

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 14 January 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Juliet Campbell (Chair), James Rathbone (Vice-Chair), Carl Handley, Jim Mallory, Pauline Morrison and Sakina Sheikh

APOLOGIES: Councillor Davis

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Brenda Dacres (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities), Councillor Jonathan Slater (Cabinet Member for Community Sector), Councillor James-J Walsh, David Austin (Acting Chief Finance Officer), Tom Brown (Executive Director for Community Services), Salena Mulhere (Assistant Chief Executive), Sherene Russell-Alexander and Katie Wood (Scrutiny Manager)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 1.12.20

1.1 RESOLVED:

That the minutes be agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 RESOLVED:

Councillor James Rathbone declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in item 5 as he was on the management team of a community library.

3. Response to Referrals from this Committee

There were no referral responses due at this meeting.

4. Q and A with the Director of Human Resources

4.1 The Committee welcomed Sherene Russell-Alexander, Interim Head of HR, to the Committee. During her introduction to the Committee and in the discussion that followed, the following key points were raised:

- As part of the response to the on-going pandemic, HR would be continuing to focus on staff well-being.
- The Committee's recommendations as part of their equalities review had been welcomed and HR would be working with the Assistant Chief Executive to take them forward.
- Staff were supported to work from home in a number of ways including: access to an online staff support hub with focus on well-

being; and support for managers to help them adapt to focus on outputs rather than “presenteeism”.

- Some of the challenges staff faced from working from home included: working longer hours and back-to-back meetings with too little “down time”.
- There had not been an increase in stress or mental health issues reported to HR and the employee absence rate was 37% down on the previous year.
- Frontline staff undertook risk assessments to ensure they were safe and appropriate safety measures were in place. The council continued to engage with Trade Unions on these areas.
- There were currently three staff forums. Work was being undertaken to ensure clearer Terms of Reference were in place and a consistent approach in terms of how they were able to access senior management.

4.2 RESOLVED:

The Committee thanked Sherene Russell-Alexander, Interim Head of HR for attending the meeting.

5. Budget Cuts

5.1 Tom Brown, Executive Director for Community Services introduced the report to the Committee. Salena Mulhere, Assistant Chief Executive and David Austin, Director of Corporate Resources were also in attendance to respond to Committee’s questions. During the introduction and in the discussion that followed, the following key points were highlighted:

- The council was facing a very challenging financial position following ten years of austerity policies by the government. There remained a large amount of financial uncertainty with the financial settlements being yearly.
- The Local Government Association estimated a £4bn shortfall in local government funding nationally.
- The council has a statutory responsibility to produce a balanced budget. This was particularly challenging following the Covid-19 pandemic and the resources the council needed to spend to support the most vulnerable residents.
- The council had a predicted shortfall of £40m over the next three years. £28m savings would be needed to be made in the next financial year, 2021/22. £15m was put forward in December with an additional £13m being put forward in these papers.
- The Covid-19 pandemic created considerable financial challenges for the council. It affected the council tax and business rate collection rate and there was likely to be a significant increase in unemployment. There had also been a reduction in the income generated through the council’s commercial estate.
- The title of the A-18 cut was wrongly listed and should read “Cuts to the libraries and advice service”. There would be a strategic review

of the library service to ensure the Council was clear on what the service should look like. 80% of the out-goings for the service were staff costs.

- C-09 was a restructure and there would be no negative service delivery impact on the Youth Offending Service.
- C-24 would mean that theatre staff would be working to support the work for the Borough of Culture.
- C-29 was a restructure that had already been implemented in the Crime, Enforcement and Regulatory Team.
- E-11 involved supplementing the Environmental Enforcement Officers with Civil Enforcement Officers.
- The click and collect service at Lewisham Libraries had been introduced in response to the pandemic.
- It was hoped that the restructured library service would help residents to access services and reduce the digital divide.
- It was asked whether savings B-12 “Adult Learning Lewisham – back office efficiencies” could be considered alongside the libraries and advice service as a potential to make further savings. In response The Executive Director for Community Services highlighted that both areas were within his Directorate and under the same Executive Member so this could be looked into further.
- The libraries review would involve extensive resident engagement as well as Councillor engagement. Equalities considerations would also be key. Consideration of the libraries estate would take place after the review had reached its findings. Part of the vision was for libraries to be a safe space to help build and strengthen the community providing access to information and advice.
- The Committee was informed that all the cuts proposals had a plan behind them. The thematic approach was ensuring a joined up approach with a strong focus on equalities considerations at every stage. The Assistant Chief Executive had put in place a team of Strategic Transformation Business Partners whose role would include ensuring a joined up approach to the cuts and consideration of equalities including the cumulative affects from different proposals. There was a will within the organisation to successfully deliver the cuts needed.
- Socio-economic status would be considered as part of the equalities consideration. It was understood that job losses and the financial impact of covid would have an impact on the most vulnerable. Contextual factors would be used to help assess socio-economic disadvantage such as those on free school meals or who receive council tax benefits.
- Intersectionality remained an important consideration and would be looked at when considering the effects of different cuts on different communities and individuals.
- Members of the Committee proposed a referral to the Public Accounts Select Committee.
- Members of the Committee requested that more information on the library consultation, once it had commenced, be brought back to the

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee in the next municipal year.

5.2 RESOLVED:

1. That the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select Committee: The Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee recommends:

That Lewisham Council agree in principle the proposed cuts to close the budget gap created by the Government, subject to the completion of Equalities Impact Assessments and feasibility studies as necessary. Where possible we would urge the Council to provide additional income generation support to partner organisations and in particular charitable, voluntary and community organisations.

2. That more information on the Lewisham Libraries Consultation return to the Committee in the next municipal year.

6. Select Committee work programme

6.1 Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager, introduced the work programme to the Committee and highlighted a number of proposed changes to the work programme for the next meeting which were unanimously agreed by the Committee.

6.2 RESOLVED:

1. That the following items be removed from the Select Committee Work Programme for the March 1st meeting:
 - Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
 - Safe Lewisham Plan
 - Local Assemblies Review
 - Lewisham Libraries including NCIL.
2. That the following items be added to the work programme for the March 1st meeting:
 - Stop and Search and Prevent Update
 - Q and A with Cllr Kevin Bonavia, Executive Member for Democracy, Refugees and Accountability
 - Youth Offending Service – progress and challenges
 - Update on changes to the Probation Service.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

Chair:

Date:
