

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Annual Report 2022/23

Chair's Foreword

"2022/23 had proved to be a busy year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as is evident from within this report. I wish to express my gratitude to all staff, partners, and Cabinet members for their continued support to the Committee and scrutiny. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum whose invaluable attendance at these meetings have provided a voice for the young people of Borough, they have certainly contributed some very challenging questions.

The Committee reviewed a variety of items which were community focused such as *Young People's Covenant & Employment for Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)* and *Working with Faith Communities in Barking and Dagenham*. It was fantastic to see throughout the reports that different services were working together to deliver a valuable and much needed resource back into our Borough and Communities.

The Committee reviewed the *Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27*, and in doing so, assisted the Cabinet Member in developing a robust strategy for the Council.

The Committee had also been very grateful to receive a number of wide-range and insightful presentations from a number of our partners which included the Metropolitan Police, Barking and Dagenham Trading Partnership (BDTP), and Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership (BDSIP). 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 our residents."

Cllr G Paddle

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2022-2024

Membership

The OSC membership consisted of ten Councillors, two co-opted church representatives, two parent governors' representatives and two co-opted youth representatives from the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum.

- Cllr Glenda Paddle (Chair)
- Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair)
- Cllr Andrew Achilleos
- Cllr Donna Lumsden
- Cllr Fatuma Nalule
- Cllr Ingrid Robinson
- Cllr Paul Robinson
- Cllr Muazzam Sandhu
- Cllr Phil Waker
- Cllr Mukhtar Yusuf
- Richard Hopkins Church Representative (Church of England)

- Glenda Spencer Church Representative (Roman Catholic)
- Sarfraz Akram Parent Governor (Secondary)
- Sajjad Ali Parent Governor (Primary)
- Millie Kiseke Youth Representative
- Humayra Uddin Youth Representative

The Committee received invaluable support throughout the year from Masuma Ahmed, Principal Governance Officer and Claudia Wakefield, Senior Governance Officer.

Early Help Improvement Progress Report

Members received an update on the journey of improvement to the Council's Targeted Early Help Service (TEHS), addressing the challenges faced and the actions implemented to resolve them.

The Commissioning Director for Care and Support was confident that the Service would receive the upper end of the 'requires Improvement' rating, in the event of an OFSTED inspection. Reasons for this included the Service's unprecedented demand where caseloads per staff member remained extremely high, cost-of-living related challenges and the unique demographic of the Borough. Additionally, the infrastructure required for the Start for Life family support hubs created delays for the completion of improvement programmes for the Service. These factors would impose challenges in receiving a 'Good' OFSTED rating by Spring 2023, although an Independent Review evidenced that the Service had improved. Moreover, the inflated agency market was a massive challenge for the Council. The Council's active investment in the Service encouraged a new recruitment programme through which 80% of posts were aimed at retaining staff. Benefits including an enhanced management layer in place, alongside good supervision, support, training and development opportunities were offered through apprenticeships to attract staff. Commissioning Innovate Children and Young People (CYP) was a temporary measure as a rapid response to meet the surge in demand for the Service. Integration between the TEHS and other Council services was seen as a prerequisite for its effectiveness, ensuring that families were well-supported. As a result, reintroducing TEHS from Community Solutions to children's services was essential to provide targeted support to those most in need.

Fees and Charges 2022

The Committee received a report on the 2022 Council fees and charges, which provided the opportunity to review and provide feedback to be considered for the 2023 fees and charges by Cabinet in November. Several points were addressed by the Strategic Director, Finance and Investment bringing to light the impact of complications including Covid-19 and high inflation from the rising cost-of-living.

