

<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>			
Report Title	Update from Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees and Accountability		
Key Decision	No		Item No. 3 (appendix B)
Ward	All		
Contributors	Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees and Accountability		
Class	Open	Date: 27 January 2020	

## Purpose

This report provides an update to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on some of the achievements in the Democracy, Refugees and Accountability Portfolio.

## Recommendation

Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note this report.

## Democracy

My portfolio covers responsibility for promoting democratic values and good governance. A major part of this work has been the implementation of the recommendations of the Local Democracy Review as well as oversight of governance, legal and electoral services. Current progress includes:

### Local Democracy Review

The Local Democracy Review is the result of a pledge made by the Mayor to make Lewisham Council more open, democratic and transparent. I chair the Local Democracy Working Group of eight councillors, which is delivering the 57 recommendations of the Local Democracy Review agreed in April 2019. The Working Group meets regularly in public and a summary of the work delivered to date is publicly available on the Council website at the following link: <https://lewisham.gov.uk/mayorandcouncil/local-democracy-review/delivering-the-recommendations>

Some highlights include:

- After extensive benchmarking and consultation with councillors, we will be recommending changes to Overview and Scrutiny to enable the introduction of Task and Finish Groups and improved scrutiny practice in the next municipal year.
- We have worked on a role specification guide for the various responsibilities that councillors carry out so that councillors, officers and the public better understand what is expected from each role.
- We are making changes to our internal processes and tools in order to improve the way in which we provide feedback to residents who participate in consultation and engagement activity.

- We have successfully trialled webcasting of Mayor & Cabinet and Full Council meetings and expect to have a regular service for these and other council meetings in the near future.
- We are working closely with young people to improve our current approach to online communications and social media aimed at them. We are also developing new mechanisms to increase young people's engagement with and understanding of local decision-making, such as councillor 'question time' panels in schools.
- We are upgrading our licensing system in order to streamline back office functions and provide an online platform for residents to make licensing applications and representations as well as seeing real-time updates on applications in their local area.
- We have made changes to our internal processes and tools in order to improve the way in which we provide feedback to residents who participate in consultation and engagement activity.
- We have focused on how we can better engage with 'seldom heard' voices in Lewisham and a comprehensive, multi-faceted, changing approach is being developed informed by comprehensive evaluation of traditional consultation models and a greater focus on engagement and insight.

### **Legal and Electoral Services**

Electoral Services have had a very busy 2019 with two elections, the European Parliamentary Elections and the December General Election. Both of these elections were conducted at very short notice and, even with being responsible for three constituencies at the General Election, Lewisham was one of the first London boroughs to declare all its results.

Changes have been made to constitution agreed at full Council to update and give effect to some of Local Democracy recommendations and other matters affecting governance, for example the introduction of parental leave for councillors.

Legal services have also been pro-active in assisting with a number of enforcement actions including:

- The Revenues and Benefits Departments are continuing to tackle rogue landlords across the borough. Thousands of pounds of housing benefit payments claimed unlawfully by a rogue landlord for tenants in unlicensed HMOs are set to be recovered by the Council in a forced sale of the rogue landlord's property. The monies, which total over £100,000, will be used for the Council's enforcement activities to improve housing standards across the private rented sector.
- The Private Sector Housing Agency won a successful prosecution in regard to 2 unlawful eviction charges under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 against a rogue landlord who used physical force and intimidation against his New Cross tenants. The landlord pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 4 months' custody, suspended for 12 months, 150 hours of unpaid work, £200 compensation for the tenant, a victim charge £115 and ordered to pay the Council's costs of £1,000.
- A positive outcome for the Council resulted from the prosecution of a Catford premises licence holder unlawfully supplying to the public over 90 packets of cigarettes without health warnings. The licence holder also pleaded guilty to keeping over a 1,000 litres of smuggled beer and 240 litres of smuggled wine on the premises. The licence holder was sentenced by Magistrates to a total of £4,950 of fines and costs.

## **Refugees**

My portfolio is responsible for promoting the principles of Open Lewisham, namely making Lewisham a place that welcomes and supports all migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers. It includes specific responsibility for delivering the Council's refugee resettlement programme and making Lewisham a Borough of Sanctuary.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

The Council is committed to welcoming an additional 100 refugee families by 2022 making Lewisham London's lead borough for refugee resettlement. In the past year, the service has been significantly redesigned in order to scale up for the ambitious target and also to help improve support and integration for families. This includes the recruitment of a full time refugee programme manager and the recommissioning of the support service. The Council is also supporting Lewisham Refugee Welcome to recruit and manage volunteers who wish to help.

