

Decisions of the Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13 March 2014

Members Present:-

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

Councillor Brian Gordon	Councillor Alison Moore
Councillor Andrew Harper	Councillor Hugh Rayner
Councillor Ross Houston	Councillor Alan Schneiderman
Councillor Arjun Mittra	

Also in attendance
Councillor Robert Rams
Councillor Brian Salinger
Councillor Daniel Thomas

Apologies for Absence

Councillor John Marshall

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2013 be approved as a correct record.

Councillor Arjun Mittra proposed a vote of no confidence in the Chairman. This was duly seconded by Councillor Alan Schneiderman and a recorded vote was requested:

For (4): Councillors Mittra, Moore, Schneiderman, Houston
Against (3): Councillors Harper, Scannell, Finn

Motion carried.

Councillor Hugh Rayner arrived at 7.19pm

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Marshall.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Brian Gordon.

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Member		Subject	Interest declared
Councillor Houston	Ross	Agenda Item 6 (Quarter Three Finance	Non-pecuniary interest as a Council appointed

		and Corporate Performance – The Barnet Group Ltd.)	representative on the Board of The Barnet Group Ltd.
Councillor Moore	Alison	Agenda Item 6 (Quarter Three Finance and Corporate Performance)	Non-pecuniary interest as a School Governor
Councillor Harper	Andrew	Agenda Item 6 (Quarter Three Finance and Corporate Performance)	Non-pecuniary interest as a School Governor
Councillor Houston	Ross	Agenda Item 6 (Quarter Three Finance and Corporate Performance)	Non-pecuniary interest as a School Governor
Councillor Rayner	Hugh	Agenda Item 8 (Empty Properties Task and Finish Group Report)	Non-pecuniary interest as a housing landlord.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (IF ANY)

None.

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

None.

Councillor Brian Gordon joined the meeting at 7.30pm

6. QUARTER THREE 2013/14 FINANCE AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Daniel Thomas; Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Dean Cohen, the Head of Programmes and Resources, Tom Pike; Deputy Chief Operating Officer, John Hooton; Street Scene Director, Lynn Bishop; and, the Director for Finance (Capita), Paul Thorogood, presented the Quarter Three Financial and Corporate Performance report.

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, in response to a question on recyclates income, confirmed that the original income target of £1.1m was based on an original projection which had assumed a higher rate of payment for recyclates.

A Member questioned how the target for CPI 8001(a) – Reduce the number of households placed in emergency accommodation to 500 (P46) – would be met. The Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance advised that the Barnet Group were working to identify need early in order to help prevent the need for emergency accommodation and were reviewing the offer to landlords to make it more attractive to rent to Barnet Homes. Committee heard that, as with many London boroughs, housing supply was limited; a situation which the Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance expected to improve once the regeneration programme was in full swing.

A Member pointed to welfare benefits reforms, the rise in the cost of living and rents as being key factors to the pressures of meeting housing demands and asked how the Council would lobby the Government. The Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance directed Members to representations made in 2010-11 which led to a discretionary fund of around £800,000 being awarded to the Council to support the borough's most vulnerable residents.

Members enquired as to how children from challenging backgrounds were being supported to progress in Barnet's schools and whether the pupil premium was being spent in the way it was intended. The Head of Programmes and Resources advised Committee that the approach being taken was to seek best practice from those schools where the pupil premium was being spent most effectively. Members heard that progress in schools in Inner London was better than schools in Outer London at this time and work was being undertaken to understand and learn why this was the case.

Some Members advised that school governors should give particular focus to this area of responsibility and should be offered support and training to achieve this.

In response to a question on the importance of meeting the target set by CPI 1001 – Increase the percentage of eligible adult social care customers receiving self-directed support (P43) – the Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance confirmed that this was an aspirational target which was intended to support choice and as such, was up to the individual to decide for themselves whether to take this option.

Referring to missed targets for Health Checks and Childhood Obesity (CPIs 2003 and 2002(a) – P46), Committee agreed that this should be referred to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order that public health funding expenditure in these areas be reviewed and spent in the best way.

On a question relating to the missed target of CPI 4001 – Make Safe within 48 hours all intervention level potholes reported by members of the public (P47) – the Cabinet Member for Environment confirmed that this was due to a change in methodology for recording data but this was now on track to meet the target. Committee heard that resources were utilised to fix such potholes as required.

RESOLVED that the Quarter Three 2013/14 Finance and Corporate Performance report be noted.

7. ONE BARNET PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Head of Programmes and Resources, Tom Pike; the Head of Corporate Programmes, Matt Waters; and, the Deputy Chief Operating Officer, John Hooton, presented the One Barnet Programme Highlight Report.

Committee noted that detailed closedown reports for the NSCSO and DRS projects were to be considered at the forthcoming Contract Monitoring OSC. The Head of Programmes and Resources confirmed that all other projects were in closure or drawing to a close shortly. The report also included the Outline Business Case for the Registration and Nationality Service.

A Member asked whether the target date for the CCTV project would be met. The Head of Programmes and Resources advised that the CCTV project had slipped to an

expected mid-April 2014 transfer to OCS, however this was not expected to affect the financial envelope for the project.

The Cabinet Member for Access and Partnerships and the Head of Registration and Nationality Service, Mark Rimmer, introduced the Outline Business Case for the Registration and Nationality Service. It was noted that option three was the option preferred by CRC.

Members enquired as to the extent of the problem of sham marriages. The Head of Registration and Nationality Service advised that recent figures indicated that there could be up to 15,000 sham marriages in London each year.

Committee was pleased to note that there was a proposed increase to the opening hours, which would include opening on Sundays.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The One Barnet Highlight Report be noted; and,**
- 2. The Outline Business Case for the Registration and Nationality Service be noted.**

8. EMPTY PROPERTIES TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

Chairman of the Empty Properties Task and Finish Group, Councillor Brian Salinger presented the Group's final report.

Committee heard that every home which stood empty in the borough was a wasted resource and that there were a wide range of, often complex, reasons for a property to remain empty for a long time.

It was noted that Barnet had a good record of encouraging owners to bring empty properties back in to use, and that for each property returned to residential use which had previously stood empty for six months or more the Council received income through the New Homes Bonus. However, changes to the council tax rules meant that identifying empty properties was to become more challenging for Officers.

In response to Committee Members' questions as to the cost benefits of the recommendations proposed in the report, the Deputy Chief Operating Officer, John Hooton, advised that the cost of reintroducing council tax exemptions – which the Group had considered as one method of encouraging empty properties to be reported – would be higher than the actions recommended in the report. The Deputy Chief Operating Officer confirmed that there was a two-fold benefit in terms of New Homes Bonus payments and a reduced pressure on emergency temporary accommodation for every empty property brought back in to use through Barnet Homes.

RESOLVED that the Empty Properties Task and Finish Group report, and recommendations therein, be endorsed for onward consideration by Cabinet at its meeting of 2 April 2014.

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

The Committee considered the items included in the 2013/14 work programme of the Budget and Performance Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that items on the work programme, which were yet to be considered by this Committee, to be referred to the relevant successor committees for consideration.

10. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

Members moved a vote of thanks to Cllr Anthony Finn for his chairmanship of the Committee over the year.

The meeting finished at 9.55 pm