

## **Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2009**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Watson - In the Chair  
Councillors Bhatti, Clayton, Glover, Jones, McCulley, Morrison, Sandiford, Swannick and Trotman.

Councillor Amesbury – Executive Member for Arts and Leisure  
Councillor Leese – Leader of the Council  
Councillor Priest – Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources  
Councillor Smith – Assistant Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

#### **Apologies:**

Councillor McCulley and P Murphy

### **RG/09/59 Minutes**

Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 3 September 2009 were submitted for consideration.

#### **Decision**

To approve the minutes of the meeting subject to the addition of Councillor Swannick to the list of those Councillors present and to amend the last sentence of paragraph 6 of minute RG/09/54 to read, 'The piece of work did not support the conclusion that the city's high turnover in population is a major factor influencing the level of deprivation, but rather it found that poverty is also commonly found in communities where there is low population turnover.'

### **RG/09/60 Information and Overview Report**

A report of the City Solicitor was submitted. The report tracked the implementation of previous recommendations from the Committee and included an overview of the Council's forward plan as it related to the Committee's remit.

The Committee asked for further information about the details of the contract for non-specialised security services. The Committee also agreed that it would look in greater detail at the Customer Relationship Management Solution Software as part of its item on the Council's transformation strategies. The Committee also requested that at future meetings the Committee receives an update on which of the key decisions in the Forward Plan have already been taken.

The report also included reports for information on investment in culture, the site of the Irish World Heritage Centre and the Neighbourhood Funding Strategy (NFS). The report on the NFS outlined the implementation of this year's proposals and progress on last year's proposals. Members noted that further information on how services were responding to submissions under the NFS would be included in Business Plans, and the Committee would be able to comment on this at its meeting in January 2010. The Chair requested that the information in the report be circulated to all ward Councillors.

### **Decision**

1. To note the report and accept the Committee's work programme.
2. To request that an information note on the details of the contract for non-specialised security services is included in the next Information and Overview report.
3. To look at the Customer Relationship Management Solution Software as part of the Committee's item on the Council's transformation strategies.
4. To request that at future meetings the Committee receives an update on which of the key decisions in the Forward Plan have already been taken.
5. To request that the report for information on the Neighbourhood Funding Strategy be circulated to all ward Councillors.

### **RG/09/61 Business Planning 2010**

A joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Performance) and City Treasurer was submitted providing the Committee with an update on the Council's Business and Budget Planning process for 2010-2013. The report also introduced the business plans selected by the Committee at its last meeting, which included Leisure Services, Communications, Legal Services and Democratic and Statutory Services.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Performance) explained that a revised and strengthened business planning process was in place to support the Council to continue to achieve its objectives in the new, more challenging financial climate. The City Treasurer commented that a report would be brought to the Committee in December setting out a more detailed picture of the influences on the budget for next year.

### **Leisure Services**

The Head of Leisure Services introduced the service's business plan which included indoor leisure, sport, sporting events and outdoor leisure (encompassing parks, open spaces and allotments.)

A member commented that a number of open green spaces in housing areas had not been developed to their potential. The Head of Leisure commented that the service

area only worked on land owned by the Council but worked in partnership with housing associations to make the best use of their facilities.

Members noted that the service's self-assessment referred to a number of satisfaction surveys which demonstrated that customers generally had a high opinion of the service. A number of these surveys did not refer to sample sizes nor response rates, members requested that this information be provided in the next information and overview report for the Committee.

Turning their attention to the budget position, the Committee noted that the service had overspent its budget last year. The Executive Member for Arts and Leisure commented that the World Swimming Championship represented a significant cost for the service, but had brought about £23 million into the city.

Members also stressed the importance of having a long-term strategy to protect and maintain the city's indoor leisure facilities, many of which were very old buildings. The Head of Leisure Services commented that an Asset Management Plan was being prepared to safeguard these facilities.

The Committee also stressed the importance of encouraging adult participation in sport, and ensuring that suitable relationships exist with schools to make their facilities available to local communities outside of school hours.

## **Communications**

The Director of Communications introduced the business plan. The Directorate had brought together four areas of work (events, press office, communications and Mfour) and was now implementing the new communications blueprint.

A member commented that there was a lot of press attention on the decline of printed media and asked how this effected the work of the service. The Leader of the Council commented that the Council had supported some local print media in the past to ensure that adverts for housing were communicated to people to support the local housing market. The Council had also rejuvenated its magazine to residents, Manchester People, and was adopting a more focused approach to its communication.

The Chair asked whether the Council made the most of occasions when it contacted all Manchester residents, such as for electoral registration and council tax bills, to communicate the right messages. The Director of Communications commented that she was looking at how to make the most of these opportunities, for example by providing businesses with information about adopting greener practices and cutting costs when sending out business rates bills.

Members noted the statistics that showed that nationally, the more people know about the services and benefits offered by councils the more likely they are to think that their council provides value for money. Members commented that it would be useful to have some information that was local to Manchester on this. A member noted that the correlation depicted in the graph was shallow; it takes a great deal of extra knowledge about services to raise satisfaction regarding value for money. The Leader of the

Council commented that this knowledge supported the strategy outlined in the blueprint that the communication strategy needed to change from a large number of diverse messages to fewer more focused messages.

The Chair stressed the importance of two-way communication and ensuring that we kept people informed of what the Council was doing once communication channels had been opened.

### **Legal Services**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the service's business plan, and commented that the self-assessment was a thorough and comprehensive overview which addressed a number of issues that the Committee had raised during its item on it, in February of this year.

Members noted that the Council's expenditure on highways trip claims was substantially lower than many Core Citys' and many of Manchester's neighbours'. The Head of Legal Services advised that the section worked closely with the Highways section to take advantage of opportunities to drive down costs in this area. The service always paid great attention to how claims could be defended with the minimum potential cost.

Members noted that the service had an income target of £2.6 million, of which £500,000 was a target from Land Charges which was under review due to a lack of activity in the housing market. Members asked how the service would address the possibility of a drop in income as a result of this. The Head of Legal Services advised that she would monitor the situation closely with the finance section and was also hopeful that the income target could be exceeded due to the volume of work the service does for external customers, such as Registered Social Landlords.

Members noted the positive response overall to customer satisfaction surveys but noted that the low response rate in percentage terms might disguise the actual perceptions of the service. The Head of Legal Services commented that the service had doubled the number of surveys it sent out and had received more back. The surveys had been sent out during school holidays in the past, and this practice was being altered to ensure that surveys were sent out when people were more likely to be at work.

In turn Legal Services maintained a regular dialogue with senior managers in their client departments to foster positive relationships and address any emerging issues. Risk registers were employed to address potential problems before they materialised.

In the efficiencies section of the assessment members noted that a new electronic document management system was being pursued to reduce costs and staff time in preparing paper bundles for court. The Chair asked whether this was being done as part of the Customer Relationship Management Solution to implement the Council's transformational strategies. The Head of Legal Services advised that she was in contact with the Directorate of Transformation about the potential interaction of the two projects.

## **Democratic and Statutory Services**

The Head of Democratic and Statutory Services advised that the section discharged the Council's statutory functions in a manner which promoted the Council's core values and the objectives of the City Council. The service amalgamated two formerly distinct service areas, and was set to be formally established by the Personnel Committee shortly.

Members noted the high levels of satisfaction with the registration of marriages and births and asked what worked had been done to establish satisfaction with the registration of deaths. The Registration and Coroner Services Manager commented that he was exploring a sensitive way of doing this. The service was very aware of the need for sensitivity in registering deaths and the service was brought out to hospitals and to people's homes in certain circumstances to ensure that the registration was done in a sensitive way. Registration of births was also brought out to Sure Start centres to make it easier for parents to do so. The Chair requested that feedback be provided to the Committee on progress in carrying out customer satisfaction surveys.

The Committee supported the practice of taking the registration service out into communities. Members asked how many children went unregistered and what the Council did about it. The Registration and Coroner Services Manager confirmed that a failure to register a child occurred very rarely, the Council was notified of a birth by the hospital and would contact and visit families if the birth had not been registered. The Leader of the Council commented that joint work was undertaken between the Council and NHS Manchester to ensure that children do not become unaccounted for in this way.

Members asked whether customer satisfaction surveys could be spread to other areas of the service's work. The Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit Manager commented that he was considering how this could be done for the Unit's customers. The Unit organised a large number of appeals against decisions not to admit a child to a particular school, and he was looking at how satisfaction with the process, rather than the outcome, could be measured.

## **Decision**

1. To note the business plans submitted and to agree to look at how some of the plans have developed and taken account of members' comments when they return to look at business planning in January 2010.
2. To request that information about the sample sizes and response rates in the satisfaction surveys in Leisure Services' self-assessment be provided in the information and overview report for the Committee.

## **RG/09/62 Strategic Commissioning**

A report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Performance) was submitted presenting the Council's approach to service commissioning and its value to residents. The Assistant

Chief Executive (Performance) introduced the report. She had been asked to provide a plain and clear definition of commissioning, and described it as a process of identifying needs for services, ensuring that they are procured properly and effectively, and then reviewing them.

The Chair of the Committee queried where setting quality standards appeared in the commissioning cycle. The Assistant Chief Executive (Performance) clarified that this was at the stage where needs were identified.

In order to explain the commissioning process clearly, the Head of the Drug and Alcohol Strategy Team and the Head of Strategy and Performance in Children's Services attended the meeting to provide some real life examples of the commissioning process in practice.

The Head of the Drug and Alcohol Strategy described the commissioning process for some day care centres. The process had involved speaking to service users to understand their needs and concerns, these included ensuring there was a good geographic spread of the centres across the city so that people could access them easily, and ensuring the centres catered for methadone use. These concerns then formed part of the needs for the day care centres. A competitive tendering process was then used to procure a product which would meet these needs.

When it came to reviewing the commissioned product they noted that service users were no longer committing crime but had not been supported into productive lifestyles and occupations. At the review stage this aspect of the product was redesigned to accommodate this, and now the service has witnessed three service users go from voluntary work into paid employment.

The Head of Strategy and Performance in Children's Services advised the Committee that the commissioning process had been used to drive down costs and commission more preventative services. He advised that for commissioning to be successful the commissioner had to be clear about what their objectives were, what service specifications they need to meet these objectives and whether commissioning was the right tool to use. Commissioning services could prejudice small voluntary sector providers who cannot compete with larger organisations.

Members asked how the values and behaviour protocol, which the Governance Subgroup of this Committee had overseen, related to this process. The Assistant Chief Executive (Performance) clarified that this protocol effected partnership work and it expected high standards of financial probity to exist in partnerships. A lot of commissioning was undertaken by partnerships involving officers from different agencies operating pooled budgets.

Members were reassured of the value of the commissioning process, and were clearer on the processes involved. They agreed that it would be good to follow up this item by looking at how reviewing needs and recommissioning services operated.

## **Decision**

To agree to look at how reviewing needs and recommissioning services operated at a future meeting.

### **RG/09/63 Revenue Budget Consultation**

A joint report of the City Treasurer and Chief Executive was submitted outlining proposals for consulting the public on the Council's revenue budget plans. The City Treasurer introduced the report and commented that the number of responses to the budget consultation over the past few years had been disappointing. The report included proposals for this year's budget consultation, and proposals for future years to lead to a greater number of responses.

The City Treasurer commented that the low response level was a problem shared by a number of local authorities. The proposals involved using a wider range of media and less printed materials, as well as engaging focus groups to get their views on the budget.

Members noted that all responses to the consultation received an acknowledgement, the Chair commented that people should receive more information than that if they were willing to receive it to keep them informed about proposals for the budget. Members also supported the idea of encouraging more interest in the budget by engaging residents groups and ward co-ordination meetings.

The Director of Communications also advised that a more proactive stance would be taken in targeting those people in the city who are likely to be interested in the budget and are likely to reply.

The Committee felt that the proposals listed could generate a greater interest and a greater level of response in the consultation, and looked forward to seeing the results at their special budget meeting in February.

### **Decision**

To note the proposals for the budget consultation in future years.