

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26 March 2013**

Present:

Councillor Philippa Broom (Chairman)
Councillor Miss D. Patel (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

A. Ayub
C.A. Davis

M.P.C. Francis
A.E. Friday

Miss D. Patel

Apologies: Councillors F. Ayers, Mrs C. Bannister, Mrs M. Bushnell, D. Gohil, A.C. Harman, Mrs I. Napper and Mrs Rough.

In Attendance

The following Cabinet Members attended the meeting and took part in the discussion on those items relevant to their Portfolio.

Councillor R. Watts – Leader of the Council
Councillor T. Mitchell – Portfolio Holder for the Environment
Councillor Nick Gething – Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Fixed Assets
Councillor Mrs Vivienne Leighton – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development

81/13 Appointment of Vice- Chairman

Resolved that Councillor Miss D. Patel be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2012/13.

82/13 Disclosure of Interests

No disclosures were made.

83/13 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2013 were approved as a correct record.

84/13 Matters arising from the minutes

(A)5th Staines Sea Cadets

The Committee considered the response by the Head of Asset Management Services to the questions previously raised by the Committee on accommodations for the 5th Staines Sea Cadets and associated issues.

RESOLVED that the written response from the officer to the questions raised by the Committee at its meeting on 15 January 2013 be received and the action taken noted.

(B) Economic Development Strategy

The Committee discussed the report of the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy on the actions being taken for the preparation of an Economic Strategy. In support of the report the officer gave a presentation and responded to questions raised by members of the Committee.

The Committee noted that to ensure the strategy was robust the first stage would be to undertake a local Economic Assessment and a review of the council's planning policies. The majority of this work would be undertaken through the Local Plan Working Party and the Cabinet.

The Committee discussed the time frame for the work and noted that the draft local Economic Assessment would be completed by the end of April 2013 for consideration by the Local Plan Working Party and the Cabinet. The Initial public consultation on the content of the Economic Strategy would be undertaken in June 2013, following which a draft Economic Strategy would be produced. The draft strategy would be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2013 with a recommendation that further public consultation be undertaken prior to the strategy receiving final approval later in the year.

The Committee highlighted the need for councillors to have a prominent role in the process. The Committee also identified the need to ensure that the different aspects of the strategy such as the planning issues and economic development were defined and had sufficient support.

Councillor Gething the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Fixed Assets reported on the possibility of establishing a Task Group to develop the strategy.

RESOLVED:

- (1)** That the Committee continues to acknowledge the urgent need for an Economic Development Strategy to be produced;
- (2)** To note the current timetable for progressing the strategy and the consultation that will be undertaken to help ensure it best meets the identified needs and expectations of the business community;
- (3)** That this Committee assists the Cabinet by considering the draft Economic Strategy and submit any recommendations to the Cabinet meeting in September 2013;
- (4)** The Head of Planning and Housing Strategy to clarify how the process for producing the Economic Development Strategy will take place such as who will be leading on the different aspects (planning and economic development) prior to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- (5)** The Head of Planning and Housing Strategy to submit a progress report to the next meeting of the Committee.

85/13 Call in of a Leader, Cabinet or Cabinet Member Decision

No decisions had been called in.

86/13 Net Revenue Monitoring and Projected Outturns

The Committee discussed with Adrian Flynn, Senior Accountant, the Revenue monitoring report outlining the current spending and income figures to the end of February 2013. The Officer reported that the forecast outturn was £12.304m against the revised budget of £12.371m. It was noted that after taking into account the use of carry forwards, the net position was approximately £285k favourable variance. A large proportion of this was due to the excellent projected variance for refuse collection of £226k.

The Committee asked for further information from the officers on the reasons for the high use of agency staff.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Chief Finance Officer be received;
- (2) To note the net revenue spend and forecast outturn position as at 28 February 2013;
- (3) To note the reasons for the variances identified against the budget agreed in February 2012 and revised for carry forwards; and
- (4) The Chief Finance Officer to provide information on the adverse variance for housing needs and the split between agency staff and new posts as requested at the meeting.

87/13 Capital Monitoring Report 2012/13

The Committee discussed with Adrian Flynn, Senior Accountant, the Capital monitoring report which covered the period April to February 2013. The officer reported that the current position was that £663k had been spent/committed to date, which represented 38% of the revised budget. The projected outturn was an anticipated spend of £844k which represented 50% of the revised budget.

General discussion took place on the various reasons for the delays on some of the schemes within the capital programme and the possible requirement for a budget carry forward. The Committee expressed the need to know why a number of the schemes had been delayed in particular those projects relating to IT such as Sharepoint, Depot remote working. The Committee also asked for a written explanation as to the difference between a Customer Relations document system and Sharepoint.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Chief Finance Officer be received;
- (2) To note the capital spend against the budget position of the schemes within the Capital Programme;
- (3) To note the reasons for the variances;

- (4) The officers provide information on the delayed projects as requested at the meeting; and
- (5) Expressed concern at the number of carry forward requests and the number of projects not being dealt with.

88/13 Project Management Methodology

The Committee discussed a briefing paper from the Head of Customer Services on the outcome of the complete review of the Council's corporate approach to project management. In support of this the officer gave a presentation and responded to questions raised by members of the Committee.

The Committee discussed how the new project management framework across the council was being implemented and noted that there were a number of effective mechanisms in place to develop project management throughout the council. The examples given included:

- Project made simple tool kit published on the Council's intranet site.
- To address any skills gaps training had been undertaken, with a further two day training event being arranged in June 2013 to focus on the role of project sponsor.
- Support being provided by the recently established project team.

The Committee discussed how councillors were involved in the projects. It was felt that the scrutiny process could assist in monitoring project performance etc.

The formal project management arrangements and documentation included the need for highlight reports, which are used to monitor project progress, report on issues that had arisen and identify the work to be completed in the next time period. This information is currently collated and reported to Cabinet Briefings on a quarterly bases.

There was also a requirement for a Lessons Learnt Log to be maintained to enable new projects to benefit from previous experience.

Now that the documentation and processes had been developed focus would be on ensuring that it is used across the Council. It is recognised that priority, legislative and flagship projects had adopted the project management process as a matter of course. It was less obvious that this is happening for smaller service level projects.

RESOLVED:

- (1) To acknowledge the excellent progress that had been made with establishing a comprehensive corporate project management arrangements; and

- (2) That progress reports be submitted to each meeting of the Committee, in particular those project that have been identified as a Priority / Flagship project.

**89/13 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
Grant for Difficult Properties**

The Committee discussed a briefing paper from the Head of Streetscene on the progress being made with the introduction of weekly rubbish and recycling collections to the difficult properties in the borough. The Committee noted that this is a flagship project and was being managed in accordance with the council's project management policy and procedures.

Part of the funding obtained from the DCLG will be used to buy a new refuse collection vehicle with a split back compartment to allow for the collection of both rubbish and recycling at the same time. The funding also enabled a dedicated Project Officer who oversees and manages the transfer of the properties to recycling and food waste collections to be appointed.

The Committee generally discussed the councillors' involvement, what is an environment champion and whether this could be a role for a ward councillor.

RESOLVED that the briefing paper outlining the progress being made with the introduction of weekly rubbish and recycling collections to the difficult properties in the Borough be received.

90/13 Update on Laleham Park

The Committee noted that the briefing paper prepared by the Sustainability and Open Space Manager was out of date and arrangements had been made for the consultants to give a further presentation to Cabinet members. The Committee discussed how the current scrutiny task group and the Leader's task group could take this project forward.

RESOLVED that the Chairman of the Committee be given delegated authority to discuss with the Leader of the Council and the relevant Portfolio Holder on the future involvement of scrutiny in the Laleham Park project and to report back to the next meeting of the committee.

91/13 Flooding 2012 – Briefing Paper

The Committee discussed with the Head of Sustainability and Leisure and the Risks Resilience Manager the Council's response to the threat to our residents to flooding during November and December last year.

The Committee indicated that the response had been excellent. Concern was expressed over the way the possible flooding was communicated to residents in terms of the Flood Warning messages from the Environment Agency. The Risk Resilience Officer informed the Committee that the EA were looking at changing the thresholds for these warnings and were being supported by the Council in this approach.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Training be arranged for Councillors on Emergency Planning;
- (2) The Leader of the Council and ward councillors be involved/updated on the flooding situation as and when it occurs; and
- (3) The Committee be involved in the review of the Emergency Plan.

92/13 Sustainable and Communities Act

The Committee discussed with the Head of Corporate Governance his report on the framework for councils working with local residents to put forward proposals on sustainable improvements to economic, environment and social wellbeing. The report included examples of where other councils had sought to use the Act.

The Committee welcomed the opportunities that the Act provides and asked that further examples of how other authorities have used the provisions be obtained.

RESOLVED that the report of the Head of Corporate Governance be received and further examples of how other local authorities have used the provisions of the Act be obtained.

93/13 Localism Act

The Committee discussed the report of the Head of Corporate Governance on the Localism Act, which received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011. The Act seeks to hand power back to local authorities and local communities offering a new freedom and flexibilities to achieve local ambitions. The Act covers a wide range of matters relating to public services including a general power of competence, community rights, neighbourhood planning and housing.

The introduction of the General Power of Competence gives local authorities the legal capacity to do anything that an individual can do providing it does not break any other law.

The Act provides clarification of the rules on predetermination in order to free up councillors to express their views on issues of local importance.

The Act abolished the Standards Board for England with all standard matters now being the responsibility of local authorities. This included introducing a new code of conduct for councillors and a new criminal offence for failing to declare or register an interest.

The Committee discussed how best to take the matter forward to learn more about the provisions and explore how to implement the legislation to benefit the local community. It was felt that this initially be undertaken by the individual Portfolio Holders and their supporting officers. With each cabinet member looking at those aspects under their responsibility and reporting their findings to a future meeting. The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Fixed Assets to be involved in reviewing all aspects of the Act.

RESOVED that the Officers and Portfolio Holders be asked to take this matter forward by looking at those aspects of the legislation relevant to their portfolio and reporting their findings back to a future meeting of the Committee.

94/13 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee received the Cabinet Forward Plan

95/13 Work Programme

The Chairman reported that the majority of the core areas identified in the work programme for review this year had been achieved. Two matters that would be considered at the July meeting of the committee would be its work programme for the year 2013/14 and a report on the rail opportunities for linking Staines-upon-Thames to Heathrow.

96/13 Any other Business

As this was the last meeting in the current Municipal Year the Chairman placed on record her thanks and appreciation to the Committee members, the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holders and officers for their help and support in taking the work of the Committee forward.