

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 10 November 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown (Chair), Sophie Davis (Vice-Chair), Obajimi Adefiranye, Tauseef Anwar, Peter Bernards, Juliet Campbell, Suzannah Clarke, Patrick Codd, Liam Curran, Aisling Gallagher, Alan Hall, Carl Handley, Octavia Holland, Sue Hordijkeno, Mark Ingleby, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Caroline Kalu, Silvana Kelleher, Louise Krupski, Jim Mallory, Paul Maslin, Joan Millbank, Pauline Morrison, John Muldoon, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Lionel Openshaw, Jacq Paschoud, John Paschoud, Kim Powell, James Rathbone, Luke Sorba, Eva Stamirowski, James-J Walsh and Susan Wise

APOLOGIES: Councillors Colin Elliott, Coral Howard, Hilary Moore and Stephen Penfold

ALSO PRESENT: Charlotte Dale (Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Mayor Damien Egan (Mayor), Kim Wright (Chief Executive) and Georgina Nunney (Principal Lawyer)

1. Minutes of the meetings held on 5 March 2020 and 15 July 2020

1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 5 March and 15 July 2020 be agreed as an accurate records of the meetings.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 No declarations of interest were made.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the responses to the referrals made by the Committee at its January and March meetings be noted.

4. Scrutiny update

4.1 The Chair invited the Chairs of Select Committees to give a brief oral update on the work of their committees. The Select Committee Chairs advised that:

Children and Young People Select Committee

- Scrutinising the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan was a key piece of work for the Committee and Members were keen to ensure that the necessary resources were available to enable the department to meet the standards set by Ofsted and deserved by the borough's children and young people.
- Other key areas of work included (a) monitoring the reform of early help services in order to strengthen these services; (b) examining the three year

programme to raise the educational attainment levels of pupils of Afro-Caribbean heritage; (c) elective home education which had increased since the pandemic began; and (d) the effects on kids of school closure and reopening.

- Sir Norman Lamb, Chair of the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, had been invited to the next meeting to discuss CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) waiting times.
- The Chair, as part of his Business Panel role, had also been involved in scrutinising education related contracts including catering in schools.

Safer, Stronger Communities Select Committee

At the next meeting of the Committee on 1 December, Members Plan to consider the following matters:

- Hearing from the Borough Commander; discussing the IOPC (Independent Office for Police Conduct) recommendations on stop and search; and asking questions about the implementation of recommendations arising from the Committee's review of stop and search.
- Receiving the mayoral response to the recommendations of the Committee's review into equalities.

At its January meeting, the Committee plan to look at the Youth Offending Service and Members of the Children and Young People Select Committee would be invited to attend.

Healthier Communities Select Committee

At its next meeting the Committee plan to look at three key topics:

- Budget cuts
- Pathology arrangements (including the viability of the new provider)
- The Birmingham and Lewisham BAME Health Inequalities Review (so the Committee could be involved at the scoping stage).

Public Accounts Select Committee

It had been a difficult year in terms of council finances as a result of the cost of responding to the Covid pandemic and other pressures, on the back of ten years of central government austerity measures. The Committee had:

- Encouraged the adoption of a more commercial approach across the Council and produced a comprehensive report with recommendations.
- Agreed to focus its next meeting on the budget, with the Chair of each Select Committee invited to attend to present their committee's views on the budget proposals falling within their remit. Assessing the impact of each proposal on service users would be important.

Housing Select Committee

The Committee would be focusing on budget proposals relating to housing at its next meeting. Changes to the Council's housing allocation policies were also a key area of work for the committee.

Sustainable Development Select Committee

The proposed Railway Children Urban National Park was an important area of work for the Committee because Members felt it was a great opportunity to support a number of council priorities including those around climate change, flood prevention, housing and clean air. The Committee was concerned that several

parts of the proposed park were being threatened by developers and had urged the Council to take all necessary legal action to prevent this.

Cllr Hall asked the Chair of the Sustainable Development Select Committee If ward Members could be provided with the relevant documentation in relation to the visioning report on Bell Green being considered by his Committee and the Chair agreed to remind officers that ward members would need this in relation to the scheduled briefing.

4.2 **RESOLVED:** That the updates be noted.

5. Question and Answer Session with the Mayor

5.1 The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting and reported that written responses to questions submitted by Members in advance of the meeting had been published on a supplementary agenda and circulated.

5.2 The Mayor made the following introductory comments:

- These were unprecedented times but the Council had responded rapidly to the pandemic.
- The Council, residents and local businesses had very little warning before life changed overnight, which had been difficult.
- A new, second national lockdown was now in place until at least 2 December 2020.
- Locally, the numbers testing positive had been rising but was now stabilising at around 100 per 100000.
- News of a potential vaccine was encouraging and the Mayor and Chief Executive had met with other London leaders to discuss the potential roll out, as this was likely to be a critical role for the Council.
- There were many positives in the response to the pandemic, including the role played by Community Connections in getting food and essential supplies to vulnerable residents. The Voluntary and Community Sector had worked closely with the council in a range of different areas to meet challenges and support vulnerable residents.
- £34k had been raised by the Mayoresses to help provide free school meals over the October half term.
- The work on Covid and BAME health inequalities being carried out with Birmingham was vital.
- Covid champions were being recruited.
- The Budget situation was tough and sobering. It was hoped that the thematic approach being taken this year would be helpful. The focus was on the immediate budget gap for the next financial year of £18m, with further cuts being brought forward in January for Members to consider.
- The Council would continue to lobby central government for more funds to meet the costs of the pandemic.
- The Council's initial Covid 19 recovery plan had been shared with Members.
- A small number of Councillors were working on developing a race equality commission.

5.3 The following questions and responses were heard:

How has Covid affected housing building programme and how is the funding gap in terms of homelessness following the end of the national 'Everyone In' strategy being addressed (i.e. the impact of the government stopping funding the homelessness services that they funded during 'Everyone In')?

- There have been completions on new housing and the Council's plans remain ambitious. Some projects have been put back by the pandemic and during the first lockdown some planners were redeployed to support critical services. The Government have made some changes to funding arrangements which we need to look into and we will provide feedback on this to Members. Councillor Bell is working on homelessness and will update Members. We are still getting lots of approaches and information will be provided on the funding gap.

The approach to the budget should consider prevention over cure

- Absolutely, early intervention and support, especially to families is very important.

Who is the Council's statutory scrutiny officer? Why was the Mayor's portfolio amended, why was planning allocated to Councillor Bell and how was responsibility handed over in terms of the larger developments?

- Salena Mulhere, Assistant Chief Executive, is the Council's statutory scrutiny officer. It was always the intention to hand over responsibility for planning to the cabinet member with the housing portfolio during the course of administration; as it sits well with that portfolio and doing it during the course of the administration would allow a managed transition once the initial, crucial negotiations had taken place. In addition, the Mayor's role in terms of the impact of Covid meant that less time could be dedicated to the planning brief, which wasn't ideal. However, the Mayor is still involved in all the major developments.

What is the status of the Bakerloo line extension (BLE) programme; how secure is it going forward, what is the Transport for London funding situation; and how will we push for what is best for our residents in terms of transport?

- The BLE project is worth the investment and we want it to come to Lewisham and beyond to Bromley. We understand the pressures Transport for London is being put under by the Government; and we are working with The London Borough of Southwark to secure that line and that route. We expect delays due to the pandemic but it is crucial that we continue to lobby and campaign for the BLE.

What are the implications of the comprehensive spending review for Lewisham?

- In 2010 the Council's budget was 400m in real terms and today it is 230m and central government wants an extra 40m. The impact of

budget reductions is felt in every single area and we have half the staff we used to have. We would love to do more in terms of youth services and wrap around services for young people but funding reductions mean we cannot. These funding reductions do not make financial sense in the long term, as prevention is better than cure and early intervention works.

Please can you look into various issues relating to the Railway Children Urban National Park as a Tree Preservation Order is needed, alongside other safeguards including the recognition of priority habitats and the acceptance of the Gove Park Neighbourhood Plan.

- The proposed park is fully supported by the Council and we will take action in relation to illegal activity. There are resource issues but we are working through all the necessary actions.

BAME inequality has been highlighted recently via the Black Lives Matter movement and the relatively high number of Covid deaths in the Black community. How can the Council take positive action?

- Covid has shone a light on BAME inequalities nationally. We must reflect on what we are doing and what more we can do. We have a new online resource which outlines what we are doing to support BAME residents. We are also taking part in ground-breaking work with Birmingham on African and Caribbean health inequalities. There is still race inequality across many areas of society, including schools – Rathfern Primary School is leading on work to ensure that our schools have more diverse materials and a decolonised curriculum. In terms of recruitment, 46% of our senior management are from a BAME background and we have a BAME leadership academy. Our public health approach to serious youth violence is also working to address the overrepresentation of black boys in the criminal system.

What is the cost of reconfiguring the Lewisham and Lee Green Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme?

- This will be provided.

The Youth First contract needs to be financially viable

- The Council is proud that it still funds a youth service, even if it can't fund it as much as it would like to. All services are under scrutiny due to the budget but concerns around viability are understood.

5.4 It was noted that CPZs were under consideration in the budget papers due to be considered by the select committees and that the widespread implementation of CPZs was being considered across the borough.

5.5 **RESOLVED:** That a referral be made to Mayor and Cabinet requesting further information on the following issues:

- Street homelessness prevention project – an update on how the funding gap is being managed.
- The figure for the cost of reconfiguring the Lewisham and Lee Green Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme.

- The Council's BAME career progression programme – further information.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

Chair:

Date:
