

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

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2010**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Watson - In the Chair  
Councillors Bhatti, Clayton, B Fisher, Glover, Lomax, McCulley, Morrison, P Murphy (RG/10/35 - 39), E Newman, Sandiford and Swannick.

Councillor Priest, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

#### **Apologies**

Councillor P Murphy apologised for those items he was not present for.

#### **RG/10/35 Urgent Business**

The minutes of the meeting of the Governance Subgroup on 14 June 2010 were submitted as urgent business along with further information briefings relating to the item on the Information and Overview Report and a report on the Manchester Partnership Innovation Fund. A report on Manchester Central Convention Complex and an item asking the Committee to decide whether to consider this report in the private part of its meeting were also submitted.

#### **Decision**

To note the Chair's decision to accept the items above as urgent business.

#### **RG/10/36 Minutes**

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 May 2010 were submitted for consideration along with minutes of the meetings of the Governance Subgroup on 1 and 14 June 2010 and the meeting of the Human Resources Subgroup on 1 June 2010.

#### **Decision**

To approve the minutes submitted as correct records of the meetings and to endorse the recommendations made by the subgroups.

#### **RG/10/37 Local Area Agreement: Year End Performance Report**

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Performance) was submitted providing the Committee with details of performance in the Local Area Agreement indicators for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Members noted that the Manchester Partnership had strengthened its approach to risk management by agreeing a draft Strategic Risk Register for the Partnership and reporting risk on a quarterly basis to Thematic Partnerships and the Partnership's Management Group, who will advise the Resources and Performance Subgroup of actions necessary to maintain effective control. The register and actions will be reported to the Committee the next time it receives a performance report on the Local Area Agreement.

A member questioned why there was a significant time-lag in reporting data on target NI 112, Under 18 Teenage Conceptions. The Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator advised that the time lag was because of the combined lengths of time involved in pregnancy, registration of a birth, and the cross-referencing the data with abortion figures. The Committee agreed that they should refer performance in this area to the Children and Young People and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committees.

Members noted that performance in target NI 87, Secondary School Persistent Absence Rate was now improving and felt that the Committee's recognition of this should be reported to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

A member asked whether performance monitoring of the Local Area Agreement would continue, given that it was unclear whether the new Government would continue the operation of Local Area Agreements. The Head of Partnerships and Performance advised that a mechanism would still be required to monitor performance towards the delivery of the Manchester Partnership's Community Strategy.

A member commented that whilst he supported the reduction in the target for NI 154, Net Additional Homes Provided he did not support the reduction in target NI 155, Net Affordable Homes Delivered. He felt that it was important to sustain performance in this area because of the current state of the economy. The Committee agreed that they should refer performance in this area to Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee who may wish to include the work to hit this performance target within the remit of their Housing Subgroup.

## **Decision**

1. To refer the performance information relating to target NI 112 Under 18 Conception Rates to the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. To refer the performance information relating to target NI 155 Net Affordable Homes Delivered to the Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. To notify the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee that this Committee congratulates those involved in the recent improvement in performance target NI 87, Secondary School Persistent Absence Rate.

4. To note the improvement in the data quality scores overall for the performance indicators and the increased reliance the Manchester Partnership can place on the information.

## **RG/10/38 Information and Overview Report**

A report of the City Solicitor was submitted. This included an overview of the major financial decisions the Council would be taking over the next four months which related to the Committee's remit. Members noted that the value of the contract for the provision of event security, stewarding and taxi marshalling was incorrectly stated as £5000,000, the correct value was £500,000.

The report included responses to recommendations made by the Committee at its previous meetings. The Chair gave an update on the Committee's recommendation that, at their next ward co-ordination meetings, Councillors receive a brief summary of Neighbourhood Funding Strategy (NFS) proposals relating to their ward and details of other possible ways of pursuing funding for them. She advised that members were due to receive this information at the next ward co-ordination meetings and that it should be in a clear and accessible format.

As the Committee had discussed previously (RG/10/27 and 31) a large number of NFS proposals related to Highways work. Members felt that there was an obvious tension between grants allocated by Government for national priorities and money to respond to local concerns identified in the Local Transport Plan. In addition to this further local priorities were raised through the Neighbourhood Funding Strategy. A member felt that it was important for Councillors to be fully involved in Local Transport Plan consultations so that the plans reflect local priorities. The Committee requested a briefing on the Highways budget, including its funding streams and what they can be used for to explain the tensions involved.

The Committee noted briefings for information on the supply, delivery and collection of concrete, Modesole governance arrangements and Government announcements on funding reductions. A note was also circulated summarising the measures announced as part of the Emergency Budget Announcement on 22 June. More would be known about the impact of measures to reduce the economic deficit following the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. The announcements and the review would effect public sector pay and pensions and the VAT increase may be damaging to the voluntary and community sector. The Chair recommended that the Human Resources Subgroup should look at the effect of the pay freeze on the Council's workforce.

### **Decision**

1. To note the information briefings and to add an item to the Committee's workprogramme on the structure of the budget for Highways Services.
2. To add an item on the public sector pay freeze and its effect on the workforce to the work programme of the Human Resources Subgroup.

## **RG/10/39 Manchester Partnership Innovation Fund**

A report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Regeneration) was submitted setting out the purpose of the Manchester Partnership Innovation Fund and details of the projects it had supported.

The fund included just over £1.6 million to support innovative projects that would support the delivery of the Community Strategy, particularly by addressing levels of deprivation. The fund was allocated by the Manchester Partnership Resources and Performances Subgroup which was chaired by the Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources. The Subgroup put an onus on learning from the projects and developing innovative approaches that could improve the service delivered through mainstream budgets once the fund had been spent.

The Committee noted that one of the outcomes for the Resident Wages Project had been the entry of 12 residents into employment, and questioned whether this was a good enough outcome considering the level of funding allocated to the project. The Executive Member felt that it was right to test the value for money of the projects, but illustrated that the outcome would save £100,000 of Job Seekers Allowance payments each year. The Regeneration Manager (North) advised that the project had also lead to a number of other outcomes, including entry into training, voluntary work or referrals to advice services which could lead to further savings in time.

Members felt that the title of the project and its aims were unclear, and felt that the real aim of the project was supporting residents into employment rather than raising wage levels. The Regeneration Manager (North) advised that the project was aimed at supporting families to access more money by moving from out-of-work benefits into employment. An evaluation of the project would be carried out shortly. The Committee requested to see this along with information regarding the location of the residents involved, the savings achieved and how the lessons learnt were being embedded in to the City Region "Better Life Chances" pilots in Cheetham & Broughton and Ardwick.

A member asked whether why only £27,000 of the £60,000 allocated to the Safer Schools Partnership had been spent. The Executive Member advised that the project had been initiated close to the end of the financial year, and so the remainder of the allocation had been carried over to continue to fund the project.

The Committee asked whether the Area Based Grant funding allocated to the Innovation Fund was secure, or whether it could be reduced as part of Government measures to address the economic deficit. The City Treasurer confirmed that the money had already been transferred and was secure. The Committee asked for a further report evaluating the projects once they had finished.

### **Decision**

1. To recommend that the name of the Residents' Wages Project be changed to more accurately reflect the project's aims and objectives.

2. To request a further report evaluating the range of projects once they have concluded, including information regarding the location of the residents involved in the Residents Wages Project, the savings achieved and how the lessons learnt were being embedded in to the City Region "Better Life Chances" pilots in Cheetham & Broughton and Ardwick.

## **RG/10/40 Revenue and Benefits – Annual Performance Update**

A report of the City Treasurer was submitted providing the Committee with its annual update on performance and service development in the Revenues and Benefits section.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the report and commented that Council tax collection rates were up 0.9% on last year to 90.9%. Business Rates collection was less positive, and the economic downturn and a new requirement to collect Rates from empty properties had been a factor in this. Performance continued to improve in benefits administration, although many of the targets for the service had not been hit. The service faced an increase in customer enquiries regarding benefit entitlement and an increase in new claims which had made the targets more challenging.

Members noted that benefits schemes may be changed by the new coalition government and that this would affect Manchester residents and also consequently tax and rent collection. The Committee asked for their next information briefing on the coalition Government's measures to provide some guidance on what changes might take place and what affect they might have.

A member asked what relationships the service needed with utility companies to be able to make contact with debtors. The Head of Revenues and Benefits advised that the Council did not have relationships of this sort, but that work with property management agencies had been helpful. Making contact with debtors remained challenging, particularly in the city centre where a lot of properties are not inhabited by their owner.

The service inevitably experienced a number of complaints from dissatisfied customers and details of the how the complaints were handled and their outcomes were provided in the report. A member asked whether 'mystery shoppers' could be employed to test the service delivered by bailiffs. The Head of Revenues and Benefits agreed that this would strengthen the service's intelligence on bailiffs' performance and would look into how this could be done.

### **Decision**

1. To congratulate the Head of Revenues and Benefits and staff in the Revenue and Benefits service for their performance over the past year, and to applaud their approach to continuous service improvement which this Committee has supported.

2. To recommend that the service carry out 'mystery shopper' exercises to test the performance of bailiff companies operating on the Council's behalf.
3. To request that the Committee's update on the coalition Government's budgeting measures at its meeting in September includes details of the changes to benefits schemes and the effect they might have both on Manchester residents and on rent and tax collection, with case studies.

## **RG/10/41 Work Programme 2010/11 – Development and Support**

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted presenting the Committee's work programme for 2010/11 and asking the Committee what development and support it needed to deliver it. The report included development and support options, including briefing sessions, attendance at seminars and events and commissioning external training providers.

Members requested that the Committee's support officer continues to keep the Committee informed of seminars and events which are relevant to the Committee. They also requested that the risk management seminar which the Committee has requested is organised to take place in the near future.

### **Decision**

1. To agree the work programme.
2. To request that the Committee receives an information briefing on the Council's Strategy Framework, including which sections of the Council lead on the design and implementation of the various strategies.
3. To request that an item is added to the workprogramme for a date after the Strategy Framework briefing on how the strategies are linked to and support the delivery of the Community Strategy.
4. To agree that members of this Committee should attend the special meeting of Audit Committee where the Chief Information Officer has been invited to deliver a presentation on the Council's strategic approach to ICT in non-technical language.
5. To request that the Committee's support officer explores options for commissioning external trainers on best practice techniques in scrutiny investigations, questioning and listening skills and prioritizing topics for the workprogramme for the Committee.
6. To request that the risk management seminar which the Committee has requested is organised to take place in the near future.

## **RG/10/42 Exclusion of the Public**

A recommendation was made that the public be excluded during consideration of the next item of business.

### **Decision**

To exclude the public during consideration of the next item which involved consideration of information exempt from publication relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person and public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

### **RG/10/43 Manchester Central Convention Complex Limited**

A report of the City Treasurer was submitted informing the Committee that the Chief Executive was due to take a decision in consultation with the Leader of the Council to loan a sum of money to Manchester Central Convention Complex Limited. The Committee was asked to note that the Chair may be asked to exempt this decision from the Call In process.

Members tested whether the loan of the funds was in the best interest of tax-payers and whether there was a significant risk of the Council losing funds. The City Treasurer provided assurances of the financial benefits both from the terms of the loan and by supporting the Convention Complex which was a great asset and made an important contribution to the economy of the city.

The Committee felt that it would be worthwhile to hold a future meeting at the Convention Centre and hear about their business plan.

### **Decision**

To note that the Chair may be asked to exempt this decision from the Call In process and to support her in exempting the decision if she decides to do so.