

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 28 January 2021

Non-confidential minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 28 January 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Gallagher (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Chapman, Chowdhury, Cutler, Gantly, Heather, Hyde, Jeapes, Nathan, O'Sullivan, Picknell, Poyser, Russell and Wayne

Also Present: **Councillors:** Safi-Ngogo, Lukes, Gill and O'Halloran

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

246 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Councillor O'Sullivan for lateness

247 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None

248 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

None

249 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 2020 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

250 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

None

251 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

252 COVID 19 UPDATE (Item C1)

Councillor Sue Lukes, Executive Member Community Safety and Pandemic Response was present, together with Linzi Roberts Egan, Chief Executive

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Since March Council's emergency contingency plans have been routinely revised and updated for each service to ensure effective management of the pandemic in Islington. The Borough Emergency Control Centre continues to operate, together with the Islington Outbreak Control Board, together with the Fairer Together Partnership

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 28 January 2021

- Testing – the Assembly Hall test centre opened in December to provide Lateral Flow testing and in January the Vibast Centre opened in EC1V with the Arsenal Community Hub. From 18 January testing capacity across the 3 sites has increased to 10000-14000 per week and two further sites are planned
- Vaccination roll out – continue to work closely with neighbouring boroughs, and locally two primary care delivery sites Hanley and Bingfield opened in December 2020 focusing on vaccinations at present for the over 80's. All acute hospitals across the borough have vaccine supply and are focused on health staff and outpatients. In addition roving teams have been launched and are focused on care home residents and staff. A mass vaccination site is ready, based at the Business Design Centre, and is planned to go live in February. As part of an initial wave of pharmacy led vaccination centres, planning is underway to assess the feasibility of a site at ARC Centre, and if this proceeds it will fill a geographical gap in local provision
- Communication – continued to communicate extensively with residents, businesses and staff using a range of channels to reach target audiences. This has meant responding at pace to last minute Government guidance
- Test and Trace support – the service operates 9.00 a.m – 5.00 p.m. 7 days a week, and brings together a range of services. Since March the We are Islington service has assisted over 15000 people, including help with food, financial assistance, medication support, fuel support and welfare concerns. In addition, We are Islington worked with NHS, Adult Social Care and Housing to design and implement a new Integrated Hospital Discharge Pathway as part of the We are at Islington offer. Discussions are underway to develop a similar offer to further support the NHS by preventing unnecessary hospital admissions and facilitating recovery of residents in the community
- Workforce data and support – The percentage of staff unable to work peaked on 22 December at 23%, but this dropped to 21% in early January 2021. The percentage of staff working on site has remained approximately 30-40% throughout this period. On average 80.5% of critical services reported performing as normal
- Public Health impacts – Islington came out of the second lockdown in early December with an average of 250 confirmed cases, and a positivity rate of 5-6%. Confirmed infections rose rapidly throughout December reaching a range of 1800-2000 per week and a positivity rate of 25% or higher. Noted that the underlying rate of infection would have been higher than this, as many infections are asymptomatic. Cases fell in the second week of January to 1400 with the positivity rate declining to 18.5%. However pressure on hospitalisations has increased, with cumulative deaths since March being 182 since March last year, however with increased hospitalisations fatalities may increase. The Committee noted that the figures contained in the report were now updated and since compilation of the report and in the current week positive cases of infection had fallen to just under 1000, with 25 deaths
- Continue to monitor and take action to prevent disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME residents. Live analysis takes place of PCR testing against positivity of tests by ethnicity, and engagement is taking place with community members and faith leaders, by a range of tools
- Virtual training is now available to front line staff and volunteers to better support residents and is actively targeted at BAME voluntary sector organisations and faith leaders, and pre-existing strong partnerships with the community have paid dividends
- Concern was expressed that London is vaccinating less people than the rest of the country, and that this was not acceptable. It was stated that work is taking place to attract volunteers, in collaboration with other Local Authorities, however many residents had had difficulty with the NHS portal in enabling them to volunteer

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 28 January 2021

- In response to a question as to the May GLA and local by-elections, it was stated that if these were to proceed, this would place great logistical difficulties in resourcing and also difficulties with social distancing requirements. It was felt that it is unlikely that the elections would go ahead in the current circumstances but that Members would be kept informed
- In relation to whether there had been an increase in the use of food banks during the pandemic, and the demographic of use and it was stated that this information would be provided following the meeting
- Reference was made to the vaccination of the BAME population and the lower uptake and enquired the action being taken to address this. It was stated that work is taking place to influence the specific communities where take up is low to increase vaccination rates in these groups. Work is taking place with faith leaders, community groups and Mosques
- Lateral flow tests have been introduced and there is a high take up from the BAME community, and prioritisation is being given to residents who have to go to work and secondary/primary school pupils

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, and that the information requested above in relation to increase in use of food banks be circulated to Members of the Committee

The Chair thanked Councillor Lukes and Linzi Roberts – Egan for attending

253

ANNUAL BUDGET 2021/22 (Item C2)

Councillor Satnam Gill, Executive Member Finance and Performance was present for consideration of this report, and was accompanied by David Hodgkinson, Director of Corporate Resources

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Welcomed the proposed Budget for 2021/22. Despite a shortfall in government funding for COVID pandemic costs and 10 years of reduced funding due to government austerity measures, the committee congratulated the Executive Member Finance and Performance, and officers, for achieving a balanced budget under difficult circumstances
- Noted that there is a projected funding gap of £34m over the next 3 years, which will need to be addressed in the medium term financial strategy
- Welcomed the Council house building programme to provide 550 new homes, the investment in targeted youth support, and the commitment to invest £17m in a 'greener/cleaner' economy and in measures to achieve zero net carbon zero by 2030
- Noted that, although there is confidence that the Budget for the next 12 months would be balanced, there are risks to the Budget in future years particularly in relation to the Collection Fund (Council Tax and Business Rates) due to the impacts of the COVID pandemic on employment and businesses

- Noted that, in future years, the Budget could also be adversely affected by factors such as increased costs in Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care, loss of parking income, and ongoing costs arising from the impact of COVID
- Noted that the Council needed to plan for these future pressures, and to increase reserves, where possible, to ensure against pressures on the Budget in future years
- Noted that Council Tax (excluding the Mayor’s precept) would be increasing by 4.99%, which would increase Band D Council Tax by £1.17 per week, and for those residents on Council Tax support by 10p per week
- Reference was made to the Resident Impact Assessment (RIA), and that consideration should be given to the digital divide between certain sections of residents in the borough and that this should be included in the RIA in future, as this impacted on inequality in the Borough. This is particularly relevant in the current COVID pandemic, especially in relation to online learning for children in the borough. Councillor Gill stated that this could be considered by the Executive
- Concern was expressed that it is unfair that Council tenants are facing increased charges to park on Council estates, whilst owners of larger electric vehicles were not facing comparable increases in charges. Councillor Gill indicated that this issue could be considered in future, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Development and the Executive Member for Environment and Transport
- The explanations for the savings proposals in relation to sexual health and alcohol and drug abuse services were noted

RESOLVED:

That the above comments be forwarded to the Executive for consideration

The Chair thanked Councillor Gill and David Hodgkinson for attending

254

PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2 (Item C3)

Councillor Satnam Gill, Executive Member Finance and Performance and Ayesha Hakim Rahman, Head of Strategy and Change were present for discussion of the Quarter 2 Well Run Council item

Councillor Sue Lukes, Executive Member for Pandemic Response, and Keith Stanger, Service Manager for Community Safety and Crime Reduction

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

Well Run Council

- A Member enquired as to the profile/demographic of those residents in arrears on Council Tax, and also of businesses in business rate arrears

Crime Statistics

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 28 January 2021

- Noted that the crime statistics had improved however there was no room for complacency given the recent tragic death of a young person
- Good work has taken place in relation to domestic violence during lockdown, however there had been a rise in hate crime
- There had been positive multi agency work in crime hotspots
- A Member stated that drug crime has been rising, particularly in certain areas of the borough, and that CCTV when put in place alleviates the problem, however when it is removed the problem returns. Drug crime is also related to other forms of crime and there needed to be more action taken to identify and prosecute criminals
- Reference was made to the fact that drug dealing was linked to gang crime, and that residents did not feel safe, despite improving statistics. The lack of effective neighbourhood policing exacerbated this. It was stated that there is funding available to upgrade CCTV in the borough, and a mobile CCTV van would shortly be available. ASB is reducing due to better partnership working, however more residents were at home and this could be a reason for more crime being noticed. The CCTV offer in the borough is excellent in comparison to other boroughs, and that upgrades were taking place, with mobile CCTV being focused on hot spot areas. Police CCTV also is available, however sharing of information by the Police on these needs to be improved, and a multi-agency work approach taken
- It was noted that work is taking place in some hotspots and that the EC1 newsletter was being produced to increase local intelligence and to increase actions to combat crime, and inform residents of the work taking place
- In terms of neighbourhood policing it was stated that there had been an increase of new Police officers in the borough, however these were new officers just from training college, and they needed to understand how to interact with communities, and engage with local Ward Partnerships and Safer Neighbourhood Boards
- A Member referred to the huge increase in drug use/related crime in the EC1 area. This is affecting residents, particularly over the Xmas period in the Bunhill ward area. Concern was expressed that 14 people could have lost their lives, and that Peabody Housing Association, had failed to take appropriate action to address problems, and there needed to be more co-operation between Housing Associations and the Council. Incidents had been logged with the Council's Triage system and Peabody and no action had been taken. Residents had no confidence that crime was reducing, despite statistics showing that they had reduced. Communication with residents needed to be improved in order to improve local intelligence to deal with crime, and increase the confidence of residents. Drug dealing and crime in EC1 was not acceptable, and a cross-borough strategy was needed, as crime does not stop at borough boundaries
- Reference was made to trafficking/modern day slavery/far right crime, and that this should be included in future reports
- In response to a statement as to crime in Mildmay Ward, and that residents did not feel safe. Councillor Lukes stated that different patterns of behaviour were being exhibited during lockdown, however she was concerned at the lack of co-operation with some of the larger Housing Associations on criminality. Cross border work is also taking place with L.B.Hackney in relation to crime in Mildmay ward
- It was noted that Ward Partnerships and Ward Councillors would be provided in future with statistics on crime in their wards on a comparative basis

RESOLVED:

- (a) That details of modern day slavery/trafficking/far right crime be provided in future reports following discussion with the Executive Member Health and Social Care

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 28 January 2021

- (b) That Councillor Gill be requested to provide the information requested above in relation to Council Tax/Business rates arrears to Members of the Committee

The Chair thanked Councillors Gill and Lukes and Keith Stanger and Ayesha Hakim Rahman for attending

255 FINANCIAL MONITORING - MONTH 8 (Item C4)

Councillor Gill, Executive Member Finance and Performance was present together with Paul Clarke, Director of Finance for this item

RESOLVED:
That the report be noted

The Chair thanked Councillor Gill and Paul Clarke for attending

256 MONITORING REPORT (Item)

RESOLVED:
That the report be noted and Members be informed of the date of the Committee to be held in May 2021

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

CHAIR