MINUTES OF
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 20 November 2018
(7:00 - 9:05 pm)

Present: Cllr Jane Jones (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah, Cllr Toni Bankole, Cllr Princess Bright, Cllr Rocky Gill, Cllr Olawale Martins, Cllr Paul Robinson and Cllr Phil Waker

Also Present: Cllr Dominic Twomey and Cllr Maureen Worby

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Achilleos and Cllr Ingrid Robinson

11. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2018 were confirmed as correct.

13. Task and Finish Group: Visits to Void Properties

The Chair introduced a report on the Task and Finish Group, which was established at the meeting held on 9 October 2018 (Min 7 refers), and who visited various void properties on 31 October 2018.

Councillors Jones, Akwaboah, Martins and I Robinson visited four properties within the borough which were left in different conditions by outgoing tenants. It was noted that the condition the properties were left in dictated the amount of repair work that the team needed to undertake to bring the properties back to letting standard.

The report summarised some of the work that was being undertaken and it was noted that the team had 21 days to work on each property, irrespective of the state that it may have been left in and the amount of work that may need to be undertaken.

While the Task and Finish Group had no objection to the targets set, it was felt that the current 21-day target was not achievable or sustainable in most cases.

The Director of My Place was asked to respond to the findings by the Task and Finish Group, and he advised that a report was currently being prepared for the Corporate Performance Group (CPG) which would be looking into each step of the voids process and how it could be shortened. The report presented by the Task and Finish Group highlighted the need for better communication between the teams and the findings would feed into the report for the CPG.

The Committee resolved that officers review the void property turnaround target and consider implementing a revised target:
1. Either extended to 28 days overall
   Or
2. Two turnaround targets were set, one for properties where only minor works
   needed to be carried out and another for properties that required major
   works and/or specialist works such as asbestos reports, deep cleans,
   garden clearance etc.


The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services presented a
report to the Committee regarding the budget strategy for 2019/20 to 2020/21.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Council had achieved over £122m of
savings since the Government embarked on its austerity programme in 2010 and
the Council’s current MTFS, which covered the four-year period 2017/18 to
2020/21, had identified further savings of circa £58m. As a consequence of the
Council’s financial planning, no new savings proposals were necessary for
2019/20 and the predicted budget gap of £570,000 could be met by a drawdown
from the 2018/19 Council Tax Collection Fund surplus. The Cabinet Member also
referred to the Council’s ambitious Transformation Programme and the need to
allow the new arrangements to bed-in before assessing how future years’ savings
could be achieved. With that in mind, it was noted that the development of a new
MTFS for the period up to 2023/24 would commence in the New Year.

With regard to the plans for the 2019/20 budget, the Cabinet Member confirmed
that a 1.99% Council Tax increase would be proposed. The public consultation on
the Council’s plans would also include the option of an additional 1% levy
specifically for services for children and young adults with disabilities, to help
mitigate the pressures on those services as a result of Government underfunding.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member advised that:

- Reserves were currently at £17m;
- The overspend in social care would be reduced in time and the overspend
  for this year would be covered however it was noted that the demands on
  the service were still high;
- Increased business rates would be received this year via the revenue
  support grant and bids were currently being received for the power station,
  which would result on more business growth;
- Small businesses were doing well in the Borough when compared to
  neighbouring boroughs with support through the Barking Enterprise Centre
  and the Chamber of Commerce, however this did not address the decline of
  high streets which was a nation-wide problem; and
- Budget monitoring was robust, with regular Member/officer meetings taking
  place and monthly budget reports being considered by both Cabinet and
  Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration addressed the
Committee, answering various questions asked by the Committee regarding the
budget pressures on social care, advising that:
● The overspend figure was at £11m and this had already been reduced to £5m in under two years;
● The average overspend in London Boroughs for social care was £6m;
● 400 additional new cases had been received in one year, on top of the cases that would normally be received;
● An additional 17 social workers, who were not budgeted for, were now in place with each social worker taking on 19 cases;
● Adoption and fostering places within the Borough and neighbouring boroughs were fully utilised; and
● It was hoped the forthcoming budget announcement from the Chancellor would reduce pressure on adult’s social care with new money being introduced into the system.

The report was noted.

15. Work Programme

The Chair asked for the Committee to consider items for the work programme post-April 2019.

Two suggestions were received:

- Internal works for current tenants; and
- HRA Recharges: Updated List.

The work programme was noted.