

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 4 November 2020
(7:01 - 9:19 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 Dominic Twomey, Cllr Saima Ashraf, Cllr Maureen Worby and Cllr Sanchia Alasia

21. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

22. Minutes - 7 October 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020 were agreed, subject to the removal of the letter 'u' at the end of the following sentence, under item 18: '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.'

23. Covid-19 Financial Update: Income and Expenditure

The Council's Finance Director (FD) delivered a report on the Council's budget position for 2020/21, an update on the financial impact of COVID-19 and an update on the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) development.

The Chair suggested that the item currently listed in the Committee's Work Programme for 3 March 2020, relating to the scrutiny of budget savings proposals, instead be brought to an extraordinary meeting for a date to be agreed in January 2021, before the proposals were presented to Cabinet in February. The FD and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services agreed to this recommendation, stating that they would endeavour to send this information to the Committee in December for scrutiny in January, where they would also be able to update the Committee as to suggestions that had arisen from the Budget consultation.

The following matters were discussed in response to Member's questions:

- The Cabinet Member acknowledged the Council's Investment and Acquisition Strategy was ambitious and that with every investment, there was inherently a level of risk involved, and agreed to bring back updates in relation to the strategy;
- The Cabinet Member agreed to bring back a report to the Committee on the broad predictions regarding a potential £5.8 - £18.3 million Covid-19 overspend and future reports into the growth analysis from the Council's investments, as well as into the 'pent-up' service demand as a result of the pandemic;

- The FD stated that as the Council had assumed an £8.5 million loss of income as a result of Council Tax and Business Rates being significantly impacted by Covid-19, the Government had said that the Council would not need to bear this entire cost within one financial year and that it could spread this across its 2022/23 and 2023/24 budgets; and
- The FD stated that the Government was in the process of proposing additional means to spread out these costs to local authorities and that the Council was awaiting further updates. The Council was monitoring the impact of Covid-19 through its own budget monitoring cycle, whilst working with budget managers to actively address any underlying issues or any non-Covid-related historic overspends.

24. The Barking and Dagenham Response to Covid-19: Part 2

The Council's Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement delivered a presentation on the role and response of the BD CAN network and the Citizens' Alliance Network (CAN) in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. BD CAN had been established by the Council and the BD Collective (a group of social sector organisations within Barking and Dagenham) well before the onset of Covid-19 and this had enabled the partnership to respond quickly to residents' needs. BD CAN had involved over 60 different organisations from various sectors and the support of over 400 volunteers, delivering support to over 2,000 residents. As such, the Council had learnt that collaboration, trust and relationships were absolutely pivotal to the success of the BD CAN network. The Cabinet Member gave some examples of positive work to have arisen from BD CAN, such as a network of food banks and the 'Connect' platform which had provided telephone befriending support services to residents to reduce social isolation.

The Cabinet Member stated that the CAN platform enabled residents to discuss their interests and the Borough more generally. The first online sessions had launched in October and over 2,000 residents had visited the portal so far. The Council's priorities for CAN included the acceleration of the pace of engagement, the promotion of the network and to continue to ensure that it was as community-focused as possible. The Council aspired to hold physical CAN meetings when it was possible to do so and to tailor the network to accommodate the needs of the different wards within the Borough.

The Committee praised the efforts of BD CAN and the Cabinet Member thanked the private, social and faith sectors, as well as Council staff and Members for their involvement in the network.

The following was discussed in response to Member's questions:

- The Cabinet Member stated that many organisations delivering services within BD CAN had moved online which had encouraged a lot of residents to develop their IT skills. She appreciated that some residents may be uncomfortable in using IT but emphasised the presence of organisations such as Silver Net to help people to get online. The BD CAN network had also highlighted that some people did not have IT access or the financial means to utilise technology. The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration was looking into this and the Cabinet Member for

Educational Attainment and School Improvement had been lobbying the Government for more IT equipment for deprived school children.

