

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 28 January 2019 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown (Chair), Juliet Campbell (Vice-Chair), Tauseef Anwar, Andre Bourne, Patrick Codd, Tom Copley, Liam Curran, Sophie Davis, Colin Elliott, Alex Feis-Bryce, Leo Gibbons, Alan Hall, Carl Handley, Sue Hordjenko, Mark Ingleby, Caroline Kalu, Silvana Kelleher, Louise Krupski, Jim Mallory, Joan Millbank, Hilary Moore, John Muldoon, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Jacq Paschoud, John Paschoud, Stephen Penfold, James Rathbone, Sakina Sheikh, Alan Smith, Luke Sorba and James-J Walsh

APOLOGIES: Councillors Obajimi Adefiranye, Suzannah Clarke, Aisling Gallagher, Octavia Holland, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Pauline Morrison, Eva Stamirowski and Susan Wise

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing), Councillor Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees & Accountability), Councillor Brenda Dacres (Cabinet Member for Parks, Neighbourhoods and Transport (job share)), Charlotte Dale (Interim Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Mayor Damien Egan (Mayor), Stephanie Fleck, Salena Mulhere (Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance), Janet Senior (Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration) and Councillor Jonathan Slater (Cabinet Member for Community Sector)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2018

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2018 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 During the discussion on item 3, Councillor Hall declared two non-prejudicial interests:
- Chair of Unite the union community branch for Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley
 - Member of the Lewisham Trade Union Council.

3. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

- 3.1 Councillor Bonavia gave a short presentation and the following key points were noted:
- The way in which elections were run had improved significantly
 - Ways of further improving electoral registration were being considered

- The Local Democracy Review would be producing a series of evidence based recommendations shortly, including recommendations for further work
- The refugee resettlement programme would be expanded as part of establishing Lewisham as a borough of sanctuary; an independent review of the first programme was being carried out; and lots of work was being undertaken with volunteers in preparation. Housing would need to be procured for the new families and a refugee programme manager was being recruited to scale up available support.
- The Shared Service had achieved significant IT improvements, although there was much more work still to be done to get IT fit for purpose.

3.2 In response to questions from Members, the following points were noted:

- In order to reach “hard to reach” groups within the borough it was imperative for councillors to go to residents in the places they frequented as part of their daily lives, rather than expect residents to come to councillors.
- There had been a number of telephone issues resulting from the switchover to the new phone system and the restacking of Laurence House and these would be investigated. Issues around the use of voicemail would be specifically looked into.
- The implementation of Brexit held many uncertainties and should the UK leave Europe at a date post the European elections, UK MEPs may have their term of office extended until the date of departure.
- The Democracy Working Group would be meeting representatives from Kirklees to learn from their experience and processes would be put in place to ensure that any recommendations from the review would be implemented and tracked. The precise details of how implementation would be monitored were still to be agreed.
- The Local Democracy Review would consider the updated CIPFA guidance (2018) on audit committees and relevant recommendations with a view to assessing whether the best practice for audit committees put forward in the document should be adopted.
- The Local Democracy Review was concerned with effective decision making and the ability of staff to implement the decisions made by political leaders. Related infrastructure requirements would be considered as part of the drive for better decision making.
- Local Assemblies were being reviewed, with a view to making them more efficient and able to engage a wider spectrum of residents.
- The Cabinet Member did not feel that the Head of Corporate Resources being the Section 151 Officer was a conflict of interest, given the additional duties he was undertaking whilst the Executive Director for Resources and Regeneration was acting as the interim Chief Executive.
- The expansion of the refugee resettlement programme would take place slowly as it was crucial to get it right and learn from the families resettled so far. The first new families were expected to arrive in Spring 2019.

- The Shared IT Service was shared between Brent, Southwark and Lewisham on an equal partners basis, but with Brent as the legal employer. It was clear that there needed to be more resilience locally in Lewisham.
- In order to assess whether individuals were entitled to emergency relief, the Council had to engage with the Home Office and checking the immigration status of individuals was necessary to establish eligibility for this relief. It was not checked for any other reason.

3.3 Councillor Bell gave a short presentation and the following key points were noted:

- The severe weather emergency protocol had been enacted and there was an action plan in place for each of the 14 rough sleepers identified in a recent street survey (which provided a snapshot of rough sleeping in the borough). 30 places were available for rough sleepers and officers were looking to extend the provision available at St Mungos.
- A key priority for the Council was building 1000 new homes but this would take both time and expertise. 500 would be council properties and 500 owned by housing providers. A briefing for each ward would be provided covering: the location of each scheme and the proposed numbers and types of new homes that would be included.
- Meetings had been held with housing providers in the borough to make it clear that lifetime tenancies were the Council's preference.
- A list of Tenants and Residents Associations would be provided to Members so that ward councillors could engage with their local associations.
- Work to secure social housing as part of the re-location of Lewisham Library was ongoing.

3.4 In response to questions from Members, the following points were noted:

- A briefing on the implications of the removal of the housing borrowing cap would be provided.
- Viability Statements were, and would continue to be, published.
- Information would be provided on how councillors can participate in street surveys of rough sleepers.
- Any councillors with ideas around land that could potentially be used for housing should let the Cabinet Member or Strategic Housing have the details.
- Information on the budget for repairs and maintenance within the HRA would be provided. It was important to maintain existing properties as well as build new ones.
- Lewisham Homes was in the process of challenging some contractors as the standard of the work they carried out was not acceptable.

- Information would be provided on plans for the ground floor of Place Ladywell, potential landbanking in the borough and potential unauthorised sub-division of Council Housing stock.
- The Council would speak to other public sector owners of land in the borough with a view to potentially using their land for development, although the amount of land likely to be available would be small.
- Rents at Tidemill would be as close to target rents as possible.
- Interim Management Orders would be investigated.

3.5 Councillor Slater gave a short presentation and the following key points were noted:

- Local Assemblies taking decisions on the use of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding was being investigated, as would the provision of a funding pot for small grants to fund projects outside of the scope of NCIL.
- A decision on the feasibility of building a new Lewisham Library would be taken by the end of February.
- An Accessibility Commission would be set up with a focus on co-production and lessons were being learnt from Hammersmith and Fulham's Disability Rights Commission. A job specification for the Chair would be developed.
- The 21 recommendations resulting from the Safer Stronger Communities Review into LGBT+ provision in Lewisham would be implemented and a progress report would be provided to that Committee in March.
- It was hoped that a Private Renters Union would be established.

3.6 In response to questions from Members, the following points were noted:

- Officers were enforcing provisions in the contracts for the leasing of community assets relating to maintenance of the buildings but if Members had any specific concerns these should be relayed to the Cabinet Member.
- The Cabinet Member would be happy to meet a representative of the Lewisham Trade Union Council to discuss their concern over budget cuts and the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism.
- A briefing would be provided on options for the future of Lewisham Library.
- It was important that a reputable, impartial organisation was engaged to help establish the private renters union and give private renters an enhanced voice.
- The Cabinet Member would look into the "Out Late" Campaign with a view to supporting it.
- The decline in footfall at Catford Library following the refurbishment works would be addressed.
- The Cabinet Member would ensure that staff were not charged for a radar key for the proposed inclusive toilet for trans staff.

3.7 It was noted that a letter outlining the actions agreed to be undertaken by the Executive Members, would be sent to each Cabinet Member and a response expected.

3.8 **RESOLVED:** That the responses provided be noted.

4. The Corporate Strategy

4.1 The Mayor introduced the new Corporate Strategy which set out the Council's future direction. It was noted that the Sustainable Community Strategy had been written in 2007 and published in 2008, so a new up-to-date strategy was very much required. A new performance monitoring tool and a communications strategy would also be developed. Janet Senior highlighted that the new strategy had been written and designed with accessibility in mind and reported that the strategy was due to go to Mayor and Cabinet on 13 February and Council on 27 February. There would be a launch event for senior and middle managers who would then be encouraged to meet with their teams to discuss the strategy and its implications for their work.

4.3 The Committee discussed the strategy and Councillor Ingleby proposed additional text to be added to the introductions to chapters 2 and 5 and it was agreed that abridged versions of his suggestions would be added.

4.4 There was a lengthy discussion on the importance of taking action in relation to climate change and the wording in the corporate strategy around the need to move the pension fund away from investments linked to fossil fuels. It was noted that other boroughs, including Southwark, had taken similar decisions, in part driven by ethical concerns, but primarily because they felt significant investments in fossil fuels presented a long term financial risk to their fund. It was agreed that a referral to Mayor and Cabinet would be made on this issue.

4.5 The following comments were also made or noted:

- Any references to BME in the document would be changed to BAME to ensure consistency.
- The Council should broaden the focus of the Lewisham Secondary Challenge and Lewisham Learning in light of proposed changes to the criteria upon which schools are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted. A shift towards looking more closely at what is taught and how it is taught (a 'quality of education' judgement) and loosening the focus on test and exam outcomes was likely.
- The demographic section of the strategy should be expanded to reflect a wider range of diversity strands/protected characteristics than currently included.
- Race should be more explicitly referred to in the document and not just unconscious bias.

- The wording around the proposed borough wide landlord licensing scheme should be looked at again to make sure it is completely accurate.
- 50% affordable housing in developer-led housing schemes might be the target but it is not necessarily achievable and might raise expectations that cannot be met. However, it was suggested that a stretching target was needed to encourage developers to be more ambitious in their affordable housing projections.
- The new performance monitoring tool would be a lot more accessible with infographics and diagrams.

4.6 RESOLVED: That a referral as follows be made to Mayor and Cabinet:

1. The Committee requests in the strongest possible terms that the wording in the corporate strategy reflects exactly the wording in the Lewisham Labour Party manifesto in relation to the need to divest the pension fund from fossil fuels. Therefore it should read:

"We will support moving the Council's Pension Fund away from fossil fuels linked investments in response to climate change and to protect our investments from volatile energy markets".

We would encourage Mayor and Cabinet to add a line stating that we will do this "*in line with our fiduciary duty*", as many other boroughs have.

2. The Committee requests that a wider range of diversity strands/ protected characteristics are reflected in the diversity profile in the corporate strategy.

5. Items to be referred to Mayor & Cabinet

5.1 RESOLVED: That a referral be made to Mayor and Cabinet in relation to item 4 (The Corporate Strategy) as outlined.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

Chair:

Date:
