IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2009

Present:

Councillor Neil Reddin (Chairman)
Councillor Nicholas Bennett J.P. (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Colin Bloom, Eric Bosshard, Stephen Carr,
Julian Grainger and Russell Mellor

Also Present:

Councillors Peter Morgan and Tony Owen

24   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Graham Arthur.

25   DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

26   QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

No questions had been received from members of the public.

27   MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21st OCTOBER 2009

In agreeing the minutes, Councillor Colin Bloom confirmed he had sent his apologies prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8th June 2009 be agreed.

28   MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Report LDCS09137

The Committee were advised that a discussion around the Aligning Policy and Finance Workstream would be held at the meeting of Improvement and Efficiency Sub Committee on 11th February 2010.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

29   CARBON MANAGEMENT FUND: PROGRESS REPORT 2009

Report ES09102

In October 2008 the Executive agreed to establish a ring-fenced Carbon Management Fund to 'invest to save' in energy efficiency measures that would both help the Council achieve a 25% reduction in its carbon emissions over five years and achieve revenue savings. The Sub-Committee received a report providing an update on progress made on first tranche Carbon Management Funded projects and also identified a range of potential second tranche projects for 2009/10 and beyond.

Members discussed a range of issues around the reduction of carbon emissions. The Environmental Development Manager highlighted the upcoming Carbon Reduction Commitment. In future the Council would need to buy carbon allowances, but would also benefit from a reduction in energy costs related to increased energy efficiency. A range of activities could reduce the Council's liabilities under the Carbon Reduction Commitment and these were being explored.

Councillor Bloom highlighted the difficulties of supporting the existing Civic Centre site to be energy efficient and noted that modern office facilities might be better suited to efficient energy management. Another Member also identified issues around the energy efficiency of schools across the Borough and the Council's role in ensuring schools supported a reduction in the levels of carbon emissions.

Councillor Grainger underlined the need to ensure that costs related to introducing projects as well as financial and carbon savings were provided to Members to support consideration of these schemes.

RESOLVED that:

1) progress in work carried out on first tranche Carbon Management Funded projects and comments on proposed second tranche Carbon Management Funded Projects be noted;

2) that a further annual report be provided to Improvement and Efficiency Sub Committee in December 2010 detailing progress on all Carbon Management Funded projects and proposals for third tranche projects for 2010/11 and beyond.

30   LEARNING DISABILITIES - VERBAL UPDATE

The Sub-Committee received a verbal update from the Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships on progress in supporting the progression of provision for people with learning disabilities.

Work had been ongoing between Officers from Adult and Community Services and Children and Young People Services to manage existing costs through working with out-of-borough providers to reduce the costs of placements for young people with complex needs.

In the medium term, work would be undertaken to understand the numbers and requirements of young people who would be moving into Adult Learning Disability Services. This would allow accurate financial projections to be made, and would support efforts to embed the Supporting Independence agenda with young people with learning disabilities and their families to ensure these young people could move towards greater independence and involvement in mainstream activities. A pilot project would take place during 2010 to provide families with a personal budget and support them in purchasing their own services.

Members discussed a range of issues surrounding the move of young people with learning disabilities into Adult Learning Disability Services. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships explained that there had been an increase in the number of people with learning difficulties and complex needs due to better medical provision and support. It was important to ensure these people were treated as individuals and allowed to reach their potential and there was now an emphasis on helping people into supported accommodation where appropriate. However it was underlined that those who needed out-of-borough residential care would still be supported, albeit with an emphasis on working with providers to ensure reduced costs.

A Member suggested that a residential facility for people with learning disabilities and other complex needs might be beneficial within the borough. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnership explained that Bromley had historically looked to private companies to provide these services efficiently for Bromley residents. Another Member highlighted the provision of transport services and the need to ensure that people with learning disabilities had the ability to travel independently and not simply be reliant on council-provided transport.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

31   LONDON EFFICIENCY CHALLENGE

Report CEO09050

The Sub-Committee received a report updating Members on the London Efficiency Challenge. This was a free pan-London programme run by Capital Ambition to enable London local authorities to share best practice in identifying and implementing cashable efficiency savings, with a small fund available to support identified actions.

The Challenge Team had initially attended a set-up day at Bromley on 9th December 2009 to agree the broad areas of focus of the programme. Another

day was planned on 13th January 2010 to carry out individual interviews and three focus groups around the themes of customer access, mobile and flexible working and e-payments and transactions.

