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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
2 September 2021 (7.30 - 9.00 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

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| Conservative Group | Michael White (Vice-Chair), Ray Best, Philippa Crowder, Judith Holt, Nisha Patel, Christine Smith, Maggie Themistocli and John Crowder |
| Residents' Group | Ray Morgon and Barry Mugglestone |
| Upminster & Cranham Residents' Group | Linda Hawthorn and Gillian Ford |
| Independent Residents' Group | Graham Williamson and Natasha Summers |
| Labour Group | Keith Darvill |
| North Havering Residents' Group | Darren Wise (Chairman) |

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

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

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Sally Miller (Councillor John Crowder substituting) and Councillor Chris Wilkins (Councillor Gillian Ford substituting).

15 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 22 June and the open minutes of the meeting held on 3 August 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17 **ONESOURCE UPDATE**

The oneSource Managing Director advised that oneSource had started in 2013 as a joint partnership between Havering and Newham and covered areas such as legal services, HR, finance, ICT and procurement. This covered around 800 staff. It was emphasised that oneSource was not a private company, nor was it a separate organisation to Havering or Newham. Staff worked for both Councils as needed. The structure of oneSource allowed reduced expenditure through rationalisation, shared knowledge and efficiencies of scale. Since 2014, staff overheads had reduced by 37% and £1m less was being spent on agency staff.

A new oneSource strategy had been launched in February 2020 and key objectives included improved governance, nurturing of relationships and continuous improvement. The pandemic had meant a switch of focus to areas such as PPE procurement, food hubs, IT provision to staff and office rationalisation. Sufficient PPE supplies had been maintained throughout the pandemic and remote working had been successfully introduced. Other issues had included the removal of Bexley from the partnership, the Town Hall reconfiguration and the decommissioning of Mercury House.

As regards workforce issues, around 300 staff had been furloughed and individual risk assessments had been carried out for all staff. Support available to staff included the wellbeing hub, Thrive mental health app and the Employee Assistance Scheme. In order to facilitate working in the future, new policies were being developed on areas such as remote working, flexible working and health & safety at home.

OneSource priority projects for 2021/22 included the budgetary plan, HR restructure, recruitment to the new Strategic Delivery Unit and optimisation of Fusion in order to achieve savings. Developments such as shared procurement were only possible via oneSource and moves towards a shared IT infrastructure were also very positive. It was accepted that further progress needed to be made with budget issues.

Income was generated for Havering via oneSource areas such as enforcement and the bailiff service. There had also been significantly reduced costs achieved by the payroll service. Overall savings of £13-14m had been achieved by oneSource so far. The Managing Director could supply an accurate figure for how much of this was apportioned to Havering but this was likely to be in the region of 40%.

Bexley had recently left oneSource and had been charged an exit fee for doing so, under the terms of the Partnership Agreement. It was noted that a motion had been put forward to Council regarding staff leaving. oneSource had however seen a very low turnover of staff since the start of the pandemic. The employee proposition at oneSource was currently being reviewed. Recent vacancies had seen a lot of interest with for example 97 applications being received for the position of IT director. Some Members felt that this was not the case with those vacancies dealt with by the

Appointments Sub-Committee having seen relatively few applications received and that this could be a sign of a failing service.

In response, the oneSource Managing Director stated that people left the organisation for different reasons and it was important to ascertain these. HR could be asked to investigate the issue of staff morale. The reasons people left were not recorded on Fusion but exit interviews did cover this.

Most of the 37% reduction in staff costs had occurred at the start of oneSource operations. The remaining staff were able to cope as new, more efficient processes had been introduced. The Managing Director added that oneSource staff were a very hard working team. It was expected that savings could be derived from ethical enforcement and Members felt it was important to seek to assist people to pay and not just impose fines etc.

The asset rationalisation policy sought to reflect the new ways of working now available. It was not wished for everyone to return to the office following the pandemic and, for many staff, this would give a better work/life balance. It was anticipated that only 25% of the current office space would be needed. No buildings had yet been disposed of but the Council was likely to need less property going forward. Decisions would need to be taken over the future of certain Council buildings but the issue was not one of redundancies.

A Member felt that oneSource should have paid more attention to its growth strategy and asked if there was still potential for oneSource growth with other Councils. The Managing Director felt that this was certainly a possibility but that more expertise in commercialisation was needed. It was planned to reduce unit cost and define a proper product range.

Governance of oneSource was via the Joint Committee which held its meetings in public. The resilience of oneSource was ultimately dependent on the Councils supporting it. It was accepted that there was likely to be some reduction of income from areas such as commercial rents.

The average shared service normally saved 5-10% of costs when first set up. It was hoped to not have redundancy costs and to make staff cost savings via the deletion of vacant posts etc. It was agreed that all Councils were currently struggling with finances but efforts were continuing to develop oneSource services. It was clarified that the moving of a small number of staff from agency to permanent status was proportionate and would still lead to savings overall.

The Board noted the update.

18 **COVID-19 CARE HOMES AND THIRD SECTOR TOPIC GROUP**

The Chairman of the Topic Group – Councillor White thanked Members and officers for their support of the review. Positive discussions had been held with care homes, Havering MIND, Healthwatch Havering and other local organisations. It was agreed that wording in the report should be amended to read ‘living with dementia’.

The Board AGREED that the report of the Covid-19 Care Homes and Third Sector Topic Group should be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

19 **FORWARD PLAN OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS**

It was noted that it had not been possible to scrutinise some issues before decisions were taken.

The Board agreed that it wished to undertake scrutiny of the award of the CCTV contract, looking at issues such as the use of CCTV in town centres, estates, decommissioned systems and the relationship with the Police etc.

It was also agreed that the Board should seek to scrutinise the Cabinet reports due on the Social Value Strategy and the Housing Allocations Policy.

20 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

The report included in agenda item 5 contained exempt information relating to commercial issues as did the exempt section of the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 3 August 2021.

The Board therefore **RESOLVED**:

To exclude the public and press from the meeting on the grounds that it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public were present during that item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

Chairman

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