

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
22 SEPTEMBER 2016
7.30 - 8.50 PM



Present:

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Mrs Birch, Brossard, Harrison, Mrs McCracken, Phillips, Porter, Mrs Temperton and Thompson (Substitute)

Parent Governor Representatives:

Mr R Briscoe
Mrs L Wellsteed

Executive Members:

Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services & Public Protection
Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation & Finance

In Attendance:

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Alan Nash, Borough Treasurer
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services

13. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen and Tullett.

Councillor Thompson was acting as a substitute for Councillor Allen.

14. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on the 7 July 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs Birch declared a personal interest as the Spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing.

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

16. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

17. Public Participation

There were no submissions from the public in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

18. **Council Budgetary Position**

The Executive Member for Transformation & Finance and the Borough Treasurer presented the Council's current budgetary position, in preparation for scrutiny of the 2017/18 budget proposals.

At its meeting on 18 July 2016 the Executive considered a report setting out the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. At that meeting it was agreed that the Government's offer of a four year funding settlement be accepted.

In order to accept the Government's offer of a four year funding settlement the Council was required to publish an Efficiency Plan and lodge this with the Department for Communities and Local Government by 14 October 2016. The Efficiency Plan had been approved at Full Council on the 14 September.

The Council's Efficiency Plan 2016-2020 complied with the professional guidance and brought together documents and information that had been published previously (i.e. The Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Transformation Programme) to explain the Council's approach to achieving balanced budgets over the period of the four year settlement.

The Efficiency Plan 2016 -2020 identified the specific transformation projects that would need to be implemented to deliver this outcome. The figures were robust but not set in stone, this allowed a sound foundation to build upon as it was impossible to predict the changes that may occur over the next four years.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- The Government would not be auditing the Efficiency Plan. This meant that the Government would not be checking that the Council had undertaken all that was mentioned within the Efficiency Plan. The plan was to assure the Government that the Council had a credible plan in place and that the Council were taking their financial situation seriously.
- SITA were outsourced to remove the garden waste collections however all policies and procedures were set by the Council.
- The Transformation Projects would look at the big spend areas to achieve a balanced budget. The savings didn't have to be made in the same order that were stated within the Efficiency Plan.
- The target figures within the Efficiency Plan had been discussed with Directors and Chief Officers but at this stage in the Transformation programme it hadn't yet been determined how the figures would be achieved.

19. **Office Accommodation**

Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services, attended the Commission to present the plans for office accommodation changes.

The office accommodation changes formed part of stage two of the Accommodation Strategy and would provide the opportunity to deliver the objectives of the Council's

Support Services Review through co-location of all support services. This would also enable the Council to be more efficient and rationalise the accommodation and dispose of sites, as well as reduce the demands on the capital maintenance budget and release the Easthampstead House site for further town centre regeneration.

Essential repairs were required to keep Easthampstead House open beyond the next two years including window replacement and heating pipework replacement. The essential works would cost in the region of £1m and the current running costs per annum were at least £330k.

Work to Time Square had last been undertaken in 2013 this had included significant work to increase occupancy levels as a result of accommodating Seymour House staff, replacing the air-conditioning distribution system, lighting, ceilings and power upgrades and the consolidation of the customer service function. Works to the Atrium were excluded but were now required as the glass was starting to crack. It was thought that the Atrium works could include building a more substantial structure and assist with extending each floor.

In order to consolidate all staff and services Time Square would need to accommodate 975 staff, there were currently 785 based there. A reduction in storage and more extensive use of flexible and mobile working would be required to increase occupancy levels coupled with better space planning to create better working through co-location of departments, maximising floor grids and standardising layouts. Storage would need to be created for deeds and legal documents that couldn't be digitalised.

Flexible working would require three desks for every five staff, which would result in staff spending at least 40% of their time away from a desk or at least two days per week working from home. There would be a need for additional personal lockers and a clear desk policy put in place. The Council currently worked on a 5:4 desk ratio. Flexible and mobile working would allow staff to have a better work-home life balance, ensure less commuting time and create a more motivated workforce. There would also be savings in capital and revenue through the reduced office footprint. Staffs laptops were currently being upgraded and there would need to be further investment in technology to support flexible and mobile working.

Issues had arisen with trying to locate a suitable area for the democratic function and meeting rooms were often used throughout the day for training and briefing sessions. A potential location was the Ground Floor South which could be used to create a larger Council Chamber, two large Committee Rooms, a Boardroom, the Mayoral Suite and the Minority Group Room. There would also need to be an area to facilitate the Majority Group Room and the Leader and Executive accommodation which would be in physical proximity to the Chief Executive. Workshops for members would happen at a later date for those who wished to be involved with assisting with the draft plans.

Other potential difficulties included the lack of physical storage space available in Time Square, staff car parking, the ICT Network links out of Easthampstead House ie the Library and the cost of new furniture throughout Time Square.

The business case stacked up for delivering savings and it was the right time to capitalise as the Easthampstead House site receipt could be substantial and would more than cover the Time Square costs.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made:

- Many of the teams within Time Square were already working on a 5:3 desk ratio however the use of the grid floor plates would need to be maximised to enable the move.
- There was already a clear Flexible Working policy in place and staff already had this applied to their roles. There were three different work styles; Fixed, this was primarily a desk bound role that required the user to be in the same physical space for most of their working hours. HomeFlex, this was also a primarily deskbound role but with the correct IT equipment, it could equally be done for part of the week from home. Free, staff whose role involved working in the field, attending meetings or working in other locations and could also work at home for part of the week given the correct IT equipment.
- All staff's work style had been categorised for the past five years. There were approximately 30% fixed workers and 60% flexible workers.
- To purchase a new building the Council would have to sell both Easthampstead House and Time Square. In 2012 a new build option had been investigated but it was thought that this would bring further costs and add complications.
- The Council was currently at its highest point of staffing levels, there would certainly be fewer staff in the future.
- The expected cost for the changes and move to Time Square was approximately £3.5million.
- It would not be easy to add an annex onto Time Square as the underground car park posed complications. Likewise it would be hard to add an extra floor onto the building due to the material on the roof that would need to be removed. Parts of the underground car park were being looked at as a possible storage solution.
- If all staff were unable to fit into Time Square a short term option would be to rent office space nearby.
- Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Committee were currently working on a work stream for options regarding the regeneration for the whole Easthampstead House site which also included the library, Magistrates Court and possibly the Police Station. The site would be a large, prime development site.
- Expressions of interest for the site had not been invited yet, however there had been forty five expressions of interest for the site at Garth Hill. The site had been professionally valued and would be desirable for mixed use due to the Town Centre Regeneration.
- The Council had a good working relationship with the Police and talks were ongoing regarding the Police Station.
- There would be detailed costings brought to members in due course, the presentation given to the Commission was to make Members aware of the work that was currently being undertaken.
- Easthampstead Park Conference Centre would not be considered as an option for office space. There was currently a separate work stream ongoing which would look in great detail at the options for Easthampstead Park Conference Centre for the future.
- There would be enough car parking spaces in the High Street Car Park for all staff members that were currently enrolled in the Staff Parking Scheme.
- The total number of staff was nine hundred and twenty five as of 1 June 2016.
- It was thought that there were no policy reasons to why a multi story car park couldn't be built by the train station.

The Chairman thanked Alison for her presentation and looked forward to further updates in the future.

20. **Broadmoor Hospital Sirens**

Richard Beaumont updated the Commission on discussions with the West London Mental Health Trust concerning the redevelopment of Broadmoor Hospital, the Trust's plans to decommission a number of the Hospital alert sirens and the arrangements to notify alerts to schools.

In 2014 the Commission had spent a lot of time focusing on the sirens issue as concerns had been raised following a public consultation regarding removing the sirens that the Borough Council had not been included in.

Members of the Commission visited Broadmoor on the 22 August 2016 to raise a number of points. The use of an App to allow wider broadcast of the cascade system was discussed. IT were currently investigating capability of the system to implement an App.

Improvements had been made to the school cascade system. Forsetcare would still implement the cascade to each Council's Emergency Planning Officer and it would be their responsibility to cascade to their schools, this would be done via telephone and also by email with a confirmation read receipt.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made:

- It was unknown if Forestcare provided a password in case of a hoax. Clarification would be sought from Forestcare.
- Fifteen thousand people were currently signed up to the Council's alert system with online portal access.
- Members were concerned about the latest cascade as it had taken Ascot Heath Junior's forty eight minutes to respond as there had been a lack of office staff to respond to the three emails sent to the school.
- Members who attended the visit to Broadmoor felt that they had more confidence when talking to residents about the sirens.

21. **Quarterly Service Reports (QSRs)**

The Commission noted the Quarterly Service Reports for the first quarter of 2016/17 (April to June 2016) relating to the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

In response to members' questions, the following points were made:

- Reference L185 in the Chief Executives QSR was a cumulative figure.
- Station Green was a huge improvement, congratulations were given to all that had been involved.
- The library had not been listed in 1.2.11 of the Corporate Services QSR as part of the review of key council properties. This was because the Library Review, which was part of the Transformation Programme, hadn't yet been completed.
- The figures in L076 under Corporate Property would be checked as the Q1 performance was out of line with the target .
- The issue surrounding the publishing of minutes within 5 clear days of the meeting had been addressed. There had been new members of staff in the team who had been learning the procedures. Managers had expressed that they were happy with the development of the new staff.

22. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Commission noted the forthcoming items on the Executive Forward Plan of a corporate nature.

23. **Work Programme and Panel Activity Update**

The Committee noted progress against the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2016-17. The programme was still at an early stage with no red indicators and no immediate concerns.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission were currently spending the majority of their time on the Transformation Programme and the Chairman expressed personal appreciation to all Members that had been involved in the Core Groups reviewing the Transformation Projects. He welcomed anyone who wished to take part in future meetings.

CHAIRMAN