

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE O&S

COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1030 hours on 5th October 2016, Committee Room 2 – Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Mohammed Aikhlaq (Chair)

Councillors Muhammad Afzal, Randal Brew, Ray Hassall, Changese Khan, Chaman Lal, Ewan Mackey, Yvonne Mosquito, Rob Pocock, Hendrina Quinnen and Sybil Spence

Also Present:

Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes

Cllr Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Value for Money and Efficiency

Cllr Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member for Transparency, Openness and Equality

Andy Fullard, Interim Information and Technology Director

Iram Choudry, Research & Policy Officer, Scrutiny Office

Clive Skidmore, Head of Housing Development

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 submitted on behalf of Cllrs Ewan Mackey and Hendrina Quinnen.

3. CORPORATE RESOURCES & GOVERNANCE: ACTION NOTES SEPTEMBER 1ST AND 7TH 2016

(See document No 1)

RESOLVED:-

To note the action notes

4. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY

(See document No 2)

i) The Cabinet Member presented the report, and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were made:

- Birmingham Pound – this is still in its infancy; a number of meetings have been held and are exploring the experience of Bristol and Lambeth. In terms of timescales, there is lots of work to do and discussions – the Committee could look at the benefits and how it might work;
- Where digital signatures are used, there is always a clear instruction from the Cabinet Member before that is used;
- Internal trading operations – the Committee would welcome list of operations responsible for and their budget;
- Managing suspensions – this is difficult to handle, and our staff are our greatest asset, but where there is a problem this should be dealt with quickly and efficiently. The Cabinet Member has worked with the Deputy Leader on this matter;
- The energy company has been proposed for a long time and would leverage in income. Meetings have been held with Bristol and Nottingham officers about how it works. There are opportunities relating to the number of council houses and the Combined Authority;
- Review of the Commissioning Strategy – the Committee could support the Cabinet member in this work.

ii) Tracking: Council Commissioning and Third Sector Organisations

(See document No 3)

RESOLVED:-

That Recommendations 01 and 02 are “Achieved (Fully)”; and Recommendations 03 and 04 are “Achieved (Late)”.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPARENCY, OPENNESS AND & EQUALITY

(See document No 4)

The Cabinet Member presented the report, emphasising that he was keen to address criticisms made of the council in the past and support culture change in the organisation, including ensuring opposition members were also involved. A key priority is delivering on the Child Poverty Commission.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following points were made:

- The Cabinet Member was also working on reducing the number of private reports and moving to a paperless committee system;
- ICT strategy: member IT equipment is being considered as a part of this – users will be profiled to see what is needed. “Bring your own device” is already in place. A further update can be provided;
- Equalities – the Cabinet Member is determined that the council looks like the population that it serves (gender, ethnicity, disability etc) at every level;
- Sutton Coldfield members want to hold District Committee meetings in Sutton Coldfield but cannot currently livestream – the Cabinet Member noted that some wards are able to livestream though working alongside our partners (e.g. Billesley ward). Many council devices have cameras on so these could be used for filming but we have to work within the procedures;
- Challenging colleagues in the Executive is also critical – to ensure there is openness and transparency.
- A briefing on the NAIS will be circulated.

RESOLVED:-

That the Cabinet Member comes back to report on progress in six months

6. CORPORATE RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE O&S COMMITTEE: WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

(See document No 5)

RESOLVED:-

To note the work programme

7. REQUEST FOR CALL IN: ACQUISITION OF PRIVATE SITES AND EMPTY HOMES

(See document No 6)

Cllr Brew explained the reasons for the request for call in: primarily that the intention of the Cabinet decision, to allow the Cabinet Members and officers to sign off decisions without going to Cabinet, and that the powers are being taken away from

the collective decision-making model that provides important safeguards against negligence and abuse.

The following reasons for the request for call-in were highlighted:

- 4 – the Executive appears to have failed to consult relevant stakeholders or other interested persons before arriving at its decision;
- 5 – the Executive appears to have overlooked some relevant consideration in arriving at its decision;
- 6 – the decision has already generated particular controversy amongst those likely to be affected by it or, in the opinion of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it is likely so to do;
- 7 – the decision appears to be particularly “novel” and therefore likely to set an important precedent.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes and Clive Skidmore, Head of Housing Development, responded that current programme for bringing land into use entails sites being “stockpiled” to be brought to Cabinet in blocks, thus delaying the decisions. This new decision would allow quicker decision making with regards to single houses and reduce the frequency of the reports to Cabinet, contributing to “decluttering” the agenda. They also emphasised that there were clear criteria in the report which meant there was no risk of overspending or spending unwisely. Financial thresholds had been discussed but it had been difficult to know where to pitch it.

RESOLVED:-

The Committee resolved (by a vote of 6 votes to 1, with 2 abstentions) to call-in the decision for reconsideration by Cabinet, on the grounds that:

- 7 – the decision appears to be particularly “novel” and therefore likely to set an important precedent.

The Cabinet was asked to reconsider its decision; in particular that Cabinet sets a financial threshold over which decisions must be referred back to Cabinet. This would allow the majority of smaller acquisitions to be completed by Cabinet Members and officers as set out in the decision report. However, the more significant decisions would be dealt with transparently and with the appropriate democratic safeguards.

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

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None

10. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That in view of the nature of the business to be transacted which includes exempt information of the category indicated the public be now excluded from the meeting:-

12. CORPORATE RESOURCES & GOVERNANCE: ACTION NOTES SEPTEMBER 1ST

(See document No 7)

RESOLVED:-

To note the action notes from the Request for Call In - Disposal of Land at Great Charles Street, Birmingham - Exempt Paragraph 3 (1st September 2016)