Since June 2019, the Council has welcomed an additional nine refugee families in addition to the seventeen families already welcomed under the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme. The service is scaling up the resettlement programme with arrivals against ten further properties already planned in the current quarter.

In August 2019 the Council announced that the Refugee Council would be acting as the professional support provider for arriving refugee families for 12 months. The Refugee Council have been working with the community with Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (LRMN) to ensure that Lewisham benefits from both the national and local expertise of both organisations. Lewisham will be going out for a longer-term tender again, provisionally if approved by Mayor and Cabinet, in February 2019.

A large focus of the refugee work is focused on integrating the refugee families into Lewisham and the wider community. Learning to speak English is a key factor in this challenge. That is why we have focussed on improving the delivery of English teaching (ESOL) for our refugee families. This is something we've been working with closely on with LRMN and Lewisham Citizens. Adult Learning Lewisham are delivering enhanced ESOL provision to meet the needs of these families, and are developing a strategic function to oversee ESOL delivery for refugees.

This team are also in the process of recruiting an officer who will support the procurement of private rented sector properties, tenancy sustainment and property move on for our refugee families, and an officer who will lead our work on becoming a Borough of Sanctuary.

In June 2019, Lewisham Council signed up to Safe Passage's campaign to welcome at least 1,000 child refugees a year to the UK. The Council pledged to take a further 100 children refugees provided there is proper government funding.

### **Borough of Sanctuary**

The Council is committed to challenging the concept of a hostile environment for migrants by making Lewisham a Borough of Sanctuary in line with the principles of the City of Sanctuary movement.

In 2018 the Council helped set up the Lewisham Migration Forum which brings together organisations in Lewisham who provide services and/or advice to migrants. A key purpose of the Forum is to encourage individuals and groups across Lewisham to sign up to sanctuary principles and commit to specific action to deliver against them.

During the 2019 Refugee Week, 17-23 June, Lewisham Council hosted a Borough of Sanctuary conference in the civic suite. This conference brought together residents, activists, faith groups, businesses and experts to discuss how to challenge the hostile environment and ensure that Lewisham becomes a Borough of Sanctuary. Speakers included representatives from City of Sanctuary, Goldsmiths University, and LRMN. The event was a great success, with over 70 attendees contributing throughout the day.

In terms of the Council's own implementation of sanctuary principles, in 2019 the Council began the process of developing a Sanctuary Strategy to ensure that all Council services are delivering against the principles of sanctuary. The draft strategy is currently in pre-decision scrutiny and is expected to be in effect by this summer. The Council has also appointed a sanctuary officer who would be responsible for the Borough of Sanctuary programme – this is the first such appointment in London.

In the meantime, the Council has already been enacting sanctuary principles in our work:

- In April 2019, the Council removed the embedded Home Office worker in the No Recourse to Public Funds team to ensure that possible applicants are not deterred from applying for emergency support. The service is currently working with advocacy groups to help improve the experience that applicants have in the process.
- In July 2019 the Council committed to ensuring free school meals for all children whose families are receiving No Recourse to Public Funds.
- The Council is very conscious of the potential impact of Brexit on the 23,000 of our residents who are EU citizens without British citizenship, so we have been promoting the protection of their rights post-Brexit and are providing verification service for settled status that is free of charge. The Council is also holding a public event on 28 January to celebrate the contribution that EU citizens make to our community and also assist with settled status applications.

## **Accountability**

My portfolio covers services that help make the Council more accessible and accountable to the public, including IT, communications and the handling of enquiries and complaints as part of customer services. My portfolio is responsible for policy development and has oversight of the delivery of the Council's new Corporate Strategy. It also covers pervasive policies, such as Brexit preparation. Finally, my portfolio is also responsible for trade union liaison and delivering the Armed Forces Covenant.

## **Communications**

2019 has been marked by some significant high profile events and activities undertaken by the Council.

The opening of Beckenham Place Park and visit by the BBC Weather team's Carole Kirkwood garnered the highest number of Facebook likes in the history of the Council's account. With strategic communications planning, the launch of park and its new lake garnered coverage in the Times, Guardian, Evening Standard and was the most visited news story on the Time Out website in 2019.

Likewise, with careful planning and liaison with the Mayor, the communications team was able to secure good, positive coverage of the redevelopment plans for the area around Millwall Football Club. It led to extensive coverage across all local South East London media outlets, BBC London, BBC Radio Five Live and in the Guardian newspaper.

Our bid for Borough of Culture has led to significant audience engagement across all social media platforms following the design and implementation of the "I Am Lewisham" campaign to mobilise and involve our diverse community.

The communications team has been working to raise the profile of Lewisham schools. Positive news stories (for example pupils winning awards, positive school Ofsted news) have been included in community news section of Lewisham Life across four issues.

All London Boroughs have worked to give as much information and encourage as many EU citizens as possible to apply for settled status in the UK after we leave the European Union. Lewisham has 23,000 EU residents on the electoral roll – approximately 21,000 of them have now applied for settled status. The communications team have publicised the Council's support navigating through the process on social media and tailored community events.

In terms of online engagement, Facebook posts reached 234,000 users over 2019. The website's news stories from March to December 2019 had 70,000 unique views, with Beckenham Place Park being the most read story with 13,000 unique views.

The Bakerloo Line Extension has seen wide reach across Facebook, with 34,218 reached from Facebook adverts with 3,180 post engagement.

Videos to promote Small Business Saturday were viewed over 8,000 times, while reaching an audience over 25,000 people.

### **Customer Services**

There has been an increase in Customer Satisfaction Scores from 6.64/10 in 2018/19: to 7.67/10 for the current year to date.

The team who deal with FOI responses have been making substantial progress in meeting the FOI response time target. In Quarter 1 of 2019 69% of FOI responses were responded to within target, by Quarter 4 of 2019 this had been increased to 82%, an increase of 13%. Currently, the FOI team are below capacity and with further recruitment the team expects to improve these request response times further still.

New telephone technology has been rolled out allowing call centre staff to work remotely in line with the Council's Smarter Working Policy.

The Register Office has been refurbished to offer a better environment for customers and increasing office space to be able to offer greater availability of appointments, reduce waiting times for services and increase income to the Council.

The Out of Hours call handling arrangements with Greenwich has been extended for a further three years with no increased costs.

We have opened a BSL (British Sign Language) line within the corporate call centre to support hearing impaired residents in the borough who seek assistance via the telephone.

The Council is proud of the introduction of Opposite Sex Civil Partnerships with the first ceremonies having taken place on 31st December.

## **IT and Digital Services**

The focus for IT and Digital Services remains the stabilisation and performance of the Council's ICT infrastructure. This is delivered via a combination of the Shared ICT Service with Brent and Southwark and the Council's own internal IT service.

2019 saw the introduction of the new website that is more user friendly for residents to access Council services, whilst upgrading the customer relationship management (CRM) system.

The project to migrate all Laurence House based officers to laptops is now in its final stages and planning is well advanced for the next phase of work to equip officers and members across the remainder of the estate with equipment appropriate to their roles. The feedback from those who have been issued with the new kit continues to be extremely positive, and indicates that the project is meeting its objectives of making staff more agile, and more productive.

The Shared ICT Service have published an IT service strategy for the next 3 years. This reaffirms the commitment of the London Boroughs of Lewisham, Brent and Southwark to work together collaboratively on a single IT infrastructure that supports and enables our individual digital journeys through the vision to "deliver an outstanding, public sector infrastructure service." The new Managing Director of the Shared Service is now in place and the permanent senior management team are currently being recruited.

The Council's Applications Management team have worked with Liquid Logic to resolve the issues with the LCS system that were referenced in the recent children's social care Ofsted report. These were caused by a fault in the software that has now been addressed, and the system is now stable.

Work is now commencing on developing the Council's Digital Strategy led by the Council's new Director of IT and Digital Services which will align to our Corporate Strategy and ensure that Lewisham has a clear journey into a digital future.

There have been over 300 partner led IT training sessions for residents including new initiatives in the Lewisham Irish Centre and Lee Green as well as the established sessions run by Phoenix, DWP and Catbytes.

Over 50 smartphone training sessions have been delivered by the telecoms company Three as part of their Discovery programme. The sessions have taken place in a number of Lewisham settings including sheltered schemes, knitting clubs, community libraries and lunch clubs as well as a giant 'Techy Tea Party' for the Positive Ageing Council.

