MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 2 December 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jamie Milne (Chair), Mark Ingleby (Vice-Chair), Chris Barnham, Maja Hilton, Ami Ibitson, Roy Kennedy, Helen Klier and Jim Mallory and

APOLOGIES: Councillors Abdeslam Amrani

ALSO PRESENT: Angelique Golding (Service Manager, Programme Management), Kplom Lotsu (Group Manager, Capital Programme Delivery), Sandra Plummer (Project Manager, Capital Programme Delivery), Selwyn Thompson (Head of Financial Services), Ralph Wilkinson (Head of Public Services) and Katie Wood (Scrutiny Manager)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2015

1.1 **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 October be agreed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public Realms work monitoring

3.1 Kplom Lotsu, Group Manager, Capital Programme Delivery, addressed the committee and highlighted the following key points:

- The report set out the framework for project and programme management at the London Borough of Lewisham
- The report set out the overall delivery framework and listed the projects, describing how they were funded and conceived.
- Funding mechanisms included: Local Implementation Plans; the Capital Programme, Greater London Authority and Section 106 funding.
- The report also included a summary of lessons learnt from projects and this continued to be updated to ensure improvements in project delivery and management.

3.2 In the discussion that followed, the following key points were made:

- Councillor Kennedy had been on a site visit in Ladywell and met with Council staff from the Capital Project Delivery team to discuss the recent public realm project at Ladywell Station. It was important to

ensure lessons were learnt from errors in delivery to ensure that there was a more stream-lined approach in future.

- Contractors were appointed on the basis of cost and value. There was a rigorous contract framework in place to maintain quality but there had been failings in the past.
- In the contract evaluation criteria listed in the report there was no specific mention of the database of local suppliers which had been agreed previously by Mayor and Cabinet. Additional information on this would be provided to the Committee.
- The report listed "Light Touch Regime" contracts. Additional information on this would be provided to the Committee.

3.3 **RESOLVED:**

That a report be brought back to the Public Accounts Select Committee in approximately 6 months outlining further lessons learnt including from comments from this Committee. The report would also include information on road resurfacing contracts.

4. Annual Complaints Report

4.1 Ralph Wilkinson, Head of Public Services, presented the report to the Committee. Angelique Golding, Service Manager, Programme Management, was also in attendance to respond to questions from the Committee. In his presentation to Committee, the following key points were highlighted:

- The report included details and numbers of complaints for the 2014-15 municipal year as well as information from the Independent Adjudicator.
- There had been a 10% increase in the numbers of complaints in 2014/15 compared to 2013/14.
- The report included a breakdown of complaints per ward.
- The report listed the areas of complaints, the main one being Highways in 2014/15. The report also listed details of compensation awarded.
- The Annual Review Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman was attached at Appendix 2 and noted that they had received 165 complaints in the 2014/15 municipal year and, out of those, 15 were upheld.
- There would be a Member Development Session on complaints on the 5th January 2016 and views and comments from this session, as well as the Committee meeting would be incorporated into the report back to Committee in March.
- There had been problems with delays in the Customer Service Casework Team recently and these were now being resolved with additional staff assisting. In addition to this there was now a separate team for FOI requests which was also improving the service.

4.2 In the discussion that followed, the following key points were raised:

- The review of the casework system was still on-going and comments from Members at the session on the 5th January would feed into this. The review included targeted savings of £50,000.
- When straight forward enquiries came in it was important for them to be dealt with quickly. A negative response felt much worse to residents if there had been a substantial delay in getting it. An example of this was waiting 3-4 weeks to be told that the issue was on a TfL road and therefore needed to be raised with them.
- Having an easy to use website with all the information available could help to alleviate these problems as residents and Councillors could increasingly access the information directly.
- Some Councillors went straight to individual officers or the Executive Directors with complaints and enquiries, a system needed to be in place to ensure these were logged appropriately.
- When there was a multi-faceted complaint the caseworker would divide it accordingly and send to relevant Directorates and then collate the responses.

4.3 **RESOLVED:**

1) That the most recent projections on complaint numbers be included in the report to be presented to the Public Accounts Select Committee at their meeting in March.

2) That the Chair circulate a note to all Councillors to include details of the principal Caseworker contact in each Directorate.

5. No Recourse to Public Funds - verbal update

5.1 Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager, reported the following verbal update to the Committee:

- The Service was continuing to make good progress in reducing demand and costs in this area whilst ensuring that services and support were focused on the most vulnerable households in need.
- Due to a Judicial Review being scheduled for the end of January, it would be beneficial for Public Accounts Select Committee to receive their 6 month update report after this was completed. This would enable the report to be more up to date on the Council's role going forward and would mean the team were better able to report on progress with the volumes of casework and the financial position.

5.2 **RESOLVED:**

That the verbal update be noted.

6. Select Committee work programme

6.1 Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager, introduced the work programme report and invited discussion on the up and coming items on the work programme.

6.2 Selwyn Thompson, Head of Finance, briefed the Committee on the Comprehensive Spending Review Statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and explained that more details would be available after the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement at the end of December. The Annual Budget 2015/16 and the Financial Forecast 2015/16 reports were scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee.

6.3 In the discussion that followed the following key points were raised:

- It would be helpful for Members to receive a briefing after the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement is announced.
- Concerns were raised around the proposed changes to the Business Rate Formula and the affect this would have on the Council.
- Concerns were raised around the potentially adverse effect of changes to the Schools Funding Formula in particular the Education Services Grant and the Dedicated Schools Grant.

6.4 **RESOLVED:**

That a referral be made to Mayor and Cabinet recommending the following:

1) That, given the demographic profile of the London Borough of Lewisham, the Committee felt there was a very big concern that changes proposed around Business Rates would have a disproportionately negative effect on the Borough. The Committee therefore recommended that the Mayor make representations to the Secretary of State to highlight these concerns.

2) That the Committee had concerns around changes proposed to the Education Services Grant and that this could have a substantial impact on the services managed by the local authority. In addition to this the changes being considered as part of the review of the Dedicated Schools Grant were also likely to have a disproportionately negative effect on pupils in Lewisham. The Committee recommended that the Mayor make representations to the Secretary of State to highlight the potentially damaging effect these changes would have on pupils in Lewisham.

7. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

RESOLVED:

7.1 That a referral be made to Mayor and Cabinet on item 6, the Select Committee Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

Chair:

Date:
