

# MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 22 July 2020  
(5:00 - 6:35 pm)

## PRESENT

Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair)  
Cllr Faruk Choudhury (Deputy Chair)

Cllr Andrew Achilleos	Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah	Cllr Sanchia Alasia
Cllr Saima Ashraf	Cllr Abdul Aziz	Cllr Toni Bankole
Cllr Simon Bremner	Cllr Princess Bright	Cllr Sade Bright
Cllr Laila M. Butt	Cllr Evelyn Carpenter	Cllr Peter Chand
Cllr Josie Channer	Cllr John Dulwich	Cllr Cameron Geddes
Cllr Syed Ghani	Cllr Rocky Gill	Cllr Kashif Haroon
Cllr Amardeep Singh Jamu	Cllr Jane Jones	Cllr Eileen Keller
Cllr Mohammed Khan	Cllr Donna Lumsden	Cllr Olawale Martins
Cllr Mick McCarthy	Cllr Giasuddin Miah	Cllr Dave Miles
Cllr Margaret Mullane	Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole	Cllr Glenda Paddle
Cllr Simon Perry	Cllr Moin Quadri	Cllr Foyzur Rahman
Cllr Tony Ramsay	Cllr Chris Rice	Cllr Lynda Rice
Cllr Ingrid Robinson	Cllr Paul Robinson	Cllr Darren Rodwell
Cllr Muhammad Saleem	Cllr Faraaz Shaukat	Cllr Bill Turner
Cllr Maureen Worby		

## APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Irma Freeborn	Cllr Emily Rodwell	Cllr Dominic Twomey
Cllr Phil Waker		

### 12. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

### 13. Minutes (13 May 2020)

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2020 were confirmed as correct.

### 14. Appointments

There were none to report.

### 15. Leader's Statement

The Leader of the Council presented a verbal statement updating the Assembly on a range of matters since the last meeting.

At the outset, the Leader thanked all those front-line and other officers for ensuring services had been maintained during the period of the pandemic and also took the

opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of his Cabinet colleagues, referring in particular to areas within the responsibility of the Cabinet Members for Social Care and Health Integration, Public Realm, Enforcement and Community Safety, Educational Attainment and School Improvement and Finance, Performance and Core Services. Other matters covered in the statement included:

- Borough COVID-19 statistics - The Leader advised on the latest statistics of confirmed coronavirus cases and deaths in the Borough and the comparison with neighbouring boroughs.
- Regeneration and other projects - the Council was pushing ahead with a series of ambitious projects for the Borough, including major infrastructure plans for the A13 and Barking Riverside areas, the development of the new film studios on the former Sanofi site, the extension of the Thames Clipper river bus service to Barking Riverside, with a new pier opening in winter 2021, and the relocation to the Borough of the Billingsgate, Smithfields and Spitalfields markets. Those and other projects would help to refocus the local economy to growth sectors such as film, media, science, data storage and research, with the potential to deliver more than 20,000 new homes as well as thousands of new jobs and training pathways to the benefit of local residents.
- Funding issues - The Leader criticised the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Summer Statement which had failed to address the local government funding crisis and the issues of poverty and employment, heightened by the current pandemic, and he called on the Government to provide a fair funding settlement. It was noted that the Council received only £2.4m in the latest round of Government emergency COVID-19 funding on top of the £12.1m earlier allocation, which meant that the Council faced a significant shortfall as additional expenditure and lost income over the past four months amounted to approximately £40m.

The Leader confirmed that the Council was committed to helping local residents and businesses through the pandemic and would be working with schools to ensure a safe return for pupils and teachers in September.

## **16. Local Government Boundary Commission Review - Council Size Proposal**

Further to a presentation to the Council in January 2020 by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), the Director of Law and Governance presented a report on the proposed ward boundary review for Barking and Dagenham.

Having regard to the stages and timetable for the review, the report put forward a finalised Council size proposal for the Authority, that being the optimum number of councillors who, in the Council's opinion, should be elected to the local authority in future local government elections.

The proposal, which was appended to the report, took account of the governance arrangements of the Council, its current scrutiny arrangements, the representative role of councillors as captured in a survey completed by all Members, as well as future trends and plans.

The Director explained that the LGBCE 'minded to' decision on Council size, together with an agreed electoral forecast based on a six-year projection, would be used to support a number of public consultation exercises, to form the basis of future electoral ward arrangements for Barking and Dagenham.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Agree that based on the findings and supportive evidence set out in the report and accompanying appendices, the Council had demonstrated that it would continue to operate effectively with the current cohort of 51 elected councillors; and
- (ii) Approve the Council Size proposal set out in Appendix B to the report for submission to the LGBCE by the deadline of 8 September 2020.

## **17. Treasury Management Report 2019/20 Annual Report**

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing introduced the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2019/20 setting out the key areas of performance and compliance with the Council's policies during the year.

The Cabinet Member referred to the major factors during the past 12 months that had effected the UK economy and would continue to do so in the short to medium term, highlighting the uncertainty over Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic and the cut to already very low interest rates by the Bank of England as a means of stimulating the economy. He stated that the COVID-19 pandemic would impact on the Council's treasury management plans going forward, particularly in the short-term.

Key highlights within the report included income from interest of £8.8m compared to a budget projection of £6.6m; an average treasury interest return of 1.35% which was 0.51% higher than the average London Peer Group return and 0.53% higher than the Local Authority average return; an average return on loans of 3.57%; and additional borrowing of £140m to support the Council's Investment and Acquisition Strategy.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Note the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2019/20,
- (ii) Note that the Council complied with all 2019/20 treasury management indicators,
- (iii) Approve the actual Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2019/20 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and
- (iv) Note that the Council borrowed £140m from the Public Works Loan Board in 2019/20.

## **18. Motions**

### **Motion – Black Lives Matter**

Moved by Councillor Ingrid Robinson and seconded by Councillor Alasia

#### **This Council notes:**

- The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is one of the most diverse areas in the country, with over 130 different cultures and approximately 23% of our residents identifying as Black/ Black British.
- The tragic murder of George Floyd in the USA, that has sparked protests across the world on the role of institutional and systemic racism faced by the Black community.
- The huge contributions the black community makes not only to this borough, but to Britain – from sports to the NHS, politics to the Armed Forces.
- The steps already taken to ensure that no-one is left behind in Barking & Dagenham, such as:
  - Producing the cohesion and integration strategy, recognising our shared values and celebrating cultural diversity.
  - Commemorating Black History Month with a programme of events to celebrate Black African and Caribbean history, culture and achievements.
  - Becoming the first council in the UK to sign up to the Conscious Advertising Network to stop funding hate and hate speech.
  - The ‘donate a flag’ scheme, allowing members for all aspects of the community to commemorate events in the Town Square.
  - Implementing compulsory training for all members on diversity and equality, including unconscious bias.

#### **This Council further notes:**

- That despite our approach to community cohesion, racism against black people continues to be pervasive in society. This includes unconscious bias and negative stereotyping in the media, including being seen as criminal and aggressive.
- The increase in racial hate crime in Barking and Dagenham. From October 2018-19, there were 416 racial and religious hate crimes reported to the police, an increase of 31% compared to the previous year.
- The disproportionate number of black people affected by knife crime – In 2017-18, 25% of victims were black, despite making up around 3% of the total population.

#### **This Council resolves:**

- That as one borough, one community we must come together in solidarity with anyone facing discrimination in our country.
- To offer our support to the Black Lives Matter Movement.
- To send a clear message that we value our black community by:
  - continuing to mark Black History Month with a programme of events

that educate residents about the experience of black residents and matters affecting the black community in Barking & Dagenham today. We call on all other London Boroughs to follow suit.

- Working closely with the charity “Show Racism the Red Card” to educate to young people on tackling racism in our community.
  - Involving them in the development of the new Equality & Diversity plan for 2021 and beyond, so that it addresses the issues that disproportionately affect their lives.
- Work alongside the Metropolitan Police and the Violence Reduction Unit to reduce and end racial hate crime.

A number of Councillors spoke in strong support of the motion and the motion was **carried** unanimously.

## **19. Questions With Notice**

### **Question 1**

#### **From Councillor Chand**

*“Does the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration agree that putting the NHS on a firm financial footing is better than a one-off handout and a round of applause”?*

#### **Response**

The Cabinet Member explained that in April 2020, in light of COVID-19, the Health Secretary announced, as part of a wider package of NHS reforms, that £13.4 billion of NHS debt had been written off. However, it was not a new policy and was merely implementing changes already agreed.

Barking and Dagenham had experienced population growth unmatched in most parts of the country and the community have had to face greater health problems than most. However, for the past decade local hospitals had not received the funding they need to break even. Given this, the Cabinet Member stated that she would not give the Government a round of applause until there was a national solution to the funding crisis in social care and provided the investment required to tackle health inequalities.

Responding to a supplementary question about writing off the historic debt, the Cabinet Member confirmed that this should ensure that Queens Hospital would come out of special measures and hopefully allow it to build afresh and deliver those much needed health services for the local community.

### **Question 2**

#### **From Councillor Chand**

*“Can the Cabinet Member for Social Care & Health Integration inform us how our care home fared during the pandemic in light of the Prime Minister’s statement that they ‘didn’t do things quite right’*

## **Response**

The Cabinet Member found the Prime Minister's statement absolutely astounding given what the care homes have had to deal with and the lack of any real support and guidance from the Government including a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), something this Council stepped in to address for all the homes.

She stated that there were ten older people care homes located in the borough, including Kallar Lodge which was Council run and seven had residents who sadly died due to COVID-19. The first care home outbreak in Barking and Dagenham came very early in the pandemic and began due to a visitor to the home having the virus which was identified at a later date.

The majority of the other outbreaks in the homes resulted following residents being discharged from hospital having not been tested for COVID-19.

She concluded her response by putting on record how proud she was of what the care homes had achieved in saving lives and how the staff had coped in very difficult and traumatic circumstances. To that end, she also supported a request from Councillor Chand for the Leader and herself to pen a letter to the Prime Minister refuting his comments which had hurt so many care workers.

## **Question 3**

### **From Councillor Oluwole**

*"Would the Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Aspiration set out the financial impact on the Council of support provided for local businesses during the COVID-19 lockdown?"*

## **Response**

The Cabinet Member explained the Government package of temporary measures to support businesses through the period of disruption caused by COVID-19, including a 12-month business rate holiday, one-off grants for certain sized businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, as well as further grants for other smaller businesses. The Cabinet Member detailed the number of businesses and the value of the support to date under each of the schemes.

In May, in response to calls for more financial support, the Government announced 5% of additional funding to support small and micro businesses that were not eligible for existing grant support such as those in shared workspaces, market traders with fixed pitches as well as some charities. Unfortunately, the limited amount of funding available had not been enough to enable the Council to help all struggling organisations in the borough.

Responding to a supplementary question about ensuring the remaining £277,000 of available grant reached local businesses, the Cabinet Member stated that the Council were continuing to review all applications including reconsidering the current criteria of those that had not been successful, in the expectation of exhausting all available funds.

## **Question 4**

### **From Councillor Oluwole**

*“Our leisure facilities make a vital contribution to the physical, mental and general well-being of our residents. Will the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement explain how the Council will mitigate the huge financial loss our leisure services have suffered during the COVID-19 lockdown”?*

### **Response**

Following a four month closure, the Government announced that subject to meeting guidance including social distancing measures, leisure facilities could start to reopen from 25 July. Everyone Active, the Council’s leisure centre provider, was working on plans to partially reopen the centres for gyms and fitness classes on 31 July and swimming activities from 3 August.

Under the terms of the contract, Everyone Active paid a fee to run the centres for the Council, which this year was planned to be waived, and which would result in a loss of income to the Council of £2m. In addition, the Council planned to underwrite any additional operating losses, with the option that if the income was better than expected, the Council would share in that success. Despite the Government’s pledge to make up income losses to local authorities, it would not cover the loss of income from the leisure provider. The Council would continue to lobby Government to secure the necessary funds and resources to secure the long-term future of the leisure services.

## **Question 5**

### **From Councillor Achilleos**

*“In January 2019, the Council established a ‘Mental Health Charter’ to support our staff and residents who may be facing mental ill health, and to stamp out discrimination and stigmatisation in our community. What work has the Council been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure our employees and the wider community have the support they need to maintain good mental health”?*

### **Response**

The Cabinet Member stated that ‘good mental health’ during the pandemic was very tangible and difficult to measure. The Mental Health Foundation had stated that 25% of all referrals requiring support were new and not previously known to the service. It was not possible to estimate nor manage the affect lockdown had, particularly on young people, and it was something that would take years to address.

Prior to COVID-19 the Council started training all managers to support staff with mental health needs and since the pandemic, with many staff moving away from their normal working environment to home working, additional wellbeing safeguards had been put in place. In the wider community, commissioners were working with health partners to strengthen and extend the mental health and

wellbeing offer for children and adults.

## **Question 6**

### **From Councillor Ramsay**

*“Following the Planning Committee’s decision to approve plans for London’s Largest Film Studios in Dagenham East, can the Cabinet Member for Regeneration update the Assembly on the positive impact this venture will have for the residents of our borough”?*

### **Response**

The Cabinet Member stated that the scheme would positively impact on the residents of the Borough in a number of ways, with filming being one of the growth sectors with an estimated worth of over £35m to the local economy. It would transform the image of Dagenham, attracting further investment and encouraging a greater sense of pride as well as creating over 1,200 new and varied jobs together with supply chain opportunities for local businesses and scope to attract new businesses. Officers had commissioned work on how best to maximise the local employment opportunities and align the existing training providers in the Borough, as well as further specialist providers to deliver the courses and apprenticeships needed to ensure people were ready to access the future jobs. A community engagement programme would involve local schools, offering visits alongside placements and more apprenticeship opportunities.

The scheme formed part of the wider regeneration of the former Sanofi site alongside one of the country’s largest datacentres, the Travelodge, Costa and Pipe Major, the UCL’s PEARL facility which was under construction and a new office for Unite the Union.

Responding to an observation from Councillor Ramsay, the Cabinet Member remarked that it was both unique and welcoming that in the period since Sanofi indicated that they were going to cease production and following the formation of the Dagenham East Regeneration Steering Group, not a single resident objection had come forward to the various proposals for the site. The Cabinet Member felt that was testament to the hard work of the local ward councilors in championing the opportunities on the site and a demonstration of the Council working at one with the local community.

## **Question 7**

### **From Councillor Haroon**

*“Can the Cabinet Member for Social Care & Health Integration update Members on the work of the Domestic Abuse Commission”?*

### **Response**

The Cabinet Member explained that the Commission had held focus groups with residents from across the Borough on domestic abuse and attitudes. Key conclusions from those sessions related to the importance of victims being



believed, how the Borough could mobilise community support for accepting victims' reports of abusive behaviour, giving them the confidence to report the abuse.

The Commission was due to have its final meeting in September to finalise recommendations for its final report. However, due to the delays caused by COVID-19, it was now expected to be published in January 2021. Notwithstanding the delay, the Council has itself initiated some important work on housing pathways to support people trying to change their lives. The new Domestic Abuse Support contract was bedding in and making strong connections across many of the statutory services and a new campaign had been launched to improve reporting of safeguarding concerns, including for victims of domestic abuse (#BDProtect).

In response to a supplementary question regarding the actions being taken by the Council to deal with an increase in the number of reported incidents of domestic abuse during lockdown, the Cabinet Member stated that the issue was not initially about moving people away but was instead about putting a wrap-around service to support the whole family and working with them to achieve the best outcome on a case by case basis. Last year, the Council appointed Refuge as a strategic partner to operate a new domestic and sexual violence service. That service, combined with the legal advice for families provided by the Council's Legal Services, had meant that the Borough had coped despite the increase in reported domestic abuse during this period. That said, the Cabinet Member was mindful that the problem could manifest when children returned to school in September, at which point additional support and resources were likely to be necessary.