

MINUTES OF HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 19 January 2022
(7:00 - 9:15 pm)

Present: Cllr Paul Robinson (Chair), Cllr Donna Lumsden (Deputy Chair), Cllr Abdul Aziz, Cllr Peter Chand, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Chris Rice

Also Present: Cllr Maureen Worby, Cllr Margaret Mullane and Cllr Andrew Achilleos

23. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

24. Minutes - To note the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2021 were noted.

25. Annual Director of Public Health Report- Equalities Challenges in Barking and Dagenham

The Director of Public Health (DPH) presented his Public Health Annual Report for 2020-21, which focussed on the health inequalities in the Borough, that had been made further stark by the Covid-19 pandemic. The report provided a snapshot of inequalities at a borough population-level and summarised the consultation feedback from key stakeholders on how to collectively reduce them and improve the health and wellbeing of all residents.

The DPH summarised some of the key health inequalities and challenges faced by black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups residing in the Borough, whilst also highlighting the deficiencies within local systems in collating accurate, reliable data. He emphasised the importance of noting that inequalities were worse than they were before the pandemic, which had severely impacted diagnostic tests and increased waiting lists for a number of conditions. Some of the challenges were very nuanced, and frequently changing; for example, the current Omicron wave of the pandemic had led to more younger groups occupying general acute medicine beds, which could potentially be attributed to issues such as vaccine hesitancy within particular BAME groups. His report did not have all the answers, but it did provide a starting point for understanding the impacts of inequalities on different groups and raised the key areas of exploration to address these challenges. It would also form the basis of the inequalities work that the Council was undertaking to inform its Corporate Plan and the future refresh of the Equality and Diversity Strategy.

In response to questions, the DPH stated that:

- More could certainly be done to engage harder to reach groups at the earlier stages of service development to ensure new services would have the desired impact. Examples of this were the development of services for

those with long Covid and the community hubs, which aimed to work with residents facing a range of issues impacting their health and wellbeing, such as domestic violence;

- Those living in 'houses in multiple occupation' (HMOs) were a difficult to reach group and adding to this challenge was the high churn in families moving in and out of the Borough, particularly in certain wards such as Abbey;
- One of the reasons the Borough was disproportionately hit by the pandemic was the higher number of HMOs in the Borough, as well as the higher proportion of residents who were employed in industries which exposed them more to the virus, such as hospitality and catering;
- NHS Partners faced real challenges going forward and it was of paramount importance that they addressed the impact of the pandemic on waiting lists and services. Simultaneously, they had to adapt their services to meet future demand. This would be against the backdrop of limited resources and workforce challenges; and
- Whilst it was true that many of the health issues faced by residents, like obesity and smoking, were preventable, these were often linked to the wider determinants of health such as deprivation and mental health problems, which were difficult to overcome in the short-term.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Enforcement stated that it was important for all partners to realise that the way they responded to issues in the community would have an impact on overall health and wellbeing outcomes – for example, she and her fellow Cabinet Members had made it clear to the Police that drug taking in the streets must be dealt with, and not just seen as a low level crime, due to the impact it had on the individual but also, communities.

Members expressed frustration that health inequalities had been an issue that the Borough had been facing for a number of years and asked what it would take to see a real difference. The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration (CMSCHI) stated that she too shared the same frustration, explaining that historically, the Borough had been significantly and continually underfunded, which meant that the challenges it faced in improving residents' health had worsened over time. However, the Northeast London system, which the Borough was now a part of, along with six other boroughs, offered a glimmer of hope in that the commissioning of resources was now more transparent, and new governance arrangements meant that the Board had a real say, giving the Borough more leverage over health funding.

In response to Members expressing concern in relation to reports that nationally, some children had not returned to school following the lockdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19, and the risks this could present to some children, the CMSCHI stated that the Council was aware of such cases and did encourage the parents of these children to put their child back into school; however, under the current legislation, parents had the choice to home school their children and in some cases, the Council was unable to change their minds.

In response to questions in relation to the struggles some families were facing in accessing speech and language therapies for children with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), the Director for Commissioning, stated that a medium-term solution was to try and bring professionals other than speech and

language therapists in to address the less complex cases. The long-term solution, and the one that would be tougher to deliver, was to work with partners in education to encourage and influence the future workforce to go into career pathways that would help meet demand, as there simply were not enough speech and language therapists.

Members referred to the statements within the DPH's report that multi-morbidity (having two or more long-term conditions) was experienced eight years earlier by the African and Caribbean groups as compared to the White British/White Other group and asked why this was and what could be done to address this. The DPH stated that there was potentially a myriad of reasons behind this, such as not accessing primary care and lifestyle issues. Communication tailored to these groups, which came from a source they trusted, was shown to be effective- for example, a huge increase in the Covid-19 vaccine take-up was seen in certain groups when messages about vaccine safety was delivered via local mosques. The CMSCHI stated that it was difficult to fully understand why some national health programmes that had worked elsewhere, had not worked in the Borough. She hoped that the new community hubs would play a crucial role going forward in this regard; however, she wanted the hubs to grow organically to fully understand local issues faced by residents, which would take time.

In response to a Member citing an example of a local Sikh temple which facilitated a very successful session between worshippers and doctors, the CMSCHI stated that she agreed that the Borough needed better programmes that were culturally specific and accessible; however, due to the challenges within funding, she had to think carefully before making too many promises around this.

26. Update on the impact of the expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in Barking and Dagenham, and how children and young people in Barking and Dagenham are being affected by air pollution following the recent case in Lewisham

The Service Manager for Environmental Health (SMEH) presented a report on the expansion of the ULEZ in the Borough and the impact on young people of air pollution. The report also provided an update on the main actions being progressed as part of the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), as well as outlining the key recommendations arising from a Coroner's report on the death of a nine-year-old girl in 2013 who resided in Lewisham, who was the first person to have air pollution as a cause of death on her death certificate. The SMEH emphasised that the AQAP was not delivered by the Environmental Health team alone; a range of partners both within the Council (such as Public Health) and outside (such as BeFirst) all played an active part and were key to its success. One of the main aims of all partners was to drive behavioural changes in those residing and working in the Borough, via a good communications strategy and other initiatives, which would reduce air pollution.

In response to Members' questions, the SMEH stated that:

- There were two monitoring stations and 30 diffusion tubes in the Borough which measured PM 2.5 and PM10 (polluting particles) and Sulphur Dioxide to help the Council determine local air quality over a period of time;
- A key aim was to reduce pollution concentration levels near schools by

introducing low emission zones and the Street Schools project, which aimed to create pedestrian and cycle-only zones in the immediate vicinity of schools. The Council was also looking to introduce a level of enforcement near schools to tackle the issue of car idling, as this behaviour contributed to poor air quality; and

- In relation to the A13 dual carriageway, there would be a consultation on this as the Mayor of London was looking to extend the ULEZ to cover further areas linked to it. Reducing pollution on the A13, which spanned across several boroughs, would require the Council to work with other local authorities on projects and campaigns, and any effect of such joint working would only be seen in the long term.

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety expressed concern that the Government had withdrawn plans for a train station at Beam Park, which would mean increased levels of car usage in this area. This example demonstrated the importance of a good public transport offer in local communities and the role it played in improving air quality.

The Council's Member Champion for Climate Change (MCCC) stated that air quality and climate change were of the most important issues the world faced, particularly when considering that Covid-19 had thus far, caused serious respiratory illness. He raised a number of issues, as follows:

- The locations of the two monitoring stations in the Borough (Scrattons Farm and Rush Green) were away from the metropolitan centres of the Borough where there was a higher density of residents and more construction work taking place. Therefore, they were not best placed to give an accurate picture of the Borough's overall air quality. The diffusion tubes mitigated this to some extent, but they did not provide as detailed data as the monitoring stations;
- He had been in discussions with BeFirst regarding the potential for utilising Section 106 payments (payments made by developers as part of agreements with the Council.) to contribute towards the cost of further monitoring stations for the Borough;
- There was data that showed a higher concentration of particulates on the western boundary of the Borough (which could in part be attributed to the easterly wind) that gradually faded out as they reached Eastbrook and Havering. He felt strongly that the Council should consider the creation of a 'green ward' near Barking Creek by tree planting and other natural solutions, which would 'catch' the particulates;
- There was some fantastic work taking place in relation to promoting active travel and electrical vehicles. In 9 years' time, when the Government was planning to phase out petrol and diesel, the market would be more competitive, making it cheaper for residents to purchase electrical cars - it was important that the Council put in place the infrastructure for these changes in advance and he very much welcomed the decision by the Cabinet to approve the delivery of 250 electric vehicle charge-points across the Borough;
- The Walking and Cycling Strategy Steering Committee had a number of priorities for the coming year, including reducing traffic in the route from the north to the south of the Borough, and making streets more attractive to cycle and walk, to help cut down on the number of short car journeys;

- He congratulated the SMEH and his team for the School Streets project as it had been a broad success, when the same could not be said of other boroughs across London. More 'School Streets' were planned to expand these across the Borough; and
- 41% of particulates in the Borough came from construction work and BeFirst and the Council were pioneering new ways to reduce this by looking at new methods of construction. BeFirst had won awards for their work on modular developments; this, essentially, was 'flat packing' a property so that much of the construction took place off-site, and whilst it did not sound very attractive, it was more energy efficient, cost effective and less polluting, which would have a beneficial impact on the environment and residents' health.

In relation to the point that the two monitoring stations were not enough to obtain a detailed understanding of the pollution levels across the Borough, the SMEH stated that there was some good news, as the Greater London Authority had recently provided the Borough with two further sensors; one was located near Jo Richardson School and the other near Barking Station. These sensors collected data which went directly to a data management consultant at Imperial College, who provided the Council with regular updates on air pollution levels. This data also formed part of the annual data set submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Further good news was that a company was sponsoring four additional sensors with the latest technology, which would be in place in appropriate locations by March this year and would provide an even fuller understanding of pollution levels in the Borough.

In response to a question, the MCCC confirmed that in the two years that he had been in the role, he had worked closely with internal officers, park rangers, Cabinet Members, conservation volunteers, the local community and external partners, all of whom had been extremely positive to work with. He highlighted some of the Council's achievements, including a new community woodland in St Chads Park, 32,000 trees planted in a 'forest of thanks' in Parsloes Park (to commemorate key workers and those who had lost their lives in the pandemic) and the 'wild and free in LBBD' project which aimed to increase participation within the Borough's country parks. He very much hoped to continue with this work if re-elected.

The Chair thanked the MCCC and the SMEH for their attendance and updates on this very important area of work.

27. Health and Care Bill (House of Commons Bill 2021-22)

The report was noted.

28. Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was noted that the minutes of the last meeting of the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be accessed via the web-link on the front sheet of the agenda.

29. Work Programme

The changes to the Work Programme, as detailed in the report, were agreed.