

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 15 October 2019 at 7.05 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown, Peter Bernards, Juliet Campbell, Patrick Codd, Jim Mallory, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon and Luke Sorba

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Kevin Bonavia and Councillor James-J Walsh

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sakina Sheikh and Councillor Liam Curran

242. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the open meeting held on 1 October June 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

243. Declarations of Interests

None received.

244. Outstanding Scrutiny Matters

RESOLVED that the report noted.

245. London Borough of Lewisham's Brexit Preparations

The Panel received a report introduced by the Director of Corporate Policy and Governance (DCPG) about the London Borough of Lewisham's (Lewisham) preparations for Brexit.

Commenting on the report, Members welcomed statement that the preparations were necessary in light of an announcement that the Government had identified a series of 'reasonable worst-case assumptions' for the impact of a no-deal Brexit. It was recognised that the testing of business continuity plans for a variety of scenarios across key Council service areas remained a priority, with a focus on the distribution and supply of food, medicines and fuel.

Members also noted responses to questions about Lewisham's preparedness for Brexit from the Council's Executive Directors within the scope of their individual service remit. Other Directors present also contributed in clarifying issues to the Panel. It was noted that ongoing efforts by the Council's Brexit Co-ordination Group (BCG) with departments and across London regions were in line with Lewisham's Corporate Strategy for 2018-2020. Information that the coordinated efforts spanned across the Council's work in relation to social care, school and children services, regulatory services, housing, homelessness and capital

programme delivery, data protection and emergency planning was welcomed by Members.

Members expressed satisfaction that ideas gathered on the Council's Brexit Plan via its website since January 2019 had been useful to the work of the BCG. Members therefore endorsed a decision by Officers not to close website link until 31 October 2019 in light of the Government's deadline for Brexit to occur, and the likelihood of a no-deal.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair, Councillor Bill Brown invited comments from Councillor Kevin Bonavia, Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees and Accountability. It noted that the Cabinet Member was leading on Lewisham's preparatory work on Brexit.

In addressing the meeting, Councillor Bonavia echoed statements by the DCPG, confirming to the Panel that the arrangements assimilated a wide range of national guidance from government departments. The Cabinet Member confirmed to the Panel that the baseline of the efforts was to ensure that Council's departments had prepared their services to test and support business continuity arrangements for a variety of potential scenarios, including a no-deal Brexit. Thus, there were ongoing liaisons with partners through the Local Resilience Forum. Meetings with the police, and health service officials through the South East London Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships were also underway as part of the coordinated efforts by the BCG. The Cabinet Member confirmed that Lewisham would also continue to participate in regional co-ordination across local government, to include weekly submissions to the London Resilience Forum and London Councils.

Councillor Bonavia continued by recalling to the Panel that residents living in Lewisham voted overwhelmingly for the United Kingdom to remain within the EU. Thus, the coordinated efforts to enhance Lewisham's response in delivering to its citizens would include arrangements for direct support to EU nationals through the establishment of various communication initiatives, with a view to increase an awareness of the EU settled Status (EUSS).

In his closing remarks, Councillor Bonavia stated that views from the Panel on the report to further support the preparatory work of the BCG would be welcomed.

Members of the Panel, together with Councillor James-J Walsh who was also present at the meeting commented on the report, and their contributions are attached to these Minutes as an Annex.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked Councillors Bonavia and Walsh for their contributions at the meeting. The Chair also expressed appreciation to Officers and the BCG for their efforts to Lewisham's Brexit preparatory work.

RESOLVED – That the report about Lewisham's preparations for Brexit.

246. Open Item(s) - Decision by Mayor and Cabinet on 10 October 2019

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

247. Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees Work Programmes - 2019-2020

The Panel received an update report presented by the Scrutiny Manager in regards to Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee activities. It was noted that Members were currently being consulted on potential changes to the scrutiny structure in Lewisham. There would be a roundtable on Friday 18 October between 11am and 1pm, in Room 101 at Laurence House. Thereafter, two drop in sessions would take place on Wednesday 23 October between 11am – 1pm and Tuesday 29 October between 6-7pm.

