

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday 26 January 2021 at 7.05pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bill Brown, Juliet Campbell, Sophie Davis, Peter Bernards, Patrick Codd, Liam Curran, Joan Millbank, John Muldoon, Kim Powell and Luke Sorba.

IN ATTENDANCE Councillors Barnham, Bell, Bourne, Dromey, Handley Johnston-Franklin and McGeevor.

Presenting Officers:

Director of Public Services, Director of Public Health, Head of Business & Committees, Interim Director of Regeneration and Place, Senior Development & Land Manager.

Clerk:

Committee Officer

The meeting commenced at 7.05pm and adjourned at 7.06pm in order to consider business of the Overview and Scrutiny Education Business Panel.

The meeting resumed at 7.15pm.

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the last meeting held on 15 December 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Millbank declared an interest in item 3 because she is a member of Lewisham Local Collaboration.

Councillor Muldoon declared an interest in relation to PLACE/Ladywell. He is a volunteer for a project at Rushey Green Time Bank who are currently licensed on the ground floor of PLACE/Ladywell. He does not receive any financial remuneration.

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

This item was presented by the Director of Public Health and the Director of Public Services.

The Director of Public Services said that there had been many changes since the last meeting of this Panel. Lewisham had moved from tier 4 to a national lockdown following a huge increase in infection rates.

Critical Services continued to be delivered but were under pressure from covid absences and some staff in isolation. Response services also continued to be delivered. 140 members of staff had been deployed throughout the Covid action team. The main areas of deployment included 52 members of staff in local track and trace, 30 in community testing and 26 in enforcement.

Community Testing for those without symptoms – As at 25 January 2021, 4042 were tested, 65 of those were positive. There were testing centres in the Civic Suite, a mobile unit in Wearside and a site at the Green Man. A further site in the North of the borough should be open next week. A walk in service would be offered this week at certain times of the day, in an effort to make the service more convenient for people to use.

Trace and Trace was labour intensive. Last week staff were contacting 86% of cases; the 12th highest in London.

Enforcement – Covid rules had been enforced in parks at the weekend and businesses visited. It had been noted that people had become more complacent and there had been wide spread noncompliance. Joint working within the teams had improved. Enforcement arrangements had been reviewed and some changes had been made. Enforcement officers delivered a letter from the Mayor to all local supermarkets and it was now easier to report breaches on line. Last week 1,576 checks were made and 267 formal visits made to businesses.

Schools 10% of pupils attended school. These included vulnerable children and those whose parents were key workers. Numbers were higher than in the first lockdown. Schools and colleges were working with officers and the department of education to establish need and ensure the most vulnerable and disadvantaged learner had access to digital services.

Infection rates were down. Over the last 7 days in Lewisham, the infection rate per 1000 was 538. This figure was higher for 60+ years at 644. Although hospitals were still full, it was hoped that within 2 weeks these numbers would reduce also. The numbers of deaths from covid in the week ending 8 January 2021 had increased to 30. This number was expected to increase over the next few weeks.

In conclusion, the Director of Public Services said that staff were focussing on key areas and working very hard.

The Chair thanked staff and volunteers for their hard work and expressed members' appreciation for the way the delivery of critical services was being carried out.

Councillor Codd asked whether people were co-operative when contacted by Trace and Trace staff, whether they were isolating and whether there was enforcement after advice had been given. The Director of Public Services said that generally people were co-operative but it was not known whether the advice was adhered to. There was a national concern that not all people would isolate following advice that they may have been in contact with a positive case or that they had the virus themselves. There was no enforcement at the moment but could be a possibility when numbers reduce. In the summer months, Police had undertaken enforcement regarding those isolating when entering this country, but numbers were low.

In response to another question from Councillor Codd about the purpose for people wanting to be tested, the Director of Public Services explained that community testing was being managed in accordance with government recommendations. Targeted groups were those people who were out circulating in the community but the reasons for wanting to be tested were not vetted at the centre. It was noted that numbers spike on Friday but there was no evidence to support the idea that people were preparing to flaunt the rules at the weekend. Although information was sent along with results via a text message, officers were also working on an explanatory takeaway leaflet that would be given during testing, explaining the rules regarding a negative or a positive result.

It was noted that some seconded staff would continue to work within the covid team for several more months. Officers were considering how they would transition back to their own services but for now officers were considering rotating roles because some of the work was very intensive.

In a response to questions from Councillor Millbank, members were advised that care agency workers in the community were treated the same as staff in care homes in that they both receive weekly PCR tests. In response to a further question about whether toilets were open in Lewisham Market, the Director of Public Services agreed to provide Councillor Millbank with the answer.

In response to questions from Councillor Bernards, the Director of Public Health said that there was no data regarding the take up of vaccines yet, so they did not know the number of patients missing their appointments. Clarification would be sought about whether the two vaccinations offered to residents were the same brand of vaccine. Evidence regarding approved vaccines stated that they had similar ethics and safety profiles. There was no data regarding the numbers of people who may have died following

vaccination but as of 21 January 2021, across South East London 97,000 vaccines had been delivered. Data not available at present would be incorporated in future reports.

Councillor Codd said that he had been contacted by several elderly residents in his ward claiming that they had received a text from their G.P but the instructions had been confusing and they were concerned that the texts were a scam. The Director of Public Health agreed to discuss this with NHS colleagues.

In response to a question from Councillor Sorba about the use of resources for lateral flow device testing, the Director of Public Health said that the main rationale for using the test was to identify asymptomatic cases that would not otherwise be detected. With regard to false negatives, and those falsely reassured, Lewisham provide messaging in the form of a leaflet and wider messages which state that the negative result was only valid for that moment in time and that they should continue to adhere to current guidelines. Lewisham was trying to achieve the maximum gain from the identification of asymptomatic cases, balanced with the risk that negative results may be used to ignore government guidelines.

In response to a further question from Council Sorba about a government directive to recruit vaccine ambassadors, the Director of Public Health said that Lewisham had recruited over 150 champions who received weekly emails, fortnightly webinars and a lot of work had been done with these champions on information regarding covid 19 vaccinations. More champions would be recruited. Every effort was being made to target messaging to champions who would be in touch with those who were potentially vaccine hesitant and to empower them to spread the messages about covid 19 vaccinations.

Councillor Curran said that he had been advised that some surgeries had been so successful administering the vaccine that they had to wait a week or two before stocks were replenished. He had heard that this had been done deliberately, in part, to ensure that there was an even distribution of the vaccine in each area. He asked whether this was true and whether the distribution could be increased. The Head of Public Health said that she had not heard about this practice but agreed to discuss this with CCG colleagues and provide members with a response in future reports.

The Chair thanked the Director of Public Services and Public Health for their detailed responses.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

4. Key Decision Plan

The Head of Business and Committee presented this report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. Decisions made by the Mayor on 13 January 2021- open session
The Future of PLACE Ladywell

The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place presented the report

Councillor Muldoon referred to page 29 of the Mayor and Cabinet report, 13 January 2021, and asked whether there was a great demand for commercial spaces on the east side of Lewisham High Street and whether tenants had been identified. The Senior Development & Land Manager advised that all the units were currently let; three through a company called Meanwhile and one through the Council. Officers were working through the long term options for the commercial units and they would be secure until at least October. There were indications that the units were popular and able to be rented because all of the units were currently under leases.

Councillor Codd said that he considered that the retention of the PLACE Ladywell building on the current site was the best option and asked whether Planning would support the sustainable future of the current site for several more years. He had concerns about how long Planning would allow this decision to stand and asked for some assurance that the future of the site would be secured for a number of years.

Council Johnston-Franklin said that PLACE Ladywell was a great design on Lewisham High Street and she asked whether it would be possible to relocate to Slaithwaite Road car park in the future. She also asked whether only 69 homes would be built behind the site if it stays in its current location; this would be a huge drop in the numbers expected at the beginning of this project. She asked whether officers had undertaken a risk assessment. Councillor Johnston-Franklin said that she had been contacted by parents of children currently attending the nursery on the site, expressing their concern at the loss of a very much needed nursery provision. She asked whether spaces had been found in the borough to accommodate these children.

In response to these questions, Councillor Bell said that every development undertaken by Lewisham is project managed. Occasionally, during this process, an unforeseen problem may arise and it was important that decisions change to ensure that this Council does not continue to lose money. The first phase of this project would provide 69 homes, phase 2 would deliver more with PLACE being retained in phase 1.

Councillor Bell said that the nursery had a commercial lease with the Council for 5 years and they were aware that a break in this contract would take place; he understood that this had been discussed with Lewisham Homes on 27 March 2020. In the summer of 2020 it was agreed that the lease of the porta cabin at the rear of the site should be extended until March 2021. Unfortunately the nursery did not advise the parents until 6 January 2021. Lewisham had empathy with the parents, particularly during this pandemic. A meeting would soon be held between parents and CYP officers to consider how Lewisham could support parents. Lewisham had managed this situation correctly in their duty to give notice regarding the nursery closure. An external company had been employed to find alternative provision. 13 sites were identified, 3 were being given serious consideration. He said that Lewisham must not allow the funding from the GLA to be lost, because families were living in cramped temporary accommodation.