Members discussed the scope of the Challenge Team. The Chairman felt it would be beneficial for councils across London to share best practice around improvement and efficiency. A Member suggested that it would also be valuable to look at Local Authorities outside of London and at the processes utilised by private companies. Councillor Grainger highlighted the need to ensure that the report summary was completed fully to support Members in identifying the key issues in reports.

RESOLVED that the timetable and proposed actions for the London Efficiency Challenge be noted.

32   **ORGANISATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Report CEO09051

The Sub-Committee received a report providing an update on the progress of the Organisational Improvement Programme definition phase following the commissioning of this work by the Improvement and Efficiency Sub Committee at its meeting on 21st October 2009.

Members discussed the key issue of Reception Points at the Civic Centre and how face-to-face customer service would be delivered in the future. Members considered a range of issues including the potential for one-stop shops delivered across town centres with a range of key partners.

The other major area of work was around an upgrade to the corporate website and services which was currently being costed. Investigations were also being made regarding the potential for joint procurement with Lewisham and Newham. A Member highlighted the importance of ensuring the website strongly supported self-service processes into the future.

RESOLVED that:

1) **progress made in defining the first phase projects within the Organisational Improvement Programme be noted;**

2) **that the refined vision of the programme be endorsed;**

3) **that business cases for investment be brought to Members for approval in early 2010.**

33   **VOICE RECOGNITION PROJECT INCLUDING DEMONSTRATION OF BUSINESS CASE TOOL**

Report CEO09052

The Chairman invited Tony Norman and Andrew Walker from Telephonetics VIP to give a presentation demonstrating the potential usage of voice recognition technology, which could be applied to calls to the internal switchboard in the Customer Contact Centre. A business case tool was also demonstrated by Officers, which could be used to ensure robust business cases were produced for all projects within the Organisational Improvement Programme.

Mr Norman explained that the Bromley Council switchboard currently channelled 547,538 queries per annum, which was the equivalent of 5.5 FTE. Of these calls, 60,000 queries per annum were internal calls, which was the equivalent of 0.7 FTE. The use of a form of voice recognition software would enable the vast majority of these calls to be processed without the use of a staff member and would also provide 24 hour coverage for calls. Whilst it would not remove human contact, an application of voice recognition software would add another communication channel and would enable contact details for partners and suppliers to be stored as well as those of Bromley employees.

Members had a general discussion around voice recognition software. A Member queried the adaptability of the software. Mr Norman confirmed that the system could be educated to recognise a range of accents, short forms of first names and key words to ensure that calls were directed appropriately. The other Local Authorities currently utilising the Telephonetics VIP software had a success rate of approximately 96% in correctly routing calls. All failed calls were checked to ensure any issues with the software could be identified and tackled. Further applications of voice recognition technology also included the potential to handle some simple service requests 'end to end', for example notifying a missed bin or ordering a recycling box.

A Member suggested that efficiencies should be maximised by either introducing a form of voice recognition software to support both internal and external callers or by investigating other options, such as using a call centre, as soon as possible. Officers highlighted the importance of building the confidence of Members and Bromley staff in the efficiency of the proposed new processes before servicing external calls, and highlighted that the suggestions of a call centre had previous been considered but that Members had been keen to ensure local control of customer contact processes.

Councillor Grainger underlined that the introduction of voice recognition technology did not address the identified issue of staff members utilising Contact Centre resources to have their calls directed. He suggested that a stronger internal telephone directory might reduce the number of unnecessary calls being placed by Bromley staff. Another Member highlighted the importance of learning from the experience of other councils utilising voice recognition software.

The business case tool was then demonstrated by the Programme Assurance Manager. 'Mietool' was a major new free resource for local authorities and had been designed to construct robust business cases for proposed efficiency projects.

Members considered the potential application of the business case tool. The Assistant Director of Organisational Improvement confirmed that the tool would be used to construct invest-to-save business cases in a consistent way to support the evaluation of such projects by Members.

A Member underlined the benefits of the project management elements of the tool but was concerned that the functionality of the tool that supported development and analysis of the business case was not fully realised. Officers highlighted the capabilities of the tool that, through robust data entry around staffing and other costs, was able to identify cashable benefits, providing both a best case and worst case scenario. The Chairman highlighted that the outcomes of a business case were not always financial and that these factors would also have to be part of the evaluation of a business case.

RESOLVED that:

1) **the proposals for the introduction of a form of voice recognition technology be noted;**

2) **Members endorse the use of the business case model for all projects coming through the Organisational Improvement Programme.**

The Meeting ended at 10.25 pm

Chairman