

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 21 July 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown, Peter Bernards, Juliet Campbell, Patrick Codd, Liam Curran, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon, Luke Sorba, Sophie Davis and Kim Powell.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Jim Mallory, Councillor Chris Barnham, Councillor Paul Bell, Councillor Amanda De Ryk, Councillor Silvana Kelleher and Councillor Coral Howard.

9. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on June 23 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

10. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Joan Millbank declared a personal interest in Item 3 as a member of Lewisham Local Collaborative which was referred to in the report.

Councillor Sophie Davis declared a personal interest in Item 3 as an appointed member of Voluntary Services Lewisham.

11. Scrutiny of the Council's Covid-19 Response - Update Report

The report was introduced by the Chief Executive and the Director of Public Services.

Councillor Mallory referred to the financial section in paragraph 6.8.1 and noted that while there had been a £53.2m financial impact, only £18m had been received leaving a gap of £35m. He urged for robust financial monitoring and asked for updated information. The Acting Chief Finance Officer reported a further £3.2m had been received as a share of a national allocation and that the next income return would be prepared at the end of July.

Councillor Campbell asked if a public health communications strategy was being formulated as the borough headed out of lockdown. Councillor Millbank added that a summary of lessons learned was required as well as consistent data management. The Chief Executive explained that the borough was mirroring Londonwide messaging which reflected NHS provision and timing provided by Public Health England.

The Chair pointed out there was likely to be new rules on social distancing and public behaviour including the requirement to wear masks in shops and he asked if the communications strategy targeted likely affected groups. Councillor Codd underlined the need to collaborate with local communities,

the rapid introduction of traffic calming measures being a prime example of that need.

The Chief Executive indicated a new Director of Programme Management would tackle some of the issues raised and indicated there were lessons that could be learned on air quality and traffic calming.

Councillor Muldoon highlighted a review of BAME Health inequalities to be undertaken by Birmingham City Council and Lewisham and he issued a general invitation for nominations to be made to both an Academic Board and an Advisory Board.

Councillor Curran raised three questions, asking when normal Council meetings might return; what had been the financial impact on major town centre developments such as the A205 realignment and was it possible for emergency signage to have details of sources of further information.

The Chair indicated he thought the next step for the return of meetings would be a hybrid option and he asked for an update on the feasibility of this to be considered in August. The Acting Chief Finance Officer said information on the financial impact on town centre developments would be provided subsequent to the meeting. The Chief Executive said revisions to road closure signage could form part of a wider communications strategy.

Councillor Bernards raised concerns about the increase in the numbers of rough sleepers. He noted steps already taken by Councillor Bonavia with regard to those with No Recourse to Public Funds. He pointed out those who lacked access to digital technology might be prevented from making Council Tax reduction claims or from accessing Homesearch facilities. The Director of Public Services responded by explaining safeguards had been put in place for the digitally excluded including all Universal Credit claimants. A comprehensive telephone service was in place for all Homesearch queries.

Councillor Bell, the Cabinet Member for Housing explained that in terms of assisting rough sleepers the policy was now mandated as 'Priority Need' rather than the previous 'Everyone In'. He reported on steps taken to assess and assist all rough sleepers apart from a small minority who refused to engage.

Councillor Campbell asked if greater communication could take place with residents with prevention messages for harder to reach groups. The Chief Executive said all communication channels including social media outlets were being used reflecting Londonwide messages on social distancing. She said she would ask the Director of Public Health to provide an update on translations which were available.

Councillor Sorba sought fuller details of the Summer Activities programme. He also asked if the road safety measures introduced during the pandemic would be reviewed in September.

The Executive Director for Children & Young People said a guide on Summer

Activities would be produced shortly containing fewer but more targeted activities.

RESOLVED that:

(1) the update on the Council's response to COVID-19 be noted; and

(2) a further update on the the Council's response to COVID-19 be received in August.

12. Key Decision Plan

The Key Decision Plan was presented by the Head of Committee Services.

Councillor Curran asked if there were to be any emergency executive meetings scheduled in August. The Head of Committee Services said none were currently scheduled but the Mayor could arrange additional meetings if required.

Councillor Curran noted an update on Climate Emergency plans was not due until February 2021 and wondered if an earlier consideration might be more measured. The Head of Committee Services noted the concern raised and promised to discuss this with the officer responsible.

Councillor Howard noted the proposal to award a 5 year concession contract at Beckenham Place Park and asked if there could be a review after one year. The Head of Committee Services reported there was a changed lead officer for the project and he would consult with him and report back subsequent to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

13. Decisions Made by Mayor and Cabinet on 10 June 2020 - open session

Financial Forecasts

The Financial Forecasts item considered by the Mayor & Cabinet on July 9 was reviewed by the Business Panel.

Councillor Sorba highlighted the expenditure on residential placements arising from the Council meeting its legal obligations. He suggested additional support for Early Help services could bring down the need for residential placements.

The Acting Chief Finance Officer confirmed the growing level of cost pressure on Children's Services. The Executive Director for Children & Young People stated there was a financial recovery plan in place and short and longer term savings would be achieved centred on Early Help and prevention.

Councilor Codd said the report illustrated a higher demand for Council services during the pandemic and he asked how pandemic and non-pandemic

costs were allotted. The Director of Financial Services observed this was the first monitoring report of the financial year and Covid-19 costs needed to be closely monitored. Accounting codes using widely understood definitions were being used to that end.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

14. Exclusion of the press and public

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act, as amended by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (Amendments) (England) Regulations 2006:-

Decision made by the Mayor and Cabinet on 9 July 2020

- i. Settlement on outstanding litigation case regarding non-payment of an
- ii. affordable housing contribution at 99 Plough Way

15. Decisions Made by the Mayor and Cabinet on 10 June 2020 - closed session

Settlement on outstanding litigation case regarding non-payment of an affordable housing contribution at 99 Plough Way.

The Business Panel further considered this confidential item originally considered by the Mayor & Cabinet on July 9.

The Panel received a presentation on this case stretching back to 2003 from the Director of Planning. She explained specialist legal advice had been obtained and that the recommendation proposed was seen as the only viable option offering positive advantage to the Council. The Director of Planning laid out the safeguards put in place in the years following to ensure a repetition of this case did not occur again.

RESOLVED that the decision of the Mayor & Cabinet be upheld.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm