

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 24 November 2020 at 7.05 pm

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Chief Executive, Director of Public Services, Director of Public Health, Head of Highways and Traffic, Head of Scrutiny, Head of Business and Committees, Principal Lawyer, and Transport and Policy Development Manager.

Clerk: Senior Committee Manager.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Liam Curran.

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the last meeting held on 13 October 2020 be confirmed and agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of Interests

The meeting noted personal interests in relation to Item 3 “Scrutiny of the Council’s Covid-19 Response – Update Report” as follows:

- Cllr Joan Millbank – declared that she is a member of the Lewisham Local Collaborative.

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

The Chief Executive introduced the report to the Panel, advising that staff were aware that Members had been appreciative of their efforts. She commended efforts by the Director of Public Service (Director of PS) and the Director of Public Health (Director of PH) for leading the Council’s Covid-19 response arrangements since the first lockdown announcement in March 2020.

The Panel was advised by the Chief Executive that the scale and pace in which the Council should respond had been heightened by the recent Government’s announcements about a second wave of lockdown restrictions, and arrangements that should be in place after the Christmas period. The Panel noted that as part of the announcements, work was underway to commence local testing, and Council officials had a series of logistical meetings with their colleagues in the National Health Service (NHS) to identify how to proceed with the rollout of the vaccination programme.

The Chief Executive also pointed out to the Panel that officers were aware of the impact on the role of scrutiny in terms of implementing its work programme. Notwithstanding that, input from scrutiny Members as an ongoing channel for suggestions and feedback would continue to be useful in the process. Thus, scrutiny remained integral to the Council's Covid-19 response effort. It was stated that the combined efforts with scrutiny had enabled officers to balance the requirements of delivering in a transparent and democratic setting, whilst meeting the demands of the unprecedented challenges posed by the crisis.

In concluding her introductory remarks, the Chief Executive stated that the Director of PS would present further updates to the Panel.

The Director of PS stated that since the last report to the Panel, schools and colleges had remained opened. More shops were allowed to stay open. There would be no requirement to follow the formal shielding approach during the second wave of the Covid-19 lockdown. However, the Council would continue to support critical services. Staff assigned to the Covid-19 Action Team would be delivering non-critical services. Work was underway to distribute grants to businesses who were experiencing financial problems as a result of the crisis. There would be ongoing supply of personal protective equipment at a local level.

Commenting on the data-sets in the report, the Director of PS highlighted that the increase in the level of the 7-day infection rates was due to pre-lockdown gatherings into the second wave of the pandemic. However, infection rates were stabilising nationally. Although Lewisham had a lower number of infections in comparison to most London boroughs, plans were underway to minimise risks through efforts to set up a local test-booking system. It was stated that the Council would also follow national guidelines in test and trace applications once it becomes clear about the role of councils in the arrangements. Meanwhile, the Council would continue working with its NHS partners on how to identify people who had the virus without showing signs of having it. It was stated that those who show symptoms would be required to self-isolate, in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

In response to questions raised, the Director of PS advised the Panel that lessons learnt from the Liverpool approach was that it was not cost-effective to carry out tests for the whole population at the same time. Thus, should the test and trace pilot which the Council was participating in becomes successful, the rollout would be delivered in a targeted way in Lewisham, with a view to prevent onward transmission. As an indication, staff with nursing backgrounds working in local schools and care homes could be empowered to carry out targeted testing, thus reducing a strain on the Council's resources.

The Panel also noted confirmation by the Director of PS that the Council was continuing its effort to contact clinically vulnerable people. Therefore, concerns about food supplies would likely be dealt with by staff providing information to on how to access the appropriate support service.

The Director of PH also responded to questions, advising the Panel that if the current test and trace pilot scheme becomes successful, and a rollout was required, the Council would likely follow national guidelines for symptomatic

testing. Meanwhile, the Private Coronavirus (PCR) swab remained the 'gold' standard for symptomatic testing. Thus, the Council was directing residents who had symptoms to book tests via 111 telephone hot-line. Alternatively, residents could book via the Council's on-line portal which contained information about local testing sites, or request a home testing kit.

In terms of the infection period, the Director of PH gave an assurance to the Panel that the work undertaken by public health colleagues in the test and trace pilot scheme were supported by evidence. It was stated that transmission of the virus could occur prior to someone becoming symptomatic. Therefore, as part of the local test and trace plans, staff had been trained to gather information about whom those with symptoms had been in contact with, as a means of tracing individuals who had been exposed to the virus. It was stated that those exposed to the virus would be advised to self-isolate in order to minimise and/or prevent further transmission.

The Director of PH also confirmed to the Panel that the Council was sharing information about infection risks with community champions. The Director of PH confirmed that her team had also met with the Young Mayor's advisers, with a view to recruit young community champions to help convey appropriate messages about risks associated with the spread of the virus, and how to minimise transmission.

The Panel requested that officers should share data about the number of positive and negative test cases identified in Lewisham during the test and trace pilot. Officers should also share information on how long the pilot would last.

Action: PS & PH

The Panel also noted clarification from the Chief Executive that Lewisham applied to be in the test and trace pilot scheme independently, and not part of a consortium. It was stated that the learning, evaluation and insight from the pilot could help to shape future policy in reducing health inequalities that currently exist. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council had started engaging with local inter-faith forums and the Black and Minority Ethnic community, with a view to understand barriers to people taking the vaccine, including the flu jab.

In light of a suggestion, the Chief Executive advised the Panel that the NHS was leading the rollout of the vaccination programme, and that a Vaccinations Committee had been set up to prioritise the work based on clinical needs. Thus, a vaccination update in an all-Member briefing could be effective if there was an NHS colleague present to lead the discussion. Notwithstanding that, considerations had been given to utilise General Practitioners' surgeries, libraries, and pop-up vaccination centres in parks and other public spaces in the event of a decision to rollout the vaccines. The Chief Executive stated that the role of ward councillors would be vital in sending out appropriate messages to the community about the testing and vaccination programmes.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair, Councillor Bill Brown, thanked the Officers for the introduction, presentation, and responses to questions. The Chair asked the Panel to note recognition by the Chief Executive about of the role of scrutiny in the

decision-making process. The Chair welcomed appreciation by the Officers about the importance of the Panel's contribution in supporting the work of the Council and its partners in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

4. Update on temporary measures to support safer walking and cycling in response to the COVID 19 pandemic

The Panel received and considered an update report presented by the Head of Highways and Transport (Head of H&T) about changes to the Lewisham and Lee Green Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN), and the overarching measures to support safer walking and cycling in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The Panel asked questions about applications of the measures, and noted responses by officers.

1. Cycling Incentives

In response to questions raised, the Head of H&T advised the Panel that the Council could not deliver its highways and transport programme in the current financial year as it had intended because funding stipulations issued by the Government required councils to focus on delivering measures in response to the pandemic. In spite of that, the Council remained supportive of active and sustainable modes of transport, and was implementing a bicycle-loan scheme to support key workers.

The Panel was further advised that following recent negotiations between Transport for London (TfL) and the Department for Transport, the Government announced that additional funds could be available to London councils. The Head of H&T stated that the extra funds could present an opportunity for the Council to re-prioritise its earlier commitments to deliver a balanced highways and transport programme, including further incentives to support cycling initiatives in Lewisham in addition to the loan scheme.

2. Air Quality & Traffic: Monitoring Implementation

In light of a concern, the Head of H&T informed the Panel that the Council was undertaking traffic counts, and had installed air quality monitors at specific locations across the wider LTN system. Furthermore, the Council was utilising Global Positioning System (GPS) data and other highways performance reliable information provided by TfL to monitor and compare its performance with other London councils. The Panel noted that officers were also engaging with residents on matters relating to the Council's climate change initiatives.

The Head of H&T stated that key success to monitoring was to gauge how the measures were improving living conditions for residents. Therefore, although preliminary evidence suggested that air quality in areas where the measures had been implemented was not getting significantly worse, the Council would continue to monitor more closely, with a view to undertake an impact assessment to inform proposals in the final decision report.

3. Community Engagement & Monitoring

The Panel noted arrangements to support current initiatives relating to low traffic neighbourhoods, pop-up cycling facilities, school streets programmes, and the creation of additional pedestrianised public spaces for people to move about in conveniently. The Panel expressed a concern that residents' living arrangements were significantly distorted because of inadequate notice prior to implementing the measures in their neighbourhoods.

Speaking in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees and Accountability, Councillor Kevin Bonavia stated that the Government required that councils should spend the money in a very short space of time in the middle of a pandemic, in spite of earlier concerns that it could impact adversely on community engagement timeline. Councillor Bonavia stated that the Government would be informed of the lessons, however, the Panel should be assured that the Council would continue to consult and provide adequate notice on issues that impact residents' lives.

