

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 19 April 2017 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Maja Hilton (Chair), Brenda Dacres, Carl Handley, Simon Hooks and Mark Ingleby

APOLOGIES: Councillors Chris Barnham, Paul Bell, Amanda De Ryk, Roy Kennedy and Sophie McGeevor

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member Resources), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), David Austin (Head of Corporate Resources), Louise Comley (Principal Educational Psychologist), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance), Janet Senior (Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration), Selwyn Thompson (Head of Financial Services) and Ann Wallace (Service Manager, Children with Complex Needs)

1. Confirmation of the Chair and Vice Chair

- 1.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) asked the Committee to confirm the outcome of the AGM on 27 March.

Resolved: that the outcome of the AGM on 27 March be agreed and that Councillor Maja Hilton be confirmed as the Chair of the Select Committee and that Councillor Chris Barnham be confirmed as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March

- 2.1 There were not enough Members present at the meeting who were also in attendance at the meeting in March to confirm the minutes as an accurate record.

Resolved: that the agreement of the minutes be postponed until sufficient members are present to confirm their accuracy.

3. Declarations of interest

There were none.

4. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

5. Management report

- 5.1 Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The management report had been considered by the Committee for a number of years on a quarterly basis, most often as an information item.
- The purpose of the report was to serve as a management tool for the Council's executive management team to keep a track of the performance in key areas.

- The report was presented in four sections: performance, projects, risk and finance.
- Over time, the number of performance indicators in the report had been streamlined down to 23.
- At the front of the report the indicators were summarised, further detailed information about the indicators was included in the rest of the report.
- The report used a red, amber, green (RAG) system of indicators - to highlight performance against targets. There was also a system of arrows and symbols that indicated the direction of travel of the different indicators.
- There were currently (February 2017) five red rated areas for management attention.
- There were two areas for management attention relating to performance in timely completion of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) for children and young people. Officers from the Children and Young People's directorate were in attendance to provide further context about performance in this area.

5.2 Ann Wallace (Service Manager, Children with Complex Needs) and Louise Comely (Principal Educational Psychologist) addressed the Committee in relation to the Council's performance in producing EHCPs:

- There had been a significant change in the legislation relating to EHCPs, as well as issues with computer systems and levels of staffing in the team responsible for completing the plans. This had led to delays in completing the plans and a significant backlog of cases had also developed.
- The most significant issue in relation to performance of EHCPs was the change in legislation (from September 2014), which had led to a substantial (30% on average) increase in the level of requests for plans each month.
- EHCP statements were previously required for children who were referred from ages five to 18. The change in legislation meant that they were now required for children and young people referred to the Council from birth to age 25. This had markedly increased the workload of the service.
- There had also been a significant lack of capacity in the workforce. Staffing levels had been increased but there was still a significant backlog of work and the team were dependant on agency staff to fill gaps in capacity. However, in September there would be new educational psychologists joining the team.
- There had also been serious problems with the availability of key IT systems and access to Lewisham Council and Lewisham NHS networks. The new IT system was a real improvement.
- There was a statutory deadline for the completion of EHCPs. However, the completion of each ECHP might require input from a broad range of health and social care professionals so meeting the legislative deadline (which had changed from 26 to 20 weeks) was extremely challenging.
- If there was a problem at any point in the system, this would have an impact on the completion of the plan.
- Performance had begun to improve.

5.3 Barrie Neal, Ann Wallace and Louise Comely responded to questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- A single case officer oversaw the completion of each EHCP but up to 10 professionals might be involved in the assessment of a case before a plan could be completed.
- Once a draft plan was in place it had to be assessed by a panel and officers were required to engage with parents, which meant the timetable for completing assessments was very tight.
- In September, despite the increase in permanent staff, there would still be a need for some agency support.
- There were approximately 30 requests a month for new EHCPs. In some months this could be as high as 50. Before the new legislation - there had been approximately 15-20 requests a month.
- There were 1800 current EHCPs for children and young people that teams were managing and monitoring.
- There were statutory duties to children who were already subject to plans.
- The quarterly financial forecast report to the Committee provided more information about areas of overspend and cost pressures.
- Work was taking place with partners to improve the operation of the Council's Oracle finance system.
- There were individual transformation teams within directorates overseeing the transformation of systems, processes and IT.
- Corporate risks were reported to the internal control board. The board met quarterly and was chaired by an independent expert. Reports from the Board were considered by the Council's Audit Panel.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

6. Select Committee work programme

6.1 The Committee discussed the work programme for 2017-18, the following key points were noted:

- Officers would consider alternative dates for the Committee's next meeting in order to avoid the pre-election period and school holidays.
- Meetings in the pre-election period tended to focus on the essential business of the Council.
- The Committee's usual start time would be moved to 19:30 but this might be varied by the Chair on occasion in order to accommodate agendas that were very full.
- The Lewisham future programme savings proposals would be considered at the Committee's meeting in July alongside the medium term financial strategy.
- Items would need to be moved to accommodate the proper scrutiny of savings proposals.
- The intention would be to consider the item on school budgets alongside the CYP select committee.
- An update on income generation would be considered at the Committee's next meeting.
- An item on PFIs would be considered as soon as possible.
- The consultation on business rates and fair funding was not likely to be available until July.

6.2 The Committee also discussed the potential scope for its in-depth review:

- There were proposals for reviews on private finance initiatives, income generating arms-length companies/investment vehicles, and the cost of living.
- It was agreed that a scoping report would be produced for a review of household budgets in Lewisham. It was proposed that the scope included potential lines of enquiry about the following:
 - Pressures on households in Lewisham, including increases in the costs of transport; caring and essential items.
 - The impact of inflation and pay restraint on Lewisham households.
 - The varied impact of financial pressure on different demographics/households in Lewisham.
 - The impact of Council policy on different households.
- It was proposed that the Committee would look at changes over a ten year period and, if possible, produce projections for the coming years, in order to inform Council policy.
- It was noted that one of the difficulties was about the availability of Lewisham specific data at a micro level. It was highlighted that focusing issues at a micro level might produce lots of anomalies.
- The Committee was mindful of the amount of time it had available to carry out the review.
- It was noted that the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee would consider a presentation from the Chief Executive on the impact of demographic changes in the borough.

Resolved: to incorporate the changes requested by the Committee into the 2017-18 work programme; to consider alternative dates for the meetings scheduled to be held in June and July in order to take account of pre-election period restrictions; the scrutiny of the Lewisham future programme savings proposals and the intention to jointly scrutinise an item on school budgets with the children and young people's select committee. It was also agreed that: a scoping report would be received, setting out possible key lines of enquiry for a 'household budgets review'. Finally, the Committee agreed to move the usual start time of the meeting to 7:30pm.

7. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

Chair:

Date:
