

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Annual Report 2021/22

### Chair's Foreword

"2021/22 proved to be another very busy year for the Committee and I cannot begin this report without giving my immense thanks to our staff, partners and Cabinet Members, for their continuing support to scrutiny. Without their unfaltering patience and openness when responding to our questions and suggestions, scrutiny would not be possible.

The Committee has addressed a true variety of key topics this year, ranging from the Council's Targeted Early Help Review to how we engage with private sector landlords, making numerous recommendations that it wished to see implemented within its services. We have also been particularly pleased to note good progress made in areas of previous challenge, such as through how we work with residents affected by capital works and through recommendations made as part of our 2018 and 2019 scrutiny reviews, *Improving Household Waste, Recycling, and Street Cleansing* and *Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact*.

The Committee has also been very grateful to receive wide-ranging and insightful presentations from a number of our partners, such as the Metropolitan Police Service, Northbury Primary School, the National Probation Service, BDSIP, BDTP, Be First and Reside, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with these organisations, as well as with our Council colleagues, to continuously improve services for the benefit of all of our local residents, over the next year.

### **Cllr Jane Jones**

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021/22

### Membership

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

- Councillor Jane Jones (Chair)
- Councillor Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair)
- Councillor Toni Bankole
- Councillor Donna Lumsden
- Councillor Olawale Martins
- Councillor Fatuma Nalule
- Councillor Simon Perry
- Councillor Ingrid Robinson
- Councillor Paul Robinson
- Councillor Phil Waker
- Mrs Glenda Spencer Church Representative – Roman Catholic
- Mr Baba Tinubu Parent Governor – Primary
- Mr Sarfraz Akram Parent Governor – Secondary (from January 2022)
- Fiona Eagleson and Zubin Burley Youth Representatives

Claudia Wakefield, Senior Governance Officer, and Masuma Ahmed, Principal Governance Officer supported the Committee.

### Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) - Quality Assurance and Progress Update Report

The Committee received a report on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which provided context behind the move of the MASH into Children's Care and Support in September 2020, as well as the various challenges that had been facing the service at a time of unprecedented demand, which had increased in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst considerable progress had been made since the move of the service, it was acknowledged that it would take some time to address residual issues within the system, along with the escalating demand pressures.

The Committee provided challenge around issues within the system, enquiring as to where the majority of referrals came from, as well as how relationships with Community Solutions would be maintained, now that MASH had moved into Children's Care and Support. The Committee emphasised the need to work closely with the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the relevant directors, to ensure that improvements could be made within the Early Help system. It also stressed the importance of an effective service for vulnerable children in the Borough, with the right pathways to prevent the escalation of need.

## **General progress update regarding A2020 Scrutiny Recommendations - KLOE 4**

The Committee received a general progress update regarding the Key Line of Enquiry 4 (KLOE 4) recommendations that arose from the Ambition 2020 (A2020) Scrutiny Review, which focussed on how well the Council's new approach was fostering a sustainable place where people wanted to live. This was followed by a presentation by the Head of Leisure, Parks and Heritage around the parks elements of the recommendations. The latter highlighted a variety of work that had been undertaken within the parks, projects that had been supported by the local community, increased social media engagement and LBB website improvement.

The Committee referred to some of the older play equipment that was currently in parks such as Old Dagenham Park, which it felt needed to be replaced to improve the play experience for local children and families. It learnt that the Council had made improvements to eight of its parks in the Borough; however, it was advised that a full replacement of a park scheme or play area would cost in advance of £250,000. The Council had recently worked with local community groups who sourced their own funding for Valence Park, and match-funded this money to support the community group. With other parks, the Council was replacing equipment when it was feasible, but there were a significant number of areas where the entirety of a park's play equipment needed replacement. The Committee was assured that the Council was working through its 25 parks and open spaces to see where it could make improvements and investment was needed.

The Committee was pleased to note good progress against each of its KLOE 4 A2020 scrutiny review recommendations.

## **Report requested by recommendation 13 of A2020 Scrutiny Review - Impact of change to Reside's affordability threshold**

The Committee received a report on the impact of change to Reside's affordability threshold, in line with the Housing Allocations Policy. The different tenures that Reside was providing were outlined, with these being set at a range of rent levels to meet different types of housing need in the Borough.

The Committee had previously expressed concern about the risk that residents in shared ownership arrangements could become 'stuck', as they could reach a point where they had purchased a significant share of their home, but struggled when they looked to sell, as they were dependent on finding someone else who would buy their shares. The Committee was pleased to learn that the Council had since approached the Greater London Authority (GLA) on this issue, suggesting that the GLA create a Pan-London scheme, matching people across parts of London who wished to buy and sell, to facilitate this process. The Committee then suggested that the GLA may also wish to consider a rent deposit scheme for potential shared ownership purchases, to act as a type of 'insurance' for residents.

The Government had recently changed the rules around shared ownership, meaning that buyers could now purchase a minimum property share of 10%. The Chair expressed her concerns around this, stating that it would be easier for individuals to

speedily invest, without assessing what this would cost them in the future. She encouraged the idea of Reside being able to buy back this 10% property share, in the event that residents struggled with their share in future and had to consider giving this up entirely.

As a result of the presentation, the Committee:

- Emphasised the need for the Council to think through the Shared Ownership scheme and any potential implications for residents, such as not correctly understanding the terms and conditions when buying into the scheme;
- Requested some information on staircasing (where an owner of a Shared Ownership property purchased further shares of the property, from the person or organisation that also part owned the property) and sales, to gain a wider understanding of the scheme;
- Requested that a Member Briefing session be provided for all Councillors, to enable them to gain a better understanding of affordable housing, due to the vast number of questions that the Committee had in relation to this; and
- Recommended that communication be improved with potential tenants, to better understand what they were looking for and could afford.

### **Targeted Early Help Review**

The Committee received a report on a review of Targeted Early Help services, which was presented by the Council's Strategic Director for Community Solutions (a directorate bringing together seven services which provided holistic support to residents and aimed to tackle root cause issues) and the Commissioning Director for Care and Support (a directorate identifying need and procuring social care services to meet local demand). The report outlined a number of areas which needed immediate action and improvement, such as management oversight and system risks. It also outlined corrective action both already undertaken and scheduled to take place over the next 12-18 months.

The Committee sought assurance that the team would learn lessons from any previous mistakes or oversights, to ensure that these would not be repeated in the future. It was advised that the improvement plans being developed would clearly reference learnings from the Independent Review, explaining what needed to be done to improve the service and what needed to be avoided going forward.

The Chair emphasised the need to listen to frontline staff, acknowledge any faults and learn from these to ensure a greater service going forward. The Committee also recommended that the necessary funding be provided to ensure that the Council could develop a robust Target Operating Model (TOM) and a more effective future service. The Cabinet Member stated that she would do all in her power to ensure that the new model developed was correct and that the Borough's most vulnerable were protected.

The Committee made a number of recommendations which included the implementation of robust systems for identifying poor performance, referring complex cases, clarity of the services on offer to families and enhanced staff training.

### **General progress update regarding working with residents affected by capital works**

The Committee received an update regarding capital works (ie. infrastructure improvements, roof replacements etc.) to dwellings and the liaison with residents, following previous considerations at its 2 December 2020 meeting.

The Committee had previously challenged the practice that resident satisfaction surveys following works were returned to contractors rather than to Council / Be First officers, as this may have put residents off from lodging any issues directly with contractors.

The Council's Strategic Director for My Place, Assistant Construction Director for Be First and Head of Major Works at BDTP had since acknowledged this feedback and reviewed how the Council's stock investment programme was delivered, as well as how customer satisfaction data was collected and assessed, to ensure that a proper improvement programme was in place.

The Council's One Borough Voice system was to be employed to ensure that customer satisfaction data was collected and assessed via the Council, and not through contracted companies. The teams were also working with residents and contractors to understand any concerns that they may have had around Covid-19 and were putting in means to alleviate these, such as through using the same operatives to deliver all works in any particular property.

As well as the initial feedback provided by residents, the Committee recommended that residents also be given the opportunity to give feedback in the three to four weeks following works undertaken to their properties. This could be collected through the digital One Borough Voice surveys, as opposed to concerns being raised via Councillor casework. It would also ensure that customer feedback was better understood by the services, who could then more quickly respond to these residents. The Committee further suggested that residents be able to provide any feedback via paper questionnaire if they wished, as not all residents had access to the Internet.

### **East Area Borough Command Unit Update**

The Committee received an update from the Metropolitan Police East Area Borough Command Unit (BCU) Chief Inspector, Chris Nixon, on policing across the boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Havering. It had requested this update following a presentation from the BCU at its 3 February 2021 meeting, asking for the following areas to be covered:

- Update on Response Times;
- Potential reasons for the Borough's high missing people figures; and
- Engagement with the LGBTQ+ Community, particularly in light of the Police failings surrounding the Stephen Port murder investigation.

The Committee was pleased to note that the LGBTQ+ Independent Advisory Group (IAG) had been established following the Stephen Port murders, to engage with the LGBTQ+ community, and that the LGBTQ+ IAG was looking to increase its

membership. The Chair suggested that the BCU contact the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the Operational Director for Enforcement Services for assistance with further recruitment to the LGBTQ+ IAG, as well as the Borough's Flipside group if the BCU wished to expand its younger Police Encounter Panel's (PEP) membership and obtain the views of young people around policing.

The Committee also provided challenge in relation to domestic abuse, due to the significance of the issue in the Borough which had the highest domestic abuse offences per 1,000 people in London. Members were pleased to learn that the BCU was part-way through a training package for response team officers on domestic abuse matters and feedback to date was that participants had found the training valuable. The Chief Inspector commented that there had been a recent increase in the amount of arrests made by officers for coercive and controlling behaviour, which was partly down to this new training.

### **Air Quality Action Plan Update and Ambition 2020 Scrutiny Review Recommendations**

The Committee received an update on the Air Quality Action Plan, how the Council was managing the impact of development on air quality and the next steps for improving air quality and raising awareness within the Borough.

The Committee provided challenge around follow-up work to ensure that any trees that had been planted by the Council as part of its tree planting action plan were being looked after to ensure their survival. It also sought guarantees that developers were delivering on air quality improvement commitments at new developments. Whilst officers were not aware of any major survival issues in relation to trees that had been planted in the last three years, they agreed to raise the issue with the Parks and Open Spaces team to ascertain the schedule for tree check-up. Officers were also in discussions with Be First around ensuring that promises made by developers in terms of tree planting were actively pursued; however, they acknowledged that this needed to be followed up more in future.

The Chair suggested that officers ask ward councillors whether they would be willing to use part of their allocated ward budget for pollution-busting plants close to school buildings to reduce pupils' exposure to carbon emissions. The Head of Sustainability and Climate Change stated that the team had already had conversations with Valence School about green grids and that, in the lead up to the COP26, communications kits would be sent to schools.

### **Supporting Residents with Financial Matters - Appointeeship and Deputyship**

The Committee received a presentation on the current arrangements for Appointeeship and Deputyship within the Council, as well as the plans to implement a Deputyship service from December 2021 to sit alongside the current Appointeeship Council service. Both services were in place to support residents without the capacity to manage their own finances, or who did not have a family member willing to conduct these matters on their behalf. It was noted that whilst the Appointeeship service was limited to small amounts of money and every day financial matters, the

Deputyship service could encompass all aspects of financial matters (depending on Court of Protection (COP) directives).

In response to concerns raised by the Committee, it was provided with assurance around how the Service would deal with a resident's funds if they were using the Council's deputyship service and passed away, as well as arrangements that would take effect should a resident not have a will in place. Members were also informed of the safeguarding arrangements if the Council felt that a family member was withholding the finances of a resident who was not using the Council's Appointeeship or Deputyship service, as well as of staffing arrangements and performance monitoring, to ensure a well-resourced and well-run service for residents.

The Chair praised the decision to establish a Deputyship service for residents who were no longer able to manage their own finances, noting that this could also prove beneficial for elderly parents who wanted to ensure that their vulnerable children were adequately supported after their passing.

### **Adaptations**

The Committee received a presentation on adaptations to Council and private ownership properties, to help residents gain an increased level of independence.

Due to concerns around a national shortage in occupational therapists (OTs), the Committee encouraged the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration to facilitate ways the Council could 'grow its own' OTs, and was pleased to hear that the Council was exploring the potential to establish its own OT course, along with Coventry University London (CUL). CUL would run the course and the Council would use the apprenticeship levy to enable it to offer a salary to those in training. The Council was also exploring the option of working with North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT) and neighbouring boroughs, so that the course could gather the numbers required to run and more people could benefit from the offer.

The Cabinet Member stated that further conversations would also be had around specialist housing and returning vulnerable residents to the Borough (as many were situated in specialist out-of-borough placements), citing the redevelopment of Brocklebank Lodge and the desire to undertake similar developments in the Borough. The Chair emphasised the need to plan ahead for sufficient quantities of specialist accommodation and suggested that further work be undertaken to identify potential sites that could be redeveloped in the near future, to improve provision and cost-effectiveness for the Council.

### **Update on Reside**

The Committee received a presentation on Reside, the company established by the Council to support local people to access higher quality, more affordable social housing, which included a breakdown of the current tenures, plans for future growth, the addition of market rent properties to the Reside portfolio and plans to manage this, and the Reside tenancy policy, which enabled residents to stay within their properties as long as they were paying their rent and abiding by the conditions of their tenancy.

The Committee questioned the customer service provided by Reside, challenging the levels of communication to tenants and emphasising that it felt that this needed to be improved, especially when considering that it would soon be offering market rent properties and would be taking on a number of properties from Be First. The Committee was assured by the Head of Housing and Asset Strategy that the new Interim Managing Director (MD) of Reside was very keen to put together a plan to drive improvement across the service, to improve both growth and the current offer as well as to improve the quality of communications to residents.

### **Reunification of Probation Services**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of the Probation Delivery Unit for Barking, Dagenham and Havering on the reunification of probation services, which detailed the purpose and recent history of these, the reasons behind the reunification, the new structure, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and mitigating measures, future plans and key priorities.

The Committee suggested helping 'revolving door' offenders, those who repeatedly and rapidly entered and exited prison, into unpaid work where they could gain experience and establish a better sense of routine and, assuming all went well, receive a positive job reference which would help them in their endeavours to secure paid employment. It enquired around whether the Council could assist in terms of helping these offenders to continue to receive benefits and to remain housed during a period of unpaid work. The Head of the PDU advised on the community payback scheme, which was a court-ordered sanction to undertake unpaid work, and the Committee was also informed of some of the barriers to individuals undertaking other unpaid work without this impacting on their benefits, which was not within the gift of the PDU. Nevertheless, the Head of the PDU acknowledged that more needed to be done to address skills, improve outcomes and reduce offending and, to that end, the PDU was working with the Council to explore potential programmes to encourage skills development through community work, separately to community payback.

### **General Progress Update Regarding "Improving Household Waste, Recycling, and Street Cleansing" Scrutiny Review**

The Committee received a general progress update regarding progress made as part of the "Improving Household Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing" scrutiny review, which included projects and work being undertaken as a result of the ten recommendations made by the Committee. The update was provided by the Strategic Director of My Place, the Operational Director of Enforcement Services and the Head of Regulatory Services.

Whilst the Committee was pleased to hear of progress against a number of its previous recommendations, particularly the plans to improve advertising and engagement with residents to promote waste minimisation, it noted that several of the progress actions had been delayed. As a learning point, the Committee requested that where there were challenges to implementing scrutiny recommendations in future, proactive and clear communication from the relevant



Cabinet Members and senior officers would help to assure the Committee that its recommendations continued to be a priority and had not been forgotten.

The Committee commended the Cabinet Member for Public Realm for his assistance in helping Councillors to resolve residents' waste issues during the pandemic. The Chair also expressed her appreciation for the hard work of the service during the pandemic and for continuing to build on the Committee's recommendations. She suggested that there be continued conversations around improving the messaging on the Council's website, with pictures to show what residents could and could not recycle. The Committee also suggested utilising space on the sides of waste trucks for local business and private advertising, to generate more income for the Council.

### **Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26**

The Committee received a report on the Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26, which was presented by the Chief Financial Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services.

The Committee provided challenge as to ongoing savings and pressures and noted that many were driven by demand relating to Covid-19 in areas such as in Children's Care and Support, where the Council had seen increased pressures. It learnt that the Borough was also supporting some very high needs families in high-cost placements, some of which would continue indefinitely. The Council was working hard with providers to find either alternative provision, or a way of providing the right care through a more financially sustainable approach. Care and support colleagues also worked closely with the Finance team, to ensure that costs could be mapped.

Members sought assurance that further savings would not be needed in this financial year, due to investments that were to come to fruition next year. They were pleased that the Council would continue to look into prevention activity and investment opportunities, to support the community and pay dividends in future years. Members praised opportunities for innovation, such as through the Council's district heat network programmes and work to provide alternative services for residents at a lower cost, such as through supporting residents with both Council and non-Council-related debt through the Homes and Money Hub.

### **East London Joint Resources and Waste Strategy - Post-Consultation**

The Committee received a report on the East London Joint Resources and Waste Strategy and the key themes that had arisen from the public consultation, which had been undertaken between July and September 2021. The Strategy set out options for how waste and recycling services in the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge and Newham could be developed as part of the preparations for the East London Waste Authority (ELWA) new waste disposal contract that was due to commence in 2027.

The Committee was critical of the volume of plastic waste generated by organisations such as supermarkets, stating the need for a collective recycling effort that did not solely rely on local residents. It was pleased that the London Transport and Environment Committee (TEC), of which the Cabinet Member for Public Realm

was a member as part of his portfolio, was looking at a number of options to encourage supermarkets and other large users of packaging, such as Amazon, to minimise the use of plastics and reduce packaging.

The Chair also suggested the need to have a strategy in place for recycling in flats and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), considering that recycling rates were lower for these types of accommodation, which may be attributed to barriers such as only having one waste disposal shoot. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that recycling in flats was an issue in the Borough and nationally, and that the Strategy pinpointed increasing recycling rates in flats as a main challenge. He had produced a recycling video and hoped to develop social media messages with pictures of what could and could not be recycled, as well as more recycling campaigns. The Strategic Director, My Place stated that she would be looking at improving the waste facilities on estates to make recycling easier for residents.

### **Community Hubs - Developing a Network of Community Hubs**

The Committee received a report on establishing a network of community hubs, alongside partners and the local community, which would create spaces in each ward for residents to 'go, do and connect' and which would provide gateways to information, advice and support. These would develop over time and whilst there would be a core service at every hub, each hub would also adjust to deal with local issues, and what local residents felt was most important to them.

Whilst praising the value and dedication of volunteers at the hubs, the Chair commented that there needed to be a high level of buy-in from different council departments to ensure that their staff were working in the hubs at certain times to provide specialised, face-to-face support to residents, as well as front-desk Community Solutions staff who could identify any presenting issues and signpost residents to the most appropriate form of support. She was reassured that the model was not dependent on volunteers, and that the volunteers would supplement the work of Council staff.

The Deputy Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum (BADYF) asked how the hubs would be made attractive to the next generation in the Borough, with the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and Strategic Director, Community Solutions highlighting the importance of talking to young people about their needs, asking them for suggestions and working to create these opportunities alongside the young people, who could then make these spaces work for themselves. The BADYF Deputy Chair stated that a previous tour by the BADYF of the Domestic Violence Hub in the Barking Learning Centre had been very worthwhile and suggested that similar arrangements for the new Community Hubs be made.

Several other suggestions were made to promote the hubs and the services they offer, which included promotion within schools and as venues for Members' Surgeries.

The Faith (Roman Catholic) representative co-optee of the Committee also spoke on the benefits that the hubs would bring to the local community, citing her involvement in 'Sparking Purpose', an organisation that worked with families and schools to

prevent permanent exclusions of young people who brought weapons into school. The hubs could enable this type of work to take place outside of the family home, which would be particularly important for those who may be experiencing domestic abuse. The Cabinet Member stated that every hub would have a room bookable for different community organisations, who could then work with local residents one to one, and to meet them in a safe space.

The Committee praised the innovative Community Hubs model and how the preventative work undertaken through this would lead to improved outcomes for residents.

### **Homes and Money Hub**

The Committee received a presentation on the Homes and Money Hub service, which worked to support residents in a variety of ways, such as to sustain and secure their tenancies, reduce their debts, and receive support and skills to manage their finances and improve their lives. There were two Homes and Money Hubs in the Borough, based in Barking Learning Centre and in Dagenham Library.

The Chair suggested that Homes and Money Hub staff provide some support and training to those working in the new Community Hubs, to be able to identify any presenting issues and signpost residents to the Homes and Money Hub. The Head of Support Lifecycle agreed, highlighting that current training taught staff to ask the right questions and had proved very beneficial with colleagues in Universal Services (the entry point into the Community Solutions service) throughout the pandemic.

The Strategic Director Community Solutions praised the fantastic work of the Head of Service and her team, working with other colleagues in sharing learning and supporting residents. Whilst the team had around 30 staff, with the level of need far outweighing the level of resource, staff were working differently, becoming more skilled by working with other colleagues to provide more generalist and specialised knowledge to residents. It was envisioned that this type of learning model would also be taken into the Community Hubs. The Committee was also pleased to learn that the Local Government Association (LGA) had highlighted the Homes and Money Hub as an exemplar nationally, in supporting the lives of local residents.

The Committee hugely praised the positive work of the Homes and Money Hub team, and the Head of Support Lifecycle invited the Committee to visit the sites and meet with the staff and residents to find out more about the work of the Hub.

### **How are we incorporating Race & Social Justice work into our schools' education programmes?**

The Committee received a presentation on how the Council and its partners were incorporating race and social justice into its schools' education programmes. The presentation was delivered by the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement, the Headteacher of Northbury Primary School, the CEO of the Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership and the Education Strategy Commissioning and Intelligence Lead. The work was of particular

importance, given the diverse demographics of the Borough which had a 67.1% black and minority ethnic (BME) population, which was above the London average.

The Committee sought assurance regarding diversity within school staffing across the Borough, seeking to understand how schools were working to address any lack of diversity through recruitment and creating the pathways for individuals to grow within the organisations. It also highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing across schools and enquired as to how schools were working to engage parents on the programme and how best to equip headteachers to approach difficult conversations around race and social justice.

The Committee highly praised the work of all involved and the ongoing nature of this work, as well as the tangible values and practical steps involved, and asked the participants to return with any further suggestions as to how Members could continue to best support this work. The Chair encouraged Members to use their respective positions on school governing bodies to promote these conversations. The Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum also spoke positively on the work being undertaken to combat racial and social injustice in the Borough, which she felt was very inspirational.

### **Quality of schools' recovery post Covid-19, and how are we working to address schools' performance in traditionally underperforming groups?**

In response to the serious concerns held by the Committee on the impact on children and young people's education as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns, a report was provided on the quality of schools' recovery post Covid-19, and how the Council and its partners were working to address schools' performance in traditionally underperforming groups.

The Committee praised the education recovery plans for the Borough's children and young people in regards to Covid-19 and the variety of approaches being taken to support pupils' mental wellbeing, such as through the delivery of virtual Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Hot Clinics and Vulnerable Pupils' Hot Clinics, allowing professionals to refer cases of children or young people to multi-disciplinary teams. The Committee was also pleased to note strong partnership working between schools, BDSIP, the Council and partners during Covid-19, in areas such as e-learning, SEND recovery and access to technology for remote learning.

The Committee highly praised the work of schools and its partners during the pandemic, and thanked officers for the presentation.

### **Update: Early Help Improvement Programme and Early Help Target Operating Model**

The Committee received an update on the Early Help Improvement Programme and Early Help Target Operating Model (TOM), which related to the Targeted Early Help provision and not to the Universal Early Help provision that still sat within the Community Solutions service. The presentation detailed the immediate actions undertaken since the Independent Early Help review in July 2021, the short-to-

medium term actions currently underway, and future work, priorities and governance arrangements.

The Committee was pleased to learn of the extensive work that had been undertaken to improve the Targeted Early Help Service following on from its previous recommendations, such as through:

- The designing of a new TOM in partnership with the Social Care Institute for Excellence, staff, schools and partners;
- A new Head of Early Help officer;
- Better levels of investment in the service and work to ensure that there was the right mixture of skills and capability at each level of the service;
- Partners that were actively involved in the design of the Early Help service, who were understanding and committing to doing what was needed as part of the wider system;
- A Performance Management Framework and quality assurance model used for Early Help that now mirrored that used for other parts of the care and support system and which had been routinely tested and commended by Ofsted;
- 48 training sessions for all Early Help staff that had been delivered by Innovate, with training needs continuing to be identified; and
- Quality assurance now being undertaken at a multi-agency level, rather than a single-agency level.

Whilst praising the work undertaken to date, the Chair stressed the need for reassurance that the Improvement Programme was being developed and delivered as planned. With that in mind, officers were asked to arrange an informal meeting with the newly appointed Chair shortly after the May 2022 Local Elections and for the issue to be included on the agenda at the Committee's first formal meeting in the new municipal year.

### **Social Infrastructure Update and Plans**

The Committee received an update on the Social Infrastructure project in the Borough. This provided some context as to the invaluable work of BDCAN and volunteers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, providing support to residents in relation to food, welfare and self-isolation, as well as to the vaccination response. The Council had continued to build on this support over the past few months, collectively working alongside its social sector partners to further build on the relationships, values and approaches that underpinned the work of BDCAN.

The Committee suggested employing more means to recognise the contribution of volunteers and was pleased to learn that the Council and BDCAN had spoken directly to its volunteers on the issue. A 'Volunteer of the Month' scheme had been introduced, enhancements made to the breadth of training programmes and opportunities that volunteers could access and improvements to the experience for individuals to register their interest in volunteering through digital platforms. It was also encouraged that the Council and BDCAN were going to be working with some of its faith communities around topics such as Covid vaccinations, ensuring that it

was capturing more of its communities and that it was targeting those that may not have been reached in the first instance.

One Member noted that there was initially some confusion around the offer of the network, with some of the community believing that this was only to be accessed by those who were elderly, or self-isolating, when it could in fact be accessed by all within the Borough. She encouraged BDCAN to continue to advertise the offer, as well as highlighted the importance of the ongoing work to connect BDCAN into local spaces such as schools and children's centres. Officers welcomed ongoing feedback from the Committee, as well as other Members, as to how to continue to evolve the Citizens' Alliance Network, and how to tailor this for different areas of the Borough.

The Committee widely praised the work of BDCAN, emphasising the importance of this social infrastructure and its hopes that it would continue to serve the Borough's communities in future times of crisis.

### **Engaging Private Sector Landlords**

The Committee received a presentation on engaging private sector landlords. This provided an update on the Borough's Selective Licensing Scheme, which was introduced in September 2019 to address migration and deprivation within the private rented sector (PRS) in Barking and Dagenham, and to improve the standards of living within private rented accommodation.

The Committee expressed concern that there was often less time for teams to carry out some of their non-priority work, learning that there was a general lack of resourcing within private rented sector teams and a national shortage of qualified Environmental Health staff.

The Committee also felt that as different local authorities had different coloured waste and recycling bins, residents who moved into the Borough were not always aware of which bin to use. As such, it asked that the Council provide the relevant support and advice where residents had accidentally mixed their waste or placed their rubbish outside the boundary of their property, and that enforcement was only used in appropriate circumstances, such as repeat offending.

The Chair was particularly pleased that the Council was investing in its staff and to ensure their career development; nevertheless, she emphasised the need to ensure that the borough-wide licensing scheme was properly resourced. As such, the Committee recommended that the funding raised from the licensing scheme be reinvested to ensure that the service was adequately resourced.

### **Fees and Charges 2022**

The Committee received a report on the Council's fees and charges for 2022, which had been approved by Cabinet on 16 November 2021 and took effect from 1 January 2022.

The Committee expressed concern that the charges for Dagenham Library had been increased when this was not the case for Barking Library, asking officers to look into whether these could be removed or levelled as part of the 2023 fees and charges.

The Committee was also critical that the fees and charges did not reflect the lower surcharge for Euro 6D compliant vehicles, which were more environmentally friendly, to differentiate this from the higher surcharges for diesel cars that did not meet the Euro 6D standard. Officers also agreed to take this matter forward for consideration as part of the review of fees and charges for 2023.

### **Investment and Acquisition Strategy**

The Committee received a presentation on the Council's Investment and Acquisition Strategy (IAS), providing challenge to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth & Core Services on a number of aspects of the report.

With regard to B&D Energy costs, Members expressed concerns about how the rising cost of gas would affect residents. The Committee learnt that in terms of managing B&D Energy costs for residents, the Council governed this via the Shareholder Panel (SP). There were two Cabinet Members and two senior officers on the SP, who were responsible for holding individual companies to account. The individual companies would have their business cases approved through Cabinet each year, and there would then be quarterly updates that came through to the SP. The Committee was advised that the SP also scrutinised the businesses on aspects of their operations; for B&D Energy for example, the SP had asked for reassurance that the Council was passing on costs to the consumer that were in line with what it had incurred, and not to profit from energy increases.

The Committee was reassured by the role of the SP in holding the Council companies to account and ensuring that the Council was delivering the best for residents.

### **Contact**

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

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