

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 November 2022 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Ayesha Lahai-Taylor (Chair), Liam Shrivastava (Vice-Chair), Hilary Moore, Rachel Onikosi and Hau-Yu Tam

APOLOGIES: Councillors Bill Brown and Mark Jackson

ALSO PRESENT: Antonio Rizzo (Library and Information Services Manager), Katie Wood (Scrutiny Manager), Councillor James-J Walsh (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure (job share)), Councillor James Rathbone and Councillor Aliya Sheikh

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Councillor Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People), David Murray (Interim Director: Culture, Learning & Libraries) and Katharine Nidd (Head of Strategic Finance, Planning and Commercial)

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 13 October 2022

1.1 RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 13th October be agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

2 Declarations of interest

2.1 RESOLVED:

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Budget Reductions for 2023/24

3.1 Katharine Nidd, Head of Strategic Finance, Planning and Commercial, introduced the report to the Committee. Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director Children and Young People provided an overview of the savings directly relating to the Committee. David Murray, Interim Director of Culture, Learning and libraries was also in attendance online. In the subsequent discussion, the following key points were raised:

- The Council was now in its 13th year of budget reductions following cuts from central government and the budget had been reduced by £137 million since that time.
- There was still uncertainty around the levels of cuts due to the financial settlement from government still not being confirmed as well as general economic uncertainty and the effects of the higher inflation rates.

- Tables 5.8 and 5.13 in the report listed the decisions that were being proposed to be made by Mayor and Cabinet and by officers as per the scheme of delegation in the Council's constitution.
- Regarding the Equalities Impact Assessments (EAAs) on the proposal for CYP_SAV_04 - CYP Youth Service Budget Review, the Committee heard that the EAA would be carried out on specific proposals but it was hoped that the reduction would be in back office functions and would therefore not have an effect on services. This would be monitored and EAAs completed as necessary.
- Regarding the EAA on the Youth Offending Service Review CYP_SAV_05, the Committee heard that the saving would not cause any change in service as it was a reduction to consultancy costs and the work had already been completed and changes and learning were already embedded in the service.
- Members of the Committee raised concerns that a reduction in spending on youth services could cause additional spending in other areas such as to community services. The Committee heard that the details would be worked through closely with colleagues and partners to avoid this. The aim was for the cost reduction to be related to overhead costs and not impact service provision. If there was any reduction to service provision proposed, a full EAA would be completed.
- All Directorates across the Council were considering any impacts their proposed cuts would have to other services and to partner organisations. Members of the Committee asked that it was closely monitored whether additional costs for waste collection caused an increase in fly-tipping.
- The Committee heard that it would not be appropriate to add the cost of bulky waste to housing service charges as many residents did not use this service and service charges also went to the Housing Revenue Account rather than the general fund.
- Regarding the budget cut proposal CYP_SAV_01 - review of children's centres budget, the Committee were informed that the Department for Education had announced funding of £900,000 in 2022/23 and £1.5 million for 2023/24 which would therefore mean the total funding for family hubs would increase.
- Members of the Committee raised concerns regarding the reduction in opening hours for libraries. In particular the role they were due to play in "Warm Welcomes" as well as other crucial roles such as in social prescribing. In response the Committee heard that the changes were proposed from April 2023 and the service was very aware of the possible impacts and would be looking in detail at who was accessing the libraries and when to try and minimise any impact. There would be consultation and research carried out as well as EAAs on any proposals relating to change of provision.
- Regarding ALL_SAV_01 - absorption of £2m unfunded pay award, this was due to the pay award of £2355 per member of staff and £1925 for senior managers. The pay award was more than originally budgeted for with a total cost of £4.5 million more than the budgeted £2.7 million. Each directorate would therefore need to take an additional cut proportionate to their staff numbers to make up the £2 million shortfall.
- Councillor Sheikh was invited to speak and requested that it be minuted that she would like an update on the budget reduction agreed in 2020/21 to the over 60s free swim and gym access.

3.2 **RESOLVED:**

That the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select

Committee:

- 1) The Committee requested that the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select Committee on proposal COM_SAV_08: Reduction in opening hours at Lewisham Libraries.
- 2) The Committee was concerned with the saving on reducing hours at Lewisham Libraries. The Committee felt that in light of the policy on “Warm Welcomes” and due to the hugely important role libraries play in supporting vulnerable residents such as through social prescribing, supporting digital inclusion and being a place of welcome to all residents, that it was essential that the impact of the cut was very carefully examined before any decision was made. Library usage by demographic use at different dates and times should be carefully examined to minimise any impact and consultation should take place with partners at community libraries. It was important to fully examine whether a cut in hours could have unintended consequences for the most vulnerable and cause additional costs to other services by residents’ needs having to be met in other and possibly more costly ways.

4 Libraries Update

4.1 James-J Walsh, Cabinet member for Culture and Leisure and Antonio Rizzo, Head of Library and Information Service gave a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is included in the agenda documentation. David Murray, Interim Director of Culture, Learning and Libraries was also in attendance online. During the subsequent discussion, the following key points were raised:

- Business Support for local residents and businesses was available through BIPC Local at Catford Library. It included a range of resources which would also be available at other libraries in the borough.
- Lewisham had the highest levels of volunteering in libraries in the country and had a successful partnership role with the community.
- The libraries service worked with a range of young people including the Young Mayor and Young Advisors and had activities focussed on young people. A member of the Committee highlighted that continuing engagement with young people was particularly important with the budget reductions to a range of services.
- Continued work was being carried out with Grove Park and Crofton Park Libraries to improve the IT infrastructure and to encourage new people to access the libraries such as through engaging with families who use the parks. There could be an opportunity to identify IT equipment that could be donated by the Council to improve the offer available.
- Working with the Communications Team to help ensure that residents knew libraries were a place for everyone was important. Different locations and libraries would need a bespoke strategy for this.
- Equalities considerations would be carefully examined before any changes to opening hours were finalised.
- There were a range of schools visits to the libraries and to look at the archives. There was a service available to Lewisham schools where the Lewisham Library Service would buy books for them so they could benefit from the savings they were able to get. This also enable the books to be bar-coded so students could use the same library card to access books in schools and in libraries in the borough.

- Members of the Committee congratulated the Library Service on the new Catford Library and praised the quality of the provision.
- Lewisham Library had a range of issues and capital investment was needed as the building was not currently fit for purpose. A bid to the Government's "Levelling Up Fund" had been made but urgent action was needed to make the building waterproof and warm as soon as possible.

4.2 **RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

5 Select Committee work programme

5.1 Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager, introduced the report to the Committee. During the subsequent discussion the following key points were noted:

- A member of the Committee commented that in addition to the briefing note received on the public health approach to violence reduction, it would be good for the Committee to consider whether there was further potential for the Committee to look at the correlation between crime and disorder, health and inequalities by working together with Healthier Communities Select Committee.
- The Metropolitan Police BCU Commander had confirmed he would attend the January meeting. The Borough Commander for Lewisham, London Fire Brigade, had not yet confirmed her attendance.
- The Scrutiny Manager was thanked for her work in Scrutiny at Lewisham Council.

5.2 **RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted and the work programme be agreed.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

Chair:

Date:
