MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 27 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown (Chair), Obajimi Adefiranye, Tauseef Anwar, Peter Bernards, Suzannah Clarke, Patrick Codd, Sophie Davis, Aisling Gallagher, Leo Gibbons, Alan Hall, Octavia Holland, Sue Hordijenko, Coral Howard, Mark Ingleby, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Caroline Kalu, Silvana Kelleher, Louise Krupski, Jim Mallory, Paul Maslin, Joan Millbank, Hilary Moore, Pauline Morrison, John Muldoon, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Lionel Openshaw, John Paschoud, Stephen Penfold, Kim Powell, James Rathbone, Luke Sorba, Eva Stamirowski, James-J Walsh and Susan Wise

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sakina Sheikh, Juliet Campbell, Tom Copley, Liam Curran, Colin Elliott, Carl Handley, Jacq Paschoud and Alan Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing), Councillor Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees & Accountability), Charlotte Dale (Interim Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Councillor Amanda De Ryk (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources) and Barrie Neal (Director of Corporate Policy and Governance)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2019

1.1 **RESOLVED**: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2019 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 **RESOLVED:** That the following declarations of interest be noted in relation to the *Cabinet Member Question Time* item on the agenda:

Councillor Wise - Director at Lewisham Homes
Councillor Ingleby - Director at Lewisham Homes
Councillor Kelleher – Lewisham Homes tenant
Councillor Penfold – Employee of Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Councillor Adefiranye – Wife is a volunteer at the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network

3. Scrutiny Update

3.1 The Chair invited the Select Committee Chairs to give a brief update on the work of their committees.

3.2 The following updates were noted:

Cllr Muldoon (Healthier Communities):

- The Committee had made three recent referrals to Mayor & Cabinet.
  - One concerned the reconfiguration of adult social care day services. It was noted that a service users group would be established at the Calabash Day Centre.
  - Another concerned adult safeguarding and the need to more widely publicise the methods of getting in touch with the Council in the event of concerns.
  - One concerned charging for overseas visitors - the Committee had questioned a senior manager from Lewisham Hospital on how national policy was being implemented, including the scope for local discretion, but wanted further information to be provided.

Cllr Sorba (Children & Young People):

- The Committee was following up on its exclusions review and would have an update at its next meeting on progress in implementing the Committee's recommendations.
- The Committee was feeding into, and monitoring, the Early Help Review and was keen to ensure that a comprehensive needs analysis would be completed.
- Waiting times for mental health appointments were a key area of concern, although it was noted that there had been substantial reductions in waiting times recently.
- Other key matters being scrutinised by the Committee included the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan and educational attainment.
- Information on (a) relevant guidelines in relation to waiting times for mental health appointments for children and young people; (b) the key milestones in the improvement plan for Children's Social Care and the extent to which they are being met; and (c) any specific actions that are being taken to reduce exclusion rates for groups that are disproportionately affected, would be provided.

Cllr Mallory (Public Accounts):

- The Committee had focussed attention on the Children's Social Care Budget as it was dissatisfied with the way it had been managed and the Adult Social Care Budget which had, to some extent, been cushioned by the Better Care Fund.
- The income generation and commercialisation review being led by the Vice Chair was progressing with recent evidence sessions/visits to Barking and Dagenham and Waltham Forest.
- Members were invited to the Committee's meeting in February, where the budget would be discussed.
- The Chair had been asked a Council question about the state of the Council's finances.

Cllr Bernards (Housing):

- The Committee was reviewing the engagement of residents in relation to housing developments and felt that:
  - Early engagement was key

- Engagement should start with a blank sheet of paper
- Engagement should be ongoing
- A wide range of people, including the hard to reach, should be included.

- The recommendations would be circulated to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee once agreed.

Cllr Rathbone, on behalf of Cllr Campbell (Safer, Stronger Communities):

- The Committee had moved away from performance monitoring to strategy development and did a great deal of pre-decision scrutiny.
- It was particularly focussed on crime & disorder and equality of opportunity (including deprivation).
- The development of a new Comprehensive Equalities Scheme meant that its in-depth review into equalities was timely.

RESOLVED: That the updates provided be noted.

4. Cabinet Member Question Time

4.1 Cllr Bonavia was questioned first. In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following points were noted:

- The accessibility of polling stations would be looked into.
- Liaison with trade unions was improving. The works council had been largely dormant as issues had increasingly been resolved informally. However, the Council was now looking to reinvigorate councillor involvement, alongside trade unions, in the development of proposals for improving the work environment and the sharing of concerns.
- More resources had been directed towards the handling of Freedom of Information requests – the Council target was to respond to more than 90 per cent within the standard timescale.
- The Lewisham Migration Forum worked with all cohorts of refugees, including LGBT+ refugees but connections would be made with groups providing specific support to this group.
- Consultation by identity, rather than geography, had been considered by the Local Democracy Working Group and the Cabinet Member agreed that a future report to the group would specifically cover this matter.
- The removal of the embedded Home Office worker from the *No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)* team had not had a detrimental impact on the work of the team. The culture within the team and the behaviour of staff towards clients was being looked into and a general training day was planned which would cover this, amongst other things. Thorough guidance on how to deal with clients would be provided.
- The Council sought to ensure that all schools provided free school meals to NRPF children and that funding was not an issue.
- A communications plan would be developed to ensure that parents fully understood the school admissions process and their options.
- Refugee children had access to a dedicated budget which could be used to purchase school uniform. Contingency funds were also available.

- IT had been an issue when Ofsted inspected children's services. The Liquid Logic issue had been resolved and work to improve the resilience of all systems had commenced. It was imperative that all applications were up to date with staff properly trained to use them. A draft digital strategy had also been prepared.
- The Local Democracy Working Group had looked at the 2019 Citizens' Assembly held in Camden on the Climate Crisis. However, after analysing the cost-benefits of Citizens' Assemblies, the Working Group agreed not to recommend that a Citizens' Assembly be undertaken by Lewisham. Cheaper alternatives were being looked at.
- Telephony needed to improve with a proper call back system put in place.
- There was a £30k grant to support volunteers working with refugees so this should be able to fund DBS checks if required.
- Webcasting was available in the Council Chamber and rooms 1 and 2 (when used together and when each participant had a microphone) so Business Panel, for example, had the potential to be web cast.
- The Council wanted all public organisations in Lewisham to adhere to sanctuary borough principles.

4.2 Cllr Bell was questioned second. In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following points were noted:

- All new housing schemes were mixed tenure as (a) evidence showed that mixed communities worked best and (b) owner occupier homes could cross subsidise social rent homes. The Ladywell site would be at least 50% social rent and Ladywell Place would be relocated. The development at Achilles Street would also be mixed tenure.
- Better IT systems would assist in enabling information about domestic violence to be extracted by landlords. The Council was working on how to respond to the implications of the Domestic Violence Bill, when enacted, and consideration was currently being given to potential changes to the Council's allocations scheme to support survivors of domestic abuse.
- 120 properties had been bought from Hyde last year to address demand for temporary accommodation. Some of the Council's temporary accommodation was in other boroughs but temporary accommodation was being developed in borough where possible and Hamilton Lodge in Forest Hill, for example, had been converted for this purpose.
- There was an Article 4 direction in place in Whitefoot restricting permitted development rights, with the aim of stopping the spread of unsuitable HMOs (houses in multiple exploitation) that were exploiting those living in them.
- More social housing was a top priority for the Council and whilst all legitimate concerns would be addressed, it would not be swayed by people protesting the building of new council housing without good grounds.
- The borough wide landlord licensing scheme might be implemented in a variety of ways, the Council was keen to get a borough wide scheme and was of the opinion that its data was robust enough to warrant this, but a

selective licensing scheme was the fall-back position. The application would be made in March.

- There were many reasons why delays had been encountered in the building of new council homes, including protracted legal disputes and protesters occupying sites. However, the Council was roughly on schedule with 200 starts on site expected this year. The *Building for Lewisham* website would be launched on Wednesday 29 January, presenting easily available information on all sites.
- Housing for elderly LGBT+ residents was under consideration and discussions were being held with Tonic.
- Obtaining permission to make alterations to shared ownership properties could be exorbitant. Another issue was the difficulty in selling properties that were on the sixth floor of a block or higher.
- The Mayor of London had secured billions of pounds of funding for social housing in London at the London affordable rent level. This was not 60%+ more expensive than social rent, it was approximately £10 - £15 more expensive per week and considerably cheaper than market rent. It was important to get as many social houses built as possible given the large number of people on the register, so if London affordable rent enabled this, it was to be welcomed.
- A private renters union would be established with a partner. Work would begin in early 2021 and the Licensing scheme was currently taking priority.
- Capital letters had been set up with the aim of London Boroughs becoming more efficient in securing accommodation within London - in borough - wherever possible. To date, it had not delivered the expected results but it was hoped that this would improve.
- To enable the Besson Street development the Council was putting the land it owned into a joint vehicle and it expected an income of approximately £1m a year, in return. The Music Room (5 creative arts spaces, used by the community for band rehearsals, photographic shoots and dance) would be protected.
- Lewisham was still looking to create a site for gypsies and travellers but had encountered difficulties in its negotiations with Network Rail. There would be a Mayor & Cabinet report in February.

4.3 Cllr De Ryk was questioned last. In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following points were noted:

- Consultation on the in-sourcing of the school meals contract had been extensive, with primary schools being generally more positive about the proposals than secondary schools. The council would do the “thinking” around meal plans and logistics whilst the schools would need to provide cooks and lunchtime supervisory staff. A hybrid option might be possible.
- When thinking about in-sourcing it was important to remember that costs might initially be higher but quality could be better; and in future years there might be income generation opportunities. However, it was important not to overburden insourced services in

their first few years of operation by cutting their budget or expecting immediate expansion into the market.

- There had been some growth in the internal audit budget to address growing demands on the service.
- Human Resources were looking into the option for staff to buy annual leave, subject to service demands; and the establishment of a management development programme funded by the apprenticeship levy.
- Kim Wright was designing and delivering a service transformation programme and would provide more information on this at a briefing on 10 February.

4.4 **RESOLVED:** That a referral to Mayor and Cabinet be made, outlining the further information requested by the Committee:

- **Polling stations** – Can the accessibility of polling stations be reviewed and information provided on whether all polling stations used for the forthcoming London Mayoral and Assembly elections will be fully accessible.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)** – Can further information be provided on the content and date of the "general training day" for NRPF officers and on the organisation that will be delivering the training.
- **School Admissions Publicity** – Can the communications plan relating to school admissions (with the aim of ensuring that parents are properly informed about the process and their options) be sent to members of the Children and Young People Select Committee, once prepared.
- **Citizen Engagement** – Can some examples of consultation activities where there has been good feedback to participating residents be provided.
- **Domestic Violence** – Can a briefing be circulated on the work being carried out in relation to the Domestic Abuse Bill and the potential changes to the allocations scheme in relation to survivors of doemstic violence.
- **School Meals –** Can some further information on the in-sourcing of the school meals contract, including timelines and implications for schools, be provided.
- **Council Tax –** Can reassurance be provided that the Council correctly applies the council tax reduction for students.
- **Cycle racks** – Can an update on officer efforts to make renting a bicycle rack more affordable, following the rent increase that was put in place following the end of TfL funding, be provided. *(Matter arising from minutes of the last meeting)*

5. Referrals to Mayor & Cabinet

A referral was made in relation to the item on the agenda entitled “Cabinet Member Question Time”.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

Chair:

Date:
