

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8 March 2022 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Paul Maslin (Chair), Peter Bernards, Bill Brown, Juliet Campbell, Colin Elliott, Mark Ingleby, Caroline Kalu, Louise Krupski, Jack Lavery, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon, Rachel Onikosi, Jacq Paschoud, John Paschoud, Stephen Penfold, Luke Sorba and James-J Walsh and

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillors Tauseef Anwar, Sophie Davis, Aisling Gallagher, Alan Hall, Coral Howard, Silvana Kelleher, Samantha Latouche, Jim Mallory and Eva Stamirowski

APOLOGIES: Councillors Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore, James Rathbone, James Royston and Susan Wise

ALSO PRESENT: Charlotte Dale (Head of Overview and Scrutiny)

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Councillor Kim Powell, John Bennett, Miatta Fahnbulleh, Atika Mohammed, Salena Mulhere and Patrick Dubeck

NB: Those Councillors listed as joining virtually were not in attendance for the purposes of the meeting being quorate, any decisions taken or to satisfy the requirements of s85 Local Government Act 1972

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2021

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2021 be agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 None

3. Future Lewisham - an economically sound future

- 3.1 Councillor Lavery introduced the item and introduced the external speaker, Miatta Fahnbulleh, Chief Executive of the New Economics Foundation. Miatta spoke about the current cost of living crisis, the impact of the pandemic and options for recovery. Key points included:
- People were not feeling the benefits of a growing economy as living standards had not increased since 2008 and the cost of living was now increasing significantly.
 - We must recognise the context, including the inequalities across society, the diminution of social protections, the huge cuts to local government and the cost of living (including energy) crisis.
 - A green recovery is possible and desirable: there is some consensus.

- Recovery requires the use of local as well as national levers.

3.2 Miatta suggested that the following actions were key to local economic recovery:

- A focus on driving up living standards (not just targeting growth) with the creation of good and secure jobs.
- Giving local people a bigger stake: developing a shared vision with communities as to what “good” should look like, which might include wellbeing as well as financial stability; and thinking about co-operatives.
- Investing in green infrastructure and decarbonising the local economy in ways which create good jobs.
- Building a local supply chain involving education and the NHS. Mapping the local investment potential and the funding that flows through a geographical place across organisational boundaries to pool resources.
- Creating a partnership with local businesses which involves social responsibility.
- Wrestling power from Whitehall and pushing devolution.

3.3 In response to questions from the committee, the following was noted:

- The capacity and viability of local community organisations was critical and local authorities should consider the support they could provide in terms of access to council premises; encouraging the community acquisition of assets; and through procurement and commissioning policies.
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) could be very useful in terms of local businesses supporting each other and in galvanising support for collective local action. However, in the current economic circumstances, persuading businesses to vote in favour of creating a BID was often difficult due to the mandatory levy.
- Business charters can help in getting businesses to engage; and licensing and procurement can be useful local levers.
- Although GDP had grown, the increase in low pay, low skill jobs had resulted in a productivity challenge.
- The circular economy was a huge opportunity which might enable a degree of self-sufficiency to be delivered in some areas.
- Examples of good practice in the local authority sector included (a) Liverpool Council’s work on energy efficiency and retrofitting, with its living standards perspective and its focus on a local supply chain with skills offer; (b) Manchester’s ‘living wage city’ scheme using procurement as a significant lever; and (c) Hackney’s energy co-operative with profits going to community schemes.
- Creating employment spaces and hubs and using empty shops creatively was one way to make new hybrid working arrangements benefit local areas.
- It was important to link skills training with need in a particular area and create targeted skills academies.

3.4 John Bennett, Head of Economy, Jobs and Partnerships, introduced the officer report and it was noted that:

- Unemployment had increased with young people particularly affected. There were around 8,000 unemployed in Lewisham in January 2020, which rose to 20,000 at the height of the pandemic in 2021, and was now at 14,000.
- There were inequalities in the local labour market, particularly affecting Black and disabled residents.
- Highly qualified residents often worked outside the borough.
- There were approximately 68,000 jobs in the borough but 210,000 working age residents. (In terms of the number of jobs Lewisham came 32 out of 33 boroughs).
- There were between 10,000 and 11,000 businesses in the borough, with 98% employing fewer than 9 people.
- A recent high street survey had revealed that 70% of the business on Lewisham's high streets were independent and two thirds of the independent businesses were owned by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic entrepreneurs.
- The council's response to the pandemic included the *We are Lewisham* Borough of Culture Grants and Advisory Service; Business Resilience Grants and Support; ready to supply support for local suppliers; free membership of the Federation of Small Business and the South East London Chamber of Commerce; engagement and business advice for Black-owned businesses; and Creative Enterprise Zone projects.
- The council had also been working with partners on local procurement, apprenticeships and climate change.
- Officers had produced a framework to guide the work of the Economy, Jobs and Partnership service over the coming months and provide shape to achieving the ambition for An Economically Sound Future. There were four draft objectives: more local jobs; increased local spending; strong partnerships and infrastructure; and tackling unemployment and inequalities.

3.5 In response to questions from the committee, it was noted that:

- The Lewisham Local card was a fantastic way of supporting local businesses.
- Lewisham Works would work with local employers to make methods of recruitment more flexible and less intimidating; and help employers to help prospective applicants overcome barriers to work. There would be no upper age limit to the people helped into work.
- Independent small businesses felt a connection to the borough and often had an inclination to 'give something back' that larger, less local, employers did not always have. But it was recognised that the council should encourage smaller businesses to grow through proactive engagement.
- Hybrid working and the reduction in commuting was an opportunity for Lewisham and could lead to more money being spent on the high street and a demand for local workspaces.
- There were a number of local 'anchor' organisations for skills, including Goldsmiths, the GLA hub on the southbank, King's College London who

had campuses in the borough; and London Southbank University, which was also important. The team needed to think about and map routes into careers and ensure the options were there for residents to acquire relevant skills.

- Although the funding had ended for the Lewisham Construction hub, officers were continuing to work with developers and construction companies.
- CIDS – Community Improvement Districts - were a possibility, perhaps in Lewisham town centre, given that many local businesses felt they could not afford the levy that comes with a Business Improvement District.
- It was proposed to run the high street survey annually so that the results could provide a good evidence base for projects and interventions. It would also serve as a useful point of engagement with independent local small businesses.

3.6 Councillor Powell, Cabinet member for Business and Community Wealth Building, commended the work of the Economy, Jobs and Partnerships Service and all that they had achieved over a short period of time, during the pandemic.

3.7 Councillor Lavery summarised the discussion and thanked the presenters and it was:

RESOLVED: That a referral be made to Mayor and Cabinet stating that the Committee:

- Endorsed the proposed introduction of a new employment service, Lewisham Works, to support local unemployed residents in to work.
- Welcomed the commitment to an annual headcount and survey of independent and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic owned businesses, and a focus on improving engagement and trust between these businesses and the Council.

The Committee also agreed to ask Mayor and Cabinet to set out a strategy for future economic development in the borough, and agree that delivering this as part of the next Corporate Strategy should be a priority for the Council.

4. Update on the Resident Experience Programme

4.1 Councillor Walsh introduced the item and spoke in particular about the member casework element of the programme, which many Members had been actively involved in. Atika Mohammed introduced the update and explained that the programme was:

- Centred around the needs of all residents
- Challenging assumptions
- Using evidence to make decisions
- Understanding current experience in order to improve it via a

discovery phase.

4.2 In terms of casework, prototype solutions were being developed to address the needs of users and the problems identified. A collaborative approach was being taken, with people from a number of different teams involved.

4.3 In response to questions from Members, the following was noted:

- Some casework would need to be dealt with by exception, but finding an improved solution to deal with the majority of cases was important.
- 9 members had been involved in the discovery work undertaken so far.
- The new model would aim to capture the different elements of a resident's interaction with the council - and identify repeat cases and also connect cases.
- It was recognised that Members needed to know who was dealing with their case and have a named contact.

4.4 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted, specifically the work undertaken to date and the planned next steps for the Resident Experience programme; and the specific outputs of the member casework design sprints and the next steps for that review.

5. Update on "A Greener Future"

5.1 It was noted that at the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members had agreed that:

- Each select committee should appoint a climate change champion
- Planning Members should receive training on the interaction between the climate emergency and the planning process
- There should be an annual all-member briefing on the climate emergency.

5.2 It was reported that:

- Five Climate Change Champions had been appointed by the Select Committees
- Planning Members would receive training on the interaction between the climate emergency and the planning process (provided by the Centre for Sustainable Energy)
- There would be an annual all member briefing on the climate emergency in January of each year.

5.3 **RESOLVED:** That the contents of the update report be noted.

The Committee expressed its thanks to both the current Chair of Overview and

Scrutiny and his predecessor this administration, for their work in support of effective scrutiny. The Chair noted that he had attempted to enable scrutiny to set its own agenda and work in co-operation with the Executive to add value and to benefit local residents. He thanked those present for their support in his endeavour.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Chair:

Date:
