

Decisions of the Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 January 2013

Members Present:-

Councillor Anthony Finn (Chairman)
Councillor Joan Scannell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Geof Cooke	Councillor Alison Moore
Councillor Brian Gordon	Councillor Hugh Rayner
Councillor John Marshall	Councillor Alan Schneiderman
Councillor Arjun Mitra	Councillor Reuben Thompstone

Also in attendance

Councillor Daniel Thomas – Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved that –

The decisions of the meeting held on the 29th November are agreed as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

None.

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Rayner and Scannell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Item Six as they were both private landlords.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (IF ANY)

Responses to public questions submitted in advance of the meeting are included in the supplementary agenda to this meeting and are available from the Council's website.

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

None.

6. THE BARNET GROUP PERFORMANCE REPORT, APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2012

Derek Rust (Director of Operations – Barnet Homes) and Amanda Jackson (Director of Operations – Your Choice Barnet) presented a report to the Committee setting out the performance of the Barnet Group from April to September 2012.

Paul Shipway Head of Strategy & Performance Environment, Planning and Regeneration and Mathew Kendall, Acting Associate Director, Joint Commissioning, London Borough of Barnet were also in attendance.

The directors provided an overview of the Group's performance for the period concerned and then provided responses and clarifications to the following issues raised by the Committee:

Leaseholder satisfaction – the Committee were informed that where leaseholders had expressed dissatisfaction this was in relation to the costs rather than quality of service.

Emergency accommodation budget – the Committee were advised that the cost of emergency accommodation was drawn from the council's general fund rather than the housing revenue account with much of the cost met through housing benefit.

The Committee were advised that due to inflationary pressures on rents in the private rented sector some housing was being procured with higher rental costs. To mitigate against this Barnet Homes have been set a performance target to reduce the number of properties which exceed the housing benefit subsidy.

The Committee were advised that in relation to the average weeks spent in emergency accommodation the figure of 27 weeks for Quarter Two was affected by the difficulty the service found in procuring permanent accommodation for households to move into which resulted in an increase in the use of temporary and emergency accommodation.

It was clarified for the Committee that the figure of 509 in emergency accommodation for Quarter Two related to households and not individuals.

The Committee were informed that in order for someone to come out of emergency accommodation they would have been either assessed as being not in housing need and given advice about their future housing options, they could be placed in more secure accommodation which could be in the private rented accommodation sector, they could be housed in Barnet homes own stock, housed through a housing association or through a long term lease agreement of some description.

Private sector accommodation – the Committee were advised that due to the current market situation private landlords could secure higher rents than would have previously been paid. Barnet Homes was attempting to attract private landlords through a range of services and incentives.

The Committee were advised that there was a significant differential between rents paid in the private sector and what could be paid at a housing benefit level.

It was confirmed for the Committee that it was difficult to find accommodation for large families requiring more than four bedrooms in the private rented sector due to the bedroom cap placed on housing benefit.

It was confirmed to the Committee that there was an increasing pressure to look at housing affordability outside the Greater London area. The Committee were informed that there were strict regulations in place and that the Government were not encouraging this practice. However, there were provisions available where a housing option outside London was available for clients whose personal circumstances could be accommodated through this option. The committee were informed that when considering housing options

outside London a holistic evaluation process was undertaken to assess both the housing and broader needs of households such as educational considerations for children.

Banding system – the Committee were advised that there had been initial issues with regard to the recently introduced banding mechanism but that a dedicated team had been put in place to address these issues and deal with the bag-log in processing cases.

Anti-social behaviour – the Committee were advised that the fluctuation in cases reported in the performance report was due to several issues including seasonality and a change in approach in how these issues were handled by the service. The service was now encouraging residents to deal with low-level issues themselves through mechanisms such as mediation.

The Committee were informed that there was still a possibility of eviction and conviction for serious cases of anti-social behaviour and such cases would be treated within the category of being made intentionally homeless. These households would possibly be subject to other legislative obligations on the council such as the Childrens Act.

Arrears – the Committee requested that the figure for arrears as reported provide a clearer indication between minor and more significant arrears.

In terms of the impact of changes to housing and council tax benefits the Committee were informed that officers from Barnet Homes were engaging with households who were deemed as being likely to be affected by these changes. It was estimated that approximately 1,000 tenancies would be affected by these changes.

Quality of accommodation procured from the private rental sector – the Committee were informed that properties were checked to ensure they met appropriate quality standards. The Committee were advised this was more difficult in terms of emergency accommodation though checks were also undertaken on these properties where possible.

Future presentation of performance targets – the Committee commented that many of the indicators presented in the report were not performance indicators but rather indicators of activity and demand. For future reports the Committee requested that these be presented separately. The Committee also requested that future reports provide an indication of direction of travel from quarter to quarter and year to year utilising a rag rating format. The committee recommended that officers consider adopting a reporting format as utilised for reports to the Audit Committee.

Sickness absence – the Committee were informed that the higher number of sickness absence in Your Choice Barnet was due to a number of issues. Though no particular trend had been identified it was noted that the work was quite physical and conducted at close proximity possibly resulting in high transmission rates of respiratory infections. Officers in the service also had to take precautions so that they did not risk the health of vulnerable clients.

Future reporting to scrutiny – the Committee requested that the results of the surveys being utilised to inform the Barnet Groups next agreement with the council be presented to the Committee prior to the final papers in relation to this issue being presented to the Executive. Officers stated that they would liaise with the scrutiny office to assess the feasibility of this proposal and report back to the Chairman.

Resolved that –

1. The scrutiny of the performance of housing associations be added to the Committee's Forward Work Programme.
2. The Committee note the report.

7. QUARTER 2 CORPORATE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE 2012/13

Cllr Daniel Thomas, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, alongside John Hooton, Assistant Director Strategic Finance, and Tom Pike, Head of Performance, presented the 2012/13 Quarter Two Finance and Corporate Performance results.

Pam Wharfe, the Interim Director for Environment, Planning and Regeneration was also in attendance.

The Cabinet Member and officers provided responses to questions and clarifications on the following issues:

MTB 7 – Percentage of council services rated as high performance/low cost – the Committee commended on the performance of council against this performance indicator which saw the council ranked fourth in London overall.

Objective setting process for staff - the Committee welcomed the development of this collaborative format for delivering improved performance across the council.

Agency staff – the Committee were advised that a number of measures had been undertaken to reduce dependency on agencies including the utilisation of a market supplement during the current transformation recruitment process.

Procurement savings – the Committee were advised that the planned savings related to ambitious targets that were not always realisable and were often ahead of national averages. The Committee were advised that the NSCSO contract when initiated would help realise these savings in future years.

The targets were set around corporate contracts and that individual services such as Adults Social Care Services realised savings that were not necessarily captured in the figures presented to the Committee.

The committee were advised that over a number of years savings targets had been set for corporate procurements. When these were not met the outstanding savings that had not been met were rolled forward into the following year resulting in a cumulative saving target.

Parking – in relation to parking revenue recovery plans the Committee were informed that the findings of the pilot undertaken in North Finchley would be used to guide future planning.

Cllr Thomas advised the Committee that were targets were not been met in relation to the recovery of parking revenue that members should take into consideration the broader national and local economic environment which made target planning difficult to set.

Presentation of results – the committee requested that officers when drafting the contents of reports, such as the control actions contained within the Corporate Risk Register, adopt the principles of using plain and simple English.

Recycling – the Committee were advised that the introduction of the new single bin arrangement for general household waste recycling alongside the introduction of the food recycling bin would help improve the council's performance. These new bins would be introduced in October 2013.

Street lighting – the Committee were informed that the legal issues related to the proposed reprofiling of the new column installation programme had been resolved and that subsequent savings would be realised next year.

Delay to the implementation of the restructure to customer services and registration – the Committee were advised that some issues relating to the retraining of staff and required up-skilling had affected the performance targets for the period concerned. Performance over the last two months had been monitored and current figures suggested that performance would be above target by quarter three.

In terms of future savings the Committee were informed that there have been a significant amount of savings predicated on the consolidation of customer services.

Resolved that –

1. The Committee note the Quarter Two Finance and Corporate Performance Reports
2. The Committee receive a One Barnet programme highlight report at the next meeting (7th March 2013)
3. The Committee recommend that the Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider options for the future scrutiny of the One Barnet programme

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

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme. The committee requested that an item on parking be taken forward from the work programme long list. The committee also requested that in light of the recent Government statement that councils in England could lose their powers over adoption services if they take too long to find adoptive parents that a report on Barnet's adoption services performance be presented to the Committee as soon as possible.

The Committee requested that officers, if possible, present a report on outline proposals for Childs Hill and Grahame Park libraries at the March meeting of the Committee.

The Committee requested that the Chairman liaise with the Governance Service to consider how measures could be put in place to ensure quarterly performance is presented in a timely manner.

Resolved that-

1. The findings of the North Finchley parking pilot study be presented to the Committee
2. With regard to the Adoption Service - the Corporate Performance team in conjunction with the Children's Service present a report to the Committee on the services performance in meeting timelines for placements
3. The Governance Service provides Committee Members with copies of the Quarterly Finance and Performance Reports when these are distributed for Cabinet Resources Committee.

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting finished at 9.50 pm