- The Cabinet Member stated that the Council, partner organisations and BD CAN services and hubs were ready to provide support to residents during the second, almost imminent lockdown. BD CAN were also looking into Christmas donations and the creation of gift boxes for vulnerable families within the Borough.
- The Council's Director of Policy and Participation (DPP) noted that whilst BD CAN hubs were available, some of the Council's social sector partners had rearranged their services resulting in a slightly different configuration of hubs. He stated that this information could be sent to the Committee and that Hub information continued to be the first option upon telephoning the Council's Contact Centre.
- The DPP noted that supermarket delivery slots would be much more available during the second lockdown than in the first, so demand for food parcels would not be as high. Previous 'shielders' also now only needed to take some additional care as per government guidance, rather than shielding entirely. Nevertheless, the Council would have access to some supermarket delivery slots for the local community and would continue to work with partners to distribute food parcels. The Council was communicating with residents who had previously sought support.

The DPP delivered a presentation into the inequalities within society that had been exacerbated as a result of Covid-19. Different communities had experienced differing negative impacts of the pandemic, with the Council trying to understand and mitigate these. The Fenton Review, which had been published nationally, was helping the Council to understand the wider impact on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and the Council was looking to other sources to further develop its understanding.

The Council's Head of Insight and Innovation (HII) provided an extensive analysis in relation to the impact of Covid-19, which had been undertaken by both the Council and its partners. It was noted that 1,751 cases had been recorded in Barking and Dagenham as of 16 October 2020. More women than men had had Covid-19 in the Borough and most cases were amongst the Borough's White British population; however, BAME communities had been disproportionately affected. The HII presented a detailed analysis into Thames ward as an example, which showed that nearly all long-term health conditions were experienced by the BAME community at a much earlier age than the White British population. This was of particular concern as these long-term health conditions were all risk factors for contracting Covid-19.

The following was discussed in response to Member's questions:

- The HII noted that the latest shielding datasets now recorded dates of death, with 55 residents of the Borough's 8,000 residents on the list having sadly passed away since the Council first received this list. Whilst these deaths were not necessarily as a result of Covid-19, it did mean that the Council now had data that they could utilise to begin to match Covid-19

deaths in comparison to housing tenure to draw resulting conclusions;

- The HII explained that the age rates displayed on the Thames ward analysis of long-term conditions and Covid-19 diagnosis were the average age of residents when they first received a formal diagnosis of these conditions by a GP. The Insight Team were also in the fortunate position of having the data-sharing agreement in place with health partners before the pandemic struck, meaning that they had been able to accurately predict 93% of residents who would come onto the shielding list before the Government provided the Council with such data, enabling the Council to better prepare its response;
- The DPP noted that it was essential that continued analysis was focused on informing directions for future services. Whilst more research needed to be undertaken, those communities who were in less contact with BD CAN may have had closer support networks than those who had more contact;
- The HII noted that his team would be sharing the information collated for all wards with the Committee and health partners; and
- The HII had been undertaking an NHS Health Check Uptake project through the employment of a text message patient booking system. This had seen a significant improvement to historically low health check uptake figures over the past 18 months, as well as an earlier identification of long-term health conditions by GPs. Going forward, the HII aimed to begin to challenge the age at which surgeries send out health check letters to patients, noting that BAME communities often experienced long-term conditions at an earlier age than the White British population, and to build an evidence base that presented the foundations for future conversations.

25. Work Programme

The Chair informed the Committee of several changes that had been made to the Committee's Work Programme 2020/21, as well as changes that were yet to be made, subject to the Committee's agreement:

- The rescheduling of the MASH Annual Report and the Early Help update on the Ofsted Improvement Plan, from the 6 January 2021 to the 12 May 2021 meeting, following conversations with the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the Director of People and Resilience;
- Looking at the other 6 January items, the previously entitled 'Disabilities – specialisms' item was now called the 'Disabilities Improvement Programme Report' and the previously entitled 'Update on the key issues in looked after children's services' was now called the 'Corporate Parenting OSC Report' to better clarify what these reports would focus on;
- As discussed at Item 23, the Work Programme would need to be updated to reflect the addition of an extraordinary meeting in January to enable the Committee to consider financial savings proposals before they were presented to Cabinet in February 2021;
- The addition of an item regarding the use, data governance, ethics and

transparency of the Council's OneView software had been made to the 3 February meeting agenda; and

- The update on the Action Plan arising from the Committee's scrutiny review into Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact had been removed from the May meeting agenda, as the Committee would be receiving updates on this in January and March.

The changes to the Work Programme were agreed.