

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 28 June 2022 at 7.05 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Mark Ingleby (Chair), Chris Best, Joan Millbank, James Rathbone, James Royston and Luke Sorba.

ALSO JOINING VIRTUALLY:
Councillors Ese Erheriene and Ayesha Lahai-Taylor.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Penfold and Councillor Eva Stamirowski.

NB. The Councillor listed as jointing virtually was not in attendance for the purpose of the meeting being quorate, any decision taken, or to satisfy the requirement of s85 Local Government Act 1972.

OFFICERS(S) ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Executive Director of Corporate Resources, Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning; Director of Communities, Partnership & Leisure; Assistant Chief Executive; Joint Commissioning Lead Officer; Head of Service for Joint Commissioning; and Public Digital Lead Officer.

OFFICERS(S) JOINING IN PERSON
Head of Overview and Scrutiny; Head of Committee Business; and Clerk: Senior Committee Manager.

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel held on 22 March 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

3. Key Decision Plan

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

4. Open Session - Decisions by Mayor and Cabinet on 15 June 2022

Councillor Mark Ingleby, Chair of the Panel, informed the meeting that he had received a request from Councillor Joan Millbank to consider a decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 15 June 2022 relating to "Permission to Procure for 0-19 Public Health Nursing Services".

Councillor Millbank addressed the meeting on the topic, advising that she welcomed the decision because of the unified strategy and the multi-disciplinary

approach to deliver across agencies. She however expressed a concern about safeguarding and the potential of creating barriers to access child assessment and antenatal care services via virtual appointments. Councillor Millbank also enquired why an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was not undertaken when formulating the proposals upon which the Mayor and Cabinet decision was based.

In response, the Joint Commissioning Lead Officer informed the Panel that because of social distancing requirements at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, appointments with service users were via the telephone, but that medium was not as effective. The introduction of a National Health Service (NHS) software made it possible to deliver an improved service to women and families via virtual interactions. It was stated that feedback collated from users who accessed health appointments via the NHS virtual medium showed their experiences were good and that they would recommend the facility to their families and friends because they felt listened to and supported.

The Joint Commissioning Lead Officer also responded to a follow-up question, clarifying to the Panel that information from the feedback collated from service users was considered as part of the review. Therefore, the NHS software would remain an option within the new service specification so that users with digital capabilities who had expressed a preference to access support virtually based on their individual experiences would be granted video appointments. However, in order not to digitally exclude families, the default option for health visits and consultations would remain physical via face-to-face.

The Panel received confirmation from the Joint Commissioning Lead Officer that face-to-face appointments would be provided during the first two visits for new births and the 6-8 weeks' reviews thereafter due to a recognition that most families would require hands-on support during those periods, regardless of needs. Thereafter, it would be a clinical judgement by health visitors to decide whether the one or two-year reviews should be held virtually, or if a blended approach to include face-to-face appointments would be required. It was stated that in situations where there were concerns about safety and wellbeing, particularly for those families identified as 'vulnerable', it was likely that clinical judgements would enable them to access services face-to-face for all health reviews including antenatal appointments.

The Head of Service for Joint Commissioning also confirmed to the Panel that an EIA review was underway. It was stated that the process would include all factors relating to protected characteristics for equality considerations, and be completed in time for the award of the contracts.

Commenting on the responses, Councillor Millbank thanked the Officers for the clarifications, and expressed satisfaction that parents' feedback and views would continue to be considered as part of the review process, commenting that it would have been inappropriate for professionals to insist on virtual consultations to access health and antenatal care.

Councillor Sorba commented that there had been media publications where safeguarding of children could have been handled better, therefore, allowing parents to self-select based on their preferences to access health and antenatal

services, and the reliance on health visitors to make clinical judgements were potential risks.

In response to concern by Councillor Sorba, the Joint Commissioning Lead Officer gave an assurance to the Panel that safeguarding plans in the new service specifications to support families using a multi-discipline approach included the involvement of General Practitioners as well. She reiterated by stating that every parent would be seen in the home environment more than once. Thus, face-to-face consultations would continue alongside effort to improve digital access, with a view to diversify universal health visiting offers for families.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. Open Session - Decisions by Executive Director of Corporate Resources

Councillor Mark Ingleby, Chair of the Panel, informed the meeting that he had requested that the Panel should consider the decision taken by the Executive Director of Corporate Resources relating to the “Full Fibre Broadband for Lewisham Residents”. Speaking on the issue, Councillor Ingleby welcomed statements that the work would assist in the promotion and improvement of economic and social wellbeing of the borough, but that he was unclear about the method of constructing the digital services, and wanted clarification that there would be a rigorous control in the implementation of the proposals.