The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place clarified that 69 homes could be achieved on site in the first phase, plus 24 retained, plus the further development potential to be realised over time. The number of new homes on the whole site would be 232. The number of affordable rented homes would be 112 if the PLACE building were moved.

The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place, said that he expected the refurbishment project necessary at PLACE accommodation, to be an investment for several years. This would be discussed in the planning process as officers considered phasing of the delivery of construction works.

The Senior Development & Land Manager said that planning colleagues were supportive of the approach being taken. There was temporary planning permission for the PLACE building which would be renewed on a temporary basis and would be on a cyclical basis until officers were in a position to continue with phase 2.

In response to a question about risk assessment at the outset of the project, the Senior Development & Land Manager said that this was an innovative project, something that had not been done in the UK before on this scale. The risk was assessed with professional officers and an employer's agent in charge of checking that the project was being put forward correctly by the contractors. During the tendering process, the costs associated with the project were assessed and considered to be similar. However, the world had changed since the inception of this project. Officers had to consider the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, and the fire in Barking and the subsequent changes in building regulations and building safety. A large amount of the costs will ensure that the building was safe in perpetuity. These changes could not have been foreseen at the beginning of the project.

Councillor Curran expressed his disappointment that the building at PLACE Ladywell could not be relocated as had been anticipated. However, if a lot of money had been saved by not having to keep families in temporary

accommodation, he considered the project to be a success. He asked if the cost benefit analysis included the costs of all consultants.

Councillor Curran also referred to paragraph 7.7 in the report where it states that 'the financial risk associated with the larger scheme is not commensurate with the gain in affordable housing numbers'. He asked for clarification of this statement because the site is large and even 112 affordable homes seemed unambitious compared to the amount of space available. Councillor Curran also asked how officers could ensure that future modular systems would be fully locatable.

In response to one of Councillor Curran's questions on an unambitious number of homes on the site, the Interim Director of Regeneration and Place advised that this was part of the work undertaken by the design team. They would have held discussions with planning colleagues about the appropriate level of development on the site. The headline number was in the region of 260 homes. This was considered to be operating within a reasonable brief to achieve a sizeable scheme. It was further clarified that 260 homes included the relocation of PLACE building too. On the Ladywell site it was being muted that 232 homes could be delivered there. He said that with regard to the perceived small number of homes at the rear of the site, the development at the back must be sympathetic to the front coming forward at some date. Planning colleagues would be looking for his colleagues to produce a master plan for the development of the whole site.

In response to questions from the Chair and Councillor Handley regarding the inability of the structure being relocated as anticipated, the Interim Director of Regeneration and Place said that this project was innovative, and would provide real homes and real value in this borough. It had been delivered at speed, and there was still value in them. He said that where possible, when moving accommodation around, the lesson he had learned was the need to identify the sites from the outset. This would enable a costing based on a particular site. The Council moved at pace in response to a genuine housing need and this could not be criticised. The only refinement to this would be to obtain a firm costing on an actual site.

The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place said that in the report, it did not state that the structure could not be relocated. Officers had considered the cost of relocation, changes in building regulations and other planning considerations, and the risk to relocate the site had been considered too high.

Councillor Millbank said that nursery provision was important and Lewisham would be supporting the nursery to find an alternative site because it would only be available for 5 years. However, she wished to stress that by releasing the site, 10 families would have lifelong tenancies.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. Scrutiny Update Report

Councillor Curran reported that the Sustainable Development Select Committee had referred to Mayor and Cabinet, the recommendation that the Council had a place on the website where advice could be found on how to live more sustainably and reduce carbon footprint.

Councillor Sorba said that the Children and Young People Select Committee made two referrals to Mayor and Cabinet, recommending that two of the cuts proposals should not be taken in this financial year. One was the cut in children's mental health services the other was the cut to health visitors.

He said that the next meeting of this Select Committee would receive the six monthly safeguarding report and members would also consider a six month follow up on the work the Committee had undertaken on temporary accommodation and how it affected families who were placed out of the borough, particularly if they had children attending Lewisham schools.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7. Exclusion of the Press and Public.

Agreed.

8. Decisions made by Mayor on 8 December 2020- closed session The Future of PLACE Ladywell

Officers were asked whether the financial costs for relocation were robust. Members were advised that there had been several changes since the beginning of the project including a change in building regulations. In addition, considering a specific site or a series of sites would have enabled officers to consider a cost base. The report was transparent and officers' recommendation was that the PLACE building should not be relocated at this time, but come forward as a second phase in the future.

Members were advised that refurbishment and safety control fire measures would be undertaken to the PLACE building. These works would be on the outside of the building and could be completed with residents in situ. Members were advised of the costings of the upgrade works.

There were no decisions identified for further discussion.

The meeting closed at 10.10pm.

Chair