

EFFICIENCY AND PERFORMANCE SUB (FINANCE) COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 September 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Efficiency and Performance Sub (Finance) Committee held at Guildhall, EC2 on Wednesday, 16 September 2020 at 1.00 pm

Present

Members:

Jeremy Mayhew (Chairman)
Deputy Jamie Ingham Clark (Deputy Chairman)
Randall Anderson
Deputy Roger Chadwick
James de Sausmarez
Alderman Sir Peter Estlin
Deputy Clare James
Paul Martinelli
Hugh Morris
Deputy Philip Woodhouse

Officers:

John Cater	-
Peter Kane	- Chamberlain
Kate Smith	- Town Clerk's Department
Andrew Carter	- Director of Community and Children's Services
Simon Cribbens	- Community & Children's Services Department
Sean Green	- Chamberlain's Department
Hayley Hajduczek	- Town Clerk's Department
Mark Jarvis	- Chamberlain's Department
Peter Young	- City Surveyor's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Dominic Christian, Oliver Lodge, and Alderman Lyons.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED - That the public minutes of the meeting held on 7th July 2020 be agreed as an accurate record.

4. WORK PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk which set out the work plan for future meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Sub-Committee noted the Report.

5. **DEPARTMENTAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT - DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The Committee received a Report of the Director of Community & Children's Services concerning performance management and monitoring within the Department for Community & Children's Services (DCCS).

The Director began his presentation by providing a brief overview of his Department. DCCS provides a wide range of front-line services to the community, including, adult social care, children's social care, state sector education, tackling rough sleeping, public health (including the City's response to Covid), libraries and social housing. The department strives to deliver these services in the most effective and efficient way to deliver the best outcomes for City residents while securing value for money.

The Director emphasised that the Department is on a journey to improve its performance culture, to use data and intelligence to help improve and transform its services, and to commission services in more innovative and effective ways.

There followed a set of questions from Members:

What are the essential ingredients for a high-performance culture? Does this exist in DCCS and what is the evidence?

The Director responded that a high-performance culture starts with clearly defined values that fit with the Corporate Plan.

The overarching concern was to foster a culture where people felt both empowered to play a full role in influencing and shaping outcomes, and comfortable to take on board the lessons of when things have gone right or wrong. The Department takes training and development very seriously and wants to encourage a proactive culture where leadership at all levels is embedded. The Director added that whilst recent indicators and benchmarking are positive for the department (notably, on recent Ofsted inspections and good staff and resident survey results), driving a high-performance culture is not static, and it would be complacent to imagine that we can't continue to improve across different areas.

Are there possible changes in the TOM or Governance Review which will contribute to creating a higher performance culture?

The Director responded that the TOM was still at a draft phase and a Report summarising the Governance Review was only circulated the previous day; however, he welcomed any initiatives that sought to strip out duplication and promote joined-up, collaborative thinking. He highlighted the ongoing issue around building a Corporation wide online payment platform as a good example of a practical cross-cutting project.

Do we have the right individual and organisational incentives in place to encourage higher performance and innovation?

The Director responded that it was a mixed picture; the appraisal system is getting better, but he was doubtful about whether our current incentives regime was as effective as it could be, particularly for officers on lower grades who very often aren't receiving proper recognition for their contribution; this was a clear obstacle in building that high-performance culture that we should be striving for. The Director added that any new incentives also needed to drive collaboration and minimise the risk of staff operating within silos.

In response to a follow up query around the effects of Covid, the Director reflected that whilst remote working had, in some ways, driven greater collaboration due to a wider range of individuals being able to join meetings and engage via Teams, we now lacked those "water cooler moments" that had previously served as a very useful way for officers to communicate more informally, this was particularly acute for new joiners and more junior officers.

The Director stressed the importance of banking some of the new ways of working, as quite simply, they had proven more effective than some of the pre-Covid working practices. The efficiencies driven by digitalisation in different service areas (notably in our libraries), for instance, was a real lesson as we move forward. However, the Director did sound a note of caution about wanting to wait before reaching a final judgment on the full effect of these digital initiatives; from an officer point-of-view, the benefits seemed evident, but clearly, we needed to keep service/end users top-of-mind - some may have had worse experience navigating the new digital services than the pre-Covid set up. The Chairman added that we may see greater challenges when we begin to roll out hybrid models for meetings and services (as opposed to doing things purely remotely); the Director agreed, and emphasised that demonstrating adaptability and agility were going to be critical to meet user demand as we looked ahead to a post-Covid environment.

Report highlights value / benefits of data and dashboards, how in practice can we avoid drowning in data? In what ways have you found dashboards improve performance?

The Director was concerned about the potential for "data overload"; however, his primary consideration was around how to make the best use of the data we already have by getting solid, coherent data to staff on the front line so they can make a real difference to people's lives. In addition, the Director was also keen to ensure that the collaborative approach when it came to departments sharing and analysing data during the Covid period was not lost in the years to come.

With small client bases, a commissioning model can offer more sustainable and affordable cost base, with good levels of service. Is the current balance of in house and commissioned external service the right one?

The Director responded that the balance between internal and outsourced must be constantly reviewed. Due to our relatively small size, the Corporation faced the frequent challenge that our bigger contracts simply aren't profitable enough for larger firms to bid; so, when appropriate, we look to collaborate with other local authorities so as to achieve our need through economies of scale. The Director stressed that, despite collaboration with others, it was vital that we still performed the role of the "intelligent buyer"; we had to retain our ability to assess the provider, as we were the only ones to fully understand the local needs.

What is the timeline for delivering transformational change?

The Director stressed that whilst the TOM timeline is important, other aspects of transformation are already taking place, for instance, the Department was working with others, including NHS City & Hackney and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, to make changes to health commissioning. The Director added that, whilst the TOM timeline has been delayed, he envisaged that in 2022 a firmer plan (with milestones) should be clearer. On the broader point about transformation, the Director emphasised that there wasn't an end-point in mind, as improvement needed to be a continuous process.

Would you agree that there is a disconnect between the provision for statutory and discretionary service provision?

The Director responded that whilst we had to meet our statutory requirements, there was a wider degree of discretion about how we meet those requirements than is perhaps fully appreciated outside of DCCS. When it came to statutory services, the Department were focused on the outcomes for the end-user, with value for money at the heart of decision making, this required a high degree of analysis and an openness to new ideas.

How are diversity issues mainstreamed into the work?

The Director responded that DCCS were doing a great deal, with a range of KPIs designed to meet the needs of different communities within the City, as well as robust Equality Impact Assessments carried out on a frequent basis. It is also a big focus for the Department's recruitment and retention. The Director added that there was more to do and harnessing data would play an important role, especially during the pandemic as the number of individuals from different communities needing our support has increased significantly.

What have you as a department learned from the need to respond at pace to Covid-19? Did you have the information you needed to identify vulnerable people at your fingertips? Have you reviewed this and do you have a plan of action that mainstreams this learning for use in future lockdowns / crises?

The Director responded that the pandemic had accelerated the shift towards digitalisation, whilst the efficiencies were evident, this did create new challenges, as frankly, there was only so much you can do via a screen –

safeguarding was a particular concern in that regard. In addition, it was apparent that due to the cost of devices, we faced an issue around digital exclusion.

In terms of the information available in March, whilst the Department already held a rich set of data around core users, the nature of the crisis meant that the net had to be widened, which meant that officers needed to think outside of the box (e.g. electoral roll data).

The Department had been formulating a recovery plan since early summer, this plan will provide a thorough analysis of the lessons learnt during the pandemic, as well as the new ways of working we should consider retaining. The Director stressed that recovery needed to be collaborative effort across the Corporation involving officers and Members.

Are support services right sized – any changes you would like to see?

The Director responded that whilst he recognised the need for a shift in the approach of support services, we all needed to ensure that innovation is not blocked, and speedy resolutions had to be at the heart of the new system.

RESOLVED – that the Sub-Committee noted the Report.

6. GUILDHALL COMPLEX - ROAD MAP FOR RETURN TO THE OFFICE

The Committee received a Joint Report of the Town Clerk, the Chamberlain and the City Surveyor concerning the road map and return to the office.

Before the meeting, it was envisaged that the focus of the discussion would be on the medium – longer term. In fact, after the City Surveyor's opening introductory remarks, the discussion quickly turned to the state of the current arrangements, with Members expressing concern about the pace of getting officers and Members back into Guildhall in greater numbers.

Whilst recognising that the greater risk for officers came from using public transport to come back and forth to the Corporation's operational buildings, Members were concerned that we were in danger of "gold plating" arrangements for officers and Members once they had made it into the office/place of work. For instance, the rules on the number of individuals allowed in certain areas at Guildhall struck Members as particularly overly prescriptive.

Given the Report would also be going to the meeting of the Establishment Committee on 17th September, the Chairman asked that, by the time of that meeting, officers are in a position to confirm i) the number of staff that, pre-Covid, used Guildhall as their primary workplace; ii) how many of these staff members, on average, were coming back to the office on a regular basis; and, iii) how many individual Risk Assessments (which allowed officers to return to the workplace) still needed to be completed.

Noting that similar discussions had taken place at the meeting of the Resource Allocation Sub-Committee and the Court of Common Council during the previous week, Members had concerns about the overall pace and willingness of some Chief Officers to embrace the call to encourage people to come back.

More positively, they were pleased that officers were examining the longer-term consequences of Covid, specifically in terms of flexible working, and, with the likely permanent reduction in the number of staff members attending the office every day, the potential opportunities for the rationalisation of the Corporation's operational building portfolio. They asked that more details are submitted in due course.

RESOLVED – that the Sub-Committee noted the Report.

7. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There were no items of urgent business.

9. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

10. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED - That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 7th July 2020 be agreed as an accurate record.

11. **NON-PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

There was no other business.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm

Chairman

Contact Officer: John Cater
tel.no.: 020 7332 1407
john.cater@cityoflondon.gov.uk