

# MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 13 November 2018 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown, Juliet Campbell, Alex Feis-Bryce, Jim Mallory, Pauline Morrison and Luke Sorba

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joan Millbank, Councillor John Muldoon and Councillor Susan Wise

## **154. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the open meeting held on 16 October 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **155. Declarations of Interests**

None received.

## **156. Outstanding Scrutiny Matters**

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## **157. Notifications of Late and Urgent Items**

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## **158. Decisions made by Mayor and Cabinet on 31 October 2018**

### Joining South London's Regional Adoption Agency

The Executive Director for Children and Young People introduced the report.

The Chair asked officers if the Council would make any savings from the amalgamation and was told costs would remain the same. Councillor Mallory said if there would not be any savings benefit, Members would like assurance that this Partnership would be effective and beneficial, otherwise why would the Council want to do it. Councillor Mallory also asked how many children needed to be adopted, and how many prospective adopters the Council have.

The Executive Director for Children and Young People responded that joining the Regional Agency would make the service more effective and Lewisham would benefit from the economies of scale and wider pool of prospective adopters. She also said that as Lewisham would be part of the Board arrangements we would be in a better position to monitor and influence the service. The Team Manager, Adoption Service said that currently Lewisham has 16 children awaiting adoption, which included a large sibling group. She said the number of prospective adopters

did not match up with the number of children. She said it would be useful to work with neighbouring boroughs instead of competing with them. Panel Members heard that one of the Children Social Care officers, Natalie Bendall had been named Adoption Social Carer of the year. Members sent their congratulations to her.

Councillor Mallory asked whether officers were comfortable with the arrangements, and was told officers were comfortable especially since the Lewisham Team Manager, Adoption Service was involved at the preparation stage. Officers thought this would be good for Lewisham. The Chair asked what the disadvantages were, and was told that officers would be losing their working culture, which worked well, and now they might have to get used to a longer process. Lewisham officers were used to quick turnarounds. They would lose their model of matching which had been successful to date, because both teams work closely to get to know the child and the potential adopter very well, and this facilitated the matching process.

Members were informed that only two Boroughs currently use the Lewisham model and the other eight might not want to change their current model. Councillor Campbell asked whether there were any chance that some of the matching might breakdown if the Lewisham model was not used, and was told that both models would not lead to disruption. Councillor Campbell asked how the Lewisham model's timing in compared to others, and was told about 20-30 days quicker.

Councillor Sorba argued that he would be reluctant to support a move that had no evidence of efficiency and speed especially if there was no benefit of savings. He asked which children Lewisham staff would be supporting, and was told all staff would be supporting all the children from the various Boroughs. He said he was concerned that the host Borough might have an unfair advantage, and was told that this would not be the case as Southwark also had a very good service provision and was the other authority using the same model as Lewisham.

The Executive Director for Children and Young People said that all Local Authorities have to adopt the Regional arrangement sooner or later as this was the plan from central government. She said it would be better for Lewisham to be involved from the start so that we would be able to influence it to ensure it delivers what Lewisham wants. Councillor Sorba asked about the TUPE arrangements for staff. This was responded to by the Executive Director for Children and Young People. Councillor Sorba also asked whether staff had been consulted and was told formal consultation had not yet been done, but there had been discussion with staff and the Trade Union.

Panel Members were told that the governance arrangements had not been done as yet. The Principal Lawyer informed Panel members that officers were keen to ensure the best possible process was adopted, and adopting Lewisham's model could still be achieved as the process was still at inception. Councillor Mallory said he concurred with Councillor Sorba as Lewisham's high achievement should not be compromised. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said it was a positive working with Southwark as Lewisham works well with them, and

Southwark had a high Ofsted rating, and their geographical location was advantageous.

Councillor Feis-Bryce asked if officers had the option whether they would opt out, and was told that because everyone had to be part of it officers had to adapt. The Executive Director for Children and Young People said her thoughts would have been, to continue the status quo as it was working well for Lewisham. Councillor Sorba maintained that Lewisham's Adoption Service would not improve with this Partnership.

Panel Members agreed that although officers had put forward a convincing case, they still have concerns and would like Mayor and Cabinet to ask officers to ensure that careful consideration is given to the draft governance structure, to ensure Lewisham's quality service was maintained, and that the process be monitored.

RESOLVED that:

- i. the decision of Mayor and Cabinet be noted.
- ii. Mayor and Cabinet be requested to ask officers to ensure that careful consideration is given to the draft governance structure, to ensure Lewisham's quality service was maintained.
- iii. Mayor and Cabinet be requested to monitor the process.

**159. Decisions made by the Joint Committee of the London Boroughs of Brent, Lewisham and Southwark**

This item was not requested for discussion.

**160. Overview & Scrutiny Select Committees Programmes 2018-19 Update**

The Scrutiny Manager reported that the second round of Select Committee meetings had concluded and a referral outlining the views of scrutiny on the budget cuts proposals would be presented to Mayor and Cabinet on 21 November.

It was noted that the third round of Select Committee meetings would start on 3 December and end on 20 December and those Committees conducting in-depth reviews were holding evidence sessions and going on visits to progress their reviews.

It was also reported that some Scrutiny Members visited Parliament on 31 October and spoke to Clive Betts MP about successful scrutiny methods and techniques following observation of a select committee hearing. Other Members would visit the London Assembly on 28 November. The aim of the visits was to observe and discuss national and regional scrutiny practice.

Two Scrutiny roundtables have been arranged to feed in scrutiny's views to the local democracy review. These would take place on Friday 16 November between 1pm and 3pm and on Wednesday 21 November between 7pm and 9pm.

The Chair of the Public Accounts Select Committee, Councillor Mallory stated that the Select Committee was busy with Regeneration and would only be doing a review on income generation. Councillor Sorba, Chair of Children and Young People Select Committee notified Panel Members that the Select Committee would be doing an in-depth review on School ExclusionS, and would be shown a presentation of the Glasgow model.

The Head of Corporate Resources explained to Panel Members the recent issues surrounding the Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) dispute between some London Councils and Barclays Bank. He assured Panel Members that Lewisham was not in the same position as these London Boroughs, and the Council's External Auditors were looking into the situation and would give their advice by the end of the year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**161. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This item was not needed as no confidential item was discussed at the meeting.

**162. Decisions made by Mayor and Cabinet on 31 October 2018**

This item was not requested for discussion.

Meeting ended: 8:00pm

Chair.....