

ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH
CORPORATE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 15 JULY 2021 AT 7.00 PM

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Members:

Councillor John Fahy (Chair), Councillors Norman Adams, Clare Burke-McDonald, Gary Dillon, Pat Slattery, Aidan Smith and Spencer Drury.

Cabinet Members

Councillor Linda Perks, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Officers

Assistant Director Corporate Finance, Assistant Director of Digital, Head of Procurement, Head of Customer Services and Scrutiny Manager

**Item
No.**

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Hawking.

2 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

3 Declarations of Interest

Resolved -

That the list of Councillors' memberships as Council appointed representatives on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies be noted.

4. Minutes

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings of the Corporate Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel held on 07 October 2020 and 13 January 2021 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

5 Lead Member Update

The report was presented and summarised by Councillor Linda Perks, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources who thanked staff for their work throughout the pandemic and responding to the needs of local residents. She provided details of the Revenue Outturn 2020/21 which had seen a £4.0m increase in the Council's General Reserve and a £5m one-off capital spend on a range of initiatives investing in local communities and supporting the recovery after the pandemic. She confirmed that there was uncertainty around government funding going forward and the savings reported in the revenue outturn were unsustainable.

In terms of procurement, the Cabinet Member confirmed that changes to the Contract Standing Orders would be presented at the next Full Council meeting and would include a think/buy local policy promoting community wealth building. She stated that, if approved, the aim was to produce guidance for departments across the Council for implementation in September.

The Cabinet Member informed the panel on staffing and future working arrangements confirming that various back office services had been integrated to better support the new ways of working. She provided an update on the implementation of the Digital Strategy and the establishment of the new digital board. She confirmed that the GS Plus Ltd and GSS Ltd transformation programme timescale has been realigned to 2024/25.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member confirmed that senior chief officers were required to sign off any introduction of agency workers or extensions of agency contracts adding that cabinet members also monitored the use of agency staff. She provided examples of instances where use of agency staff was necessary. She advised that it was

still too early to report on future working arrangement of council staff however, the Customer Services department would have a small team located in the Eltham Centre.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member stated that the recent agreement with Trade Unions on the Housing Repairs Scheme should lead to a considerable long term improvements in the service along with the return to business as usual following the pandemic. She advised on the recent changes in senior management which highlight the importance of the service area and the need to keep up the momentum on the implementation of the scheme.

In addressing the panel, Assistant Director of Digital confirmed that digital services currently employed 4 apprentices and were aiming to hire 7 more by the end of the year.

The chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the extensive report.

The panel

Resolved –

To note the update from the Lead Member for Finance & Resources

6 Customer Service Standards Review Report

The report was presented by the Chair of the Panel who confirmed that the review had lasted for over 18 months. He thanked front line customer service staff for their work during the pandemic adding that it had been a challenging time and advised on his own personal experiences with residents who needed urgent housing repairs during this difficult period.

The chair thanked 2 community representatives for their involvement in the review group and attending the evidence gathering sessions with local residents. He also thanked members of Corporate Governance for the extensive and detailed report. He noted that residents had high expectation of council services and there was a view that when issues were reported over the phone, people do not receive a call back however, this may no longer be the case.

In addressing the Panel, a community representative involved in the review stated that residents feel that the Council had not been responding well to urgent queries during the pandemic and that waiting times for visit/inspection had increased.

In addressing the Panel, the Assistant Director of Digital welcomed the detailed recommendations in the report and supported the engagement with residents on the service.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director of Digital advised the panel of the improvements to the Customer Service Department and confirmed that she was committed to working across the Council to improve and standardise customer service. She stated that the service is respectful, responsive, consistent and actively listens to residents. She confirmed that the Council website would be looked at as part of the Digital Strategy however, the inclusion of more useful information would be picked up by the new content designers shortly. She provided details of the integration of new systems including Customer Relations Management and the Telephony and Data Management.

In addressing the Panel, the Cabinet Member noted that a number of the recommendations required the cooperation of other service areas across the Council and the integration of Customer Services into the Digital Strategy would help support their implementation.

The Panel welcomed the response from officers and offered their support in the implementation of the recommendations and improvements to customer service across the council.

The Panel

Resolved –

To endorse the recommendations in the report and agree that the report be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7 Progress report on the implementation of the Procurement Strategy & Social Value Policy

The report was presented and summarised by the Assistant Director of Corporate Finance who thanked the procurement team for delivering the procurement agenda during these difficult times. He stated that the service had previously been under resourced however, the consultation on a permanent structure was now complete which should enable greater outcomes for procurement related activities. He provided an update on the plans for the next reporting period including the launch of the Corporate Procurement Board and a greater focus on the think and buy local agenda.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director of Corporate Finance highlighted the requirement to hold a named contract manager for all procurements and to measure the outcomes of what is delivered for Greenwich residents. He explained what “local” means in terms of procurement and the 4 tiers of spend which include suppliers from: Greenwich (with a Greenwich post code), neighbouring boroughs, London and then everything else.

In response to a question, the Head of Procurement confirmed that had been no major changes in procurement practice since the United Kingdom left the European Union and that the Council was awaiting new government procurement policy.

In addressing the meeting, the Cabinet Member advised that a meeting had been scheduled with the Director of Housing & Safer Communities to look at ways of implementing the new CSO think/buy local policy on the big housing contracts.

The chair thanked the officers for the report commending them on the progress made in the implementation of the Procurement Strategy & Social Value Policy.

The Panel

Resolved –

To note the progress made on the implementation of the Procurement Strategy and Social Value policy for the period from Sept 2020 – May 2021 (8 months).

8 Contract Standing Orders – Summary of Exemptions and Variations

The report was presented and summarised by the Assistant Director of Corporate Finance.

The Panel asked for more information on the variations of contracts HAS 01, 02 & 03 and when the long-standing dispute between the provider and the NHS, in relation to the rent liability for the buildings, would be resolved.

Action: AD Corporate Finance

The Panel

Resolved –

Noted the summary of Exemptions and Variations from Contract Standing Orders as reported to Cabinet on 16 June 2021.

9 Commissioning of Future Reports

The report was presented by the Chair.

The Panel

Resolved –

Noted the work items scheduled to be presented to the next meeting of the Panel.

The meeting closed at 8.32pm

Chair