The Scrutiny Manager further advised the Panel that Mayor and Cabinet would meet on 30 October to consider the budget cut proposals and referrals from the select committees on the cuts will be considered.

The Panel also received confirmation by the Scrutiny Manager that those Select Committees undertaking in-depth reviews were collating evidence via written submissions, engagement activities and visits. It was noted that the activities were progressing well.

Commenting on other aspects of work of currently undertaken by select committees, the Panel expressed a concern that the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Local Democracy Review excluded executive arrangements. It was recognised that that was what was agreed by Members when the ToR was discussed, however, with hindsight, executive arrangements should have been included. The Panel also suggested that contact should be made with Children and Young people representatives, and it was recognised that Calabash centre had been scrutinised by the Healthier Communities Select Committee, and the Mayor & Cabinet deferred decision on it.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

248. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

249. Decisions made by Mayor and Cabinet on 10 October 2019

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

ANNEX TO MINUTES

Contributions by the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel, and Councillor J-James Walsh to report on Lewisham's Brexit preparations.

Risks Prioritisation

Members expressed a disappointment that there was no sense of priority of risks in the report. It was suggested that to effectively gauge Lewisham's response to potential crisis, a model based on the traffic light system could perhaps be used to identify the likelihood of low, medium and high risks of events happening.

Outreach

Members welcomed steps taken to access Lewisham's Electoral Register to identify and contact EU nationals. It was recognised that access to other public sources of information was instrumental in identifying 21 Children Looked After and 11 Care Leavers who were EU nationals for support to apply for British Citizen. Members were however of a view that the effort could be more robust if it included outreach activities to support of migrants in micro-communities. Small and medium-sized businesses, faith and other hard-to-reach groups in Lewisham were highlighted as examples by Members.

Political Leadership

Members commented on a need for resilience and cohesion in the event of crises posed by Brexit. It was recognised by Members that the preparations should include arrangements for political leadership in Lewisham. Thus, efforts should be enhanced with relevant stakeholders to identify how to deal with community tensions regarding, for example, potential insurgence of hate crimes. It was also the view of Members that the planning could include support to immigrants, particularly EU nationals whose status would be most affected. Members stated that advice on potential review of driving licence, and the tackling of homelessness for migrants as a priority of the Council should also be considered. Further suggestion to mitigate for school places for children of EU nationals as part of the EUSS awareness activities was also highlighted as relevant to political leadership.

Workforce Planning

Members stated that plans should be clear about staff levels in social care and commissioning services, to include coordination with those working for the National Health Service. It was stated that the arrangements should highlight how those staff would respond to emergencies without the employers breaching the Working Time Directive, particularly during winter pressures. It was stated that the use of agency staff should form part of the preparations. The comments to be directed to the Director of Human Resources for consideration as part of workforce-planning preparations arrangements.

Data Considerations

Members expressed concern about data protection issues, commenting that the UK might no longer be able to access EU Data in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Furthermore, plans should be in place to manage likely changes to procurement regulations. Members requested clarity about the wider infrastructure of data map in Lewisham, including the transfer of laws by statutory documents, specifically in

relation to State Aid Regulations. Members to also be provided with an assurance about data storage and access issues for the Council, particularly as it relates to Apple devices, whose data is stored in Cork.
Continuing on the issue of data

Food Supplies

Members acknowledged that the Council had implemented a Food Poverty Scheme. However, because of potential rise in inflation in the event of Brexit, Lewisham should exert more urgency to deal with increase in food prices. Thus, whilst food-banks were in operation, there should be plans to expand involvement by community agencies as a means to mitigate against food shortages, particularly for less well-off residents. Furthermore, consideration should be given to customer protection in regard to food outlets, and reactions by regulatory and enforcement services in that regard.

Financial Reserves

Members also expressed a concern that there was no evidence that the Council's financial reserves would be replenished in the short and medium-term. Thus, matters relating to overseas investments should be considered as part of the Council's financial viability response to eventualities.