Hackney

<table>
<tr><td>London Borough of Hackney
Scrutiny Panel
Municipal Year 2017/18
Date of Meeting Monday, 23rd October, 2017</td><td>Minutes of the proceedings of the Scrutiny Panel held at Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8 1EA</td></tr>
</table>

Chair	**Councillor Ben Hayhurst**
Councillors in Attendance	**Cllr Margaret Gordon, Cllr Christopher Kennedy, Cllr Ann Munn, Cllr Sharon Patrick and Cllr Anna-Joy Rickard**
Apologies:	**Cllr Mete Coban and Cllr James Peters**
Officers In Attendance	**Tim Shields (Chief Executive) and Ian Williams (Group Director of Finance and Resources)**
Other People in Attendance	
Members of the Public	
Officer Contact:	**Tracey Anderson** ☎ 0208 3563312 ✉ tracey.anderson@hackney.gov.uk

Councillor Ben Hayhurst in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies had been received from Cllrs Coban and Peters.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 There were no urgent items.

2.2 The Chair noted that Members had asked that Item 6 – Chief Executive Question Time – be predominantly focused on the topic of ICT. He therefore suggested that this item be delivered at the same time as item 5 (ICT Update).

2.3 With Members agreeing to this, the recording of the discussions associated with both items 5 and 6 are recorded in the minutes under item 5.

3   Declaration of Interest

3.1   Cllr Gordon noted that in pre meeting discussions Members had requested for an update on Universal Credit as part of the Quarterly Finance Update (item 7 on the agenda).

3.2   She declared that she was an employee of the Department of Work and Pensions and that she would therefore excuse herself from the meeting for this part of that item.

4   Minutes of the Previous Meeting

4.1   The minutes of the meeting of the 17th July 2017 were agreed as an accurate record.

4.2   Two actions arising from the last meeting were due to receive responses in this one from Ian Williams, Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources. The Chair suggested that these be received during the Quarterly Finance Update.

4.3   Cllr Nick Sharman, Chair of Audit Committee, fed in at this point. He brought Members' attention to the discussion in the last meeting recorded in section 5.24 of the minutes. Giving an update on the development of a suite of key performance indicators, he confirmed that a data dashboard had now been finalised following liaison between the committee and the Business Analysis and Complaints Service.

4.4   He said that this now included a 2 page summary detailing the key indicators for the Council. He wished to thank Bruce Devile, Head of Business Analysis and Complaints for driving this forward.

4.5   He said that the dashboard had highlighted some good areas of performance but also some issues; most notably within Housing Services.

4.6   He suggested that the dashboard should be used by both the Audit Committee and Scrutiny Panel to inform their work.

4.7   He also recalled the points made by the Mayor in the previous meeting around him being happy to attend Audit Committee or Scrutiny Panel to discuss the issues that the work that the Audit Committee brought to light. The Chair of Audit Committee suggested that there might be further discussion around the forums in which the Mayor might feed into regarding the data.

4.8   The Chair thanked the Chair of Audit. As a way forward he suggested that the Group Director for Finance and Corporate Resources might circulate the data dashboard to Scrutiny Panel Members. This would then help the panel reach a view on how they might incorporate considerations around it into its work programme.

ACTION 1 - Group Director for Finance and Corporate Resources
To circulate Audit Committee Data Dashboard to Scrutiny Panel Members.

5 ICT Update

5.1 Guests in attendance for this item were:
- Tim Shields, Chief Executive
- Rob Miller, Director, ICT

5.2 The Chair welcomed the guests. He thanked the Director of ICT for having provided what he said was a concise and helpful report, which was available within the agenda packs.

5.3 The Director, ICT thanked the Chair. He said that he had joined the Council a little over a year ago, at what was a very exciting time. He had entered an organisation which had had strong ITC infrastructure and arrangements already in place. There had been a track record of investment and achievement, meaning that his focus had not needed to be on putting right issues. For example, on entering the role very few Council computers were run on the dated Windows XP system. The Council had been responsive in moving to Windows 10 at an early point.

5.4 A key element of this was the in-house model which had been in place since 2012. This had meant the Council had the strategic levers for change at its control. Moving forward, it could continue to respond to the rapidly developing changes in technology, without the risk of being constrained by any rigid external contracts.

5.5 A good set of information and assets were in place, including the Hackney One Account and Citizen Index.

5.6 Asked to explain the Citizen Index system the Director, ICT confirmed that this was a database of all of the Council's residents. Its links to other systems meant that changes to records on this would automatically update other databases used by Council services. It also meant that the Council could better understand and meet the needs of residents by having insight into their interactions with areas across the organisation.

5.7 The Director, ICT said that successful projects had brought significant savings and service improvements to the Council. A project led by Parking Services and supported by ICT had enabled much greater use of online permits. The strength of the Citizen Index system had also enabled the service to verify address details through this rather than paying significant amounts to private providers (for example Experian) to fulfil this function. Improving online services for customers had enabled channel shift by many of those previously accessing them via face-to-face contact.

5.8 His service was now working to build on these successes. Work in progress included a redesign of the Hackney Works service to allow more ease of access for residents with employment or work experience needs, and a service enabling Council residents to check their rent account balances and report and track repairs requests in real time online. He said that a key aim of his service was to work very closely with users to shape the solutions being created. For example, the launch of the 'check my rent' tool had involved usage by 650

customer in the first week. This would act a pilot with which to create and drive further improvement.

5.9   This principle of working with people more closely was applicable to both residents, internal council services, and businesses also.

5.10   On businesses, the service was progressing a Business Index. In a similar vein to the Citizen Index, this tool would enable the Council to have a definitive register of businesses in the borough in order to be able to better support them.

5.11 Adding to this, and in response to a question from a Member, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Business Index would better enable businesses to be provided by a one stop shop service offer. This was part of a drive by the Council to make business start-ups easier, and to give support to aid their growth.

5.12   The Council was introducing both a Landing Pad which would enable businesses to quickly access services such as setting up a Business Rates account upon starting up in or moving to the borough, and a Launch Pad which would provide advice and support to help them grow.

5.13   In response to a Member question around whether there could be a resident Landing pad, the Director of ICT said this would fit with the life model approach that his service was aiming to take.

5.14   A Member noted the moves towards more effective partnership working with other organisations including the NHS and other London boroughs. She asked what steps the Council was taking to ensure that consent was given where appropriate and what communications were being made to residents around this. She felt that closer working could raise issues. For example, there might be a risk that in some cases residents would be less likely to access health services for them or their family if they were aware that this might automatically be shared with other agencies.

5.15   The Director, ICT said that this was a crucial consideration. The service had always worked to ensure its compliance with Data Protection legislation, and was awaiting the introduction of the new General Data Protection Regulation Act which was expected to come into force from May 2018. A picture was beginning to emerge on the contents of this and the implications for the Council and the service was working through these.

5.16   He felt that there should always be a full focus on compliance, but that this should also be coupled with working to ensure that this did not prevent progress. For example, he suggested that while one service might not need to share the full details of a verification check with another service, that it could be of benefit to the resident if the service was able to confirm that the verification had been passed successfully. This could mean that whilst a raft of information was not being shared, that residents or businesses would not need to submit a range of details again.

5.17   He fully agreed that the Council would need to be very careful, and also that some sharing arrangements would be more appropriate than others. The joint agreement which had been reached between the Council and the Homerton

which enabled social workers and health practitioners to share information in order for a more integrated service to be delivered had been successful. However, while there would be benefits of wider sharing – for example that which would enable housing providers to be aware when residents were in receipt of support from Adult Social Care – there would need to be great caution applied.

5.18   The Chief Executive agreed with this point. The Council continued to be very cautious whilst also recognising the benefits that greater data sharing could have for residents.

5.19   In terms of technology generally, he noted that developments had significant potential to enable independence. Intelligent personal assistant devices (for example Amazon's Alexa) could better enable residents to call for help in their homes. Alerts of vulnerable person suffering a stroke or having very low blood sugar levels based on a device worn by them could be sent to healthcare providers or other contacts. The Council would seek to be at the forefront of development.

5.20   A Member asked what the Council was doing to ensure Cyber Security.

5.21   The Director of ICT confirmed that this Council and others were required to report back to the Cabinet Office on a set of indicators. Their responses were used to give assurance that their infrastructure was robust enough for their access to the Public Services Network. The Council had passed this.

5.22   In addition, the Council commissioned external providers to test the strength of their security and to identify vulnerabilities needing to be addressed. The count of vulnerabilities had been low; there would always be some that were identified from these exercises.

5.23   The Chief Executive said that advice to staff was a crucial part of the work to protect the Council. Regular updates were sent around emails and advice around not to open what appeared to be suspicious content. The infrastructure in place blocked many of these before they reached the user. The front door at the Council was strong but vigilance was needed.

5.24   The Director of ICT said that it was crucial to enable staff to work securely whilst doing their jobs. He referred to a case where a Council had been fined £150,000 for a breach in which a social worker emailed a document to her personal email address so that she could work on this on her personal computer. The Social Worker's computer on her accessing the file had then uploaded a range of the data to a website. Hackney was working to ensure that Council staff had access to reliable and secure systems (including the capacity to work on personal devices but within a secure system) to ensure that the above scenario would not play out here.

5.25   A Member noted the references in the paper to the development of analytics capabilities. She saw great potential in systems monitoring and mapping the extent and impacts of change. She asked whether a system could be envisaged which would consider and make available data around planning approvals, new licenses and revisions to licenses (including hour based licensing applications) and the impacts that these changes had. She suggested

that noise and antisocial behaviour could be two indicators used to explore the impact, but said that this could be positive aspects also.

5.26 Looking specifically at noise, she said that as a Councillor she had found herself performing analysis herself on cases raised with her by a number of her constituents, regarding one source of noise. She said that this was cumbersome and also that the requirement for residents to fill in paper copies of diary forms made them easy to mislay and also – she felt - more difficult for the Council to identify trends and patters. She asked if the improved analytics could allow for online reporting, and a better depth of analysis regarding noise complaint cases. She said that an online reporting option would be valuable in her view; it was difficult for customers to make contact with the service at late times of the day and night when problem noise often occurred.

5.27 The Director of ICT thanked the Member for the suggestions which he felt were fully sound. He very much saw a future in which analytics and data was used to aid both services and Members in their decision-making and in their assessments of the impacts that these had had.

5.28 He confirmed that his service was working closely with the Enforcement Service. This was part of wider work within the fuller Public Realm Division led by Aled Richards. Early work had delivered improvements to the bulky waste collection function.

5.29 As per the points in his paper, the ICT Division was moving away from following a standalone strategy, towards working in partnership with services, and providing advice and support on the areas they themselves were prioritising. Future areas of focus in Public Realm – including on noise within the enforcement area – would be informed by the priorities for that area.

5.30 This said, the Director of ICT said that the sound data held around Planning – down to property reference number detail – would give a good foundation point for enabling the initiatives mentioned by the Member.

5.31 On noise specifically, the Chief Executive noted the Members concerns about the need to make reporting easier. He confirmed that it was possible to report issues online. However, he also noted that fuller investigation of noise issues required officer visits to ascertain noise levels compared to statutory nuisance thresholds. The diary systems complemented this and online diary submissions were possible. However, this would not remove residents' frustrations at needing to wait for investigative staff resources to be available.

5.32 In response to a question from the Chair of Audit around how the service currently monitored its performance the Director of ICT confirmed that there were a suite of performance indicators in place. However, the service recognised the need for these to be reviewed. They were currently focused on processes and not people.

5.33 Noting the points around the potential of analytics to provide a breadth of insight, including by area, the Chair of Audit Committee said that he would be supportive of this. He asked whether ICT saw a future model in which the impact of investment on results and outcomes could be better measured. He felt that the impacts of the significant regeneration which had been delivered in

the borough associated with the Olympics was not very quantifiable. This was in particular relation to jobs. He noted that the Council was unable to categorically state the number of jobs which had gone to local people as a result of the games.

5.34   The Chief Executive said that on jobs the Council had been careful to ensure that those being supported into employment related the Olympics had been long standing Hackney residents. Other boroughs had not always been as stringent on ensuring this within their programmes.

5.35   He acknowledged that full data on employment outcomes of the games was difficult to quantify. This was due to lack of information sharing from and between the Inland Revenue and the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Council not having the capacity to track people as they left the borough nor as they went in and out of employment.