Examples included changes to parking charges on standard staff permits during Covid-19 when staff worked from home; the promotion of Borough libraries and football pitches at a reduced cost; the charging policy for School visits to museums within the Borough; and the feasibility of parking charges based on vehicle emission categories against DVLA records. Additional issues were raised, such as restricting increased charges relating to the Right-To-Buy scheme, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), Selective Licenses, gambling and casino fees; and arrangement for Street Works Permits, the Flooding and Drainage Service, Low Risk Pest Control services, Bulky Waste and Graffiti and Jet Washing services. Another point to consider for fees and charges was the merits associated with increasing non-essential service fees to subsidise essential services for residents. Members were reassured that the Council would try to reduce costs for staff, although some of these costs were unavoidable. Statutory fee increases and cost recovery fees, for example, could not be reduced. However, fee increases that were negligible would be considered as a means to balance and reduce costs for staff overall.

Barking & Dagenham Trading Partnership: Repairs & Maintenance

Members received a report on repairs and maintenance undertaken by the Barking and Dagenham Trading Partnership (BDTP). The general performance, information across repairs, disrepairs and voids, and current concerns and their associated improvements were outlined.

It was recognised that the impact of Covid-19 exacerbated the repairs backlog. Factors such as staff members contracting Covid-19, labour and materials costs, and the underreporting of repair issues during the pandemic resulted in high demand for service as the consequences of the pandemic improved. The Council's collaborative approach to support BDMS (Barking and Dagenham Management Services) contractual obligations could confront the issues that both the Council and its customers were facing. Furthermore, a focus on proactive repairs instead of reactive repairs for long-run cost-efficiency was necessary. The Acuserve system was useful to collect robust data and inform its future plans; a 30-year asset management plan would provide a clearer understanding of the Council's stock and inform residents of when their works would be undertaken. The importance of surveyors was highlighted in devising a realistic strategic plan which was achievable and monitorable, to contribute to a good level of performance. Investing in upskilling and introducing apprenticeships to improve the capacity to deliver within the Borough's sufficient budget was highlighted. The value of staff members' opinions, understanding and the issues they faced when carrying out repair services around the Borough all contributed to a compromised quality of work. Factors such as previous redundancies, the removal of the bonus scheme for workers and the inability for repairs to be undertaken during the weekend were mentioned. The Committee requested the possibility for more qualified surveyors to find the root cause of issues for quicker repairs and more effective communication improved between workers and surveyors.

Housing Regeneration

Members received a presentation on housing regeneration since April 2019. Housing regeneration schemes reflected the relationship between Be First (BF), who acquired several 'turnkey' property units; and other developers, who had built the units. The involvement of developers allowed for a cheaper alternative to the greater costs that would apply to Be First, therefore enabling the success of these schemes.

A Community Infrastructure Levy could potentially be used to support local infrastructure; however, developers were not required to pay the charge if they committed to affordable housing. The Council and Be First had an Infrastructure Delivery Plan outlining different infrastructures to be included in the expected developments, such as convenience, access to education, healthcare, transport and Community and Family Hubs. The Council and BF's placemaking strategy explored the design of developments considering planning and building control regulations. Further, interactions with Reside focused on the affordability and viability of developments in the current economic climate, alongside discussions on the Council's potential in receiving more grants for construction with the Greater London Authority. The need to deliver more fit-for-purpose 3 and 4-bedroom units was as part of the 'Homes for Everyone' review. Moreover, the Mayor of London's borough-specific planning policy targets which had not been historically met by the Borough, were increasing possible as housing schemes were more successful. A five-year housing plan outlined how it would action its target. Commitments to environmental change were prioritised as part of the housing developments. The Local Plan induced flood risk assessments, whilst 'car light' and 'car-free' developments were part of the London Plan. Resultantly, transport and cycle infrastructure were promoted by the Council and Transport for London. Further, efforts for sustainable living encouraged "Passivhaus" (buildings created to very high energy efficient design standards so that they sustained a mostly constant temperature all year round), ultimately benefitting residents with lower prices from B&D Energy.

Economic Infrastructure

The Committee received a presentation on the economic infrastructure that was being delivered in the Borough, as part of the Be First mission. Economic infrastructure included Dagenham East, Eastbrook Studios and Dagenham Dock and the Factory District. Improvements to Barking Station and the Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy 2020-2030 were also mentioned.

The Transport Growth Programme which aligned with the Local Plan was introduced, outlining the potential of growth through transport facilities such as Electric Vehicle charging points, cycle training and improved bus lanes for the Borough. Successes such as the Barking Riverside Overground Station and Barking Riverside Pier were mentioned. Issues surrounded TfL bus delays, and the need to improve issues at Barking Station as the Council and Be First pushed for better services towards east London. Opportunities to procure a bike rental scheme with neighbouring boroughs was also suggested, as TfL would not extend its cycle hire scheme that it ran in the

centre of London. Moreover, engagement with schools was prioritised to promote future career pathways and job opportunities because of investment within the Borough. The introduction of warm spaces across the Borough were mentioned as an intervention to deal with the cost-of-living pressures for residents. Further, the 'Healthy Streets' initiative was aimed at improving outcomes for residents in relation to long-term health conditions and environmental damage. Road safety was highlighted by the road improvements in Heathway and Be First's work around the A13 to divert traffic and limit the impact of lorry traffic on smaller streets. Additionally, the School Streets programme enforced low traffic neighbourhoods, by investing £200,000 of the funding to implement cameras and monitoring technology. Additional funding was bid for via the Good Food Economy, to promote healthy eating and proper infrastructure for children, young people and families.

Young People's Covenant & Employment for Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Members received a presentation on the Young People's Covenant & Employment for Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which detailed the current initiatives promoting young people's employability and future initiatives such as the Careers Hub East which formed in line with the national guidance for SEND employability. Practical initiatives to promote employability were mentioned such as film-focused careers events, the Taste Festival and the SEND REACH programme, alongside the Council's internal framework to understand and provide the correct guidance and support for young people, including individuals with SEND.

Following the presentation, a Care Leaver's Covenant was suggested, similar to the Council's Armed Forces Covenant, where all young care leavers' (including SEND individuals) employability prospects were improved with guaranteed interviews for Council job posts. This could contribute to the ongoing and future regeneration in the Borough, through upskilling opportunities which would reduce the skills shortage. It could be suggested that employers provide ongoing support to such an initiative by part-funding for the continual growth of a workforce from the Borough. The Council's efforts could encourage young people to remain in education until the age of 25. Job opportunities were also available for SEND individuals as part of Inclusive Growth pledges, although it was highlighted that more support could be available by engaging with local employers. It was recognised, however, that graduate opportunities needed to be improved as more young people enter higher education, with the opening of the Film Studios, UCL PEARL research and data centre and the relocation of the Billingsgate, Smithfield and New Spitalfields markets into the Borough.

Customer Services (Contact Centre)

The Committee received a presentation on the Customer Services Contact Centre, detailing how it was configured and used, and its current performance and challenges. There was a focus on improving the quality and scale of the service overall.

The use of technology for online payments through *My B&D* and Chatbox functions, the quality of calls, the supply of staff to meet customer needs and removing siloes for cross-departmental working were all interventions in place for a better customer access and experience. The Shared Service Model Strategy as a first point of contact through Community Hubs was also highlighted. The functionality for the Contact Centre was emphasised; where it should be monitored for effectiveness and conversations should be saved for a fixed period to avoid customers repeating long-term issues. Ensuring accessibility was necessary, where Contact Centre opening hours of 8am-6pm would be helpful, alongside Saturday morning availability for resident who work full time. Resultantly, Contact Centre Officers would benefit from flexible working hours suited to their needs. It was noted that the Housing Repairs team were without a fit-for-purpose repairs diagnostic tool for the last two and a half years which hugely contributed to extensive telephone queries for Customer Services Officers. January 2023 would see a new, improved diagnostic tool. Customer satisfaction was prioritised, and residents' high rate of response to surveys suggested positive change. Furthermore, the changes to the *My B&D* platform enabled smoother, more trustworthy payments for customers. A multi-channel approach through Live Chat, online forms, call monitoring, informative complaints investigations and face-to-face Community Hubs, all contributed to improving the service and worked to free up resources.

Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) Project Update

Members received a presentation updating the Committee on the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) Project.

Issues surrounding parking restrictions in Dagenham due to the CPZ project were stated due to the danger of isolating residents who had fewer transport links compared to Barking as the use of different modes of transport to reduce the number of cars per dwelling, was prioritised. Lobbying efforts would continue for Dagenham East, Dagenham Heathway and Dagenham Dock stations. Members were interested in the introduction of a loading bay at Farr Avenue in the Thames View area. There had been prior engagement with local businesses, and officers ensured that a period of free parking was available for users in different locations, with extended times for an additional fee. The 24-hour CPZ in the Thames View area due to parking and emergency accessibility issues was highlighted due to difficulties for residents to access their estate without getting a Penalty Charge Notice. Moreover, the new School Streets initiative was brought forward by Members who recognised issues such as irresponsible parking during school runs and the displaced parking on non-CPZ roads. However, enforcement action did have an impact through Civil Enforcement Officers, which would be rolled out with new CPZ schemes going forward. Issues surrounding inaccessibility of hybrid or electric vehicle charging points was mentioned. The sustainability of policies around lower charges for EV owners was questioned with the impact of increasing EV charging infrastructure considering potential energy, power shortage and future demand. Members were assured that a parking specialist

customer service operator was now available to support customer queries and received positive feedback from users.

Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27

The Committee received a report on the Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27. The remaining 2022/23 financial gap and its potential implications for services and Council Taxpayers in the Borough, were outlined. The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 was published on 19 December 2022, regarding the allocation of funding from Government for each borough. The Government provided a policy statement setting out their direction of travel for 2024/25; however, there was still significant uncertainty surrounding funding for future years. Decisions were made against a backdrop of unprecedented uncertainty and several very significant events over the last 15 years, including a banking crisis, Brexit, Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, and the cost-of-living crisis.

The 2022/23 savings target of £6.219m was agreed, where £3.600m of these savings had been fully achieved or expected to be achieved in-year. £2.354m were at high risk of not being achieved at all, with the remaining £0.265m being uncertain or only part achieved in year. The Council's 2023/24 growth bids reduced to £14.3m from £24m, which highlighted the scale of growth needed to provide a level of service for residents and the importance of 'future proofing' budgets. The Council considered pressures like the pay award and increased energy costs into its forecasts and plans with a 4% inflation increase. The social care sector experienced a staff shortage; higher salaries presented a 3.3% public sector wage inflation, above the 2% inflation target. Regarding support for residents in the cost-of-living crisis, the Council offered a £4.5m cost of living fund to support the most vulnerable, alongside the Government Housing Support Fund. Interventions such as family hubs, support from energy companies and charities were available. Council Tax support through the Citizen's Advice Bureau and lower rents on Reside properties also provided support to eligible residents. Lower cost services such as online 'chat box' functions could resolve simple queries so complex ones could be handled with human assistance, to reduce cost pressures.

Community Safety Partnership Plan 2023-26

The Committee received a presentation on the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Plan 2023-26. Both residents and professional opinion engaged in the Plan.

The CSP Board included responsible authorities such as the Metropolitan Police, the Council, Health partners, Housing, Probation and the Voluntary Sector. The Council closely engaged with the Police, and received data on crimes, offences and trends. Reporting crimes fluctuated, as such, reporting statistics were not always a true indication of crime. The CSP launched a 'Safe Haven' alongside Barking Station, the Heathway and other businesses to provide women with accessible spaces if they felt uncomfortable. To support this, the Council and Police issued closure orders for premises with anti-social behaviour (ASB). Furthermore, the Police visited schools to

educate the youth on violence against women, alongside Victim Advisory Groups, women's charities, the British Transport Police and the community hubs involved. The Council was also funding a ten-officer Police team, to address ASB issues in the community with other support measures such as the Borough Command Unit (BCU) which prioritised addressing drug use through 'stop and search' practices, ultimately to shape its Local Policing Plan. Problems with rogue landlords engaging in criminal behaviour were monitored with the Borough-wide licensing scheme; the Metropolitan Police also helped to prosecute and issue financial penalty notices to raided properties which operated as cannabis factories and brothels. Regulations on vapes were a Trading Standards issue which the Council engaged with to educate young people. The Council had set up a community voluntary sector fund, which could be applied for on its website, providing £100,000 pounds in 2023 for local community groups that worked to address the community safety priorities.

Working with Faith Communities in Barking and Dagenham

Members received a report highlighting the rich diversity of faiths and beliefs in the Borough, engagement, and work with faith communities to date, and issues and challenges behind faith-based work.

The Council sought to ensure spaces were available for religious worship where possible on Fridays and Sundays when a community centre was leased from the Council itself to a community organisation for broad use of the whole community. Challenges were faced with Friday prayers and schools, and the Team liaised with planners to ensure that any new schools were designed to facilitate a space for Friday prayers. Moreover, suggestions were made for spaces to be used 20% of the time for religious worship as part of their leases. Through leasing for broader community use, fees would not be charged at commercial rate which would occur if spaces were for religious worship only. Cooperation with faith organisations was also discussed in relation to noise level and worshipping with respect to residents who lived around premises. Dispensations where appropriate, such as Ramadan, were made. The engagement of the community was prioritised, so they could benefit from initiatives such as food banks in churches. A good level of engagement would support open, transparent conversations with faith leaders, ultimately reducing the possibility of community tensions. The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) also provided extensive support to schools during these times. The Church Representative (Church of England) Co-optee praised the Faith Builds policy and its alignment with the Church of England's 'National Vision for Education' document. He enquired about the Council's work with schools on faith communities, whereby the SACRE in Barking and Dagenham was actively reviewing schools' syllabuses, specifically around PSHE education. Other initiatives included school visits to faith communities during Interfaith Week, as well as the 'Votes for Schools' programme which enabled live conversations around different community topics.

OFSTED Inspection Readiness: Update Report

The Committee received an update on the Council's Children's Social Care OFSTED Inspection Readiness. The continuous journey of improvement of Children's Social Care took place since the last OFSTED Inspection and two OFSTED focused assurance visits in the intervening period were highlighted, as well as the exacerbated pressures from Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and population growth.

Areas for future improvement included consistency in the quality of services and meeting national demand for children in care placements. Previous OFSTED ratings of 'Requires Improvement' in 2019, progressed to 'Inadequate' or closer to 'Good' because of improvements over the past four years. The Inspection focused on Early Help services as part of the 'Health and Protection' section and its improvements resulted from an Independent Review of the service. Improvements to Early Help allocation times were recognised. Demand for Adults' and Children's Social Care was impacted by increased migration in the Borough, resulting in financial pressures on the need to provide good quality and consistent practice. To monitor the standard of service and risks to young people, the Council's comprehensive quality assurance function, Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference chairs. An upcoming joint OFSTED and CQC Inspection for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were in place. Extensive work was focused on recruitment and retention by the Council, particularly around agency staff rates and aims for a stable workforce. Recruitment packages included competitive pay for social workers, professional development, flexibility and support and training through the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme. Family support work apprenticeships were also available, further to global recruitment campaigns from South Africa and Canada to attract high quality, experienced individuals. Key worker housing offers were also in consideration as a financial incentive within the Borough.

Pre-Scrutiny Briefing: CQC Inspection

Members received an update on the Care Quality Commission (CQC Inspection). This was a new national inspection regime, with the CQC looking to begin its inspections of Adult Social Care Services in 20 local authorities from April 2023. The CQC would be assessing how the Council met its obligations under the Care Act, and how they worked alongside their respective Integrated Care System (ICS) partners. The inspection would assess Adult Social Care Services alongside departments such as Housing, Community Solutions, Employment and Public Health, with a focus on four areas that local authorities needed to deliver on.

A project group was currently in place to consider current practices and to complete the Council's Self-Evaluation for Adult Social Care. The Council also commissioned independent reviews on potential issues in services and looked at aspects such as providing assurance around services, despite historical underinvestment. Joint working practises would also be developed. Further information on the inspection process and updates would be presented by the CM and CDCS to the Committee following the completion of the Council's Self-Evaluation. It was noted that the report

mentioned preventing social care to shift the Council's resources on providing additional support as a preventative measure before people need to progress to statutory social care services. Concerns surrounding the upcoming CQC inspection were highlighted as local authorities were still due to receive components of the framework and guidance for inspections. Although it was confirmed that Children's Social Care would not be assessed during these inspections, the CQC did not provide a timescale for which they would give their ratings, which added to concerns around lack of preparation.

Metropolitan Police Service Turnaround Plan 2023-25 and Baroness Casey Review Final Report

The Committee received a presentation on the Metropolitan Police Service Turnaround Plan 2023-25 and the Baroness Casey Review Final Report. The Review was commissioned by the Metropolitan Police to review its culture, standards and practice following the Sarah Everard murder by a serving Police Officer in London in 2021. Details on the processes, data, influencing factors and the Metropolitan Police's stance on improving outcomes were outlined. A focus on the safety of women and children had already experienced some positive progress. Further, the Metropolitan Police Turnaround Plan 2023-25 was outlined and link to the Review, to identify focus areas for improvement, such as tailored policing and safeguarding in partnership. Positive work was presented through the Borough Neighbourhood Superintendents and Police Community Support Officers in London.

Issues of profiling within the BAME community and raising concerns to the Police with confidence, were raised. A community based on localised connections and close partnership-working was crucial to make progress, through Ward Panels to share intelligence and community information, seek advice and discuss priorities. 60 'walk and talks' with Police Officers were conducted to understand women's safety in town centres and hotspot areas; so far, these had taken place in Dagenham town centres, alongside public space protection orders and fines for the harassment of women in Redbridge were desired to be replicated in Barking and Dagenham. Rebuilding trust amongst the community was important for the Police. Police abstractions were irregular where Officers were drafted to support other areas; abstractions happened around 2-3 times a month to support emergency response teams, and to Central London functions, which the Metropolitan Police Commissioner would continue to reduce. Welfare hubs for support across East London were accessible for Officers who had been assaulted or dealt with a traumatic incident. Moreover, mental health and financial support were to be offered. Recruitment processes needed to ensure policing was an attractive profession, with empty vacancies despite Outreach teams in place.

Pre-Scrutiny Briefing: The Development of the Corporate Plan 2023-27, 4 April 2023

Members received an update on the development of the Corporate Plan 2023-27. This detailed the context behind the former Corporate Plan and the impact of changes such

as Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis; the principles envisioned behind the Corporate Plan in addressing organisational challenges; leadership development and the approach and priorities to best support residents across the Borough.

The need for better relationships between officers and Councillors was highlighted as an essential contributor in resolving issues Council-wide. Collaboration would ensure that officers were not dismissive of issues which were not department specific. Working alongside Councillors would also contribute to decision-making capabilities for staff. The new Performance Framework which would effectively gather concise intelligence, information and data to monitor performance against the objectives. Further, data on the delivery and effectiveness on individual services and transparency for Cabinet Members would be included in service plans. A framework would be developed whereby this data would be reported to Cabinet and Assembly, alongside reports to present a well-functioning system. Moreover, a responsible, empowered workforce based on accountability and collaboration was recognised to be impactful for service performance. Following on from this, the importance of equalities, diversity, fairness and inclusion was outlined as part of service delivery, in consideration of the communities needs and the impact they received.

Contact

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