

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Annual Report 2018/19

Chair's Foreword

"The first year of the new Scrutiny structure has, to me, proved to be both rewarding and challenging.

As the Chair of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I started the year by meeting with Cabinet Members, directors and officers to find out what the key issues were in order to help the Committee develop a meaningful work programme.

Before the Committee formally sat for the first time in September, I met with the Members to discuss the draft work programme and bring together suggestions for topics we wished to look at. As we quickly found out, the challenge was not, "what are we going to scrutinise" but more, "what are we not going to scrutinise". With the Council still going through the transformation process, Scrutiny must ensure the Cabinet is held to account for decisions made and also to ensure that pre-decision scrutiny is undertaken in a timely and efficient manner.

Once the work programme was agreed, the Committee spent the next eight months working through packed agendas scrutinising a range of issues from social value in contracts through to how the Council is supporting a good start for its youngest children.

Following the meetings held with Cabinet Members earlier in the year, an understanding was reached that the role of Scrutiny had changed. It was not to criticise the work of Cabinet Members, but to help Cabinet reach its vision for the Council and our residents. I would like to thank the Cabinet Members who have attended meetings this year for their input, insights, for listening and taking on board suggestions or concerns raised by the Committee.

The Committee's first in-depth scrutiny review started slightly later in the year and it is shortly due to reach its conclusion. The next challenge is to decide on the next topic for an in-depth scrutiny review – suggestions are welcome!"

Cllr J Jones

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership

The OSC consisted of ten Councillors, one co-opted church representative, one co-opted parent governor representative and one co-opted youth representative. There were two vacancies – co-opted church representative (Church of England) and co-opted parent governor representative (Secondary).

- Councillor Jane Jones (Chair)
- Councillor Andrew Achilleos (Deputy Chair)
- Councillor Dorothy Akwaboah
- Councillor Toni Bankole
- Councillor Princess Bright
- Councillor Rocky Gill
- Councillor Olawale Martins
- Councillor Ingrid Robinson
- Councillor Paul Robinson
- Councillor Phil Waker
- Mrs Glenda Spencer Church Representative – Roman Catholic
- Mr Baba Tinubu Parent Governor – Primary
- Johami Mutuale Youth Representative

Leanna McPherson, Democratic Services Officer, supported the Committee.

Lessons Learnt from the Elevate Joint Venture

The Committee started off the year in September 2018 by looking in detail at the lessons learnt from the Elevate East London joint venture and the way forward, as the contractual arrangements were ending in 2020.

The Committee requested details, and then undertook pre-decision scrutiny, of the post-Elevate delivery models before they were considered for approval by Cabinet. The Committee sought assurance from the Chief Operating Officer that robust monitoring processes would be put in place following the transfer of services back to the Council.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Corporate Plan 2018 – 2022

The first pre-decision scrutiny undertaken by the Committee was for the Corporate Plan 2018 – 2022.

The Corporate Plan is a key part of the Council's strategic planning, delivery and accountability framework. The development of a Corporate Plan ensures the Council's contribution to achieving its vision and priorities is proactive, co-ordinated, achievable and resourced in line with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Committee was pleased that the document was written in a way that was easy to read and particularly welcomed the spotlight on stable finances during times of austerity. The Committee pointed out, however, that there was no mention of social

housing within the draft Corporate Plan 2018 – 2022 and challenged how the Council would provide greater independence to residents through social housing.

The Housing Stock Investment – Decent Homes Process & Customer Satisfaction (including Stock Condition Survey)

The Committee requested a report on the Decent Homes (Housing Stock Investment) Programme, the role of the programme with regard to involving the customer and monitoring customer satisfaction in the delivery of works.

The Committee found that there was a low response rate to the customer satisfaction surveys and also raised issues regarding the method of issuing customer surveys to the Council's residents.

The following suggestions for surveying residents once work had been completed on their homes were made by the Committee:

- Give residents the option to choose how they would like to take part in the survey before the work was undertaken which could include post, telephone, email, social media or text message;
- Make the surveys available in other languages for those residents whose first language is not English; and
- If surveys were to be collected by the contractor, ensure they were collected in a sealed envelope.

The Committee felt it would be useful to undertake visits to 'void' properties that were being made up to Decent Homes standard and several members of the Committee carried out site visits to view properties at various stages of refurbishment. The members prepared a report detailing their findings and recommendations and presented it to the full Committee in November 2018. The report was then fed into the Improvement Plan for My Place.

Private Sector Housing – Proposal for New Licensing Scheme

In October 2018, the OSC was consulted on the proposed Private Rental Property Licensing Scheme 2019 – 2024.

The principal objective of the scheme was to regulate and improve the management and condition of accommodation in the borough's private rented sector and address, in particular, high levels of anti-social behaviour.

The consultation contained three options for consideration:

- Option 1 – Apply for a scheme covering 20% of the Borough;
- Option 2 – Apply for a scheme that did not include all wards; or
- Option 3 – Apply for a borough-wide scheme.

The Committee welcomed the proposed scheme, supporting the option to apply for a borough-wide scheme.

Budget Strategy Report 2019/20 to 2020/21

In November 2018, the OSC reviewed the Council's Budget Strategy for 2019/20 to 2020/21 and invited the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services to attend the meeting and speak on the main components of the budget strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration was also in attendance and answered challenging questions raised by the Committee with regard to the ongoing pressures on social care budgets.

Social Value in Procurement

The Committee asked for a detailed report on how the Council is meeting its obligations under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and in December 2018, OSC was presented with a detailed report on the subject. The Council had an obligation to consider how it might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area and how it may act with a view to securing that improvement.

The Committee welcomed the report and the progress the Council was making with social value in procurement. However, it was noted that many of the examples given were for large scale/high value procurements. In response to these concerns, OSC were advised that work was being undertaken into how the Council could help smaller businesses, and particularly those from the local area, by encouraging and assisting those businesses to jointly bid for Council contracts.

Tri Borough Policing: Victim Satisfaction and the Perception of Crime in the Borough

The Committee took a different approach this year in challenging the Tri Borough Policing East Base Command Unit (BCU) with regard to victim satisfaction and the perception of crime in the Borough.

Representatives from across the Borough were invited by the Committee to attend the meeting to hear and discuss the views of service providers who were working with victims of crime and those of the Safer Neighbourhood Board (SNB), based on the information picked up via the local ward panels.

Representatives from the BCU were also in attendance to address the Committee on work being undertaken in relation to victim satisfaction and the perception of crime and to respond to the points raised by the services providers and the SNB.

The Committee also heard from the Chair of the BAD Youth Forum, Johami Mutuale, who gave an impassioned speech on crime-related issues effecting school children in the Borough.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Arrangements

The Committee received a report on the Council's new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements, which had moved from the operational oversight of Children's Social Care to Community Solutions, following the creation of a new structure in Autumn 2017.

The Committee considered proposals for improving MASH-related services and it was noted that by referring families into an early help offer, it stopped repeat referrals coming back to MASH and would reduce demand. However, to do this families would need to be identified before they got to MASH through the early help offer. The early help offer was still being developed and it was suggested the area be scrutinised in more detail later in the year.

The Committee also requested that the MASH arrangements be reviewed annually as part of its quality assurance arrangements.

Shortly after the report was considered by the Committee, the Council was subject to an inspection by OFSTED, where the report to the Committee was praised.

How do we communicate with our residents?

The Committee requested a report on how the Council communicates with its residents and were provided with a detailed presentation outlining the Council's approach to communications, the channels used and their reach and impact.

The Committee challenged the use of the internet as the main source for communication with residents, expressing concerns that elderly residents and those in poverty may not have access to social media and other internet mediums. In response, the Committee was advised that the mail-outs sent to residents 3-4 times a year addressed some of the gaps for those not using the internet. The Committee suggested that other ways to reach the demographic of the Borough who were not online should be explored.

Local Offer for Care Leavers

OSC received a report on the 'local offer' for care leavers, which was a requirement of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Council was required to publish a 'local offer' of support and services that it made available to children and young people leaving care.

As part of the enhanced local offer development process, a number of key stakeholders including the OSC were asked to consider '*what do we want for our care leavers to support them to succeed in adulthood?*'. This was particularly relevant as OSC was undertaking its obligations as part of the Council's corporate parenting role.