There has been partnership work with Phoenix Housing and Lewisham Homes that has funded digital champions to support jobseekers with the digital aspect of employability. A number of Digital Zones continue to support vulnerable residents with their immediate needs including blue badge applications, benefit claims and changes of circumstances.

Partnership work with the City of London Corporation has continued and they have hosted and delivered 5 higher level IT training session for unemployed Lewisham residents. The Go On partnership was actively involved in the 'Festival of Creative Ageing' film making project and is currently mapping all IT services in partnership with Community Connections.

## **Policy Development**

Progress is being made to better align the Council's performance reporting, strategic and service planning and consultation and engagement capacity to effect delivery of the Corporate Strategy. A dedicated cross-Directorate group, chaired by an Executive Director,

is overseeing the strategic co-ordination and alignment of business systems and processes to ensure accountability for action. The delivery of specific Corporate Strategy commitments is being tracked at Directorate Management Teams and the Executive Management Team, with overall accountability to the Mayor & Cabinet.

On a practical level, progress is also being made on the delivery of individual Corporate Strategy commitments which is regularly monitored with the Mayor. Some examples include: over 200 care leavers have now been exempted from Council Tax; more than 400 business have been supported through the Council's business growth programme (exceeding our target of 300 two years ahead of schedule). In addition, Lewisham is now well on its way to doubling the number of London Living Wage accredited employers in the borough by 2022.

The Council continues with preparation and planning for Brexit. Officers are updating business continuity arrangements to ensure that the functions performed and services provided by the Council are responsive to Brexit risks. Officers are also now tracking a suite of high-level indicators which will enable the Council to be responsive to business risks such as unanticipated increases in service demand. Supplementing these arrangements is a wider engagement with the London region and through which Lewisham and other local authorities are able to escalate issues directly to Whitehall. As part of this, the Council is working with Directorate Management Teams to track and review the bookcase of major Council strategies. This will help the Council ensure that Brexit-proofing is integrated into the process of strategic development and service planning.

In addition to the above, an annual review of key corporate policies is underway to refresh the corporate policy infrastructure supporting the Corporate Strategy. Amongst these, a new Single Equality Framework 2020-24 is in development, whilst a review of the Council's Corporate Equality Policy (timed incorporate learning from the councillor-led in-depth review of equality in Lewisham) has commenced. Also underway is a refresh of the Council's Corporate Performance Management Framework, which codifies the performance management business system as well as the habits behaviours and ways of work that underpin it. Furthermore, building on the Local Democracy Review, the Council will be refreshing its Engagement Policy to ensure that it is better able to meet the needs and expectations of Lewisham residents.

### **Trade Union Liaison**

The Council is committed to promoting the support that trade unions provide to staff and work is underway liaising with the council's recognised trade unions to make better use of the Works Council so that there is an effective forum to share concerns and proposals for improving the working environment.

### **Armed Forces Covenant**

The Council refreshed its Armed Forces Covenant in 2018 to ensure that armed forces members, veterans and families living in Lewisham are not unfairly disadvantaged in accessing Council services and support. Lewisham Council was awarded with the Gold Award from the Ministry of Defence's Employers Recognition Scheme in November 2019. This award acknowledges the outstanding work that Lewisham Council does to support members of the armed forces community, including reservists, veterans and spouses, at work and across the borough.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no specific financial implications directly arising from considering and noting this report.

## **Legal Implications**

There are no specific legal implications of relevance to this report.

## **Equalities implications**

With respect to the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Scheme 2016-20, the activities described in this report make a clear contribution to the following equality objectives:

- Tackling victimisation, discrimination and harassment
- Improving access to services
- Closing the gap in outcomes between citizens
- Increasing mutual understanding and respect within and between communities
- Increasing participation and engagement

The various activities described in this report will benefit all protected characteristics. However, specific actions such as work being undertaken on the refugee resettlement programme, borough of sanctuary, Brexit planning and the Local Democracy Review, will help mitigate the particular risk of discrimination or disadvantage faced by the protected characteristics of age, race, religion/ belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Although not a characteristic protected under the Equality Act 2010, the activities described in this report will also help to tackle socio-economic inequality, which is part of the lived experience of all characteristics protected under the Equality Act.