

Minutes

**Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy
Overview Committee
Thursday 8 January 2015
Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW**



	<p>Members Present: Councillors Richard Lewis (Chairman), Richard Mills (Vice-Chairman), Wayne Bridges, Tony Burles, Nick Denys, Narinder Garg, Raymond Graham, Carol Melvin, and Robin Sansarpuri.</p> <p>Officers: Garry Coote (Corporate Fraud Investigation Manager), Bharat Jashapara (Principal Accountant - Finance and Administration), Iain Watters (Corporate Finance - Financial Planning Manager) and Khalid Ahmed (Democratic Services Manager).</p>
32.	<p>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2014</p> <p>Agreed as an accurate record.</p>
33.	<p>EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC</p> <p>It was agreed that all items of business would be considered in public.</p>
34.	<p>BUDGET PROPOSALS REPORT FOR ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE SERVICES 2015/16</p> <p>The report set out the draft revenue budget and capital programme of the Administration and Finance Groups for 2015/16, along with indicative projections for the following four years.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that the Council continued to operate within the constraints of the Government's deficit reduction programme which had seen a reduction of £58m in central government funding since 2010/11. Combined with the range of demographic and other service pressures which were impacting on the Council's finance, this required the Council to continue to identify savings and efficiencies to protect services to residents.</p> <p>Members were informed that the budget proposals presented to Cabinet in December included a reduction of £8,529k in funding and savings proposals which amounted to £10,113k. These savings included £6,879k of new proposals.</p> <p>In relation to Administration and Finance Group Budget proposals, there were proposed savings which totalled £1,521k for 2015/16. Members were informed that the proposed savings were a combination of service efficiencies, additional</p> <p>Action By:</p>

	<p>income generated and the retendering of contracts.</p> <p>Particular mention was made to the increased income from Legal Services (£140k), which was being delivered through higher rates charged for S106 agreements. In addition there was increased anticipated income of £40k anticipated from Registration from the extension of operating hours and the marketing of wedding packages.</p> <p>A Member asked why was the renewal of Marriage Vows only charged as a flat fee and not cost banded as per the Marriages/Civil Partnerships. In response, subsequent to the meeting, Members were informed that there was less demand for renewal of Marriage Vows than for Marriages/Civil Partnerships, therefore the 'renewal' ceremony was offered only on certain days and on a flat fee basis.</p> <p>In relation to the Fees and Charges, Members were informed that the proposed increases were effective from 1 January 2015 and had been agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 18 December 2014.</p> <p>In relation to the Council's draft Capital Programme, it was noted that despite the current financial difficulties in local government finance, there would be a proposed significant capital investment of around £336,290k which would be of great benefit for residents on the Borough.</p> <p>RESOLVED –</p> <p>1. That the budget projections contained in the report be noted together with the acknowledgment that the delivery of front line services to residents of the Borough had not been impacted by the savings which the Council was making.</p>	Action By:
35.	<p>SECOND MAJOR REVIEW - CORPORATE FRAUD - SOCIAL HOUSING</p> <p>The Council's Corporate Fraud Investigation Manager attended the meeting and provided Members with the background to the review topic.</p> <p>Members were informed that Social Housing Fraud related to the abuse of the allocation and occupancy of a Council owned property. Offenders could be either sub-letting their property, living elsewhere or claiming to be homeless when they were not. Therefore, the tenure or homelessness application would be fraudulent and the registered tenant or applicant would not have a genuine housing need.</p>	

<p>The Committee was informed that in October 2013 the Government passed legislation to criminalise sub-letting fraud. On conviction, tenancy fraudsters faced up to two years in prison or a fine.</p> <p>Members were informed that Hillingdon would use these powers to prosecute suitable cases. Reference was made to the Council's publicity on this which included "blow the whistle on Housing Cheats" posters which appeared in every issue of Hillingdon People. This had helped to generate calls to the Council's fraud hotline, and all such referrals were fully investigated by the Council.</p> <p>In addition, examples of case studies which involved social housing fraud were publicised in Hillingdon People and these articles often described the improved quality of life for Hillingdon residents who had been allocated the tenancy of a recovered property. Members were informed that this generated positive feedback from residents and encouraged the reporting of suspected social housing fraud.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that the Social Housing Fraud Project had commenced in October 2010 and had been initially targeted at registered Council tenants who were either sub-letting the property or were not resident, and therefore, the properties were empty.</p> <p>Members were greatly encouraged that since the commencement of the project 177 properties had been recovered and re-let to people with genuine housing need.</p> <p>Members were informed that the Audit Commission estimated that nationally it costs Councils on average £18,000 a year for each family placed in temporary accommodation. Working on that basis the savings to date for the 177 recovered properties was £3,186,000.</p> <p>The Team</p> <p>Members were informed that the team currently comprised of two full time Housing Investigation Officer Posts, one part-time Visiting Officer, administrative support and the Corporate Fraud Investigator Manager. The Committee would receive evidence from members of the Team during the review.</p> <p>The Project Team met every week to review cases and to agree the appropriate course of action and a Legal Officer attended these meetings.</p> <p>Members were provided with a brief summary of some of the data systems which the Team could access to carry out</p>	<p>Action By:</p>
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	<p>investigations but greater detail would be provided on these during the review.</p> <p>Current work</p> <p>Officers were currently working with a credit reference agency (Experian) to data match all Hillingdon’s housing tenancy records with credit reference data. These matches would identify if tenants were linked to another address other than their Council property, if they had a mortgage for a different address, or if there were people other than the registered tenants living at the property.</p> <p>From August 2014 Corporate Fraud Officers had been working with Housing Needs reception staff to carry out enhanced checks and verification of people’s homeless status. This work had ensured resources had only been allocated to residents with a genuine housing need.</p> <p>Reference was made to other projects which included a bungalow project whereby 520 had been visited, and 5 had come back as being non-occupation. Tower blocks within the Borough would also be an area which would be investigated.</p> <p>The Committee thanked the Corporate Investigations Manager for the presentation and asked that further details be provided during the review on the data matching systems which the Team used, together with more details on other initiatives which other local authorities or private sector used, which could be used by this Council.</p> <p>Reference was made to the publicity around social housing fraud and the need for residents to be better informed regarding the conditions of their tenancies. Members asked that this area be covered during the review.</p> <p>It was agreed that for the next meeting, a scoping report be developed to help Members with their review.</p> <p>RESOLVED –</p> <p>1. That the information provided be noted and officers be asked to develop a scoping report for the review based on the information submitted.</p>	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Khalid Ahmed / Garry Coote</p>
36	<p>UPDATE ON CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE REVIEW</p> <p>Members were informed that work on suggested recommendations was still ongoing and Members would be updated as soon as these had been developed.</p>	

37.	CABINET FORWARD PLAN Noted.	
38.	WORK PROGRAMME Noted.	
	Meeting commenced at 7.30pm and closed at 8.45pm Next meeting: 5 February 2015 at 7.30pm	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Khalid Ahmed on 01895 250833. These minutes are circulated to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.