

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
22 October 2024 (7.30 - 9.28 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Dilip Patel, Keith Prince and David Taylor
Havering Residents' Group	Laurance Garrard (Chairman), David Godwin, Christine Smith, Bryan Vincent and Julie Wilkes
Labour Group	Mandy Anderson
East Havering Residents' Group	Martin Goode
Residents' Association	
Independent Group	

Councillor Chris Wilkins was in attendance.

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

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

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Philippa Crowder, Councillor Christine Smith substituting.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Philip Ruck, who was in attendance via videoconference.

8 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

9 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 30 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10 **CORPORATE HR METRICS - AGENCY WORKERS AND SICKNESS ABSENCE**

The Assistant Director of Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that the Council had a target to reduce the cost of agency workers by 50%. The HR talent team was working with directorates to move staff from agency to permanent status where possible.

A further target was to decrease levels of sickness absence by the publication of the October workforce data. HR metrics were produced monthly and sent to each directorate. Benchmarking with other Councils was also undertaken.

The Occupational Health Service and Employee Assistance Programme were in the process of being reviewed. A Member pointed out that a broadly similar borough such as Bexley was performing better on sickness absence. The Assistant Director had not specifically looked at the position in Bexley but was part of the London HR Network. Officers agreed to look at any spend on agency workers outside of the official agency framework.

In social care and housing, a high level of agency staff churn had led to issues with consistency of practice. Lowering caseload levels could assist with reducing agency worker spend and sickness levels as stress levels would be lower. Council apprentices were moving into permanent jobs which was a positive development. It was accepted that agency workers were sometimes not suitable and needed to be replaced but officers were not aware of any risk of non-delivery of services in this instance.

The Assistant Director felt that all services should have a workforce plan and there was a high level of detail in the data available. A staff performance programme was used but agency and permanent staff were not compared. Support measures for sickness issues were also available.

Agency staff were used for certain roles such as IT which were very difficult to recruit to. Officers were keen however to move staff onto permanent contracts. The Choose Havering brand and the challenge of Havering's position were used to aid recruitment. Some staff did however prefer the flexibility of working as agency staff.

The Assistant Director felt it was important to focus the support measures available to support staff with long-term sickness. The target to reduce agency workers had been deliberately set at an ambitious level. Sickness figures did not include agency staff as they were not paid employees of the Council. Agency workers who were off sick from front line roles would be replaced as soon as possible. The Health and Safety policy around workplace injuries etc applied to both agency and permanent staff.

The issue of staff isolation had not been raised directly but would be picked up by line managers in staff 121s etc. Officers accepted that the Occupational Health service had not previously been promoted in the right

way. Performance related pay and similar incentives had previously been considered but this had proved hard to implement. Incentives to reduce sickness could be considered. It was clarified that agency staff were also able to access wellbeing support etc.

The definition of the period that constituted long term sickness was set by London Councils but this could be altered if necessary. Referrals to Occupational Health could be made at lower sickness levels.

The Board **AGREED** the following recommendations:

- **The three Strategic Directors to attend the next meeting of the O & S Board to update on work in their directorates to address agency workers cost and levels of sickness absence (service)**
- **Future reports to show the impact across pay grades of the cost of sickness absence (service)**
- **Information to be provided on the best performing boroughs in these areas and what they are doing to reduce agency worker costs and levels of sickness absence. (service)**

11 **UPDATE ON DELIVERY OF 2024/25 SAVINGS**

The Strategic Director of Resources reported that £10m of the £15m of planned savings had now been achieved. £2.7m of savings were rated as amber with the remainder rated red i.e. not likely to be achieved with the timescale. Officers wished to report to the Board on progress with savings on a quarterly basis.

It was possible that other departments could make further savings to assist areas which had unavoidably overspent due to demand etc and this would be addressed with individual directors. All areas were however under financial pressure.

Savings implemented were ultimately suggested by individual service areas. It was clarified that the extra highways funding recently received from Central Government was for additional maintenance only. Officers accepted that the division between amber and red rated savings was quite subjective and the rating may be based on the view of officers. More detail of actual savings against those forecast could be given in future reports. A parking review being undertaken by Cabinet would look at the impact of current parking charges.

Green waste permits were renewed in March and it was not possible to offer e.g. a six month permit as the Council had to pay the relevant contractor for the full year. Councillor Stanton would forward to the Strategic Director correspondence relating to the collection of sharps bins.

