

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Annual Report 2019/20

Chair's Foreword

"2019/20 proved to be a particularly exciting year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, having undertaken two separate scrutiny reviews into 'Improving Household Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing' and 'Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact'. I would like to commend both Members and Officers for their work in collating and scrutinising the information required for these reviews, with the recommendations assisting in our continuous efforts to improve services for the benefit of our residents.

As the Chair of the Committee, I began the year by meeting with Cabinet Members, directors and officers to find out more about their thoughts around key issues, which helped to guide the Committee in developing a meaningful work programme.

Before the Committee formally sat for the first time in June, I met with the Members to discuss the draft work programme and consider topics that we wanted to address. In doing so, we noted our role in helping the Cabinet to reach its vision of continuously improving services and amenities for our residents, while also holding the Cabinet to account for the decisions that they were proposing to make.

Once the work programme was agreed, the Committee spent the next ten months scrutinising a range of issues from the Council's Air Quality Action Plan through to how the Council is developing its Local Offer for care leavers, something which as our role as Corporate Parents, the Committee is passionate about.

I would like to thank the Cabinet Members who have attended meetings this year for their input and insights, as well as for listening and taking on board suggestions or concerns raised by the Committee."

Cllr J Jones
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership

The OSC consisted of ten Councillors, one co-opted church representative, one co-opted parent governor representative and one co-opted youth representative. There were two vacancies – co-opted church representative (Church of England) and co-opted parent governor representative (Secondary).

- Councillor Jane Jones (Chair)
- Councillor Andrew Achilleos (Deputy Chair)
- Councillor Dorothy Akwaboah
- Councillor Toni Bankole
- Councillor Laila M. Butt
- Councillor Rocky Gill
- Councillor Ingrid Robinson
- Councillor Paul Robinson
- Councillor Bill Turner
- Councillor Phil Waker
- Mrs Glenda Spencer Church Representative – Roman Catholic
- Mr Baba Tinubu Parent Governor – Primary
- Johami Mutuale Youth Representative

Leanna McPherson (5 June 2019 - 8 January 2020) and Masuma Ahmed (5 February 2020 - 4 March 2020), Democratic Services Officers, supported the Committee.

In-Depth Scrutiny Reviews

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook two scrutiny reviews in the 2019/20 municipal year. The Committee completed its 'Improving Household Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing' review in September 2019 and began to consider its 'Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact' review in October 2019.

In-Depth Scrutiny Review: Improving Household Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing

On 5 February 2019, the Committee agreed to undertake an in-depth review into Improving Household Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing. As part of the Review, the Committee:

- Tasked officers with undertaking research;
- Met with the Director of My Place;
- Met with the Head of Regulatory and Enforcement Services;
- Held a meeting with representatives from 'Keep Britain Tidy';
- Undertook a visit to the Frog Island Waste Management facility;
- Received a briefing from the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement; and
- Held a joint meeting with Officers from Enforcement Services, Waste Services and the Private Rented Properties Licensing Scheme.

As a result of the review, 10 recommendations were reached by the Committee.

In approving the review, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that the Director of My Place develop an Action Plan describing how the recommendations would be implemented and requested an update report on progress at a future meeting.

The update report showed progress against the majority of the recommendations made by the Committee, such as through increased social media education campaigns and newsletters to educate residents about reuse and recycling. Nevertheless, the Covid-19 pandemic had had an impact on some of the recommendations relating to engagement and the progress of these would continue to be monitored by the Committee.

In-Depth Scrutiny Review: Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact

In September 2019, the Committee embarked upon a review on the implementation of Ambition 2020, the Council's service transformation programme.

The Committee agreed the following four key lines of enquiry (KLoE) to form the basis of the Review, as follows:

- KLoE 1: How well established is the governance of the Council's new wholly-owned companies, to ensure they play their role in delivering the borough's ambition and expected financial returns?;
- KLoE 2: How much impact has the new Council approach had on the improvement in customer service standards, and what are the plans to continue this improvement with the return of Elevate services to the Council?;
- KLoE 3: How well are the new arrangements of the Council managing demand for the Council's statutory services across homelessness, adults' and children's social care?; and
- KLoE 4: How well is the Council's new approach fostering a sustainable place where people want to live?.

The final report, complete with 24 recommendations, was later approved by the Committee on 1 July 2020, during the 2020/21 municipal year.

My Place - Voids Improvement Plan

The Committee received a report on the Voids Improvement Plan, which it had requested following Task and Finish Group visits to void properties in October 2018.

The Voids Improvement Plan had been developed as part of an overall improvement plan for My Place and was currently at a pilot stage (which began in June 2019), with the next step aimed at receiving feedback to be used to influence future changes. In developing the Voids Improvement Plan, officers had considered the original report prepared by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its Task and Finish Group visits, as well as the customer experience of the service and the financial losses that the service was making.

The Committee challenged officers in relation to several aspects of the Voids Improvement Plan, such as through whether improvements to homes made by tenants, such as carpets and curtains, could be retained during the void process. The Committee was advised that there were often health and safety issues with such improvements, for example as it would not be known if the products were fire retardant. Aids and adaptations also had to be removed from void properties as they were often not wanted by prospective tenants.

The Committee learnt that a database of properties containing asbestos had also been created and that a detailed plan for dealing with minor and major works to void properties was to be developed going forward.

Improving the Employability Prospects of Barking and Dagenham's Young People

The Committee received a report on improving the employability prospects of Barking and Dagenham's Young People, which was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement.

In 2017, the then Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC), had undertaken an in-depth scrutiny review on the subject which was presented as a final report to the CSSC in March 2018. The recommendations of the CSSC (eight in total) as an outcome of the review were key to changes leading to improvements in the offer of work-related learning, work experience and apprenticeships.

The Committee was provided with an update on each of the recommendations. It was advised that while it was difficult to attribute specific outcomes and improved performance to the scrutiny review itself, a number of improvements to the employability prospects of young people in Barking and Dagenham had been seen since the publication of the report and implementation of the recommendations.

The Chair of the Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum also addressed the Committee as to how she felt that some young people needed more motivation. She questioned the Committee as to how a child could be motivated if their parents were not interested in what they were doing.

Air Quality Action Plan 2019

The Committee received a report on the proposed Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2019, which was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety.

The Committee raised concerns that public transport provision, particularly buses, were a high source of nitrogen oxide emissions in the Borough. It was noted that while Transport for London (TfL) were providing electric buses in central London, this was not happening in the Greater London area. The Committee suggested that TfL be approached to outline how they planned on supporting outer London Boroughs to meet their air quality objectives.

The Committee also proposed that an efficiency standard for boilers be introduced as part of the AQAP, as it was noted that non-efficient boilers were highly polluting.

The Committee also heard from the Chair of the BAD Youth Forum, who spoke of her concerns in relation to reuse and recycling in the Borough. She noted that some residents used bonfires to reduce the amount of rubbish coming from their homes, where they could in fact reuse or recycle some of those items.

Shareholder Panel - Internal Governance Review Report

In September 2019, the Committee heard a report on the findings of the Shareholder Panel Internal Governance Review and the current progress against actions. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services attended the meeting and spoke on the main components of the review.

The Chief Operating Officer was also in attendance and answered questions raised by the Committee in relation to the governance and scrutiny arrangements of the Council's commercial portfolio.

Community Safety Partnership Update

The Committee received a report outlining an update of the key priorities of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the actions taken to address them. The report was introduced by the Operational Director, Enforcement and Community Safety (ODECS) and included a presentation on the recent Crime and Disorder Strategic Assessment based on six priority areas.

A representative of the Metropolitan Police, the Chair of the Safer Neighbourhood Board and the Adolescents and Youth Offending Service were also in attendance to address the Committee on the work they had undertaken in support of the Plan.

The Committee discussed the challenges of knife crime, noting that the number of young people who were victims of serious violence had increased. Regarding 'stop and search', the Committee heard an impassioned speech from the Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum, who stated that the Police needed to understand that for many young people, 'Stop and Search' was seen as a tool to deal with black youths rather than the wider community.

Barking and Dagenham Housing Allocations Policy

The Committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny on the draft Housing Allocations Policy. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing presented the draft policy and recent consultation results for consideration. Comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were included in the Cabinet report, presented on 18 December 2019, for consideration before the Cabinet made its final decision. The draft Housing Allocations Policy was subsequently approved by Cabinet (minute 82 refers).