

## BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT BOARD

TITLE	Author	ITEM NO	Date
<b>Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 – Year End Report</b>	William Tompsett, Senior Strategy, Policy & Performance Officer		19 Mar 18

### 1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the delivery of the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18. The report builds on the in-year updates and submissions to the Secretary of State and details the continuous progress against the five areas of Communications, Property, Elections, Organisational Culture and Grants and the 26 actions found within the Improvement Plan.
- 1.2. The Directions from the Secretary of State for Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) requires the Council to submit quarterly update reports. The fourth quarterly update report will be submitted on 30th March 2018.

### 2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. The Board is asked to:
  1. Consider and comment on the draft update report attached as Appendix 1
  2. Consider and agree any revised milestone timescales in the Improvement Plan attached as Appendix 2.

### 3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. The Council as part of its final submission to the Secretary of State for DCLG submitted a Best Value Improvement Plan 17-18 and outlined proposals to set up a Best Value Improvement Board to drive sustainable improvement across the organisation by providing oversight, support and challenge. Following the Secretary of State revoking the previous Directions and the removal of the Commissioners involved in the governance of the Council, the Secretary of State issued new Directions which will be in force until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018.
- 3.2. In line with the new Directions the Council has undertaken the following:
  - Submission of quarterly reports on all outstanding actions in the Best Value Action Plan and Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 to the Secretary of State with the third update submitted in January 2018;
  - Set up a new Best Value Improvement Board, chaired by the Mayor, with cross party representation and external representatives to provide suitable challenge to improve all Council activities;

- Developed proposals for an independent review of achievement against the Best Value Action Plan and Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18. This will be undertaken with the LGA in the form of a Corporate Peer Review and is planned for June 2018.

3.3. The Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 has five key priority areas comprising 26 strategic actions. These priority areas are a continuance of those found in the Best Value Action Plans arising from the original Secretary of State's Directions. The Plan demonstrates continued implementation where previous activities could not be implemented before the Directions expired as well as continued improvements.

3.4 The Best Value Improvement Plan sits within an Improvement Framework which outlines the work streams the Council is delivering to become an 'excellent modern council'. This includes the work being driven by the Children's Services Improvement Board led by an independent Chair, an internal time limited Adults Improvement Board and new improvement areas of customer services and Organisational culture as reported to the Board at the last meeting.

3.5 Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2017 received a report detailing the progress the Council has made in becoming a more open and transparent organisations with ongoing work that will help to:

- Continuously provide opportunities for the public to hold the Council to account , whilst also ensuring that it always holds itself to account;
- Provide quality data, which is clear, easy to understand and accessible;
- Involve residents in the design and delivery of services enabling a more open and collaborative approach to Council business.

3.6 The latest Annual Residents Survey shows residents perception of the Council is improving with 79% saying they trust the Council and 59% agreeing the Council is open and transparent. We also saw an 11 points increase to 68% of residents feeling the Council listens to their concerns and a 9 points increase to 58% of residents agreeing that the Council involves them in the decision making.

#### **4. 20017/18 PROGRESS AGAINST BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

4.1. During the first year of the Best Value Improvement Plan the Council has delivered the majority of the short-term and medium-term milestones and where there are any delays a revised plan has been set out. Work on the longer-term milestones are on-going with plans for delivery over the next financial year. Regular updates on progress are provided to the Corporate Leadership Team and Members and all activities have been incorporated within individual Directorate Plans to ensure focus remains on delivery.

4.2. Elections - The Council published a revised Register of Electors in December 2017 and is meeting regularly with partners to plan the Mayoral and local elections for 2018. Location for the count and enhanced security measures for

all polling stations has been agreed with the police. A comprehensive count plan is being developed alongside mandatory training and guidance for all count staff and poll clerks. Mandatory training is planned for all count staff, poll clerks and presiding officers and improved communication on voting processes is being made available. The Council has also agreed to pilot an enhanced Postal Voting Scheme with the Cabinet Office which will include increased security and guidance as well as sample checking.

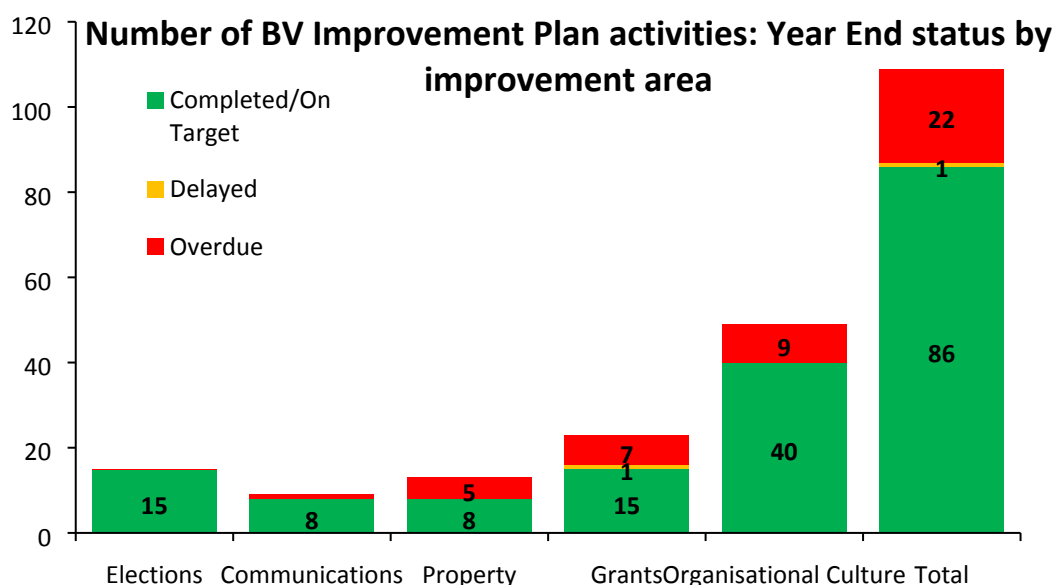
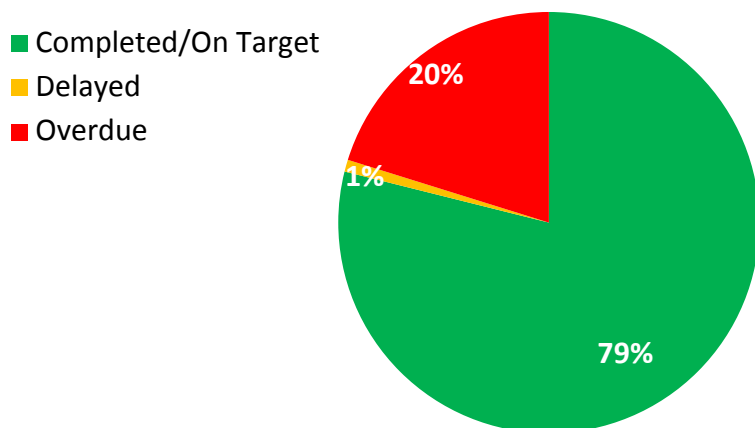
- 4.3. Communications - The communication infrastructure has been improved considerably over the last year with the development of a Communication Strategy for 2017/18. Internal communications have been enhanced by the introduction of a weekly staff email newsletter that sees continual growth in its readership and interaction with articles. The use of dedicated poster sites and 12 plasma screens in the Town Hall ensure key messages and updates for staff are seen. Also, an intranet project manager was appointed to drive the effectiveness of this media. Improvements in external communications include the completion of the media consumption survey which is being used to develop future work and ensure we can reach different audiences effectively. The survey provides a range of intelligence including areas where can further develop its communication work. We have seen significant increase in the number of residents signed up to our e-newsletter and with the segmentation of this we will be able to target information to residents according to their interests.
- 4.4. Property – A total of four sites have been identified for use as Community Hubs. The first was launched in September 2017 and work is progressing to deliver the rest over the next two years. The Council continues to manage its assets through the revised governance structure and use vacant buildings for housing and commercial use. A review of depot provision across the borough is being undertaken and specialist consultants have been appointed to conduct a feasibility study for this which is due to be completed in April 2018.
- 4.5. Grants - A new approach to grants management is being developed in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector. The system mapping of requirements to improve management reporting, information management and analysis of the new GIFTS software was completed. The Mainstream Grants Programme is monitored quarterly by the Grants Scrutiny Committee and Grants Determination Committee. An audit has been completed of the grants monitoring process and recommendations arising from this will be taken forward.
- 4.6. Organisational Culture - Revised core values have been agreed by senior management and communicated to all staff through range of engagement events across different Council sites. A staff survey and wellbeing survey were carried out in 2017/18. A refreshed Member/Officer Protocol is now in place and work is being undertaken raise awareness and implementation. A revised Whistleblowing Policy was also agreed and launched. This will now be a mandatory training requirement for all staff in the new Learning Management System. The Transformation Programme engaged staff through conversation groups and other wider staff engagement.

4.7. The Tower Hamlets Summit was held in January 2018 and brought together a wide variety of partners and stakeholders to gather views and conversation around the content and focus for the new Community Plan being developed with The Tower Hamlets.

4.8. The charts below show the reported progress against the 109 milestones in the Best Value Improvement Plan which are still active. In order to ensure consistency in the reporting of the status of key milestones the following criteria have been applied:

- **On Target** – where the key milestone will be achieved by the deadline
- **Completed** – Where the key milestone has been achieved by the deadline
- **Delayed** – where the key milestone has not yet been completed but will be completed within a month of the original deadline
- **Overdue** - where the key milestone has been delayed by more than a month from the date of the original deadline

### BV Improvement Plan activities : Overall Year End Status



## 5. **COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 5.1. The Best Value Improvement Plan is a priority for the Council, and requisite resources have been identified within the budget in order to deliver the outcomes. Any additional resources required to deliver any of the activities will need relevant authority before commencing.

## 6. **LEGAL COMMENTS**

- 6.1. The Council is a best value authority within the meaning of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. As a best value authority, the Council has an obligation under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness” (the best value duty).
- 6.2. Where the Secretary of State is satisfied that an authority is not meeting its best value duty, the Secretary of State may: (1) direct the authority to take action to bring itself into compliance with that duty; (2) direct that specified functions be carried out by the Secretary of State or a nominee and that the authority follow the Secretary of State’s instructions and provide such assistance as may be required (Local Government Act 1999). In accordance with this power the Secretary of State gave directions to the Council on 17 December 2014, 29 April 2015 and 6 May 2015. Revised directions were also given on 16 January 2017.
- 6.3. These Directions were revoked by letter from the Secretary of State dated 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and which removed the DCLG Commissioners on 31 March 2017. This letter set out fresh Directions and which are in force until 30 September 2018.
- 6.4. The directions are enforceable by the Secretary of State, who may seek an order in the High Court requiring the Council to remedy any breach. Under the current circumstances, it is appropriate for the Council to take steps to comply with the directions and to monitor its compliance with the directions. The report relevantly informs the Board of progress and timescales.
- 6.5. When taking action in response to the directions, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). Compliance with this duty has been a feature, to the extent relevant, of the Council’s action in response to the directions.
- 6.6. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

Appendix 1: Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 summary

Appendix 2: Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 delivery plan