



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 14th NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT: Councillor T Jay (Chair), Councillors R Bilcliff, R Claymore, R Ford, S Goodall, Dr S Peale, P Standen and M Summers

The following officers were present: Stefan Garner (Executive Director Finance), Lynne Pugh (Assistant Director Finance), Joanne Sands (Assistant Director Partnerships), Sue Phipps (Strategic Housing Manager), Jane Smith (Head of Benefits) and Jo Hutchison (Democratic Services, Scrutiny and Elections Officer)

Apologies received from: Councillor(s) B Price

48 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2019 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peale and seconded by Councillor R Claymore)

49 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Claymore declared that she had a pecuniary interest in the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy Update (minute 57) and accordingly would withdraw from the meeting at that point.

50 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair reported on the following:

- The QPR Executive Summary working group outputs would report back to this Committee in February 2020 and then the Committee would consider whether to make any recommendations to Cabinet; and
- The remit for the Review of the Senior Management Restructuring, which was expected to cover a debrief of the project, including the objectives at the start of the project, the expected benefits to be delivered and the extent to which they had been realised. The Chair confirmed that he had a meeting scheduled with the Chief Executive to discuss the structure and timeline for this.

51 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no items to report to the Committee.

52 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET / COUNCIL

No matters had been referred to this Committee.

53 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

There was no further update beyond that provided earlier on the agenda by the Chair.

54 2019/20 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan and highlighted the following items for further consideration:

- Legal Services Review – the Committee agreed to add this to the Committee’s Work Plan to review the implementation of this service in due course;
- Update on Housing Repairs & Investment Contract – expected to be considered by Cabinet on 19th December 2019. The Committee agreed that they would like to consider this next year and the Work Plan would be updated accordingly.

55 QUARTER TWO 2019/20 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Executive Director, Finance provided the Corporate Scrutiny Committee with a performance update and financial healthcheck.

In terms of the financial healthcheck there was a projected underspend and this would be considered as part of the budget process for next year. It was reported that the HRA was on budget.

The Committee considered the delay which had been announced to the opening of the Assembly Rooms and focussed upon the following:

- i. The reporting in the QPR Report on the Assembly Rooms over time, and whether there were any earlier indicators which could have impacted the risk reporting.
- ii. The oversight of the main contractor including the role of the externally appointed project management company and the ongoing oversight of the project to ensure delivery to the revised completion date.
- iii. The need for there to be a review undertaken of the project after the Assembly Rooms had been completed
- iv. Consideration of the reputational damage caused by the delayed opening of the Assembly Rooms
- v. Additional costs incurred as a result of delay and any contractual provisions regarding recovery of the Council’s loss

- vi. The need to focus on the Assembly Rooms being opened on the new scheduled date.

The Committee **resolved** that the review of the Assembly Rooms project, which was expected to be undertaken must be brought to this Committee for its consideration (once available). The Committee could consider whether to make further recommendations to Cabinet based on its contents, to support the delivery of future projects.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peuple and seconded by Councillor R Bilcliff)

The Committee sought further clarification in the following areas of the QPR Q2 Report:

- i. The reasons for the underspend in the General Fund were reported to be largely due to the change in pools from GBSLEP to the Staffordshire pilot.
- ii. The arrears collection targets which the Executive Director, Finance agreed would be re-assessed for the next year.
- iii. The Committee requested that the report be clarified to provide further transparency regarding the grant on the Kerria project and the impact this had on borrowings.

RESOLVED

That;

Subject to the comments raised in the meeting,
Corporate Scrutiny Committee endorsed the contents of
the report.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peuple and seconded by Councillor R Bilcliff)

56 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2021/22

The Assistant Director, Finance introduced the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) Report and set out the options and objectives for the proposed scheme for the post 2021 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which would go out to Consultation in 2020. The key points of the proposed scheme were reported as follows:

- to be cost neutral;
- to deliver administrative savings and simplify the process;
- to use banded discounts; and
- to include relevant disregards.

The Head of Benefits outlined to the Committee three different options which had been modelled following which the Committee sought clarification in the following areas:

- i. The extent to which the proposed scheme reflected a county wide scheme. It was reported that whilst principles had been agreed at a county level, individual Council's schemes would be likely to contain local differences;
- ii. Details on where the changes (which bandings) were likely to be affected by the options modelled;

- iii. The Committee requested that a cost neutral version of Option 1 be produced to demonstrate how a 100% discount for the lowest income households could work and its impacts.

The Committee thanked the Officers for their work and requested that this item come back to this Committee in 2020 (and agreed to add to the Work Plan accordingly).

RESOLVED

That:

The impact on bandings of Option 2 be explored and details provided;

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peuple and seconded by Councillor S Goodall)

A cost neutral version of Option 1 be developed.

(Moved by Councillor M Summers and seconded by Councillor R Bilcliff)

Councillor R Claymore left the meeting.

57 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY UPDATE

The Assistant Director Partnerships provided an annual update on the impact of the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy approved by Cabinet on 7th September 2017.

The Assistant Director updated the Committee on progress made since the implementation of the Policy in 2017, including the interventions made by the Strategic Housing Team. These were reported to be largely informal interventions. However, it was reported that three Prohibition Orders had been made to safeguard vulnerable people.

It was reported that the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation was an area of focus for the Strategic Housing Team who continued to provide advice and support to landlords in this area. The recent legislative changes were highlighted as well as the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards which had become law and the work undertaken by the Council to roll out the Staffordshire Warm Homes fund.

The Committee noted the report and thanked the Officers for their attendance.

58 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee discussed the Work Plan and agreed to update it as follows:

Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan

Work Plan 2019 – 2020

TARGET MEETING DATE	SUBJECT	MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN
December 2019	Asset Management Review update (including town centre)	
December 2019	Town Centre Strategy update	June 2019
December 2019	Corporate investment strategy	
February 2020	QPR Q3 2019/20 Report	Regular item
February 2020	Market tender Update	August 2019
February 2020	Member Training update	June 2019
February 2020	Review of senior management restructuring	
February 2020	Working group report on QPR Report Executive Summary	June 2019
February 2020	Garage Sites	
March 2020	Member Support Working group – sub group on Member Communications	
March 2020	Review of Cabinet decisions over previous 12 month period	
March 2020	Parking Toolkit review	October 2019
TBC	Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2021 onwards - revisit	November 2019
TBC	Review of Legal Services (post implementation)	November 2019
TBC	The Assembly Rooms – review of project	November 2019
TBC	Housing Repairs & Investment Contract Review	November 2019

Upcoming Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meetings

5th December 2019

5th February 2020 (QPR Q3 focus)

12th March 2020

Chair