Following consideration of the report and the question posed, the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. That the Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Aspiration look into using the new Business Forum as an advocate by providing guaranteed interviews and training/advice for care leavers;
2. That the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration look into arranging joint training between foster carers, social workers and care leavers on issues such as applying for accommodation, financial management and other essential life skills; and
3. That the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services review Council Tax benefits that may be applicable to care leavers and other measures to ensure care leavers are supported as they move into employment.

Annual Residents' Survey

Following the conclusion of the 2018 residents' survey, the Committee looked in detail at the methodology and results. 1,000 telephone surveys were undertaken with residents across the borough. The sample was representative of the population and the fieldwork was carried out between October-December 2018. The results of the 2018 survey showed that the top three concerns for residents remained the same for a third consecutive year. In order of priority these were:

- 1) Crime;
- 2) Housing; and
- 3) Litter and dirt on streets/ conditions of roads

The Committee was concerned that telephone interviews were not a sufficient method of surveying residents and recommended that, where possible, the 2019 Annual Residents' Survey include face to face interviews as well as telephone surveys.

Support for Vulnerable People

The Committee requested a report looking at the support provided to vulnerable adults by the Council and other partners.

The Committee challenged how joint working was undertaken in relation to vulnerable adults and a discussion took place on areas that needed to be addressed:

- Hospital Discharge: The pathway covering the period from when a resident left the care of the hospital to their recovery at home should be reviewed to ensure that Community Solutions were involved in the process;
- Adaptations to Council Properties: The pathway from requesting an adaptation through to having the work undertaken was not clear; and
- Housing Provision: Following a suggestion from the Committee that the Voids Team assess properties to identify if suitable adaptations could be undertaken before new residents moved in, the Commissioning Director acknowledged that B&D Reside, Be First and the Council could be more proactive and the relevant commissioners needed to be clearer about the emerging need of vulnerable residents.

Good Starts for our Youngest Children

Following the recent OFSTED inspection, it had become clear that many of the children enrolled at nurseries in the Borough were not toilet trained and had poor language skills. It was important to ensure children got the best start in life and were prepared for school and it was noted this could only be achieved through partnership working with the Early Years' Service.

The Committee was updated on the strengths of the service in the current challenging climate, areas for improvement and opportunities. The Committee were also updated on the current priorities in Early Years, which focussed on:

- Working with families, health, education and community partners to narrow the 'inequality gap' at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, to support more children into early education and to raise attainment for all children; and
- Building an approach to place-based working which supported greater opportunities for coherent partnership work across early years settings and beyond.

Be First Audited Accounts

The Committee requested to look at the Be First financial statements to 31 March 2018.

The financial statements of the company for 2017/18 were signed on 1 April 2019 and subsequently filed at Companies House. The overall financial position in respect of the first six months of trading was reported as a loss of £3.9m. This loss comprises the recognition of a £3m opening pension liability and a £900,000 trading loss.

There were some issues of concern raised by the Committee regarding the filing of the accounts and in response the Committee was assured that:

- New external auditors, BDO, had been appointed and an introductory meeting had taken place to ensure they had a proper knowledge of Be First's business. The company had requested BDO meet the Audit and Standards Committee and advise of its plans and timetable for completion of the audit;
- Be First had carried out a detailed review of each ledger account. Where there were transactions between Be First and the Council, a full analysis was in place providing additional assurance over completeness. Accordingly, the issue encountered during the audit of the 2017/18 accounts was not expected to recur; and
- The external audit will be completed, within the statutory timetable for filing the accounts.

In-depth Scrutiny Review: Improving household waste, recycling and street cleansing

Starting in February 2019, the Committee is currently undertaking an in-depth Scrutiny Review entitled: 'Improving household waste, recycling and street cleansing'.

The Committee has tasked officers with undertaking research and has undertaken its own evidence gathering sessions, which included a visit to the waste management facility at Frog Island.

It is anticipated that the final report, complete with recommendations, will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2019.

Monitoring Performance - Budget Monitoring

The Committee received the latest budget monitoring report at each meeting to consider items of interest or concern.

Contact

For further information on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or the Council's scrutiny arrangements in general, please contact:

Leanna McPherson
Democratic Services Officer

020 8227 2852

leanna.mcpherson@lbbd.gov.uk