

Minutes of the Sustainable Development Select Committee

Thursday, 14 January 2021 at 7.00pm

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

Also present: Councillor Sophie McGeevor (Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Zahur Khan (Director of Public Realm), James Masini (Principal Development and Land Manager), Paul Moore (Interim Director for Regeneration and Place), Katharine Nidd (Strategic Procurement and Commercial Services Manager), Martin O'Brien (Climate Resilience Manager) and Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration & Public Realm)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020

1.1 Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 There were none.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

3.1 Resolved: that the response from Mayor and Cabinet be noted.

4. Climate Emergency Action Plan

4.1 Martin O'Brien (Climate Resilience Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The declaration is a community response to the international climate emergency.
- The declaration is not accompanied by an increase in funding from Government.
- The target for the borough to be carbon neutral by 2030 is extremely challenging.
- Lewisham's climate emergency action plan was published just prior to the outbreak of the global pandemic.
- There had been progress with the action plan – but it would need to be streamlined and adapted to meet ongoing challenges.
- The most severe impacts of the climate emergency would be felt by the most vulnerable communities.
- Social justice should be at the centre of the fundamental changes required to meet the challenge of the climate emergency.

4.2 Martin O'Brien responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- Upgrading the efficiency of buildings was one of the key ways in which the borough could reduce emissions.

- Officers are looking for opportunities to bring in funding to support the roll out of solar panels and other renewable energy technologies – but the principal focus was on increasing energy efficiency and reducing energy demand.
- Work was progressing with the development of the heat network from the South London Combined Heat and Power facility (SELCHP) and the new development at Convoys Wharf¹.
- Information was expected imminently about the green homes grant local authority delivery scheme joint bid for funding with Lewisham Homes.
- Work had been carried out using the Council tax reduction mailing list to target households that might be in fuel poverty – but partnerships with community organisations remained the best way of carrying out this work.
- Work on cycle way four and the electric vehicle charging network had been disrupted by COVID-19.

4.3 Councillor Sophie McGeevor (Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport) responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- The Council only removes trees that are dangerous – or that pose a risk of litigation.
- The role of trees in urban settings is principally one of climate change mitigation (through shading, cooling and managing flood risk) – rather than carbon absorption. The best way to reduce carbon emissions was not to produce them in the first place.
- Work on cycle way four had recommenced following the disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4 In the Committee's discussion – the following key points were also noted:

- Members welcomed the work carried out by officers.
- The Committee would welcome additional information on the Council's website about the climate emergency – and the actions that residents could take to live more sustainably.
- The importance of trees in climate change mitigation.
- Councillor Krupski proposed that - in recognition of the seriousness of the climate emergency - the budget for the Council's climate emergency work be ring-fenced from cuts - and – as additional savings were made from the delivery of the action plan - that consideration be given to adding additional officers to the team. The Chair called for a vote on the proposal and it was not supported by the Committee.

4.5 Resolved: that the Committee would refer its views to Mayor and Cabinet as follows –

- The Committee recommends that the Council puts on its website a climate emergency page, which contains a guide for residents on how to live more sustainably. This would be the most direct practical and visible way of

¹ Members asked for an update on progress with the Government-funded heat network connection between South London Combined Heat and Power (SELCHP) and the new development at Convoys Wharf. Since the meeting officers have fed back concerns raised by Veolia about a lack of progress on the commercial agreement with Hutchison Property Group. This agreement is a key milestone for the Government's release of funding and there is a significant risk that the investment in Lewisham may be lost if this cannot be achieved.

engaging with residents and businesses, therefore leading by example.

5. Bell Green and Lower Sydenham vision study

5.1 James Masini (Principal Development and Land Manager) introduced the report – setting out the initial work on the development of a vision for Bell Green and Lower Sydenham in anticipation of the future extension of the Bakerloo line.

5.2 James Masini responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- The proposed location of the station and its surroundings would be key in determining the density of housing that could be provided.
- The potential heights of buildings was at a very early stage of consideration.
- Future designs would meet the Council’s accessibility requirements.
- Housing and roads would be designed to minimise impact on residents – whilst acknowledging that access for buses and traffic would be a necessary part of the townscape.
- Further work would be carried out to manage traffic movement and access for double deck buses on Southend Lane.

