

# MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 21 September 2022 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mark Ingleby (Chair), Ese Erheriene (Vice-Chair), Yemisi Anifowose, Bill Brown, Natasha Burgess, Laura Cunningham, Billy Harding, Coral Howard, Mark Jackson, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Ayesha Lahai-Taylor, Aisha Malik-Smith, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon, Rosie Parry, Jacq Paschoud, John Paschoud, Stephen Penfold, James Rathbone, Aliya Sheikh, Sakina Sheikh, Luke Sorba, Luke Warner and Carol Webley-Brown

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillors Chris Best, Suzannah Clarke, Will Cooper, Liam Curran, Sian Eiles, Stephen Hayes, Eva Kestner, Jack Lavery, Oana Olaru, James Royston, Liam Shrivastava, Hau-Yu Tam and Susan Wise

APOLOGIES: Tauseef Anwar, Rudi Schmidt and Eva Stamirowski

ALSO PRESENT: Tom Brown (Executive Director for Community Services), Charlotte Dale (Head of Overview and Scrutiny), Jennifer Daothong (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm), Councillor Juliet Campbell (Cabinet Member for Communities, Refugees and Wellbeing), Councillor Amanda De Ryk (Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy) and Councillor Louise Krupski (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate)

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: John Bennett (Head of Economy, Jobs and Partnerships), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People), Dr Catherine Mbema (Director of Public Health), Atika Mohammed (Head of Insight, Transformation & OD) and Martin O'Brien (Climate Resilience Manager)

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 last meeting**

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July be agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

## 2 **Declaration of Interests**

- 2.1 Cllr Jacq Paschoud declared an interest in item 4 as she had a close family member in receipt of a care package from Lewisham Social Care.

## 3 **Mayoral Response to Committee Referral**

- 3.1 Councillor Lavery, who had led on this item at the Committee's March meeting, welcomed the response and outlined the importance of the council developing a clear economic development strategy, setting out its ambitions for economic growth in the borough and how this growth could benefit local residents.

- 3.2 Information was provided on the funding formula for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and it was agreed that the response to the Fund allocations, agreed with London Councils, would be provided to the Committee.
- 3.3 It was noted that the voluntary and community sector was a key employer in the borough and that volunteers were eligible for a Lewisham Local Card which rewarded cardholders for shopping locally by providing discounts and offers. The card could also be purchased for £10.
- 3.4 **RESOLVED:** That the response be noted.

#### **4 Mayoral Response to Task and Finish Groups**

- 4.1 The response to the Housing Retrofit Task and Finish Group recommendations was taken first.
- 4.2 Councillor Krupski, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate, introduced the response, which she felt was pragmatic and achievable, noting that a number of steps had already been taken to implement some of the group's recommendations. It was noted that Councillor Krupski was chairing a group which included a number of local anchor institutions, which would be looking at retrofit and how to upgrade buildings in the borough and address the shortage of skilled workers in the retrofit sector. Officers were continuing to proactively bid for new funding opportunities and to work creatively to align external funding with existing priorities and capacity, although it was accepted that the funding available was not sufficient to meet the scale of the challenge.
- 4.3 In the discussion that followed, the following points were noted:
- The group had recommended that, given the cabinet portfolios relating to the climate emergency, housing and planning were connected, discussions should take place on how these cabinet portfolios might be formally linked. It was recognised that Cabinet Member responsibilities were a matter for the Mayor and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny would speak to him on this point.
  - The situation regarding the retrofitting of voids was complicated as there were financial and practical constraints on the level of work that could be achieved within current turnaround targets. There was also a need to better understand (a) how best to optimise thermal efficiency through retrofit within these constraints and (b) the wider pressures such as the urgent need to provide properties for tenants housed in temporary accommodation. A review was planned to assess the right balance and the outcome of this review would be presented to the Housing Select Committee.
  - The group had recommended that the Council should explore the feasibility of recruiting an in-house retrofit coordination specialist. However, it was noted that there was currently huge demand for retrofit coordinators due to the focus of government funding; and it would be difficult to recruit and retain the expertise in house when the market was likely to offer higher wages than the public sector. Officers were therefore focussing on working with Lewisham College and the Green Skills Hub to support Lewisham residents in gaining the skills needed to become a retrofit coordinator. Officers would however, keep this decision under review, as having in house resource would be beneficial and, in time, might be able to generate income to 'pay for itself'.

- Steps were being taken to build up retrofit/decarbonisation expertise in the planning team and avoid single person dependency which could occur if expertise were concentrated in a single specialist who could then leave. Public practice was also being used to bridge the skills gap between the public and private sectors across the built environment, including retrofit.
- 4.4. The second TFG response was considered. Councillor Jacq Paschoud who had chaired the TFG looking into Digital Inclusion for Adults with Learning Disabilities, addressed the Committee. She spoke of the need to ensure that Adults with Learning Disabilities living with family and those living in a supported living setting were equally able to be digitally included and for all day settings to enable access to online services. Above all else, Adults with Learning Disabilities needed to be supported to have as useful and as fulfilling lives as possible. Although she welcomed the positive responses to a number of the group's recommendations, the responses citing a lack of resources and/or budget to carry out the recommended action (and nothing else) were disappointing.
- 4.5 Tom Brown, Executive Director for Community services, agreed with the sentiments expressed but noted the severity of the financial constraints that the service and the council as a whole were operating under. Unfortunately there were not the resources available to help all vulnerable groups to the extent that the council would wish to help them. The blunt tone of some of the responses was accepted but officers had deliberately not used more ambiguous or aspirational language as the budgetary context was such that there was no real chance of implementing the requested actions. Officers had instead focussed on those actions which could be implemented using available resources.
- 4.6 In the discussion that followed, the following points were noted:
- Members felt the council still needed to signal its ambitions, without being disingenuous - and seek out creative ways in which to take forward the recommended action, including working more closely with partners.
  - The group had recommended that all day service provision should have access to Wi-Fi for their service users and, following approval of the Wifi and connectivity business case for Ladywell and Mulberry Day Centres, full connectivity was still expected by October 2022.
  - Whilst a factsheet / directory of proven digital activities and tools for partners to share, could be pulled together and produced relatively easily, the cost of maintaining the document and keeping it up to date needed to be considered.
  - When the recommended changes and updates are made to the website as part of the Resident Experience Programme, key user groups will be asked to test accessibility to ensure the website is as accessible as possible for those with a learning disability.
- 4.7 The Committee voted on whether to make a referral to Mayor and Cabinet on the response, requesting a fuller and more creative response. One councillor voted against making the referral, given the bleak financial context; the possibility that the council might struggle to deliver statutory services; and the unlikelihood of resources being found to action the recommendations not currently being actioned.

