

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EDUCATION BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 13 October 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown, Sophie Davis, Peter Bernards, Juliet Campbell, Patrick Codd, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon, Luke Sorba, Lilian Brooks, Monsignor N Rotheron, Ajayi and Caseley

ALSO PRESENT:

Under Standing Order:

Councillor Cllr Chris Barnham - Cabinet Member for Schools Performance & Children's Services.

Officers:

Executive Director of Children and Young Peoples Services, and Estate Management & Contract Manager.

Clerk:

Senior Committee Manager

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Liam Curran and Councillor Kim Powell

1. Minutes

2. Declarations of Interests

None was declared.

3. Decisions made by Mayor and Cabinet on 7 October 2020 - open session

The meeting started at 7.00pm and adjourned shortly after 7.03pm, to resume at 7.07pm

Councillor Bill Brown, Chair of the Panel, advised the meeting that Councillor Luke Sorba had requested further consideration of two decisions taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 7 October 2020 in relation to:

- The future delivery of school meal provision; and
- The Greenvale School expansion project

Councillor Sorba, Chair of the Children and Young People Select Committee addressed the meeting.

1. The future delivery of school meal provision

Councillor Sorba informed the meeting that the existing contract, managed by an external operator on behalf of schools was nearing completion. It

was understandable that an in-house model for delivery would not be pursued as part of the renewal options on the basis that it was uneconomical. It was stated that the report also highlighted that the majority of schools were reluctant to undertake contract management responsibilities on similar economic basis. However, reported criticisms that the current provision included several months of failure to deliver, which had resulted in maximum penalties to schools for breaches in contract obligations, was a concern. Therefore, although there would be no direct cost to the Council in the pursuit of a new central contract, the fact remained that the proposal upon which the decision by the Mayor and Cabinet was based included an evaluation of the current provision. In view of that, Councillor Sorba stated that the Council had a duty to ensure value for money for children and young people in Lewisham, particularly also that the dedicated grant distributed to schools by the Department of Education was derived from public funds.

In response to questions on value for money considerations, the Executive Director of Children and Young Peoples Services confirmed to the Panel that the concern expressed by Councillor Sorba about the existing contract was factual. Therefore, improvement would be focused on applying sound procurement activities, and developing key indicators to support the process, with a view to help deliver a service specification with mechanisms for quality provision, and appropriate conditions to terminate the contract in the event of a breach. The Executive Director gave an assurance to the Panel that the efforts to be employed at the development stage would include engagement with the Public Health Team on matters relating to nutritional quality of the foods to be provided, and consultation with schools to determine arrangements for monitoring phases during the term of the contract.

The Senior Contracts Officer (Regeneration & Place) also confirmed to the Panel that the existing Contract and Monitoring Team of experienced staff would support the development process, and be retained after the renewal of the contract. She gave an assurance to the Panel that officers' efforts would be geared towards quality provision, and supported by balanced pricing and affordability. Thus, as part of the improvement arrangements, the Team would organise a focus group to include school leaders and governors, with a view to provide an opportunity for a wide range of input when reviewing the contract specification. It was stated that comments and suggestions from councillors would also be welcomed.

The Panel received further confirmation from the Senior Contracts Officer (Regeneration & Place) that the review criteria would include provision for accessing quality locally-sourced produce. It was stated that consideration also would be given to how the produce would be transported. Thus, submissions that support "Making Lewisham Greener" objectives would be considered favourably during the tender assessment process.

In his closing remarks, Councillor Sorba expressed an appreciation that work was underway to develop an efficient new contract specification, and that the experienced team of staff would be retained. Councillor Sorba

stated that there should not be complacency. Thus, in spite of the proposed plans, lessons should be learnt to ensure consistency throughout the term of the new contract arrangement, as failure to do so could create a gap, as was the case with a leisure contract which was stringent at the procurement stage, but failed at delivery. Thus, when examining tenders for the future delivery of school meals, officers should take care to include mechanisms for adequate management and continuous monitoring, with a view to maintain standards in quality provision into the long-term.

2. **The Greenvale School expansion project**

Because of the confidential nature of aspects of the decision by the Mayor and Cabinet on the matter, the meeting proceeded into a 'closed session'. Submissions by Councillor Sorba on financial management and value for money concerns were noted, together with responses from officers and the Cabinet Member for Schools Performance and Children's Services.

Meeting closed at 7.55pm

Chair