

# MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 October 2020  
(6:00 - 7:45 pm)

**Present:** Cllr Jane Jones (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Toni Bankole, Cllr Donna Lumsden, Cllr Olawale Martins, Cllr Simon Perry, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson, Cllr Bill Turner and Cllr Phil Waker

**Also Present:** Cllr Sade Bright

## 16. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

## 17. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 were agreed, subject to the following:

Under item 13, the reference made by the Chair to the 'River Roding' should be changed to the 'River Thames'.

## 18. Getting Barking and Dagenham Back to Work: Local Unemployment Response after Lockdown

The Council's Head of Employment and Enterprise Strategy (HEES) delivered a presentation on the Council's plans into supporting residents back into work.

The HEES provided a summary of the current landscape and the Council's response to local unemployment for those who had been affected as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown. Whilst various mediums had already been in place to mitigate unemployment before the onset of the pandemic, many additional measures had since been instated to support local residents and businesses. The Council's response to unemployment spanned the following six areas:

1. Providing core back to work support;
2. Launching a local jobs campaign;
3. Maximising external funding options;
4. Mobilising a Green Jobs creation programme;
5. Building a local jobs coalition; and
6. Kicking off a project to tackle long term unemployment.

The HEES highlighted a range of positive actions that had been undertaken by the Council and its partners during the pandemic and described the comprehensive support offer put in place by the Council. She provided Members with the latest statistics on unemployment figures and benefits claims which painted a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by the Borough, as a result of the impact of the pandemic.

In response to several questions, the HEES confirmed that:

- The Council had a good relationship with the local Job Centre Plus, who frequently liaised with the Council's Job Shop team in regards to employment. The Job Centre Plus were delivering additional Central Government funding which had been secured for job seekers, which had led to the doubling of Job Centre staff;
- The Council was committed to legally enforcing S106 agreements with bigger developers. New employees had also recently joined the Council's Enterprise and Employment, and Inclusive Growth teams, working closely with developers to ensure that targets and agreements were being met;
- The Job Shop had moved a lot of their residents' offer online during the pandemic and had carried out a comprehensive review into what had and had not worked in regards to this. Whilst the Job Shop were phasing in more face to face support for residents as lockdown restrictions eased, they were prepared to revert back to an entirely digital offer should a second full lockdown arise;
- Many of the funding streams available from Central Government were aimed at younger people, with older people proving more excluded from these. The Kickstart Scheme was targeted specifically at 16-24 year olds and whilst there was funding coming through for apprenticeships which could be accessed at any age, these were only accessed by younger people in practice. The Council were speaking to colleagues at the Barking and Dagenham Adult College to try to increase the range of courses that they offered, with the specific intention to make their offer available to older residents, who may not have felt comfortable learning in a younger environment;
- The Council was keen to invest more in Health and Social Care, as this was an area that tended to have more flexible working and better outcomes for older people moving into it, as well as more funding;
- She was of the understanding that there were some pathways for skills and training that did not interfere with Universal Credit (UC), as well as some that did. Whilst both a paid apprenticeship and the Kickstart Scheme would interfere with a resident's UC, the Kickstart Scheme would present less issues as the Job Centre would have referred the resident on to this. She also stated that it was possible in the majority of cases for unpaid training to be arranged without interruption to a resident's UC; and
- As the Job Support team and the Benefits team sat in the same part of the organisation, it could be ensured that both teams worked effectively together. A review had been recently undertaken, moving to a model whereby the same case would be treated collectively by both teams.

The Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum noted the struggle that young people were facing in regards to finding jobs without having had prior experience. She suggested that this situation could be improved through creating a job advertisement list specifically for students in colleges and sixth forms. These types of adverts, which schools could produce in conjunction with workplaces to support young people into jobs, could enable the young people to become more independent, progress in the fields that they were working within and have access to jobs which were safe. The HEES confirmed that this idea would be of benefit to many young people within the Borough and that this should be explored in more detail going forward. She noted that the Employment and Skills teams currently ran a general vacancy list, but that this was not advertised in colleges and agreed

that this idea should also be taken forward with the Barking and Dagenham Schools Partnership, as well as with the Job Shop and the Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum.

In response to further comments, the HEES agreed that it was important to support residents into jobs within established businesses and larger industries, as opposed to merely focusing only on new start-ups that frequently resulted in the business owner not taking home a salary for the first few years. The Council was currently undertaking extensive due diligence with regards to applications for Kickstart funding, with many businesses having applied to request funding to employ young people within their organisations. The Council was also undertaking a new pilot whereby it would pay for a number of business advisors to provide coaching and 1:1 support for organisations who ran care providers. This would enable those businesses within health and social care to better plan how to pay staff, have a better business model and strengthen their resilience. The Council's Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Aspiration also emphasised the free support that the Council was providing in conjunction with the BEC to support new start-ups and existing organisations through business advice seminars.

## **19. Update on the Scrutiny Review on Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact**

The Council's Director of Policy and Participation (DPP) delivered a presentation outlining the action plan that had been produced as a result of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review into Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact.

The action plan detailed the 24 recommendations that arose from the review, the steps that would be taken by Officers to implement these and their target dates for completion. The DPP noted that the presentation of the Action Plan had been delayed by a month due to Officers wanting to check updates against the Council's recently amended Corporate Plan, to ensure that recommendations could be delivered within current resources and restraints. The DPP noted that this had been verified, with no significant dissent as to the recommendations from Officers and Heads of Services. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that deliverables were subject to the ongoing pandemic.

In response to several questions, the DPP advised that:

- An item around the equality impact of Covid-19 was scheduled to come before the Committee in November, with the potential for any outcomes arising to shape the 12 May 2021 scrutiny into the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities;
- An update into the progress of the new Social Value Coordinator would be scheduled into the Committee's workplan;
- The OSC could request that Ambition 2020 reports be presented to them in the format of their choice;
- Further questions arising from the Committee in relation to affordability would be discussed at the 3 February 2021 meeting, as per the OSC's workplan and that additional scheduling would be required to ensure that items would have enough time to be discussed in full; and
- There was a need to undertake small steps to root businesses to the Borough and ensure that they had connections to the local area, highlighting the importance of maintaining contacts and building networks through meetings such as the Business Forum and through local partnerships.

## 20. Work Programme

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed Members of two changes that had been made to the Work Programme:

- The Committee was due to receive an update on the recommendations arising from the scrutiny review into 'Improving household waste, recycling and street cleansing' at today's meeting; however, she had agreed to a request by officers that this item be rescheduled to the 2 December 2020 meeting due to new staffing arrangements and the impact of the pandemic; and
- At the 9 September 2020 meeting, having received a report on preparations to produce an Air Quality Action Plan, the Committee made a recommendation that developers be required to make a contribution to offset any negative impacts of development work to the surrounding air quality. The Committee had agreed to receive an update on the Air Quality Action Plan (minute 4 refers) in June 2021 and the Chair confirmed that she had asked officers to incorporate this recommendation into the June 2021 update.

The Work Programme was noted.