4.8 **RESOLVED:** That the responses be noted and that a referral to Mayor and Cabinet be made in respect of the response to the recommendations of the Digital Inclusion for Adults with Learning Disabilities Task and Finish Group:

- The Committee noted that a number of responses cited a lack of resources and/or budget to carry out the recommended action.
- The Committee recognises the very severe financial constraints which have been imposed on Council services, with cuts made year on year despite increasing demand. However, the Committee also feels that the council still needs to signal its ambitions, without being disingenuous; and seek out creative ways, including working more closely with partners, in which to improve the experience of this extremely vulnerable and excluded section of the community. The Committee would like the response to be reconsidered and for a fuller response to be provided.

## 5 **Establishing Task and Finish Groups**

5.1 **RESOLVED:** That:

(a) Two time limited task and finish groups be established to look at creative and community workspaces and community gardening and allotments practice.

(b) The following memberships for each group be agreed:

*Creative and community workspaces:*

1. Cllr Rudi Schmidt (*nominated as Chair*)
2. Cllr Billy Harding
3. Cllr Mark Ingleby
4. Cllr Aliya Sheikh
5. Cllr Liam Shrivastava

*Community gardening and allotments:*

1. Cllr Coral Howard (*nominated as Chair*)
2. Cllr Natasha Burgess
3. Cllr Will Cooper
4. Cllr Laura Cunningham
5. Cllr Sian Eiles

## 6 **Cost of Living**

6.1 Councillor De Ryk, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy, introduced the item and outlined what the Cost of Living Programme aimed to achieve and the important role of the Local Strategic Partnership. London wealth was not being shared and whilst there was 78% employment in the borough, Lewisham residents were the eighth lowest earners.

6.2 Catherine Mbema, Director of Public Health, was leading the programme alongside Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People. Catherine introduced the report, noting that the Lewisham Cost of Living programme was focussing on the following areas for action:

- Food justice programme
- Energy advice and fuel poverty support
- Income maximisation
- Debt triage.

6.3 In the committee discussion that followed Catherine's introduction, the following key points were noted:

- A range of stakeholders were being consulted on the Food Justice action plan, building on the pre-existing Good Food Lewisham network which ran during the pandemic, and included local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust. The consultation would help galvanise support and generate "buy in" to the programme.
- A lot of funding was one off but was being made the most of – central Government grants tended to be provided with not a lot of notice and local authorities needed to react quickly which can make allocation tricky.
- In terms of staffing the programme, lessons were being learnt from the covid response with some staff reallocation and volunteering. The Council's current financial pressures were having an impact on resourcing.
- "LIFT" software (an online interactive tool combining central government and local authority data to track families on low incomes) was being purchased. This would also assist in terms of identifying the issues facing those with no recourse to public funds.
- The Council was contacting libraries, leisure centres and adult learning institutions as part of its "warm havens" work to create warm and welcoming community spaces. Schools would also be asked to be part of the approach.
- The activity being undertaken in other boroughs was being considered so good practice could be shared.
- Mental Health was a key part of the programme, ensuring that residents badly affected by the crisis did not fall into despair. Efforts were also being made to ensure those in need of support were not being stigmatised.
- The communications team were an important part of the programme and comprehensive signposting information was on the website – there had been 48,000 redirects to support services from those pages. Lewisham life in November would be dedicated to the cost of living.

6.5 It was agreed that further information would be provided on:

- Whether the Council had/could engage with the Advice Lewisham Partnership and the capacity of the VCS to respond to the cost of living crisis.
- Whether the Household Support Fund had been fully allocated.

6.6 It was also agreed that an information pack would be prepared for councillors so they could signpost residents to Cost of Living resources at surgeries and at other points during their activities as Ward Members. Councillor De Ryk reported that Lewisham Local had co-produced a comprehensive sector leaflet. Officers and Cabinet Members were thanked by the Committee for their speedy response to this crisis.

6.7 **RESOLVED:** That:

1. The work done to date to support residents be noted.

2. The proposed work to be carried out by the Cost of Living working group be noted.
3. The Healthier Communities Select Committee review the draft Food Justice Action Plan and look at the commitment to providing Warm Havens for residents where they can spend time when the weather turns colder.
4. The Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee review the Cost of Living programme from an equalities perspective to ensure that support is being provided in an equitable way for Lewisham residents.
5. It be noted that the Children and Young People Select Committee would be looking at the cost of living crisis from the perspective of children and young people at its November meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.58 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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