There were numerous instances of implementing learning from other Councils. For example a model of ward-led enablement used by Essex was being implemented by the Havering Integrated Care Board. This aimed to provide a reablement service on hospital wards to get people out of bed and moving around as soon as possible. An AI project used by Kingston to support social workers doing assessments was also being introduced to allow Havering staff to be more productive.

The proposed savings in Early Help Provision could not be implemented due to the outcome of the recent OFSTED report. There was however unlikely to be a large spend in this area. The OFSTED improvement plan and funding had been agreed by Council.

Officers did not feel that the savings would negatively impact on service delivery. The impact of not making the planned savings would need to be discussed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The savings from libraries had been refiled to around £150k in the current year. Delivery and implementation times for savings could be shown in future reports. Savings from the Better Living programme and reduction in the use of agency social workers had been rated amber as they had been part-delivered.

The business rate pool with Thurrock and Barking & Dagenham was not a fixed arrangement but officers were advising Cabinet to continue with this arrangement next year. The Strategic Director did not feel that joining the London Business Rates Pool would be cost effective.

The recent CIPFA review of the Council's financial position had been received but had been strictly embargoed by Central Government. The report was therefore unable to be shared with Members at this stage. The Council Chief Executive was continuing to ask MHCLG to allow the report to be shared.

It was clarified that Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding could only be used for capital expenditure. Neighbourhood CIL money could however be used for wider service delivery.

Officers accepted that the Council was likely to go over the limits of this year's capitalisation directive. Any savings not achieved would be considered as part of next year's capitalisation. It was accepted that this was not an ideal situation but officers confirmed that there was sufficient money from the capitalisation directive to fund the worst case scenario.

The Onesource organisation had been established to bring services together and some Onesource shared services did still remain. Issues such as austerity and a lack of standardisation had been challenges for

Onesource. It had been hoped to recruit more partners to Onesource but a lack of commonality of IT systems had made this difficult.

It was confirmed that interest had been included in the £54m capitalisation. The Council was in dialogue with MHCLG and there was tight monitoring of the budget each month.

It was suggested that the Board recommend to Cabinet that more accurate data be presented on the impact of parking price increases on the level of permits purchased. It was noted however that Cabinet was undertaking a six-month review of parking charges. Outcomes from this review would be brought back to the Board.

The Board noted the progress towards delivering the 2024/25 savings as set out in the report and appendices and **AGREED** the following comments and recommendations:

- **An update on progress with savings delivery be given to the Board on a quarterly basis. (service)**
- **That more accurate data is received and presented around the impact of parking price increases on the level of permits purchased (Cabinet)**
- **That the outcomes of the Cabinet review of parking charges are brought back to the O & S Board for scrutiny. (Cabinet)**
- **That a review be undertaken of amber-rated savings, particularly those where only part-savings are anticipated (Cabinet)**
- **Any draft saving promoted must have a plan of introduction, indicating whether the saving could be achieved in full or will be phased in (Cabinet)**
- **Any saving rated red should be presented with a plan for achieving movement to green (Cabinet)**

12 **CORPORATE PLAN 2024-27: Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2024/25)**

The Assistant Director of Insight, Policy and Strategy advised that the Corporate Plan informed the Delivery plans for each directorate. Some Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) did not have specific targets but others did have targets listed.

There were currently a total of 113 KPIs. These had been set by Cabinet in conjunction with the leadership team. Pre-decision scrutiny of next year's set of indicators could be undertaken before these were presented to Cabinet. The list of indicators would be revisited to reflect the Council's cost pressures. It was noted that the Power BI window that displayed the

performance information could not be resized and was not optimised for use on a mobile device.

Officers would look in more detail at the detail of the ethnicity pay gap indicator. Other indicators such as GCSE attainment were looked at via OFSTED etc but more detail could be provided. It was clarified that the value of underfunding was an annual indicator and would be reported on at quarter 4. An update on progress with implementation of the recommendations of the READI review could be circulated.

The Board **AGREED** the following recommendations:

- **The position with red rated KPIs to be presented separately to the Board. (service)**
- **Next year's KPI list to come to the Board for pre-decision scrutiny. (service)**
- **To ensure that Power BI is optimised for use on mobile devices (service)**
- **To reduce the current number of KPIs to a more manageable number for the 2025-27 reporting round (service).**

Chairman