MINUTES OF
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 March 2018
(6:00 - 6:43 pm)

Present: Cllr Rocky Gill (Deputy Chair in the Chair), Cllr Peter Chand, Cllr Margaret Mullane, Cllr Moin Quadri, Cllr Tony Ramsay, Cllr Sam Tarry and Cllr Phil Waker

Also Present: Alan Hill and Charles Medley;

Apologies: Cllr Dave Miles and Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe

44. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

45. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2018 were confirmed as correct, with the following amendments:

Minute 35 Budget Presentation

To add: “Members were concerned about the large increase in Council tax that would affect vulnerable residents and also were concerned about the potential overspend of £6.8m.”

46. Information Governance Annual report and Local Government Ombudsman complaints

This report provided an update on Information Governance issues in the council. The report also sets out work that has been completed in the past year and a commentary on those complaints received by the Council and in particular those that involved the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

Members were pleased with the improvements in all categories although asked about the LGO’s structure of fines. The Head of Client Unit advised that Local authorities tended not to be subjected to the highest level of fines. The £10 charge payable for some FOI requests was being removed in future. He added that a new Information Governance Manager had been appointed to deal with the issues involved and deal with complaints within the timeframe.

The Select Committee:

(i) Noted the work that has been on going to improve Information Governance within the Council

(ii) Noted the planned actions for 2018; and
(iii) Noted the status of Local Government Ombudsman cases and current complaint performance.

47. Certification of Grants and Returns 2016/17

Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 – England and Wales required that every local authority should “make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs”.

This responsibility is extended by section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 – England and Wales which requires a report to all Members to be made by the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Council’s Monitoring Officer, if there is or likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget.

For the purposes of the provision of assurance by the Section 151 Officer, this report covered the external audit report on grants and returns during 2016-17.

The Select Committee noted the report.

48. Approval of the Draft Accounting Policies for 2017-18

This report presented the draft Accounting Policies that will be implemented during the financial year 2017-18 and reflected in the published Statement of Accounts for 2017-18. It also pointed out the main contents of the Accounting Policies, highlighting any recent changes.

Members requested that information relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) recharge in 2018/19 be sent to them in a briefing note.

The Select Committee approved the Accounting Policies that will be applied in completing the 2017-18 Statement of Accounts, as set out at Appendix A to the report.

49. Corporate Plan 2017/18- Quarter 3 Performance Reporting

The Corporate Plan 2017/18 is a key document developed to ensure the Council has a co-ordinated approach to delivering the vision and priorities and makes best use of the resources available. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Key Accountabilities have been developed to monitor performance against the priorities and frontline services.

Progress is reported quarterly to the Corporate Performance Group (CPG) and Cabinet and every six months to the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (PAASC). An in-depth focus on performance takes place at the Performance Challenge Sessions held quarterly, with areas of concern scrutinised at ‘Deep Dive’ sessions on a monthly basis.

The corporate performance framework for 2017/18 consists of KPIs and Key Accountabilities presented under the Cabinet portfolio areas to form the basis of corporate performance monitoring. The framework sets out what needs to be
monitored in the year ahead whilst acknowledging that a new framework will be required by 2018/19, as the Council moves further towards becoming a commissioning-based organisation.

This Quarter 3 report provides an update of performance between 1 April 2017 and 31 December 2017 against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Key Accountabilities.

The Select Committee noted the report and asked for a briefing note outlining the following queries:

a) Information on the numbers of police and burglaries in the borough – to be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2018.
b) Information on separate charges for Council tenants
c) Information on long term sickness in Public Realm – average days lost and reasons
d) Information on the award of contract for the Highways Improvement Strategy- who were those applying for this
e) Greater detail on the needs of vulnerable children
f) A breakdown of parking charges via Ringo
g) Information on enforcement and community safety in respect of parking

The Select Committee:

(i) Noted progress against the Key Accountabilities as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;

(ii) Noted performance against the Key Performance Indicators as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report; and

(iii) Agreed any actions to address areas of deteriorating performance.

50. Debt Management Performance and Write-Offs 2017/18 (Quarter 2)

This report set out the performance of the Council’s partner, Elevate East London, in carrying out the contractual debt management function on behalf of the Council. This report covered the second quarter of the financial year 2017/18. The report also included summaries of debt written off in accordance with the write off policy that was approved by Cabinet on 18 October 2011. The report demonstrates that performance is stable, though continuing to be impacted by welfare reform measures.

Members welcomed the report and requested information on rent arrears relating to homeless people.

The Select Committee requested details of Rent arrears specifically for hostels in the borough which would be sent to them in a briefing note.

The Select Committee:

(i) Noted the contents of this report as it relates to the performance of the debt management function carried out by the Revenues and Benefits service
operated by Elevate East London, including the performance of enforcement agents;

(ii) Noted the debt write-offs for the second quarter of 2017/18

51. **Barking Market breakdown of accounts 2017/18**

At the Select Committee in June 2016, members received a report confirming accounts for Barking Market from 2012/13 to 2015/6 together with details of how the finances for the 2016/17 budget will be brought into line.

The Committee had requested that an updated report be submitted in early 2018 setting out the 2017/18 Barking Market budget including income compared to spend.

Members asked whether traders received a VAT refund. The Operational Director, Enforcement advised that this had been a one-off payment from HMRC.

Members welcomed the report and expressed thanks to officers for their hard work in ensuring that the Market was now operating with a profit.

The Select Committee noted the report.

52. **Employment Tribunal Awards 2017**

The report showed an analysis of Employment Tribunal cases where the Council was the respondent for the period 1 January – 31 December 2017.

In 2017 eleven cases were issued against the Council, compared to twelve in 2016 and five in 2015. The Council robustly defended Employment Tribunal cases. Members expressed concern about the numbers of tribunals affecting race and disability discrimination and also requested a breakdown in statistics on grounds of gender.

Detailed anonymised information was provided in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Select Committee noted the report.

53. **Vote of thanks**

Members extended their thanks to the Chair and Deputy Chair, the Independent Adviser and officers for their work during the last year.