

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 6 January 2021
(7:03 - 9:30 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 and Cllr Phil Waker

Also Present: Cllr Dominic Twomey and Cllr Maureen Worby

Apologies: Cllr Bill Turner

32. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

33. Minutes - 2 December 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2020 were agreed.

34. General progress update regarding A2020 Scrutiny Recommendations - KLOE 1, 2 and 3

The Council's Commercial Director and Commissioning Director delivered an update on the progress made regarding Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) 1-3 of the A2020 Scrutiny Review. The Action Plan, which detailed the 24 recommendations that arose from the review, had previously been agreed by the Committee at their 7 October 2020 meeting (minute 19 refers).

In response to several questions, the Commercial Director stated that:

- A Business Forum Newsletter was sent out to local businesses and Councillors by the Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Aspiration, and this now included a focus in some areas on the social value element. Lots of work had been undertaken within the Revenues and Benefits and Inclusive Growth departments during the pandemic to identify local businesses in the Borough and a list of local businesses had now been compiled.
- All Council-owned companies had agreed to produce summary business plans, which would not contain sensitive commercial or financial information, but would provide information for residents that would identify their strategic objectives and how they planned to meet these as part of their business planning process. These documents would be made publicly available from 1 April 2021 and the Commercial Director agreed to share links to these once they were in circulation.
- The Council was committed to getting as many local suppliers to bid for its work as possible. It was in the early stages of planning how to develop social value and the local business element of this; the development of the Social Value Policy had been agreed at the Council's Cabinet on 19 May

2020 (minute 4 refers).

- The Commercial team had initially been working to identify which commitments had already been made in regards to local employment and work with local businesses. The team had also been working with commissioners to identify which commitments needed to go into contracts that were going to be let over the course of the next 12 months, to ensure a more established baseline with which to work.
- The team were still at the start of their journey. There would also always be a delay between the procurement of a contract and the completion of an outcome. Some of the work completed would not lead to outcomes in the short-term, and there was a longer plan that had been developed that would provide local businesses with more information about how they could bid for work.
- The Council were constrained to a degree by the amount of work that it commissioned and a lot of the work that it commissioned was already in contract. As such, the Council was trying to establish the arrangements for contracts that were going out to procurement.
- There had been a delay in establishing these arrangements, as the Commercial team had tried to encourage Commissioners and Council Companies to secure work through local businesses where there was the opportunity to do so.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance & Core Services stated that:

- The Council needed to look into how it divided its frameworks into more bite-size, achievable outcomes for local businesses, as the commissioning work and services undertaken by the Council were vast and some of the smaller businesses were not in a position to deliver these.
- The Council had been working to ensure that it was on the front foot with its social value work and in working with local businesses; however, the Council was restricted by when its contracts ended and new procurement cycles could begin.
- The Council needed to ensure that procurement was robust, no matter the size of the contract procured. It now had an extensive list of local businesses with which to engage and work, following on from the Covid-19 business grants allocation.

Following on from the Commissioning Director's update on recommendation 5 in relation to how demand for services was affected by the movement of people in, out and around the Borough, the Council's Director of Policy and Participation (DPP) emphasised that:

- The Resident's Matrix 2019/20, which was on track to be completed by March 2021, had already been used in some pilot areas and would provide data on all wards and areas by March.
- The Demand dashboards in OneView (infrastructure management software) were now also live for commissioners and operational staff to utilise. The development of these tools was the first stage in the process and as with any data tool, more information would emerge as officers started to use this

and the real impact could be determined. As such, this was an area that the Committee may wish to revisit in the future, when more information about the impact of the tool could be collated.

- The Dashboards held sensitive service user data, which help frontline practitioners to make more informed decisions, but the Committee could be provided with some mock dashboards to better understand their structure. The Committee was also due to receive an update on the OneView software in March 2021.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration provided some additional detail around recommendation 6 in relation to challenging local authorities who placed families in the Borough without informing the Council:

- The Council had a system to challenge Local Authorities who were making placements into the Borough and not informing the Council.
- The Council's biggest issue in regards to increased demand and families with complex needs, was families who came and rented privately, who were not necessarily coming through the Local Authority route.
- There was still a lot of people who came to the Borough as housing was relatively cheap in comparison to the rest of London, and the Council would not find out about these families and their needs until they presented to Council Social Care services.
- The Cabinet Member agreed to look into the financial issues surrounding temporary accommodation, private-rented housing and placement families, stating that there was also an ongoing discussion at the London Leaders level into the unfairness of the present system in terms of the burden on some local authorities in comparison to others. Future updates on this would be brought back to the Committee.

35. Report arising from recommendation 3 of A2020 Scrutiny Review on Best Value

The Council's Commissioning Director delivered a report arising from recommendation 3 of the Ambition 2020 Scrutiny Review. This recommendation sought assurance that there were systems, principles and strategies in place to ensure that the Council received best value from the companies that it commissioned to deliver services. In delivering the report, the Commissioning Director set out the Council's obligations in regards to best value and how this was applied across a range of different activities and functions, as well as the services provided by each commissioned company and their governance frameworks.

In response to several questions, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance & Core Services stated that:

- Be First had inherited a Capital Works monitoring team that contained many challenges. Whilst Be First had naturally had teething issues with improving this team, the situation was now improving.
- HRA rents had dropped 4% over the last four years, year on year. This meant that it was not problematic to take additional money out of the HRA rents. Be First, as well as other companies such as BDMS and BDTP, were

also charging more due to external factors such as inflation. The biggest issue with companies moving forward (particularly with catering and cleaning) was that the Council pressed them to continue to match any national increases and the terms and conditions provided by the Council. This made the companies much less competitive than private markets in those particular fields. The companies also continued to manage wage conditions and sickness, and align themselves with the Council.

- Jobs had plummeted during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the companies only attending to emergencies. Whilst there was a huge backlog, the Council wanted to ensure the safety of its workforce, which could only be achieved through the undertaking of emergency repairs and less interaction with residents. It was noted that the job comparison figures in the report were from 2016/17 to year end in 2019/20 before the lockdown had taken effect, but that there had been a very marked improvement. Figures had increased from 345 jobs per operative to 616, which had not reduced quality as complaints were decreasing and good news feedback was improving. The Council had also gone from spending just over £18 million per year in responsive repairs to spending £13 million, signalling greater efficiency. The Council companies had shown robustness during the Covid-19 pandemic and dividends and profits had been made.

In response to several questions, the Commercial Director stated that:

- Beam Energy was not a company that had been set up and as such, did not have a business case in the same way that the other companies did. The Council had both entered into a partnership and embarked on a procurement process which at that point, had identified Robin Hood Energy as the best provider in the market in terms of its capability to deliver sustainable energy and lower energy tariffs for residents.
- The 53 new BDTP jobs created were not all for the lower section of the workforce, as evidenced through the analysis of BDTP information from the last quarter. Whilst most of the turnover in companies such as BDTP was experienced in the lower section, this was not the case for Be First. Turnover and jobs creation were also not exclusively the same.
- The report set out protections that residents had in relation to their energy. B&D Energy had capped its electricity prices to the average of the best deals offered by the Big Six energy providers, which had provided a level of assurance that the company was not increasing its charges outside of increases in charges that might naturally be applied to any energy provider when the cost of energy changed.
- The Council received wider value from the companies. Where projects and capital projects were commissioned on a scheme-by-scheme basis, discussions would be had between the relevant commissioner and their counterpart at the company as to an appropriate fee level. Whilst companies had to cover their costs and were also tasked with delivering other objectives, all activities undertaken went through some form of commissioning scrutiny in relation to appropriate fee levels, depending on benchmarks and were not simply accepted when proposed.

36. Corporate Parenting Report

The Council's Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration presented a report on the Council's Corporate Parenting arrangements. The report was composed of two elements: an annual report and an update following a visit from Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers at the Department for Education, in November 2020. The Cabinet Member explained the Council's responsibilities in relation to care leavers, the approach that it took to ensure that the best support could be provided to those in its care and its plans for the next 12 months.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member and the Operational Team for their work in supporting the Borough's care leavers.

In response to a question, the Operational Director for Children's Care and Support (ODCCS) stated that:

- Now more than ever, it was very important that children were supported by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) in regards to their mental health.
- There was a dedicated LAC (Looked After Children) CAMHS worker. Her role partly involved troubleshooting when difficulties arose with children placed out of the Borough.
- The Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and LAC at Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge CCGs, was now also the Chair of the Health Sub-Group which sat below the Council's Corporate Parenting Board and she had worked hard to ensure that children placed outside of the Borough were fully supported. Whilst this was not always straightforward, as other authorities were often highly challenged, there had been many instances where the Council had been very creative in terms of what they could do to support the children whilst they were awaiting local support.
- Mental health was an item that featured consistently on the agenda for the Health Sub-Group. The Council was thinking very carefully about mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact that this may have on its young people.

A Councillor praised the progress made as a result of the recommendations arising from KLOE 2 and from Elevate moving back into the Council. Calls from young people in care and care leavers now went directly to Children's Care and Support, and additional training for supporting young people in care and care leavers had been provided to Contact Centre staff. The ODCCS highlighted the positive comments that had been received from the National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers as to the Council's approach that there was no expiry date in terms of supporting those in or who had been in its care. Young people over the age of 25 were still care leavers and the Council believed in being proactive in contacting them, even when it was assumed that they were okay, as any parent would. The Cabinet Member also cited the importance of matching young unaccompanied asylum seekers with the right foster carers, and the pivotal role of foster carers in supporting these young people. The ODCCS stated that the Council was equally as supportive of unaccompanied asylum seekers as other young people in its care, viewing them as its children from the day that they

stepped through its door. Part of a new fostering campaign was to find more foster carers for unaccompanied asylum minors. A new cohort of foster carers had since been recruited and were supporting young people who were now arriving into the Borough.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member stated that when undertaking scrutiny, Members could be better corporate parents by questioning whether the various issues they scrutinised took into account the impact on the Borough's looked after children. This could include considering whether employment and apprenticeship schemes were offered to care leavers first and asking whether the 500 looked after children in the Borough were receiving the best access to services.

(Standing Orders were suspended at this juncture, in order to allow the meeting to continue until 9.30pm).

37. Disabilities Improvement Programme Report

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the Head of Commissioning for Learning Disabilities and Health (HCLDH) presented a report on the Council's Disabilities Improvement Programme. The Programme was put into the context of unprecedented challenges facing the Disability Service in relation to a rapidly growing population, the increasing complexity of service user needs and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also noted that much of the improvement work undertaken had been based on consultations with service users and their carers, the gaps that they had identified in provision and their experiences of services.

The Head of Commissioning for Learning Disabilities and Health highlighted issues facing the Disability Service and the case for change, as demonstrated through service user feedback. An extensive Improvement Programme had been designed to address the various pressure points within the system and provide service users with a wider range of tailored support that could be flexed according to their needs. The HCLDH detailed the six strands behind the Improvement Plan and the actions that underpinned these.

In response to several questions, the HCLDH stated that:

- The obligations of other Local Authorities in relation to those people with complex needs who were placed within the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham were dependent on the reason why these people were placed within the Borough.
- If service users were placed within the Borough because of Domestic Violence or for social care reasons, the Council would go back to the originating borough of the resident and ask for a financial contribution towards the service users' education or their health and care plans. If the service user moved in the Borough purely because they had wanted to do so, the Council had to pay for their social care costs.
- Many of the Borough's service users had moved into the Borough from abroad, meaning that there was no originating authority. Both the Cabinet Member and the HCLDH outlined some cases whereby families with

profound complex needs had moved into the area from abroad, resulting in extensive cost to the Council.

- A lot of housing stock in the Borough did not lend itself well to adaptation. The team had been working with Reside in regards to a new pilot at Brocklebank to produce Council accommodation tailored to those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- The team worked very closely with the ComSol housing department. There was a monthly meeting involving heads of housing and social care, where practitioners could discuss cases and look very practically into either how adaptations could be made to properties that service users were living in, or into the safeguarding risks of these properties. This ensured that all risks could be flagged as far as possible.
- The team had just started a piece of work relating to those living with dementia. This had so far involved working with the Insight Hub, who had provided information showing that 20% of all residents with dementia lived alone. The Council did not know who a further 19% lived with, meaning that potentially, 40% of those with dementia in the Borough lived alone.
- The team was looking into assisted technology, with an improvement plan in process. They were working with the Lead Commissioner for Innovation and Personalisation, with the aim to keep people living at home for as long as possible.
- Early diagnosis and early support were key to supporting those with dementia, rather than working with residents when they were already in crisis. Figures showed that there were 1,300 residents in the Borough with dementia, although this was likely to be an underestimation.

The Cabinet Member also stated that Brocklebank would result in a 1-million-pound saving for the Council in terms of what it would have to pay for residents to have placements outside of the Borough. She was soon to have a meeting with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing, where she would be able to request the development of new accommodation, as well as the potential locations for these. The Leader of the Council was also in negotiations with a Foundation that was looking to purchase some properties in the Borough, with the Council keen for these to be purchased so that it could develop some adapted properties.

38. Report requested by recommendation 7 of A2020 Scrutiny Review

In agreement with the report author, the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the Committee, the report requested by recommendation 7 of the Ambition 2020 Scrutiny Review was deferred to the Committee's 3 February 2021 meeting.

39. Work Programme

During this item:

- The Committee agreed to postpone item 8, the report requested by recommendation 7 of the Ambition 2020 scrutiny review, to its 3 February 2021 meeting.

- The Chair and the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration agreed that the matter of Appointeeship and Corporate Protection could be discussed at a future meeting of the Committee, as Members had become concerned about cases involving residents who had been assessed to be mentally incapable of managing their finances.
- The Chair encouraged the Committee to submit questions in advance of its upcoming extraordinary meeting to discuss Council budget savings proposals, before they were presented to Cabinet on 15 February 2021. As all 51 Members of the Council had been invited to attend the extraordinary meeting and to submit questions, the Chair wished to ensure that the Committee's questions would be addressed as a priority. She stated that this would not prohibit Members from asking additional questions at the meeting itself.
- The Chair reminded the Committee to attend the Budget Scrutiny Skills training on Thursday 21 January 2021.
- The Director of Policy and Participation highlighted that the report requested by the Committee in regards to the outcomes of Covid-19 for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, had not been intentionally removed from the Work Programme and that his team were working on the production of the report. The report item would be added back to the Committee's Work Programme.

The changes to the Work Programme were agreed.