

Minutes of the Sustainable Development Select Committee Thursday, 12 November 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Liam Curran (Chair), Louise Krupski (Vice-Chair), Obajimi Adefiranye, Suzannah Clarke, Eva Stamirowski and James-J Walsh and Bill Brown

Apologies: Councillor Sophie Davis

Also present: Councillor Sophie McGeevor (Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Zahur Khan (Director of Public Realm), Paul Moore (Interim Director of Inclusive Regeneration), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm) and Selwyn Thompson (Director of Financial Services)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2020
 - 1.1. Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September be agreed as an accurate record.
2. Declarations of interest
 - 2.1. Councillor Krupski declared an interest as a member of Lewisham Cyclists.
3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet
 - 3.1. Responses were received on flood risk; parks and open spaces (including the parks management in-depth review); and the development of the local plan from Mayor and Cabinet be noted. Members welcomed the response from Mayor and Cabinet on the approach to flooding in the Hither Green area. It was also noted that the Committee would follow up on discussions with the Environment Agency regarding the borough's strategic flood defences.
 - 3.2. Resolved: that the responses from Mayor and Cabinet be noted.
4. Lower Sydenham and Bell Green vision study
 - 4.1. Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm) addressed the Committee. He apologised that the report was not available to the Committee (due to the volume of work currently being carried out in response to the pandemic) and he committed to bring the report to the Committee before any future decision at Mayor and Cabinet.
5. Budget cuts
 - 5.1. The Executive Director for Housing Regeneration and Public Realm introduced the report - stating the difficult financial situation facing the Council and the additional costs associated with the response to the pandemic - as well as the approach being taken by officers to balance the budget. The following key points were noted:
 - Costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic were rising daily and had already reached £68m (both through increases in demand and lost income).

- Frequent requests from the Government for the Council to take on additional responsibilities were not met with guarantees for additional funding.
- It was not yet certain whether the Government would reimburse the Council's additional spending to date.
- The Council was overspending before the pandemic, pressures in children's services, environment and technology had already reached £10m.
- Spending controls and cuts had been implemented for the current financial year.
- There was no clarity about the ongoing financial settlement from Government.
- The Council's medium term financial strategy indicated that the Council would need to make savings of £40m over the next three years.
- These cuts would have to be made after ten years of ongoing financial austerity and cuts, which had reduced the available expenditure per person in Lewisham by £500.
- The cuts were being proposed in 'thematic strands'.
- £15.9m of savings had been identified – further cuts would be proposed at the Committee's January meeting.

5.2. The Committee considered the following savings proposals:

- A03 corporate transport arrangements
- E02 income from building control
- F15 environmental operations review
- F16 new waste strategy
- F17 road safety enforcement
- F18 Controlled parking zone extension
- A02 hybrid enforcement roles
- D06 Catford estate consolidation
- D01 generating income from the asset base
- A01 productivity staffing savings

5.3. The Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm responded to questions from the Committee on each of the proposals - the following key points were noted:

5.4. A03 Corporate transport arrangements

- Members were supportive of the cut - with concerns about: how it would be implemented in order to make mobility adjustments for staff; the demand on local car clubs; the promotion of public transport and making best use of officers' living in the borough to carry out local work.

5.5. F15 environmental operations review and F16 new waste strategy

- Members emphasised the importance of keeping the streets clean and raised questions about: numbers of staff that might be made redundant; the risk of persistent perceptions of uncleanliness in the borough; the change in the handling of complaints; clarity on the descriptions of 'hybrid roles'; income from commercial waste; the risk of illegal dumping and fly-tipping (and the measures that might be taken to prevent it); work with businesses on waste minimisation; mechanisation; communications; the usefulness of the Council website; the potential to create business improvement districts.
- Members also asked about: the potential of implementing a by-law to ban plastic shopping bags; and the potential to create new opportunities for

job sharing or part time working rather than making full-time redundancies.

- Members emphasised the importance of communicating with residents about keeping Lewisham tidy; and the benefits of place based management – rather than the sharing of similar responsibilities between different teams.

5.6. F17 road safety enforcement

- The Executive Director noted that the Council would be carrying out as much enforcement activity as possible (however, it required some upfront investment).

5.7. F18 CPZ extension

- Members emphasised the importance of carrying out this work strategically, carefully and sensitively – with thorough consultation - in order to emphasise the benefits. It was noted that a cautious balance had to be found between enforcement and the perception of money making.
- The Executive Director noted the importance of ‘winning hearts and minds’ through a considered, evidence based approach.

5.8. A02 hybrid enforcement roles

- Members noted concerns about: the limited information available on potential staffing cuts as well as potential cuts to services (particularly out of hours noise abatement) and potential commercial benefits.
- The Executive Director noted that there were unlikely to be staff cuts in the first instance and that the emphasis would be on closer working between teams. He also committed to return to the Committee for scrutiny during the review process.

5.9. D06 Catford estate consolidation

- Paul Moore (Director of Inclusive Regeneration) outlined the proposal and answered questions on: the numbers of staff likely to move to Catford under the new arrangements; the Broadway theatre; work with higher education institutions and youth clubs; the civic suite and civic meetings.

5.10. D01 generating income from the asset base

- Members noted concerns about the impact on community uses from the commercialisation of the Council’s assets and public spaces.

5.11. A01 productivity staffing savings

- Members expressed concerns about the potential to deliver this saving and the likelihood of the ongoing financial benefits that would accrue from it.

5.12. Resolved – that the Committee would refer its views to Mayor and Cabinet (via the Public Accounts Select Committee) as follows:

- The Committee notes the scale of the challenge facing the Council and it recognises the difficulties facing officers in proposing these cuts. Committee members wish to emphasise the severe and continued reduction in funding from central government over more than ten years of austerity – which has led to a reduction in spending on services of £500 per Lewisham resident. Members believe that further work should be carried out to communicate the reasons for the cuts to residents.
- Members are concerned about the impact on the lives of staff who might be made redundant as a result of cuts and reorganisations. The

Committee believes that, where possible, options should be considered for job sharing and flexible working between staff - rather than the deletion of full time posts.

- In relation to proposals F15 (environmental operations review) and F16 (new waste strategy) - the Committee supports the move to increase place based environmental services and the joined up management of areas. The Committee also believes that further work should be carried out on a proactive and informative 'keep Lewisham tidy' campaign, which emphasises everyone's responsibility to keep Lewisham's streets clean.
- In relation to proposal F18 (controlled parking zone extension) the Committee believes that any proposed changes should be carried out with the utmost sensitivity and care – in full consultation with Lewisham's communities. Members also emphasise the importance of strategically and carefully integrating the timing of any changes with plans to improve Lewisham's walking and cycling routes.

6. Select Committee work programme

- 6.1. Resolved: that the report be noted – and that the Committee would discuss the work programme for its January meeting at a later date.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Chair:

Date:
