

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report is the annual report of the Board, summarising the Board's activities during its year of operation ended May 2020.

It is planned for this report to stand as a public record of achievement for the year and enable Members and others to have a record of the Board's activities and performance.

### **BOARD MEMBERSHIP**

Councillor Darren Wise (Chairman)  
Councillor Philippa Crowder  
Councillor Judith Holt  
Councillor Sally Miller  
Councillor Robby Misir  
Councillor Dilip Patel  
Councillor Nisha Patel  
Councillor Christine Smith  
Councillor Michael White (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Ray Morgon  
Councillor Barry Mugglestone  
Councillor Linda Hawthorn  
Councillor Christopher Wilkins  
Councillor Graham Williamson  
Councillor Natasha Summers  
Councillor Keith Darvill  
Councillor Bob Perry\*  
Councillor Maggie Themistocli\*

\*For part of the municipal year

### **WORK UNDERTAKEN**

During the year under review, the Board dealt with the following issues:

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA), CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE 2019: REVIEW OF THE AGREED IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN.**

Members considered a report that detailed the Council's Action Plan to implement the improvements identified in the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge.

The action plan was agreed at Cabinet on 9 July 2019 as well as also agreeing that Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Board would review progress of the delivery of the actions plan on a six monthly basis.

The peer team considered the following five questions which formed the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Did the Council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
- Leadership of Place: Did the Council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
- Organisational leadership and governance: Was there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that responded to key challenges and enabled change and transformation to be implemented?
- Financial planning and viability: Did the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and was there evidence that it was being implemented successfully?
- Capacity to deliver: Was organisational capacity aligned with priorities and did the Council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, the Council asked the peer team to consider its approach to social care improvement, housing and regeneration.

The peer team gave a short presentation before they left Havering and produced a report for the Council in May,(Appendix A). The peer challenge was a snapshot in time and acknowledged that some of the feedback may be about things the Council was already addressing and progressing.

One of the areas highlighted was that support should be given to scrutiny to allow it to be more effective and play a more positive role in policy development.

## **STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY IN LOCAL AND COMBINED AUTHORITIES**

The Board considered a report which detailed the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities.

The 'Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Overview and Scrutiny', had been published in May 2019 by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and clarified the role and benefits of scrutiny to local authorities.

Although it was statutory guidance, it recognised that local authorities should identify how best to make scrutiny work within their own political structures and that there wasn't a "one size fits all" approach.

The guidance highlighted examples of best practice across the sector in delivering the scrutiny function.

## **2020/21 BUDGET SETTING CYCLE**

Members considered a report in February 2020 which detailed five draft Cabinet reports.

The reports would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 12 February and then onto the Council meeting on 26 February.

The five Cabinet reports were as follows:

- Havering and Wates Regeneration Business Plan
- HRA budget for 2020/21 and HRA Major Works Capital Programme 2020/21 – 2024/25
- 2020/21 Capital programme and Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy Statement
- 2020/21 Budget and 2020-24 Medium Term Financial Strategy

## **PLAN FOR BRINGING EXISTING SERVICES BACK ON STREAM POST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN**

Members considered a report which detailed the Council's plans for bringing existing services back on stream post Covid-19 lockdown.

As the Council entered the recovery phase of the Covid-19 emergency, Government and Public Health England guidance on removing lockdown restrictions and opening up work spaces required changes to the way the Council organised its services in order to maintain social distancing requirements, maintain infection control and thus reduce the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths in the work-force and community at large.

Members were advised that there were three main impacts on the Council during the lockdown period. Firstly were the additional costs that the Council had incurred, secondly was the loss of revenue and lastly the distraction of officer dealing with Covid-19.

Following the announcement of the lockdown on 23 March the Council had acted swiftly on the guidance and closed offices across the borough allowing staff the opportunity to work from home. Smart working had been rolling out for some time and continued at a greater pace due to the lockdown. The smart working had allowed staff to be more productive than perhaps they had been before.

Even though lockdown had started easing the Council was still left with the issue of social distancing

## **APRIL 2020 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION**

Members considered a report in June 2020 which set out the 2020/21 Period 1 (April) financial monitoring position. The report focused on the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Havering and the potential financial gap for 2020/21 to be funded from reserves.

The report included:

- A summary of the outturn for 2019/20
- Estimated financial impact of the pandemic on the Council for April 2020
- Government support provided to date and potential future commitments
- A financial projection setting out the potential impact on 2020/21

In February 2020 full Council agreed a balanced budget for 2020/21. The budget was set before the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in March and therefore was based on an assumption that the Council operations would be as in a normal year.

The budget included a package of £14.5m of savings which had been developed and reviewed throughout the budget process. This meant that a number of the savings proposals were already in place at the start of the year but the majority were based on assumed actions during the remainder of 2019/20 and during the course of 2020/21.

The budget also included a full appendix setting out the proposed fees and charges for the year and was set based on an assumption that this income would be received throughout 2020/21.

## **SMART WORKING**

In July 2020 Members received a presentation on Smart Working.

The presentation detailed what measures the Council had taken pre Covid-19 to help introduce smarter working including the roll out of IT equipment and the rationalisation of office space which enabled staff to work from home.

The presentation also highlighted which Council services had received Windows 10 enabled devices.

Members were advised that staff completed e learning followed by a checklist e-form and condensed DSE assessment(special requirements), which were then processed by the Health and Safety team before items were collected

The Council had introduced an Innovative drive through collection process which was now considered gold standard and being adopted across London. To date Over 700 requests for office equipment had been received.

The presentation also highlighted The S4 project which had started with the discovery phase. The project would consider how the Council could streamline and reduce the use of paper. As the majority of staff were working from home, the enforced break from using printers regularly was also an opportunity for the S4 project to rationalise printers.

## **REMODELLING OF ONESOURCE SERVICES: NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FINANCE FUNCTION FOR HAVERING**

In July Members had received a report update on the future of the Finance service provision to LB Havering following the decision taken at the 26 June 2020 oneSource Joint Committee meeting to vary the current Agreement.

The oneSource Joint Committee agreed to the request of LB Newham and LB Bexley to make the following changes to the shared arrangement:-

- Bexley to withdraw all services from oneSource.
- Newham to withdraw from all Finance Services except for the Finance services provided currently by the Transactional Team, Treasury and Pensions and the Oracle Systems Support Team (the latter initially for one year only).

These changes would create additional costs for Havering which would lose some of the economies of scale that had been achieved by sharing services. Under the Partnership Agreement between the three boroughs, the two boroughs requesting the withdrawal of services had to compensate Havering for the additional costs this change created

In light of the decision made by the oneSource Joint Committee there was a need to review the finance service for Havering.

The annual compensation figure was in the region of £346,000.

The Board considered the report and made recommendations.

### **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF AN AUTHORISATION TO AWARD A CONTRACT FOR THE EXTENSION OF UPMINSTER CEMETERY PHASES 2&3**

In July Members carried out pre-decision scrutiny of a report which sought authorisation to award a contract up to the value of £5,050,000 contained within the overall budget of £5,500,000 that had previously been agreed by Cabinet as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Land of 5.5 hectares was identified adjacent to the existing cemetery, sufficient to provide burial space for approximately 30 years at that time. To date only phase 1 of this land had been developed. A report had previously been agreed by Cabinet which agreed to the further extension of Upminster Cemetery (Phases 2 & 3).

The Board considered the report and made recommendations.

### **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE/TOPIC GROUPS UPDATES**

Throughout the year the Board continued to receive updates from the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees of the work that each Sub-Committee was dealing with.

The Board also received updates throughout the year of the work of the various topic groups that had been set up by the Sub-Committees to scrutinise the Council's and its partners work.

Each Sub-Committee annual report will show the business transacted throughout the year.

Members wished to see the re-introduction of the Debt Recovery topic group which had been previously set up independently to consider the Council's outstanding debts with a particular reference to Council Tax and NNDR historical debt. The group had instigated a more robust council process, increasing debt recovery levels.

Members also agreed to the formation of two topic groups to look at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and how Council services had been affected and how well the Council had worked with external agencies.

The two topic groups were as follows:

To strengthen the Council's Covid-19 Pandemic Command Response.

To strengthen the Council's Covid-19 Pandemic Multi-Agency Partner working Approach

## **CALL-INS**

During the year the Board considered two requisitions on the following subjects:

CALL-IN OF A CABINET DECISION RELATING TO MOPAC PARTNERSHIP PLUS SCHEME FOR S92 POLICE OFFICERS

CALL-IN OF A CABINET DECISION RELATING TO PUBLIC REALM TRANSFORMATION

## **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Throughout the year the Board continued to receive the Quarterly Performance Reports that had previously been reported to Cabinet and Demand Pressure Dashboards which illustrated the growing demands on Council services and the context that the performance levels set out in the reports had been achieved within. Each of the Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committees had agreed to focus on and be updated on two or three key indicators that were within their remit.

Each Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee continued to receive a report covering performance areas that were bespoke to the Sub-Committee's terms of reference.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

### **Financial implications and risks:**

None – narrative report only.

### **Legal implications and risks:**

None – narrative report only.

### **Human Resources implications and risks:**

None – narrative report only.

### **Equalities implications and risks:**

While the work of the Board can impact on all members of the community, there are no implications arising from this specific report which is a narrative of the Board's work over the past year.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Minutes of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board 2019/20.