

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 20 December 2022 at 7.05 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Mark Ingleby, Chris Best, Joan Millbank, Stephen Penfold, James Rathbone, and James Royston.

MEMBER(S) IN ATTENDANCE PRESENT IN PERSON:
Councillor Louise Krupski, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action.

MEMBER(S) JOINING REMOTELY:
Councillor Sophie Davis, Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Homelessness;
Councillor Luke Sorba, Chair of Children and Young People Select Committee, who is also a Member of the Panel.

OFFICER(S) PRESENT IN PERSON:
Assistant Chief Executive; and Housing and Transformation Consultant.

OFFICERS(S) PRESENT REMOTELY:
Chief Executive; Director of Housing; Head of Highways; Head of Commercial Operations and Development; and Head of Overview & Scrutiny.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ese Erheriene, Councillor Ayesha Lahai-Taylor and Councillor Eva Stamirowski.

Clerk: Senior Committee Manager

1. Minutes

RESOLVED those minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel held on 15 November 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Joan Millbank declared a personal interest as a leaseholder of Lewisham Homes in relation to a decision to be considered by the Panel under Item 3, the "Future of Housing Management: Options Review".

3. Open Session - Decisions by Mayor and Cabinet on 7 December 2022

Councillor Mark Ingleby, Chair of the Panel, informed the meeting that he had received requests for Members to consider the following decisions taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 7 December 2022:

1. Future of Housing Management: Options Review;
2. Sustainable Transport and Parking Improvements Programme; and
3. Budget Reduction: 2023-24.

1. **Future of Housing Management: Options Review**

1.1 The Panel considered a decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 7 December 2022 regarding the “Future of Housing Management: Options Review”, which:

- Noted the recent consultation and test of residents’ opinion on whether Lewisham Homes should continue to manage the Council’s housing stock, or whether the service should be brought in-house.
- Noted a cost-benefit analysis of the options and approved that officers should be instructed to give notice to end the management agreement with Lewisham Homes and prepare for the Housing management service to be brought in-house.

1.1.1 Councillor Joan Millbank declared a personal interest as a leaseholder of Lewisham Homes in relation.

1.1.2 The Panel received information from the Chief Executive that Lewisham Homes was operating an Arm’s Length Management Organisation (ALMOs). It was stated that there used to be 20 ALMOs operating in London, but only 4 of those were in existence and included Lewisham and Tower Hamlets councils, who were currently going through a process of bringing their housing management services in-house.

1.2 The Panel asked questions relating to the following:

(a) Results of the tenants’ and leaseholders’ consultation and test of opinions. Officers responded as follows:

- That the Council undertook 22 events across all Lewisham wards. Thus, responses to the consultation came from various parts of the borough and were representative of different demographics of tenants and leaseholders.
- That 1,608 telephone surveys, 502 face-to-face surveys, nearly 1,300 postal surveys, and about 260 online surveys were carried out.
- That 3,663 completed postal surveys were received via the pre-paid envelope issued by the Council; the bulk of the research by post included structured questions to ensure consistency across the various housing tenures.

(b) Integrity of the consultation progress and outcomes. Officers responded as follows:

- That the Council provided a lot of information beforehand. Therefore, most of the face-to-face events that took place were mainly about information giving.
- That the 3,663 completed postal surveys summed up to 21% of the total responses received.

- That the 21% aggregated figure of postal response rate was considered favourably when explored with other tested opinions because it represented 71% of tenants who were in favour of bringing the housing service back in-house, with only 6% against the proposal. There was evidence of cases of leaseholders being unsure, as opposed to not supporting the proposal.
- That an independent tenancy advocacy organisation operated a helpline; most of the enquiries received were related to housing repairs, which were forwarded to the appropriate channel for actions.
- That based on assurance received from the independent research company employed to undertake the survey exercise, the Council was satisfied with the consultation process, the statistical significance of breakdown by ward and demographics, and the feedback about residents' confidence level at 95%.

(c) Cost-benefit and the risk analysis of the change programme. Officers responded as follows

- That the key drivers for the change were about:
 - checking the appropriate structure in view of building safety legislation, upcoming regulations, requirements of the housing funding regime; and
 - a relentless focus on continuing to improve housing services and outcomes for the benefit of tenants and leaseholders.
- That as part of the process, the Council considered areas where further efficiencies could be made, and £300k immediate annual savings were realised.
- That the £300k identified savings would be reinvested into the Housing Revenue Accounts for noticeable improvements to benefit tenants and leaseholders who would be most affected by the change.

(d) Governance and accountability. Officers responded as follows:

- That the Council had in-house expertise to manage the change programme. It was stated:
 - That the Housing Futures Programme Steering (FPS) Group established to manage development and function timetable continued to be co-chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and its Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm.
 - That the FPS Group was in close liaison with the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Homelessness about progress.
 - That the FPS Group would be seeking approval early next year to develop the capacity for a housing leadership team within the Council.

- (e) Impact on Lewisham Homes' workforce morale because of the change programme. Officers responded as follows:
- That information to staff about what was happening, when, and why was an important element of the programme timetable.
 - That arrangements relating to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) were underway.
 - That reassurances and confidence for staff to view Lewisham as a place where people want to stay and work were reflective of current market circumstances for housing development, and challenges of retaining staff as a signal of intent for certainty through the TUPE process.
 - That there would be a vacancy for a recruit to join the Programme Management Team.

1.3 The meeting also noted information provided by a Member of the Panel as follows:

- That the Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Homelessness had received notification that a local tenants' and residents' association, whose members from Lewisham Homes were significant in numbers was:
 - requesting improved access to housing officers;
 - requesting a reduction in the time taken to make contact via the telephone and online; and
 - suggesting that the Council should perhaps consider the introduction of opportunities for face-to-face contacts.

1.3.1 The Chief Executive welcomed feedback from the Panel Member about the local tenants' and residents' association and suggested that ward councillors should continue to provide local intelligence for timely reviews of Council services, and as a means for targeting improvement opportunities.

1.4 Commenting on responses provided by Officers, Councillor Sophie Davis, the Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Homelessness:

- Echoed statements to clarify that although the 21% of postal responses from the consultation exercise seemed minimal, it represented a good result when benchmarked with other London boroughs.
- Echoed statements to highlight that the Council went over and beyond what was expected from the consultation exercise to provide an immediate annual savings of £300k through the changes to governance structures and by removing the need to client Lewisham Homes.

- Echoed statements to confirm that staff morale was a very important consideration in the engagement exercise between the Council and Lewisham Homes.
- Confirmed that the consultation would be concluded in January of 2023.
- Confirmed that there would be more details in the coming year to further align with the Council’s manifesto because the consultation responses showed:
 - evidence of questions relating to future priorities. It was confirmed:
 - (i) that tenants stated a need to receive timely and high-quality repairs, prompt responses to calls and correspondence, and improvements to homes when needed; and
 - (ii) leaseholders required that housing services should represent value for money.
 - that for most of the staff, not very much change would occur in the day-to-day aspects of their jobs when Lewisham Homes come in-house.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Homelessness for their contributions at the meeting.

The Panel:

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

2. **Sustainable Transport and Parking Improvements**

2.1 The Panel considered a decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 7 December 2022 regarding “Sustainable Transport and Parking Improvements”.

2.1.2 The Panel recognised that the decision was related to the approach and policies the Council would use to engage with residents and introduce sustainable transport and parking improvements in Lewisham.

2.2 The Panel asked questions, requiring clarifications on the following:

- (a) Confirmation that implementation would include consultation with businesses and residents, with a view to consider the retention of free parking bays to maximise footfall into local high streets and town centres. Officers responded as follows:
- That the improvements programme included changes on how parking would be managed. That would be alongside additional measures to support residents to choose more sustainable travel options, with a view to reduce parking pressures, encourage people to walk and cycle more, improve road safety, and air quality, and reduce traffic levels.

- That plans to reduce unnecessary journeys and commuter parking in residential and business areas would ensure that implementation consider feedback derived from consultative activities to enable Council officers form a balanced view of residents' expectations against the needs of local businesses.
- That among other engagement activities, the Council would undertake:
 - a three-phased approach, with the first phase supporting 5 drop-in sessions at Catford and Deptford to facilitate opportunities for business owners to discuss with officers and suggest views on how to increase footfall into their respective shopping precinct in terms of parking provision;
 - door-knocking at individual trade premises to help gauge understanding of specific business needs;
 - commence liaison with the Chamber of Commerce group of business networks to identify requirements and gain a consensus of what groups of businesses would require in assisting them to encourage more customers into their local trading precincts;
 - invite ward councillors to engagement events with businesses and residents for added value, with a view to collate and assess collective feedback.
- That individual and collective feedback received from residents and business owners and ward councillors would be utilised by the Council to:
 - design parking bays for businesses to load and unload safely as part of traffic calming measures;
 - apply restrictions flexibly to minimise congestion in residential areas by freeing up parking spaces at intervals to enable people to park close to parade of shops and trading centres at various times of the day;
 - develop parking restrictions to encourage commuters and local employees to consider alternative ways of getting to work.

(b) Confirmation that local public transport serving all parts of Lewisham would be considered so that residents and businesses would not to be disproportionately disadvantaged. Officers responded as follows:

- That the Council acknowledged the process was challenging but was making incremental steps to develop policies that support the introduction of sustainable transport and parking improvements in Lewisham.
- That the Council recognised that public transport infrastructures varied in London, with inner boroughs having considerable advantages. Nonetheless, the Council vehemently opposed, and was successful in getting Transport for London (TfL) officials to reverse plans that would have resulted in reduced bus services in the Lewisham area.

- That the proposals upon which the Mayor and Cabinet decision was based would further help in identifying areas for residents to have better controlled parking zones nearer their homes, with a view to minimise commuter parking from outside the borough.
 - That the Council would continue to lobby for Bakerloo Line extension into Lewisham to better serve residents and businesses.
 - That the Council was holding quarterly meetings with TfL officials to get Lewisham to an equitable position, so that residents can feel they can make journeys easily by public transport.
 - That because of the proposals, residents would be asked to redesign their streets, possibly with bike hangers and other appropriate road features, in addition to providing them with information so that they understand how cycle lanes would be beneficial for a better and safe environment.
- (c) A reassurance that consideration had been given to address a possible inequitable application of the Council's Parking Policy, particularly for residents living in shared ownership homes and private estates who could not possibly apply for parking permits. Officers responded as follows:
- That the Council was liaising with Lewisham Homes and other housing estate providers in areas where controlled parking zones would be implemented, with a view to provide an opportunity for residents to buy parking permits.
 - That car-free developments required those living in particular areas not to apply for parking permits, to encourage them to consider alternative travel options. Notwithstanding that, the Council's approach was flexible, in that it was allowing a reasonable time for residents in such developments to adapt to car-free zones when implementing controlled parking in the discharge of planning conditions.

2.3 Councillor Louise Krupski, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action contributed at the meeting follows:

- (a) That the scheme to implement the programme in Lewisham was innovative because of tried and tested applications by an experienced team of staff
- (b) That because the criteria for car-free developments were set out in the London Plan, it was unlikely that the Council would implement high level-controlled parking restrictions in local areas that were not supported by adequate transport infrastructures.
- (c) That areas in the south of Lewisham had limited public transport provision. Thus, officers would undertake mitigation to assess Public Transport Accessibility Levels ratings in areas across borough.

- (d) That as a member of the Transport Committee on London Councils, she would be joining officers to lobby TfL regarding its commitment to increase bus services in outer London areas as Lewisham residents living close to those neighbouring catchments would benefit from implementation.
- (e) That although the Council had emissions space routes, it was unlikely for there to be a blanket policy regarding sustainable transport and controlled parking zones in Lewisham.
- (f) That although the Council recognised that some people would require the use of their cars as a necessity, it would continue to support residents to make informed decisions aimed at reducing emissions, and that they would also benefit by limiting the amount of money they pay for their parking services.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action for their contributions at the meeting.

The Panel:

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

3. **Budget Reductions: 2023-24**

- 3.1 The Panel considered a decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 7 December 2022 regarding “Budget Reductions: 2023-24”.
- 3.2 The meeting noted that the matter for consideration by the Panel was related to Lewisham’s road safety review in light of the following concerns:
 - (a) That on 17 October 2018, the Children and Young People (CYP) Select Committee discussed budget cut proposals, which included matters relating to a review of school crossing patrols. Thereafter,
 - On 21 November 2018, the matter went to Mayor and Cabinet meeting where the feedback from the CYP Select Committee was noted, and it was decided that officers should undertake a full review of the school crossing patrol service, considering child safety, air quality implications, and the opportunity for capital investment, and report back the options as part of the 2021 budget considerations.
 - On 17 September 2019, the CYP Select Committee was advised that the proposed cuts to school crossing patrol would not go ahead because the assessment work was underway and the outcome from that would be reported separately for scrutiny, and to the Mayor and Cabinet for a decision.
 - (b) That there had been no response to requests for the report that was to be written by officers following the decision by Mayor and Cabinet on

21 November 2018, and no mention was made about the review until the submission in the Budget Reductions: 2023-24 report.

