

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday 5 May at 7pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown, Sakina Sheikh, Peter Bernard, Juliet Campbell, Patrick Codd, Liam Curran, Jim Mallory, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon and Luke Sorba.

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the last meeting held on 25 February 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record

2. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

3. Scrutiny of the Council's COVID-19 Response

This item was presented by the Chief Executive and the Director for Public Services.

The CE gave the short term proposed approach for Business Panel meetings so the COVID-19 response will be a standing item to ensure assurance and oversight. This will include a summary of the overall regional/local system response to COVID-19, any key developments since the last update, an overview and update on the Council response in relation to critical services and scope for member input and community feedback to the operational response.

The practical response set out in the report aims to strike a balance between allowing well-scrutinised decisions to be made but also ensuring the resources are within Council and remaining available to deliver critical services.

The Director for Public Services summarised the Council's response strategy and objectives for COVID-19. The strategy has been used thoroughly and has helped in identifying priorities. The 3 cores pieces to the response structure are:

The Council Silver Group which focuses on the performance of the Council; the COVID-19 Committee which focuses on the Councils partner services in health, police, etc.; and the Recovery Group which will develop as the country approaches recovery.

The Director for Public Services oversees this structure which reports to the Gold Group chaired by the CE. The CE and the Director for Public Services report to Mayor & Cabinet weekly. The South-East sub-regional group belonging to the London-wide response to COVID-19 is also chaired by the CE.

The critical services identified by the Council and government are being closely monitored and being provided with extra staff and volunteers.

Over 2700 food packages have been delivered in the borough to Lewisham residents. Over 2000 residents have volunteered to support Lewisham Local in the community. Over £30m has been given across businesses in the borough to support them in the crisis. The Council is prepared and equipped to respond to any other emergencies that arise out of the pandemic.

The following questions were asked by Councillors and responded to:

Q1. Can we consider the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel meeting once a fortnight instead of once a month, as once a month is insufficient to deliver proper scrutiny?

Q2. Has the government asked for figures on our care homes? Do we have an overview of how care homes are coping and any figures from other neighbouring authorities?

Q3. Is there representation for businesses within the 3 partners groups?

Q4. Are we able now to have more up-to-date information regarding care homes as they appear to have been delayed previously?

Q5. What were the discrepancies between the critical services identified by government guidelines and the critical services identified by the Council?

Q6. People eligible for government funding who were unable to receive support due to the emergency of COVID-19 funding, what will happen to their eligibility?

Q7. How confident are the Council in their provision to vulnerable residents who are self-isolating?

Q8. What support is available to those who are experiencing anxiety during this time?

Q9. Is there any information available on the speculation on the phased return to school of primary pupils?

Q10. Are home carers getting the correct amount of PPE? Are there other areas for testing other than Greenwich closer to the Council?

Q11. It has been found that people from BAME backgrounds are more likely to catch and die from COVID-19. Does the Council have any information or guidance as to why this is and what will be done?

A1. The CE stated that there needs to be a balance between providing opportunities for the Overview and Scrutiny to respond appropriately to challenges and dealing with any current responses. Anything more than once per month may put an onerous burden on already under pressure officers to service the Panel and will therefore not enable the Panel to do as well in responding and may take away from the quality of work.

A2/A4. Up-to-date figures from care homes according to their current capacity, death rate and their current coping capabilities can be provided in a report including historic information about the care homes. At this moment, they are coping well. The council has been supporting them as well as they can and providing them with PPE and aiding with testing staff. The Council has been reporting up to government including capacity, discharges, etc. The comparative figures on deaths are not separated from care homes. There are figures available from ONS data regarding the number of deaths in care homes per borough, which can be provided in future reporting.

A3. Business groups are not part of the committees but the Council is in liaison with them over their business grants, contact, and recovery arrangements. Liaison with any groups is in direct response to this incident and in line with the objectives set out in the Strategy.

A5. What they Council determined were priorities and the government viewed as priorities were only mildly different and for there were no differences of significance.

A6. This question can be answered in future reporting now that it has been raised.

A7. The council is reaching everyone it is aware of in the community that needs help. The shielding teams are helping provide food and any other additional support residents need. Approximately 500 residents are being contacted per day.

A8. There is a set of FAQs available on the support line and on the Council website which contains a vast amount of support including those who are experiencing anxiety and any areas available to them where they can receive extra support.

A9. The DfE have been in discussion with a number of boroughs, and their stance and guidance changes on at least a daily basis regarding the re-opening of schools. It is an ongoing discussion. They are clear on needing at least 3 weeks of announcing the reopening of schools and the reopening of schools as it will take some time to equip teachers and schools to enable a safer teaching environment.

A10. There have been local pop-up testing centres available. When the information is available, it is put on the Council website and there communication avenues. PPE was really low and as a result that London set up some emergency arrangements as were these arrangements set up locally so any worker that needs PPE in the care sector, they are provided by the Council.

A11. This significance of this disproportionality requires national conversation. The regional officer for Public Health has been asked to communicate with us on any updates to the research conducted. The Council submitted evidence to parliamentary enquiries in the last week which looked at how COVID-19 effects all people with protected characteristics. Further updates can be provided as they come.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive and the Director for Public Health.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

4. Key Decision Plan

The Head of Business and Committee presented this report.

Councillor Codd asked if a report was planned assessing the financial impact on the Council of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Head of Business & Committee stated there was no current listing of such a report in the Key Decision Plan but that the Acting Chief Finance Officer was monitoring the financial impact closely and was likely to report in the near future to Mayor & Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. Decisions made by the Mayor on 25 March 2020- open session

Single Equalities Framework

Councillor Juliet Campbell was given an assurance that the comments of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee tabled at the Mayoral meeting on March 25 would receive a response agreed by the entire Mayor & Cabinet at a future meeting.

6. Exclusion of the Press and Public.

Agreed.

7. Decisions made by Mayor on 25 March 2020- closed session

There were no decisions identified for further discussion.

8. Decision taken by Executive Director- Rough Sleeping Initiative STA

This decision was not identified for further discussion.