The statement by Councillor Bonavia was echoed by the Head of H&T who confirmed to the Panel that the Government's funding requirements provided an unrealistic timeframe for councils to implement the highways and traffic measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding that, the Council had been using the common-place approach as a tool for initial engagement with residents, with a view to collate feedback about the effects of its transport and highway schemes on living conditions, and as a means to monitor the impact. It was stated that the Council was also utilising digital media and ward councillors' network channels to collate feedback about implementation of the measures, and was considering widening its communication channels through the citizens' spaces it had created.

4. Demographics/Socio-Economic factors

In light of a concern, the Head of H&T gave an assurance to the Panel that the areas selected for implementing the measures were not based on socio-economic factors. However, it was normal for opinions to be divided on such matters. Notwithstanding that, officers had to balance the integrity of the measures and the benefits of delivering them. In view of that, the Council recognised that some people would want to use their cars, and was sending out messages to discourage short journeys in order to free the road network for essential and emergency travels. Thus, it was unlikely that residents who were using vehicles to earn their living would be disadvantaged as a result of the measures.

The Panel was further advised by the Head of H&T that the traffic and air monitors currently installed across the borough were not targeted at areas deemed as poor neighbourhoods. It was stated that the monitors would be relocated to other locations, with a view to collate wider range of data to gauge how the measures were affecting travel patterns and traffic

movements in Lewisham, including information on whether there had been an increase in cycling up-take. However, traffic counts data would not provide details on cycling usage in terms of age, race, gender, disability and social economic class, but could form part of the Council's monitoring programme when undertaking an active route survey.

5. Prioritisation & the next steps

The Panel received confirmation from the Head of H&T that one of the aims of the highway and transport measures was that those walking and cycling should do so safely, whilst maintaining social distancing. Thus, prioritisation of the LTN was linked to the work the Council was undertaking as part of its assessment of the impact of its Healthy Neighbourhood initiatives. Thus, a summary from the assessment of the various traffic and highways schemes that had been developed, and the impact on prioritisation against the various criteria set, would be published when completed.

The Head of H&T advised the Panel that the Council's resources allocated for the traffic and highways work was focused in making the LTN a success, and to undertake an assessment to gauge the benefits of implementation on residents' lives. Work to complete monitoring to inform the next steps was underway. Successes as a result of the LTN filter monitors would be replicated in other local neighbourhoods. The pedestrian space that were implemented as part of the social-distancing scheme would be reviewed from time to time to determine whether they were still relevant. The Council would likely return to implementing Healthier Neighbourhood Scheme rather than focusing on individual streets.

The Head of H&T stated that in addition to comments by Members about socio-economic assessment, officers would take into account views about transparency and prioritisation as part of the common place scheme. The Transport Policy and Development Manager confirmed that a spreadsheet with criteria measures would be developed to report on progress undertaken in relation to the school streets scheme.

The Panel also noted clarification from the Head of H&T that as part of the pandemic, and the need to formulate the Council's transport response, there were a number of projects already underway as part of the Deptford Park Neighbourhood Scheme, and Sangley Road. That funding got withdrawn. Thus, the Council was unable to complete the full process, and instead of a traffic notice, it undertook an experimental traffic order to complete the process. In terms of common place analysis, the Panel noted that comments received from residents varied, however, the Council would be undertaking a more detailed analysis for future reporting in relation to the Deptford Park Neighbourhood Scheme.

In regard to report about repeated vandalism on Kitto Road, the Head of H&T advised the Panel that it was likely that appropriate measures would be implemented as part of the Council's citizens' space initiative, subject to further funding

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. Key Decision Plan

The report was introduced to the Panel by the Head of Business and Committees. He requested that Members note and comment on upcoming key decisions.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. Decisions Made by Mayor on 11 November 2020 - open session

RESOLVED that the decisions be noted..

7. Scrutiny Update Report

In regard to the scrutiny of the budget and on engagement, the Head of Scrutiny advised the Panel that in the current cycle of meetings, Select Committees would be scrutinising budget cuts proposals. It was stated that three Select Committees had met so far this cycle, with three still to meet, and they would all be invited to make referrals to the Public Account Select Committee (PAC). It was noted that comments from PAC and referrals from the other committees would be forwarded to the Mayor and Cabinet as single referral from scrutiny. The Panel was advised there would be further scrutiny on the budget proposals in January to address the remaining gap in the Council's budget.

In terms of engagement, the Panel noted that it had been difficult to undertake work on community engagement because of the restrictions as a result of the pandemic. However remote engagement was possible, and Scrutiny Managers would be consulting with Chairs of Select Committees on options.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.59pm.

Chair