detailed the seasonal fluctuations in 16 to 18 year olds classified as NEET in Barnet illustrating that these figures are still relatively low in Barnet compared to overall figures for London. However, the report also notes that youth unemployment data for 18 to 24 year olds has nearly doubled numerically since January 2008.

The committee were informed that the latest January NEET figures for 16 to 18 year olds showed an increase from 270 to 308 but that the committee should be aware of the influence of seasonal fluctuations.

Resolved that –

The committee note the report

10. CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Resolved that –

The committee note the Cabinet Forward Plan.

11. BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Rayner commented on the need to take into consideration the volume of work allocated to both the Business Management and Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committees particularly in relation to Task and Finish Groups with a need to ensure that scrutiny reviews were reported to the appropriate committee.

The Chairman advised the committee of upcoming items on the Forward Work Programme including the addition of the annual reports and performance of the Barnet Homes Group to the committees remit.

Resolved that –

The committee note the Forward Work Programme

12. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting finished at 9.05 pm