3.3 The Panel was asked to consider the following implications should the current proposals to remove school crossing patrols be implemented:

(a) Political:

- That school crossing patrols were very popular with residents.
- That the Council would be making very low paid residents redundant.
- That in the event of accidents, the reputational damage to the Council, and more so for councillors in wards affected, would be enormous.

(b) Safety:

- That there was no evidence that the assessment work commissioned in 2018 took place. Therefore, a determination could not be made of whether all the crossings would be made safe.

(c) Other point raised was that the Panel should note that the concerns expressed about the review of school patrols in 2018 were similar to those of CYP Select Committee outlined under “Impact and Outcomes” on Page 75 of the agenda.

3.4 The Panel noted responses by Officers as follows:

(a) That the proposals aimed to balance the budget of the Council. Therefore, some of the elements required officers to make difficult decisions. Specific to school crossing patrols, the Panel was advised:

- That out of the 28 closures listed in the report, one-third were already vacant due to staff leaving the job or retiring.
- That there was no solution that would totally mitigate the risk of an accident. Notwithstanding that, officers were applying measures, so that no school crossing patrol site would be reviewed or removed without a proper assessment or road safety audit in accordance with the relevant legislation and appropriate measures aimed at minimising risk of accidents.
- That whenever there was a vacancy, an assessment would be undertaken to determine whether the site in question was safe, needed an enhancement or other intervention to operate without hindrance to children and other pedestrians crossing in the area.
- There had been no evidence to suggest that removing school crossing patrols would result in more car journeys.
- Any review carried out would require interaction at a detailed level with schools in the area.

- That officers were not seeking to pre-empt the outcome of the review, however, not delivering the agreed savings would place additional pressures on the Council to find funding elsewhere.
- That officers benchmarked other London boroughs and similar authorities as part of the road safety review and found that other local authorities had removed funding for their school crossing patrols.
- That further benchmarking exercise would be carried out to inform current proposals.

3.5 Councillor Louise Krupski, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action Member contributed at the meeting as follows:

- (a) That she endorsed Officers' response as an assurance that the Council would not withdraw any form of school patrol provision without undertaking safety reviews.
- (b) That she understood that making streets safer so that people can cross the local roads better was a key priority in the Children and Young People Select Committee agenda.
- (c) That she would provide an oversight of the road safety review as part of Lewisham's sustainable travel agenda.
- (d) That the Local Implementation Plan funds would soon be available, and the Council was seeking to align its budget with that to design safer streets for all pedestrians to use and cross safely.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action for their contributions at the meeting.

In recognition that there had been no response to the request following the decision by Mayor and Cabinet on 21 November 2018 for a report back on a full review of the school crossing patrol service, the Panel:

RESOVED that the report be noted, on the basis that the Select Committee Chairs would be invited to attend the meeting of the Public Accounts Select Committee scheduled to take place on 2 February 2023 to contribute to discussion on the budget item, with a specific focus on school crossing patrols as part of the Council's road safety review.

4. Scrutiny Update Report

The Panel received a report presented by the Head of Overview and Scrutiny, and noted the following updates:

- (a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
 - That officials from Thames Water had been invited to attend the next meeting in February to provide information on:

- their current performance and attendance standards;
 - how they communicate with the Council and residents;
 - their emergency response arrangements; and
 - their investment plans in terms of replacing the ageing Victorian pipe network.
- (b) Work of the two task and finish groups on *Creative and Community Workspaces and Community Gardening and Allotments practice*:
- That the work activities were progressing well.
 - A wide range of evidence was being collected and members and officers had been on several useful site visits.
- (c) Southeast London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- That an informal meeting took place earlier this month.
 - That the first formal meeting would take place in January, and Councillor Chris Best had been nominated as the Chair.
 - That because a lot of health planning was happening at a sub-regional level, rather than at borough level, with the advent of integrated care systems, it would be sensible to scrutinise such planning at a sub-regional level too. It was also expected that at the first formal meeting, Members would agree revised terms of reference to enable the consideration of discretionary cross-boundary issues, as well as mandatory ones (i.e., substantial cross-boundary reconfigurations).
- (d) The Panel noted that the next cycle of Select Committee meetings would commence with Housing Select Committee on 5 January, and would conclude with Public Accounts, which was moved from 19 January to 2 February to align with the timetable for the preparation of the budget.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked the Officer for her contribution at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Meeting closed at 8.49p.m.

Signed