

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE O&S

COMMITTEE

1030 hours on 6th September 2017, Committee Room 2 – Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Mohammed Aikhlaq (Chair)

Councillors Mohammed Afzal, Randal Brew, David Barrie, Ewan Mackey, Yvonne Mosquito, Rob Pocock, Sybil Spence, Waseem Zaffar

Also Present:

Cllr Tristan Chatfield, Cabinet Member for Transparency, Openness and Accountability

Iram Choudry, Research & Policy Officer, Scrutiny Office

Chris Gibbs, Service Director Customer Services

Cllr Ansar Ali Khan, Assistant Leader

Cllr Marge Bridle, Assistant Leader

Chris Jordon, Assistant Director

Cllr Narinder Kooner, Assistant Leader

Tim Savil, Assistant Director Revenue and Benefit

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised the meeting to note that this meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.birminghamnewsroom.com) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Paul Tilsley

3. CORPORATE RESOURCES & GOVERNANCE – ACTION NOTES

RESOLVED

(See document No 1)

The action notes from August 2017 we agreed.

4. CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPARENCY, OPENNESS AND EQUALITY

(See document No 2)

The Cabinet Member outlined his key responsibilities and priorities. Points to note were

- He was meeting shortly with officers from the West Midlands Combined Authority to discuss a regional co-ordinated response to the Smart City agenda
- A data portal for publishing all FOI requests would be launched shortly along with a new policy platform containing all BCC policy documents on one site. The link for these would be sent through to the Committee.
- On questions relating to the recent exchange visit to Denver to discuss counter extremism measures, the Cabinet Member was keen to stress the importance of sharing good practice with colleagues from the USA on this important area of work. The group was made up of academics from Birmingham University, West Midlands Police and the Council and they would continue to meet on an informal basis to share good practice and information. There were lessons to be learnt from both countries particularly in terms of civil engagement.
- In relation to the upcoming roll out of the new Universal Credit, the Cabinet Member pointed out that one of the areas yet to be determined was issues involving Councillor referrals. This work was on-going and he would be able to provide an update when he next attends scrutiny.
- Bereavement Services is a new addition to this portfolio. Councillors raised a number of concerns relating to the time taken for the release of bodies. Cllr Chatfield stated there had been a reduction in the time taken for the release of the deceased from 2.6 days to 1.8 days but he would be happy to meet with members to discuss their concerns outside of this meeting.
- Working with the third sector and developing a consistent approach would help avoid tensions where external organisations are both partners and contractors.
- Refugee Resettlement Programme: further details would be available at his next committee update
- The Cabinet Member made clear that there is a distinction between formally constituted cabinet meetings where decisions are made and informal meetings of the Cabinet.

5. ASSISTANT LEADERS UPDATE

The Assistant Leaders made the following key points

- In order to support Councillors within their local areas, the Assistant Leaders were working on producing a table outlining details of all front line services and relevant officers within each ward
- Ward Action Co-ordinators (WAC): They are currently looking at identifying existing staff from within the Place Directorate looking for a career development opportunity to take on these roles with a focus on those staff that can be released from their existing job roles without the need for backfilling.
- They would welcome support from the Committee in taking forward this agenda
- Local Innovation Fund: Most Wards have submitted proposals and 15 additional applications would be considered at the next Cabinet meeting for Local leadership. Cllr Khan urged members to ensure all wards submitted applications as 12 wards were yet to make an application

In response to questions from members, the Assistant Leaders made the following points

- They stressed that they would like each ward to have access to a WAC resource and this officer would more than likely support a number of different wards. Members requested that they should have responsibility for wards in a similar geographical area.
- Job description: It has gone through the councils HR processes and would be circulated to the committee once agreed.
- District Committees: A report would be presented to Full Council in November recommending the abolition of District Committees and related Committee Chair posts. Members raised concerns about the lack of governance infrastructure as a result of abolishing District committees. Mechanisms should be established to ensure members from neighbouring areas still had the opportunity to meet and discuss issues affecting all of their areas e.g. anti-social behaviour and community asset management
- Details on the timelines and ward clusters would be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet Committee for Local Leadership on September 21st, 2017. Members requested that they should be consulted on any proposals relating to ward clusters.
- Ward Plans: For the purposes of this year, the Assistant Leaders would circulate a one sided template to all members to complete in order to capture current ward priorities and feed into the Councils budget setting process. From 2018 a more detailed approach would be used. Members indicated that any data and statistics relating to specific wards should be shared with them in order to support the development of these plans.
- Members also raised concerns about the level of support needed for single member wards and requested a clear plan of action for taking this forward.

- The Chair was keen to stress that the Committee would be happy to support the Assistant Leaders in taking forward their programme of work.

RESOLVED

Assistant Leaders to provide committee with an update in 6 months' time.

6. REVENUE SERVICE UPDATE

Chris Gibbs , Service Director introduced Tim Savill , the newly appointed Assistant Director for Revenue and Benefits. Chris Gibbs made the following points

- The service is responsible for collecting £800 million of Council Tax and Business Rates and is an important source of income generation for the council.
- Bringing the service in-house has resulted in a £1.2 m one- off revenue saving and an ongoing saving of £450,000.
- The service has also recruited a number of staff to key positions resulting from the service being bought in-house and all staff are now on BCC working terms and conditions.
- Analysis identified £30 million in Council Tax arrears spanning up to 5 years. In response to this, the service has introduced a debt consolidation process in order to put together a more holistic approach in supporting citizens and maximising the collection of debt. The Council will no longer use enforcement agents in the case of Council tax support cases, instead recovering these arrears through direct deductions from claimants benefit entitlements.
- Business Rates: A report would be presented to Cabinet setting out the Councils policy on awarding rate relief to Businesses.
- In order to maximise the tax base for council tax and business rates the service carried out a pilot programme on Erdington High street and identified a number of properties which were either missing or undervalued resulting in an additionality of income of approximately £0.5m

In response to members questions, the following points were made

- The electoral roll is used and other data sharing tools when identifying the Single Persons Discounts. The plan is to review this every three years.
- The service is exploring the use of an early warning system in order to identify debts before they become a problem.
- Multi-year debtors – The next step is to have a more joined up approach across the Council by matching with other debts held by the Council (e.g. housing)

The committee congratulated Chris and his team for the excellent service they provide to both members and citizens

7. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were asked to confirm their attendance for the 18th September
Procurement strategy work

RESOLVED

To note the work programme

8. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Cllr Brew raised concerns about the current industrial crises and suggested a short piece of work to scrutinise what has happened and draw lessons learnt from the dispute. Cllr Pocock suggested this take place once the situation has been resolved.

10. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed

The meeting finished at 1225 hours.