5.36   However, he felt that the broader impacts of regeneration regarding the games was straighter forward. The new leisure centre, the ongoing improvement and development in Hackney Wick, a sustainable future having been achieved for Here East and the new housing stock which had been delivered were some of these.

5.37   A Member noted the successful moves by the Council to improve their online offers. He welcomed this and the savings that it brought. However, he asked for assurance around there being a continuing focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable residents.

5.38   The Director of ICT said that digital services for everyone was a key aim of the service. The ongoing work to embed digital service improvement into the strategies of services across the Council was being complemented by a range of activities to ensure that accessibility and digital inclusion considerations were designed into these.

5.34   He said that a crucial ingredient towards achieving this was gaining insight directly from users. To this end the service had worked with Hackney Healthwatch to deliver an interactive focus group in which partially sighted users fed back on their experiences of using current Council online services and on improvements which were needed.

5.35   The service was working to close the digital divide in other ways also. It was working with the Libraries Service to deliver training to residents on using digital technology.

5.36   It was working with residents living in hostel accommodation, piloting Wi-Fi provision. They were also engaging with residents in order to identify the barriers to digital inclusion for this group and whether these were restricted to the availability of Wi-Fi or if there were other factors which training and support might help address.

5.37   An example around this was that engagement exercises had shown that whilst some residents were confident with applications and websites which they were familiar with such as Whatsapp and Facebook, that they did not always find Council applications easy to use. They had found that the verification process

on the Hackney one Account was inaccessible for some and the service was addressing this.

5.38 A Member noted that the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Commission had carried out a day of evidence gathering in a review relating to the support for Foster Carers. He asked if the digital services for current and potential Foster Carers was being improved.

5.39 The Director of ICT said that work had started with the Children and Young People's Service in recent weeks. This had a focus on aiming to improve the online offer to better ensure that potential new carers were not put off at the early stages. There had been very good engagement from the service on this, which was a crucial ingredient to reaching good outcomes.

5.40 He was pleased that ICT had had delivered early successes in their approach of working closely with other areas – in Housing Services in particular. He said that this was enabling learning with which to apply to other areas.

5.41 A Member asked about the potential of ICT to harness community resources over the next few years. She noted that ICT solutions often led to successes in this area in addition to those achieved through volunteer coordinator roles.

5.42 The Director of ICT said experience from his previous authority suggested that securing community engagement through ICT infrastructure was generally more successful when existing platforms (Facebook for example) were used rather than new channels. The service would work to support innovations in this area.

5.43 The Chief Executive said that the Council was exploring how it could broker the join up of community resources. He was aware of ward-based innovations in which people lent items or spaces to one another which had enabled the building of greater community cohesion. The Council would continue to consider ways that it could contribute to the further building of these initiatives.

5.44 This said, there needed to be caution. Residents were likely to interpret any endorsement of a community scheme by the Council to mean that it had been checked and validated. There was a need for the Council to explore how it could help community resources flourish whilst also helping to ensure that everyone was kept safe.

5.45 A Member asked what the mechanisms were for directorates to feedback and take a lead on ICT improvements.

5.46 The Chief Executive said that recent developments in ICT had been heavily informed by the findings of the ICT survey. A key message from the survey was a need for improvement in the availability of ICT support. He said that the response to this survey by the service had been excellent, which had included visits to Council services based outside of the Town Hall campus and pop up sessions being delivered.

5.47 The Director of ICT added that the most recent completed survey had drawn 702 responses. It was fair to say that the opinions had been negative, but that this had centred on interaction issues rather than systems ones. Since this

point the service had worked hard on being interactive. This had included making one to one ICT support sessions available by appoint times to suit the user.

5.48 The Director of ICT said that responding positively to the survey would better enable the service to establish the relationships with service areas which could ensure that they were then involved with discussions on service development at an early point. In turn, this would enable ICT to be embedded within the strategies of all areas.

5.49 A Member said that she was interested in the impact that digital communications could and would have on local democracy. In particular – and given earlier discussions around the potential of analytics to map out the impacts and potential impacts of policy changes – she asked whether consultation processes could be adapted so that respondents could be grounded on both sides of the debate.

5.50 She gave any consultation on the topic of parking fees as an example. She suggested that within a new arrangement of making analysis easily available to consultees, these consultations might give modelled data on the air quality impacts (or any other benefits) each proposal within a consultation would have, compared to no changes being delivered.

