MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11 May 2016 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors David Michael (Chair), James-J Walsh (Vice-Chair), Brenda Dacres, Colin Elliott, Stella Jeffrey, Jim Mallory, John Paschoud and Paul Upex and Alan Hall

APOLOGIES: Councillors Alicia Kennedy and Luke Sorba

ALSO PRESENT: Paul Aladenika (Service Group Manager, Policy Development and Analytical Insight), Councillor Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member Resources), Simone van Elk (Scrutiny Manager), Andreas Ghosh (Head of Personnel & Development) and Councillor Joan Millbank (Cabinet Member Third Sector & Community)

1.   Minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2016

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2016 were agreed.

2.   Declarations of interest

The following interests were declared:

Councillor David Michael is a working patron of the Marsha Phoenix Trust, and a member of the Lewisham Safer Neighbourhood Board
Councillor John Paschoud is a member of the Voluntary Action Lewisham's Children and Young People Forum
Councillor Paul Upex is a board member of Voluntary Services Lewisham.
Councillor Walsh is a founder of Lewisham Council's LGBT+ group

3.   Council's employee survey - Talkback 2015

3.1 Andreas Ghosh (Head of Human Resources) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The Council's employee survey was conducted in 2015 by an independent company, and provided staff with an opportunity to anonymously say what they thought about working for Lewisham Council. This survey was conducted every three years
- The survey asked staff for their perspectives on how they were managed and how budget reductions were managed as well as their suggestions for improvements.
- Staff strongly identify with Lewisham as a place but identify less strongly with the organisation itself.
- Staff were asked what improvements could be made, and the work environment was mentioned most frequently. The two areas that were

mentioned most often after the work environment, were better communication with staff, and more resources and a more manageable workload.

- Staff tended to feel more engaged when they held more senior positions in the Council, when they felt they had been communicated with more, and when they felt good work they'd done had been acknowledged by their managers. Part-time staff tended to feel less engaged.
- The Council's Executive Management Team (EMT) had been informed of staff's suggestions for improvement.

3.2 Andreas Ghosh answered questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- The Council did not have a dedicated team that was responsible for internal communications with staff. This function was done by the human resources section. For staff to feel that communications with them were improving, managers across the Council needed to lead this work.
- The suggestions for improvements had been referred to relevant groups in the Council to progress. The comments around performance management had been referred to the Council's Strategic Performance Improvement Group. The comments around communication and engagement had been referred to EMT for action. The comments around the work environment and technology had been referred to the two Council services responsible for those areas.
- The response rates to the survey were lower than in other similar sized local authorities. There were less responses from staff that did not work in Laurence House.
- The results of the survey had been shared with the trade unions, and they had been asked for suggestions for improvements.
- The possibility of a link between what staff feel are poor tools and equipment, and poor performance by staff would be investigated.
- Staff from a black or minority ethnic background feel that their skills are underutilised when compared to staff overall.
- The Council was planning to reduce the numbers of temporary staff employed by the Council. Sometimes temporary staff were hired to enable reorganisations to take place, so this could create temporary spikes in the numbers of temporary staff employed.
- There is a process in place for staff to raise any issues, such as not having a performance appraisal. Staff can initially raise concerns with their managers. They can then notify their union. If multiple staff highlight the same issue than unions can raise this at their regular liaison meetings. There is also a formal grievance process that staff can use that has been agreed with the trade unions.

3.3 The Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- The Committee requested that all Councillors be copied in to emails that were sent to all members of staff.

- The data in the report and presentation could have been presented in such a way that the Committee could have been able to see whether there had been improvements or deteriorations in staff's responses compared to the survey done three years ago.
- The Committee as concerned that only 51% of staff had had an annual review in the last 12 months.
- The Committee was also concerned that the work environment had been mentioned most by staff as an area for improvement but that none of the actions listed in the presentation referred to this.
- The Council should make extra effort to engage with staff that work outside of Laurence House, especially as these staff are likely to engage with members of the public frequently.
- Many staff are also residents of the borough, and the Council should consider how to best make use of this when communicating with residents.

3.4 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the report, and that the following views of the Committee be referred to Mayor and Cabinet:

The Committee was interested in the results of the employee survey, but felt there wasn't enough information about what actions would be taken as a result. The Committee wanted to see that the comments and suggestions by staff in the employee survey were acted on by the Council's management.

The Committee therefore requested that a detailed action plan is produced that reflects the range of concerns expressed by staff and sets out in detail how these concerns would be addressed. The plan should indicate a timeline for completion of actions as well as definitions of what would constitute success in each instance.

The Committee was particularly concerned by the number of comments from staff that the working environment could be improved, the fact that only 51% of staff had had an appraisal or Performance Evaluation System (PES) meeting in the last year, and the need to improve communications from senior management with staff.

4. **Poverty review - final report and recommendations**

4.1 Simone van Elk (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The Committee had decided to conduct a review into poverty at their 1 July 2015 meeting. Evidence sessions had been received from Council officers including the Chief Executive as well as an officer from the social exclusion team in the Greater London Authority's Intelligence Unit.
- The evidence gathered during the review had been presented in the report.
- The Committee was asked to put forward recommendations to submit to Mayor and Cabinet.

4.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report, and that the following recommendations be made, and the report and recommendations be referred to Mayor and Cabinet:

1. That the Council should agree a definition of poverty to set a direction for the Council's work in tackling poverty and its effects, as well as develop key performance indicators so that levels of poverty in the borough can be effectively monitored.

2. That the Council reviews how it evaluates tenders for contracts, to ensure that a proper weighting is given to tenders that would improve employment opportunities for the local workforce and business opportunities for local suppliers.

3. That the Mayor makes representations to the Department for Communities and Local Government that the implementation of the Pay to Stay housing policy should take account of the high housing costs faced by people in London and be adjusted to prevent exacerbating poverty faced by London residents.

4. That the Council should organise a poverty summit similar to those organised in City of Lincoln Council with the aim of formulating a joined-up approach against poverty in the borough. Key experts in the field, such as the Child Poverty Action Group and Joseph Rowntree Trust, should be invited to attend alongside partner organisations and representatives for Lewisham Council.

5. The Council should establish a Lewisham Poverty Taskforce to understand and tackle the poverty faced by residents and communities in Lewisham, bringing Council representatives together with partner organisations of the Council. The taskforce would be responsible for working with key stakeholders to action Council's policies that tackle poverty. The Committee recommends that the Lewisham Poverty Taskforce pursue the following issues:

- Tackling in-work poverty in the borough;
- Tackling out-of-work poverty, namely for pensioners relying on state pensions;
- Tackling poverty prevalent amongst young families struggling with a combination of housing and child care costs;
- Ensuring residents are proactively informed about legislative changes that could impact both positively and negatively on their income and general financial welfare;
- Staying up-to-date on legislative changes and advise on appropriate changes to the Council's work accordingly.

6. That the Mayor add the issue of poverty to one or more of the Cabinet portfolios to ensure that there is continuous oversight by the Council's Executive on the Council's actions to tackle poverty.

5.   Select Committee work programme

5.1 Simone van Elk introduced the report. The Committee discussed the report and decided that:

- That the item on Provision for the LGBT community be moved to 17 January 2017 meeting.
- That the scoping paper for the mini-review into Developing capacity in the voluntary sector be moved to the 15 September meeting.

- That the report on the Employment profile be received as an information item, and therefore not be subject to discussion at the Committee.

5.2 RESOLVED: That the report be noted, and that the work programme be agreed subject to the discussed amendments.

6. **Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet**

That the Committee's views under item 3 Council's employee survey – Talkback 2015, and that the Poverty review report and recommendations be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm

Chair:
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Date:
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