

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 16TH JANUARY, 2024

**MEMBERS:** Councillors: Nawshad Ali (Chair), Sabri Ozaydin (Vice Chair), Thomas Fawns, Alessandro Georgiou, Ayten Guzel, Paul Pratt, and Emma Supple.

**Officers:** Fay Hammond (Executive Director of Resources), Olga Bennet (Director of Finance: Capital & Commercial), Eleanor Brown (Acting Director of Customer & Communications), Lee Shelsher (Head of Customer Solutions), Michael Sprosson (Head of Procurement Services), Harriet Potemkin (Head of Policy and Strategy), Sarah Gilroy (Policy and Performance Manager), and Harry Blake-Herbert (Governance Officer).

**Also Attending:** Cllr Ergin Erbil (Deputy Leader of the Council).

## 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Enfield Youth Parliament representatives, Cllr Guney Dogan and Cllr Julian Sampson. Cllr Sampson was substituted by Cllr Emma Supple.

## 2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Cllr Sabri Ozaydin stated that he was a director of Housing Gateway Ltd.

## 3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 31 October 2023 were **AGREED**.

## 4. CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE

Cllr Erbil (Deputy Leader), Eleanor Brown (Acting Director of Customer & Communications) and Lee Shelsher (Head of Customer Solutions) introduced and highlighted the key aspects of the report; including but not limited to: libraries and community hubs usage, digital improvements, performance and residents' feedback.

In response to Members queries regarding community hubs, officers advised that they had seen a large increase in the number of residents seeking support with the cost-of-living crisis. Officers added that they were sharing as much information with regards to this as possible; designing solutions around residents, and working with partners to ensure residents could access

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support. Officers confirmed that community hubs were located at Enfield Town and Edmonton Green libraries, with a peripatetic outreach model to ensure community hubs presence into areas where they were most needed.

In response to Members' questions and comments relating to future improvements, officers responded that they wanted to be able to respond to a greater variety of residents' needs; that were offering courses to residents who had difficulty accessing the increasing digitalisation of the service, and were continuously looking for ways to improve. Members asked that the need to upgrade residents accounts to access their council tax statements be removed.

In response to Members' enquiries regarding the review of the library service, officers replied that the first phase of public engagement was ongoing until 6 March 2024; that they were getting good responses to this, and the feedback would guide the subsequent proposals for consultation later in 2024. Officers added that they were exploring opportunities to implement a 'Library of Things' service in the future.

In response to Members' questions relating to customer feedback, officers advised that the newly implemented GovMetric allows residents to leave detailed feedback, which the service use as a learning tool to improve performance. These processes are developed and refined to drive continual service improvement. They added that residents are invited to engage in forums which aid officers in their efforts for continuous improvement. Officers described their vision for 'digital by desire' rather than 'digital by default', in making the service as assessable and effective as possible. Officers confirmed that they were working with other authorities and were hoping that technological improvements would soon allow for real time translations for residents.

In response to Members queries regarding digitalisation and platforms, officers responded that the MEQ system and reporting platform for residents used the same system and if Members had examples of differences in reporting issues between the systems, that they could look into a comparison of these. Officers added that they were looking to improve integration with social media platforms as well as Fix My Street, Next Door and Google Analytics. Officers described how they wanted to offer channel of choice and omni-communications, but that expectations need managing as resources were required to make this happen. Cllr Erbil reassured Members that customer services was not wholly digital and there was great focus being placed across the board, including face to face via Community Hubs.

### **5. CHANGE TO AGENDA ORDER**

The Committee **AGREED** to alter the order in which the items on the agenda were considered at the meeting, for the convenience of addressing the part 2 aspect of the Council Companies report. The minutes reflect the order of items as taken at the meeting.

**6. PROCUREMENT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES**

Michael Sprosson, Head of Procurement Services, introduced and highlighted the key aspects of the report, including but not limited to: the NHS Provider Selection Regime and the Procurement Act; and their impacts on the council.

In response to Members enquires regarding adapting to the changes, officers replied that the team were motivated, that they had put a project plan together as a service, and that training would be guided by further Cabinet Office advice on the Bill coming in February. Officers added that they would be very keen to offer training to councillors on the changes.

In response to Members questions relating to excluding suppliers, officers responded that the legislation contained a provision for introducing excludable suppliers if certain criteria were met, the detail for which would come in the secondary legislation, and officers would find out who the responsible minister for this was.

In response to Members queries regarding transparency, officers advised that there were new requirements to publish at least 3 key performance indicators of contracts, but that further details were still being awaited.

In response to Members questions regarding small/local business access to procurement, officers replied that it would depend on the contract value, as value thresholds would still exist which would require public procurement and the following of regulations. Officers added that smaller contracts could be tailored and reserved where appropriate for local businesses depending on the value. Being more transparent, encouraging the seeking of local quotations, training local business in bidding for public contracts and breaking down contracts into smaller lots were described as potential ways of supporting local companies.

In response to Members enquiries relating to making the most of the opportunity, officers responded that improvements had been made in procurement and contract management services, largely achieved by greater support being sought by the relevant team. Officers added within the legal team there were those who specialised in contract law, and they were collaborated with closely on procurement projects.

**7. QUARTERLY REVENUE MONITORING REPORT**

Members agreed that having read the reports, they were happy not to receive presentations on the quarterly monitoring reports and move straight into questions.

In response to Members queries regarding Temporary Accommodation, officers advised that budget pressure had been caused by a significant reduction in the availability of affordable properties in the borough, but that lots of work was being done to identify properties in and outside the borough

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to try to reduce this challenge. Officers added that before the council proposes to sell any property, an assessment is undertaken as to whether it could viably be used for temporary accommodation and or the further needs of the council. Officers confirmed they have contacted private landlords in the past to see if any would offer their property to the council for a period of time, and they would check when this was last done. This had also been done for empty business premises which could be converted to satisfy housing needs. Officers added that if a home is empty for 2 years, council tax on that property is doubled, as a means of encouraging these empty properties to be freed up, and that this would be reduced to 1 year from next year.

In response to Members enquires, officers advised on use of reserves and that the council factored cost pressures into the budget. An example was given of an extra £7m having been budgeted for temporary accommodation. They added that savings for next year were forecast at £17m. Officers advised that it was hypothetically possible for a council to issue a Section 114, whilst still having reserves ringfenced for specific departments.

### **8. QUARTERLY CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT**

In response to Members questions regarding the capital budget, officers advised that £283m was the total capital budget for this year; that line-by-line monitoring reviews had taken place, that each director had to present their spending to the Executive Management Team, and saving proposals of £17.4m were achieved.

In response to Members enquiries relating to Journeys and Places, officers replied that appendix E of the report, provided a breakdown of funding for each programme and that for Journeys and Places, of the £4.2m planned spending, £3.8m would come from grants, and £0.4m from s106 & CIL, with £0.1m borrowing.

In response to Members queries regarding schools' capital programme, officers responded that spending had been lower this year, but this was not council funded, and the need for expenditure to maintain the condition of buildings was assessed.

In response to Members questions relating to pipeline projects, officers advised that these projects were subject to business cases, that council borrowing was being reduced, and that spending was based on priority/need and constantly reviewed.

### **9. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

Cllr Georgiou asked that an officer from each department attend to answer questions on the quarterly performance monitoring reports. Fay Hammond advised that if there were particular issues in the quarterly performance report that members wanted to target in detail, these be included in the work programme. The Chair and the Executive Director of Resources added that other scrutiny panels would already be addressing some of the issues raised

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and they wanted to avoid duplication where possible. Cllr Georgiou took the point but felt these issues had financial repercussions.

In response to Members queries regarding MEQ and FOI responses, officers replied that these enquiries followed the same process, but the nature of the information requested, with MEQs often tending to be more case driven, meant that they took longer to reply to on average, but if Members wished for more specific details, they could ask for an item on it to be presented.

In response to Members enquiries relating to EV charging points, officers responded that there had been delays in procurement, but that installation would take place in the next financial year initially for 17 rapid charging points, and 900 slow electric vehicle charging points to be attached to streetlights.

In response to Members questions regarding recycling, officers advised that contamination was a key challenge to recycling, that the team was working on communication and webpage improvements and if members wished for a detailed update on this it should be added to the work programme. Officers added/confirmed that the council were below target on rejected dry recycling loads.

### **10. COUNCIL COMPANIES**

Olga Bennet, Director of Finance: Capital & Commercial, introduced and highlighted the key aspects of the report.

Officers responded to Members queries with regards to Energetik, Enfield Lets and Montagu 406 Regeneration LLP.

### **11. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

Members noted the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2023/24.

The Chair asked that Cllr Savva be invited to the next meeting as Cabinet Member for Social Housing. Cllr Georgiou asked that officer presentations at the meeting are kept brief.

### **12. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Members noted the dates of future meetings as set out in the agenda.

The Chair thanked Members and officers for their time and contributions and the meeting ended at 21:40.