In response, the Digital Lead Officer confirmed to the Panel that quality procedures from templates set out by the Government relating to public engagements, and fire and building regulations would strictly be followed in the process. Therefore, it was unlikely that implementation would include over-ground telecommunication mast. The Panel also noted that progress would be monitored by a Project Officer for delivery in accordance with expected standard. Therefore, should there be any concern during the construction, contractors would be requested to stop work until those were addressed.

Councillor Millbank enquired about socio-economic benefits of implementing the digital services, considering the cost-of-living issue which the Council was currently addressing, and the need for digital inclusion for residents.

In response, the Public Digital Lead Officer stated that the Council had benchmarked other councils that had implemented similar networks. Therefore, it was likely that implementation in Lewisham would result in the optimisation of employment and apprenticeship opportunities, the provision of digital training, and benefits for residents from competitive discounted rates on special tariffs because there would be multiple broadband providers. Furthermore, depending on the scope of the rollout, the Council would negotiate with the providers to deliver free digital connections access in public spaces and community areas within buildings, such as hotels and community centres. The Executive Director of Corporate Resources added that a mandate in the Electronic Communications Code required digital companies to install broadband fibre at cost-neutral to them.

Commenting on further responses by the Executive Director of Corporate Resources, Councillor Millbank expressed satisfaction that the Council would

negotiate with the corporate arm of delivering companies to maximise social value for residents, and that a report-back on progress would be provided for consideration by Members at a future date.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. Scrutiny Update Report

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny presented an update report to the Panel, advising that because some select committees had not met since the start of the municipal year, the report to the next meeting would contain items of work for each of the bodies, with a proposal for Members to agree a co-ordinated programme of work. Thereafter, the Panel would receive reports on progress on the work programmes of select committees at its future meetings.

The Panel also received report that the main item for consideration at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be the “Resident Experience Programme”, which would include the Member-casework strand.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny further advised the Panel that scrutiny Members could establish up to three task and finish groups at the September meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was stated that should Members decide to establish the groups, they would be required to submit ideas in time for officers to produce a report for consideration.

Councillor Millbank reminded members of the recommendations of the Local Democracy Review undertaken by the Council, including the establishment of task and finish groups.

Councillor Sorba stated that he was not in favour of task and finish groups, as he felt in-depth investigations were better carried out within the select committee setting.

However the Panel was further advised by Councillor Sorba that Members should perhaps commit to a second year of task and finish groups before deciding whether to make them a permanent part of the scrutiny process as continuing with task and finish groups for another year would enable new councillors to be involved in an alternative system of scrutiny.

Councillor Best suggested that before committing to a second year of task and finish groups, considerations should perhaps be given to addressing outstanding matters from the recommendations of the Local Democracy Review work undertaken by the Council.

Commenting on statements and suggestions expressed at the meeting, the Assistant Chief Executive informed the Panel that the results of a survey undertaken in May had been circulated to Members requesting them to share ideas about their experiences of undertaking tasks and finish groups.

The Assistant Chief Executive also reiterated that there was no requirement in the Council’s Constitution to have task and finish groups. However, if there was a

desire by Members to have such groups, officers would need time to arrange them. Therefore, Members should complete the circulated pro-forma to submit ideas of topics for consideration in advance of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2022.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7. Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chair, Councillor Ingleby moved a motion, which was seconded by Councillor Rathbone, and the Panel

RESOLVED that the meeting moved into a closed session.

8. Closed Session - Decisions by Mayor and Cabinet on 15 June 2022

The meeting considered a decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 15 June 2022 relating to “Leisure Management Contract” in a closed session.

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure responded to questions raised.

The Panel noted that implementation of the Leisure Management Contract was agreed as part of the Council’s budget saving proposals in March 2022.

The Panel welcomed confirmation that although the Leisure Management Contract was to consider an extension of term, legal advice would be sought about the need to undertake a formal consultation prior to implementation.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Meeting closed at 8.45pm.