

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
VALUE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
11 October 2012 (7.30 - 8.55 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Robby Misir (Chairman), Ray Morgon (Vice-Chair), Ted Eden and Damian White

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ron Ower and Billy Taylor.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

11 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 12 July & 31 July 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

12 PRESENTATION ON THE WORK OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN

At the request of the Committee, the Manager of Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Support provided an overview of the work of the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Committee was taken through the role of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the various stages before a case gets to be reviewed by the Ombudsman service.

The Committee was informed that the LGO has jurisdiction over the following public services:

- Local authorities
- Greater London Authority
- Police, fire and waste authorities
- School admission and exclusion procedures
- Environment Agency (flood protection issues)

The LGO's role was to investigate complaints of "maladministration that had caused an injustice"

If the Ombudsman's recommendations have found maladministration then the recommendation was that this must be reported to full Council.

As regards housing complaints, even during the period when housing was managed by Homes in Havering, the Council remained responsible in Ombudsman's eyes. Under the Localism Act 2011, housing complaints would transfer to the Housing Ombudsman with effect from April 2013

Under the new procedure, complaints about housing management could **only** be made by:

- An MP
- A Councillor
- A "tenant panel"
- The complainant – but only once internal complaints procedures had been exhausted and at least eight weeks have passed since then.

The Housing Ombudsman's findings were enforceable by a court order

The presentation also detailed the total decisions on complaints about the council between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. The decisions were laid out by service area involvement.

The Committee **noted** the presentation.

13 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2011/12 - QUARTER 1**

The Committee considered a report that set out the Council's performance against the Value Living Ambition Goal for Quarter 1 of 2012/13.

Cabinet had directed that all of the Council's Corporate Performance Indicators would be reported to Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report outlined the performance of the Council's Corporate Performance Indicators for the first quarter (April-June 2012) against the five Living Ambition Goals of the Corporate Plan.

Following the abolition of the national performance framework at the end of 2010 and the requirement for local authorities to report on a statutory set of National Indicators, the Council had undertaken a comprehensive review of all indicators and, in consultation with Services, had rationalised the number that would continue to be collected locally.

The list of performance indicators was reviewed again for 2012/13 and the revised list was approved by CMT and Cabinet. The list included 68 Corporate Performance Indicators, 39 of which were measured quarterly and reported to CMT, Cabinet and the Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the remaining indicators were collected and reported on an annual or bi-annual basis only.

The report before the Committee identified where the Council was performing well (Green) and not so well (Amber and Red). The variance for the 'RAG' rating was:

- Red = more than 5% off the Quarter Target
- Amber = up to 5% off the Quarter Target
- Green = on or above the Quarter Target

Where performance was more than 5% off the Quarter Target and the RAG rating was 'red', a 'Corrective Action' box had been included in the report. This highlighted what action the Council was taking to address poor performance where appropriate.

Also included for indicators measured quarterly was a Direction of Travel column which compared performance in Quarter 1 2012/13 with performance in Quarter 1 2011/12.

The report detailed that of the 39 indicators measured quarterly, 37 had been given a RAG status in Quarter 1. For one indicator a RAG status was not applicable and for the other indicator the information was not yet available. In summary 26 indicators (70%) were rated as 'green' and 11 indicators (30%) were rated as 'amber' (1 indicator) or 'red' (10 indicators).

The Committee considered the Corporate Performance report for Quarter one. The relevant Head of Service were present and had the opportunity to outline the challenges that has led to their respective services missing their targets.

The Head of Development & Building Control explained that there was a rush of planning applications earlier in the year, seeking to be approved before the Mayor's new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) came into effect. The performance in the first quarter of this year reflected the fact that the planning service were still catching up with the backlog this had caused.

The Head of Housing & Public Protection outlined that the economic climate had impacted on performance for this indicator. In order to address performance issues, Homes in Havering and now Housing had produced a 52 week projection of arrears and debits to identify previous trends. As well as this, new reports would be developed to give details of potential weaknesses in the way arrears are collected.

The Interim Head of Children & Young People Services informed the Committee that the percentage of placements lasting at least 2 years was a measure of the stability of placements for looked after children. The performance in this area was not considered good enough, particularly in the area of teenagers where foster care placements can tend to break down. A review of this area had been undertaken. This had resulted in increased work to recruit foster carers and also different procedures which offered greater support to the foster care placements when they came under

pressure. This was an area that was being prioritised for improvement within children's services.

The Head of Adult Social Care outlined that these indicators were in relation to hospital discharges. The first indicator was an overall partnership indicator that measured the total number of delayed discharges across the system including in the hospital itself which was still higher than it should be and was not yet showing improvement. The second related to delayed discharges for which Havering was responsible. This was reducing due to work being undertaken within social care and the numbers of delays were lower than last year. The indicator was shown as red despite the reductions because a tougher target has been set indicating Havering's intentions to continue to improve its services in this area. The Council continued to work with health partners and with the other local authorities who were served by BHRUT to improve systems and processes to improve care in the community in order to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, particularly of older people.

A more stretching target had been set for this indicator than last year in order to continue to increase the amount of self determination and choice for social care clients. The Committee was informed that performance was already higher than last year, but had not yet met the new stretch target.

The Head of Customer Services explained to the Committee that the indicators relating to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit were recession related. There had been an increase in the numbers of people claiming housing and council tax benefit and needing to be assessed for those benefits because of changes in their circumstances. This increase had put substantial pressure on the staff processing these claims and some additional resources have been brought in to clear a backlog that had developed. Given the upturn in demand/activity it was anticipated that, despite the additional resources, performance would not substantially improve during quarter 2. A review of overall demand was being undertaken as this upturn had knock- on effects on the customer services function while it was continuing to implement the new customer services processes.

Members were informed that a large proportion of Member/MP enquiries and corporate complaints relating to Housing were as a result of the benefit reforms, rather than an enquiry about the service. To address performance, complaint owners would be reminded to respond to enquiries within the required timescales. Additional resources would also be put in place in those services where the number of enquiries had increased.

In general the Committee was assured that improvements would be apparent by next quarter but it was not certain that the services would be on target.

Members requested to receive raw data in respect of the Member Enquiries and Corporate Complaint indicators. They also requested the same of Housing, in respect of the age of the rent debt. They were of the opinion that

this would enable them understood the challenges that led to missed targets by the services.

The Committee noted the report.

14 **HAVERING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

At the request of the Committee, Members received an annual update on the Havering Strategic Partnership. The report outlined the Havering Strategic Partnership (HSP) 7th Annual Conference and the outcomes from the event.

The 2012 conference celebrated the work of the partnership over the last ten years and the many successes that had been achieved by working together.

Following the conference, an evaluation was undertaken to determine the value of holding an annual conference. Overall, feedback from partners was extremely positive.

The report informed the Committee that partners were also asked as part of the feedback if there were any topics they would like to see at future Havering Strategic Partnership events. The feedback showed that they would like to see more local business involvement and business related topics, and more workshops on what partner organisations were doing. Ensuring that partnership working was kept as a priority for the borough even after the demise of the Local Area Agreement was also an emerging theme.

The Committee noted the report.

Chairman