5.51 The Chief Executive said that the Council had delivered some work relevant to this, within a budget planning consultation exercise. However, this had proven to be an overly time consuming process. He said he was keen that the Council did more, in a quicker way.

5.52 The Director of ICT agreed with this point. He also felt that the e-panel was a very strong resource for consultations of this type.

5.53 A Member said that she had ongoing concerns with the repairs service, and the issue of the repairs contact centre misdiagnosing repairs in some cases. She was aware that some service providers had moved to an online reporting tool which enabled those reporting repairs to identify the faults that they had from a set of pictures. She asked if this would help and if the service was pursuing it.

5.54 The Director of ICT said that he was aware of online reporting tools with pictures. However, he said that his experience had shown that there were challenges with these due to the diverse nature of appliances and apparatus within resident's homes. This had sometimes led to it being difficult for those reporting issues to link their faults with the range of possibilities listed and pictured.

5.55 This said, he was aware from his work with the Director of Housing Services that there was a strong focus on service improvement. He knew that the Director of Housing Services was aware of the issues regarding misdiagnoses and was seeking the address this through staff development to increase the call centre's capacity to accurately diagnose issues.

5.56 He said that ICT had supported improvements in other areas of Housing Services. On an overall level call centre performance had increased as particular system issues had been addressed. There was now also better

deployment of work with repairs staff being allocated jobs on a live basis according to need and urgency rather than on the basis of a paper list given at the start of the day. He felt that these examples showed how ICT was aiming to work hand in glove with services to deliver improvement.

6   Chief Executive Question Time

6.1   Item 6 was delivered jointly with item 5.

7   Quarterly Finance Update

7.1   The Chair welcomed Ian Williams, Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources.

Special Educational needs Services

7.2   The Chair asked for the item to start with a response to the action below arising from the last meeting.

Action: To provide further details of the targeted and exceptional policy to the Panel and what this involves.

7.3   The Group Director, Finance and Resources confirmed that this new policy was part of the response to the issue of the Council having needed to use its reserve funds to significantly contribute to the funding of high needs pupils in Hackney.

7.4   This policy replaced the previous 'Resource Level' system. The Resource Level system allocated one of 5 funding levels to schools to fund pupils' needs as detailed within their Educational and Health Care Plan (EHCP). The targeted and exceptional policy created 5 'Targeted Funding' levels to replace the bottom 3 levels within the Resource Level system, and a further 2 funding levels within an 'Exceptional Funding' category to replace the top 2 levels within the Resource Level model.

7.5   This along with other measures would help to narrow the gap between High Needs government funding and levels of SEND spend. He was working with colleagues across the Hackney Learning Trust to identify whether there were different approaches which could help support children at earlier points to reduce their likelihood of significant support needs at later points. They were also exploring whether – in the context of the Hackney Learning Trust reserve now fully committed after meeting SEND cost pressures – it was actually legal for the Council to use portions of its General Funds for this purpose.

7.6   Alongside this work, the Council was actively lobbying government for change. With High Needs Funding having been effectively frozen since 2011 at the same time as an acceleration in the numbers of young people in need of and eligible for support (through both population growth and policy change by Government), both this Council and others were facing significant budget pressures. There was an estimated funding gap of £100 million in London.

7.7   The Chair thanked the Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources. He noted that there was a working group in place which the Deputy Mayor and a number of other Councillors were part of. He suggested that the Group Director

of Finance and Corporate Resources might attend this group and provide a briefing paper along the lines of what he set out above.

7.8   Another Member felt this suggestion to be a very good one. He confirmed that dates for the group had been set for the next 4 months.

7.9   The Group Director of Finance thanked the Members. He said that he would be very happy to attend and be involved with the working group.

Waste costs

7.10   Moving onto another planned theme for the discussion, the Chair noted the related paper in the agenda packs. This regarded waste and recycling costs, and the implications for the Council of the delivery of a new waste processing plant by the North London Waste Authority (NLWA), of which Hackney was a member borough.

7.11   The Chair noted that this item and the same paper had been covered by the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission the previous week. He therefore suggested that this meeting did not discuss the item in detail, which Members agreed with.

7.12   The Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources thanked Members. He said that the only point that he would wish to make was around the work to factor portions of the costs related to the development at the NLWA into the Council's plans. On this, he said that the Council would incorporate the costs, but that the focus would need to be on mitigating and minimising them.

7.13   Investment was needed; the current waste processing facility was ending its life, bringing an end also to relatively low waste costs to the Council due to its use of a facility paid for some years ago. The Council would now need to contain the costs as much as possible whilst accepting that investment was needed.

Impact of potential lifting of 1% pay cap

7.14   The Chair thanked the Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources for the paper in the agenda packs exploring both the implications for the Council of any lifting of the 1% pay cap in local government, and also the latest developments regarding devolution in terms of a 100% Business Rates retention for London pilot.

7.15   The Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources said that there was significant uncertainty around any move to remove the 1% cap. He noted that there had been little further coverage of this issue since the end of the political conference season. He said that exploring the details behind the above 1% increases which had been ascribed to some areas (prison staff and the police) showed the increases to be lower or have greater conditions attached to them than might have first been obvious.

7.16   This lack of certainty had led him to still base budgets on the assumption of 1% pay rises in 2018/19 and 2019/20, although he had now revised pay assumptions slightly up for the latter year.

7.17 Perhaps the greater uncertainty for local government was around the commitment to meet the Government's target of a National Living Wage equal to 60% of median earnings. This could have implications for bottom ends of Council pay structures, and also those above this to ensure that there continued to be salary progression according to levels of responsibility.

7.18 Hackney was more protected from this risk than Councils which had not implemented the higher London Living Wage as a minimum pay level.

London 100% Business Rates Pilot Scheme

7.19 Moving onto the London 100% Business Rates Pilot Scheme section of the paper, the Group Director Finance and Corporate Resources confirmed that the London Leaders Committee had given broad support on making a submission to Government for a 100% business rates retention pilot for London, within a pooling arrangement involving all London boroughs. Full detail which this submission would contain needed to be worked through.

7.20 While if a scheme was introduced steps would be put in place to ensure that no single borough was worse off compared to what they would have received under the current system, there were still differences of opinion around the measures which would be used to inform the allocation of the pooled resources across the boroughs.

7.21 Inner London boroughs continued to need to correct a common misconception around these boroughs being much better funded than areas in outer London. This was reflected in the discussions.

7.22 In response to a question as to the incentive for boroughs following this model, the Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources said that this would be the retention of all business rates raised in London compared to 67% as was the case currently.

7.23 This would bring an additional £250 million into London. However, there was likely to be calls from the treasury for this greater retention to be reflected in higher contributions from the boroughs for infrastructure works in the capital.

7.24 In response to a question from a Member on timescales, the Group Director Finance and Corporate Resources confirmed that the pilot could start in 2018/19 for a period of two years. This said, there was still much uncertainty; getting the go ahead from Government was reliant on all London boroughs being in agreement on a scheme and significant differences in views would need to be settled to achieve this.

Update on Universal Credit

7.25 Cllr Gordon left the room at this point.

7.26 Moving onto a set of slides which had been tabled in advance of the meeting the Group Director Finance and Corporate Resources gave an update to Members on the planned roll out of Universal Credit and the likely implications for Hackney.

7.27   The roll-out was a significant concern for the Council; it was likely to have an impact on significant numbers of vulnerable households, on children and on people receiving services from Adult Social Care.

7.28   Areas piloted had reported significant issues and in some cases had commissioned independent reviews due to the Government previously rejecting their analyses. Southwark which shared some characteristics to Hackney had seen their rent collection rates reduce from 92% to 51%. Other areas in which pilots had been delivered had also seen rising arrears which were largely due to housing benefit no longer going directly to landlords but being incorporated within single monthly payments to households.

7.29   Despite the issues that the system was causing in its current format, roll out was still set for June 2018. Work continued on lobbying Government to adapt some aspects. This included on a move to exclude some or all households placed in temporary accommodation.

7.30   A Member noted the downward impacts that direct payments to claimants had had on rent collection levels. She asked if this was due to the 6 week waiting time for the receipt of a payment.

7.31   The Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources confirmed that the rent shortfalls were significantly due to often vulnerable households being expected to adapt to receiving one single monthly payment with which to pay their rent whilst meeting their other living costs. However, even the 6 week waiting times had made it more difficult for Councils to support households in receipt of benefit into the private rented sector in the borough as landlords were less willing to accept them.

7.32   The Chief Executive confirmed the major concerns of the Council. In response to a question about what was being done at a London level, he confirmed that there was significant lobbying of Government. This included this this council and others calling for the Government to remove the housing benefit element from the Universal Credit award, and to retain the current facility of direct payments to landlords. This would promote financial self-management whilst also giving greater safeguards to vulnerable people against evictions and homelessness. A letter was being sent to Government by the Mayor laying out the likely implications of the scheme in its current form on Hackney residents.

7.33   The Group Director for Finance and Corporate Resources said that the Council would continue to lobby against the roll out of the scheme in its current form. However, there was also a need to ensure that the Council was doing all it could to help mitigate the harmful impacts that it would have. This included through encouraging residents in receipt of benefits to sign up to Direct Debit arrangements in which monthly rent payments would be deducted from accounts on the same date as the Universal Credit was paid.

7.35   The Universal Credit element of the discussion was brought to a close and Cllr Gordon returned to the room.

7.36   As a final point the Group Director, Finance and Corporate Resources updated panel Members on the action below:

Action: Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources to set up a member workshop to support assessments of corporate risks associated with housing and regeneration developments.

7.37   He advised that he had waiting on scheduling this session due to a recent move by Government to review the Public Works Loans Board. This review was carried out in response to Government concerns that some Councils were borrowing sums from the Board for projects with the exclusive aim of generating yields with which to deliver services.

7.38   He said that he would share these concerns and was keen to ensure that the reasons for use were restricted to ensure the viability and sustainability of the Board moving forward.

7.39   He said that the emerging view was that the review would result in some changes to the criteria and tests which would be applied to applications for future loans. He was now incorporating this into the content of the Member workshop as appropriate.

7.40   He advised that the workshop had now been scheduled to be delivered to Members of the Audit Committee prior to the committee's next meeting of the 17th January 2018. He asked if Members of the Panel would be content in participating in this session jointly with Audit Committee Members.

7.41   The Chair thanked the Group Director Finance and Corporate Resources. He asked that details of the workshop be circulated to Scrutiny Panel Members. It could then be determined whether all Members with an interest in the item were able to attend this session, or whether a dedicated session for the Scrutiny Panel would need to be arranged.

8   Work Programme 2017/18

8.1   The Work Programme was noted.

8.2   Members agreed that the next Scrutiny Panel meeting of 11th December should have a focus on Housing Services. It was suggested that the Group Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services be invited to this meeting in addition to the Mayor who was already due to attend for a Question Time item.

8.3   Members noted that the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission was keeping a watching brief on contract management and housing repairs, with items relevant to this due to be discussed in its November meeting. The Chair suggested that he have further discussions outside of the meeting to enable the Panel to have oversight whilst seeking to avoid duplication.

8.4   A Member noted that a key role of the Scrutiny Panel was to provide coordination and oversight of the work of the different commissions. She appreciated that the last meeting had heard about the planned work programmes for each. However, she felt that consideration needed to be given as to how it should perform this oversight function on an ongoing basis.

8.5   The Chair agreed with this point. While he felt that this might not be a standing item for each meeting, he suggested that this might be incorporated into the agendas of alternative meetings. He said that he would give consideration to this.

8.6   He also agreed that he would work with the Head of Scrutiny and Ward Forums in seeking to produce a plan of items being submitted to Council by Scrutiny.

8.7   A Member noted that a new scrutiny structure was in place for this municipal year. She suggested that the Panel might hold a discussion item to take stock,

8.8   Members agreed with this suggestion. It was agreed that this item would be held in the meeting of 7th February 2018.

8.9   As a final point the Chair recalled discussions around the non-take up of the Scrutiny Panel Vice Chair role by the main opposition. This had ended with an agreement that the Chair would explore any ways to secure involvement in the Scrutiny Panel of opposition parties.

8.10   Updating Members, the Chair confirmed that he had raised this issue with colleagues. Any constitutional changes which would be required to better enable opposition involvement would follow in fuller reviews of the constitution.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.00 pm