5.3 In the Committee’s discussion – the following key points were also noted:

- The predominance of roads in the Bell Green and Lower Sydenham area separated the neighbourhood into disconnected parts.
- The importance of the work carried out by the Sydenham Society on a vision for the area.
- There were a number of issues with the location of the existing Lower Sydenham station (including lack of knowledge in the community about its location).

5.4 Resolved: that the report be noted.

6. Budget cuts

6.1 Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm) introduced the report, noting the ongoing pressures facing the Council and the difficulty of making year on year cuts through more than ten years of Government funding reductions. He also outlined the financial challenge created by the Council response to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing uncertainty, including that around the Government’s reimbursement of costs.

6.2 Kevin Sheehan responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- That the Civil Enforcement Officers issuing fixed penalty notices (proposal E11 – environmental enforcement, use of civil enforcement officers) should cover their own costs.
- Consideration would be given to the most effective hours for enforcement activity to take place.
- The Council was investing in contract management capability.

- Equalities impact assessments for the cuts were ongoing (and would be completed in time for the decision making process). 80 percent of the Council's budget is spent on the most vulnerable residents – which meant that most cuts proposals would have an equalities impact. The important thing was for the Council to recognise and mitigate these impacts where possible.
- In reference to proposal C11 (Reduced dependency on agency staff within Highways and Transportation Services), that where the Council was spending grant funding on highways projects, staff time would be paid for from the grant funds rather than general expenditure.
- Staffing cuts would be kept to a minimum.
- The intention is for the Council's parking system to become cashless. The Council would give ongoing consideration to the option for those who do not have access to mobile devices.

6.3 In the Committee's discussion – the following key points were also noted:

- That the majority of proposals before the Committee were not 'cuts' but proposals for income generation.
- Members welcomed the proposal of carrying out environmental enforcement using civil enforcement officers (E11).
- The importance of good contract management at all levels of the organisation.
- Concerns were raised about the quality and scope of the equalities impact assessments carried out across all of the cuts proposals.
- Members reiterated the £500 reduction in funding per person in Lewisham that had been made by Government over the past 10 years.
- That the Council should move to cashless parking (avoiding the £400k upgrade to pay and display machines) and work with local businesses to provide alternative options for people who still wished to pay using cash (or did not have access to mobile devices).
- That the reference to 'investing additional funds' in highways measures should be removed from proposal F21 (Road Safety Enforcement) – because funds from the charges would be used to support on ongoing spending, rather than new measures or improvements.
- That (in reference to proposal F-22 'Motorcycle parking charges') the Council should work with partners responsible for enforcement against pavement parking to ensure that motorcycles do not move from street parking to parking on footways.

6.4 Resolved: that the Committee would refer its views to the Public Accounts Select Committee (for submission to Mayor and Cabinet) as follows:

- Better contract management is key to a number of the cuts proposals. The Committee believes that Mayor and Cabinet should assure itself that through good organisational development and training for senior, mid and junior managers, the Council is able to effectively manage contracts at every stage of the cycle and attain the cost savings as proposed.
- The Committee recommends that Mayor and Cabinet asks officers to carry out a review of the Council's online services (particularly those provided by third parties, such as online parking facilities) ensuring a good user experience and quality integration with existing systems.
- In relation to proposal F22 (Motorcycle parking charges) – the Committee recommends that, if Mayor and Cabinet is minded to agree the proposal to

introduce charging for motorcycles, the Council should work with other enforcement partners to ensure those who are illegally parking on the pavement also have enforcement action taken upon them.

- In relation to proposal F20 (Emission based charging for short stay parking) - the Committee recommends that the Council should move to a cashless parking system as soon as possible. Members of the Committee believe that £400K is too much to spend on upgrading pay and display machines. The Committee also believes that any reference in the budget cuts report to re-investment of parking charges in transport improvements should be removed – because the reality is that the Council will be using the money to support transport costs already contained within the general fund.
- The Committee understands that a large cut needs to be made in waste management and street cleaning and that a comprehensive review will be done to enable this to happen in the most efficient way possible. However, it regrets that this will mean redundancies amongst the Council’s lowest paid workers and it highlights that this has been imposed upon us due to Government austerity. The Committee believes that any cuts to staffing must be done with sensitivity and care. The Committee welcomes Mayor and Cabinet’s response to its previous referral on staffing cuts, flexible working and redeployment and it reiterates the importance of supporting and redeploying staff wherever possible.

7. Select Committee work programme

7.1 The Chair provided an update on the process for agreeing the work programme.

The meeting ended at 9:05

Chair:

Date:
