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London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 1 March 2021

Non-confidential minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at on 1 March 2021 at 7.00 pm.

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

Also Present: **Councillors:** Lukes, O'Halloran, Gill and Convery

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

- 257 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Councillor Picknell
- 258 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
None
- 259 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**
None
- 260 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**
RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2021 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them
- 261 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**
None
- 262 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**
The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions
- 263 **COVID 19 UPDATE (Item C1)**
Councillor Sue Lukes, Executive Member Community Safety and Pandemic Response and Linzi Roberts – Egan, Chief Executive were present, outlined the report and responded to questions

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

- The roadmap out of the current lockdown has now been outlined, and GOLD are ready to respond to the relaxation of restrictions. The

Borough Emergency Control Centre continues to maintain a 24 hour, 7 days a week contingency and response service capability

- Infection rates have declined, and the cumulative number of deaths since March 2020 had reached 319 by 5 February
- We are Islington have assisted over 16300 residents, including helping over 4000 to access food and other support has been made available
- A new risk model has been implemented to help clinicians identify adults with multiple risk factors for priority for vaccinations and this involves 6000 residents
- Noted that officers from across the Council are continuing to work closely with local health and social care partners, NCL colleagues, and local communities, to support the roll out of the COVID 19 vaccination programme
- Vaccination hesitancy is a problem, and a challenge, and the communications team has worked with health professionals, faith leaders, VCS partners, Councillors and Council staff to encourage take up
- The resident support group has continued to help residents with the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID 19
- Staffing – since the beginning of February the percentage of staff working from home has been approximately 54%. The percentage of staff reported as unable to work has remained at around 13%. Building and individual risk assessments remain in place
- In response to a question about measures being put in place for children returning to schools, and a possible consequent rise in cases it was stated that whilst testing should take place twice a week permission rates for parents for children to be tested were only currently around 20%. The Government has stated that it would be mandatory for children to attend school whether they were being tested or not
- Noted that the Easter school break was only 4 weeks after children return to school, and that this could act as a 'firebreak' if infections started to rise, and that Public Health advice was available to schools
- In response to a question it was stated that the lack of support for testing from parents was due to a number of factors, such as self – isolation requirements and loss of pay, lack of information etc.
- Discussion took place as to vaccination reticence, and it was stated that some groups were not taking up vaccinations, and in many cases these were similar groups who do not take up other vaccinations. These groups need to be encouraged to take the vaccine, and work was taking place to identify places where residents felt comfortable in attending and were local to them, and work is also taking place with community groups to encourage uptake
- In response to a question as to the GLA and local elections, it was stated that these were now taking place, and that a great deal of work is taking place to ensure that these are organised in a COVID secure way. Cross London work is taking place in relation to the GLA elections, and a staggered count is envisaged at Alexandra Palace.

The Electoral Registration team is working to identify suitable polling stations and extra staff were being employed on standby. 222 Upper Street was being made available for postal vote counting. Additional cleaning was also being planned for Polling stations, and details would be provided in the Members briefing on election planning

- Reference was made to the unacceptable discarding of PPE in streets, and that this was a concern for Public safety and for cleansing operatives. It was stated that Public Health advice was available to staff as PPE could contain contaminated waste. The Chief Executive stated that she would discuss the situation with Communications to ensure that an effective message is delivered to residents on disposal of PPE
- Noted that if a resident was offered an appointment for the vaccine and could not take this up, they could contact 119 to rearrange this or contact We are Islington who could rearrange and even organise transport if there were problems with this
- Discussion took place with regard to vaccinations for carers, and that there is a lot of information on carers being vaccinated, and there had been an improvement in take up. The situation with regard to private carers was more complex, and also for residents who have direct payments for carers, as often these carers were not known to the Council. However work is being done to encourage vaccinations, and residents/carers should contact their GP to notify them of formal/informal carers in order to arrange vaccinations
- In response to a question it was stated that information was available from care agencies as to which staff have been vaccinated

The Chair thanked Councillor Lukes and Linzi Roberts – Egan for their attendance

264 PRESENTATION EXECUTIVE MEMBER FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE (Item C2)

Councillor Gill, Executive Member Finance and Performance was present and outlined the presentation – copy interleaved

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

- COVID 19 has cost the Council about £52m and after Government funding this leaves a shortfall of £8m
- The General Reserves have increased in line with forecast at £16m
- Pension Fund is leading the way in reducing carbon footprint and performed well
- Budget proposals include a capital programme to deliver 550 new homes, £17m to tackle the climate crisis, and other additional investment. To fund this £25m of savings are needed on 2021/22

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- Impact of COVID 19 has made this untypical year for income collection with a loss of business rates and Council Tax
- Maintained help available through Council Tax support scheme, supporting over 26000 households, and continued approach of ensuring a claim for UC is also treated as a claim for Council Tax support when notified to DWP
- The number of residents making a claim for UC has increased by 148% during the COVID period, and the total number of claims now totals 32339. Initiatives have been undertaken through Discretionary Grants, pension credit take up campaign, Test and Trace support payments to assist residents
- The Corporate Asset Strategy agreed by Executive in March 2020 and a number of improvements have been implemented
- Digital Services has been dominated by the response to COVID requiring the creation of new services to residents and to support home working
- Human Resources – developed and rolled out COVID workforce policy and well-being hub for staff, workforce equality plan, government funding for Kickstart schemes, new grievance procedure and other initiatives
- Legal services – completed affordable workspace projects, dealt with high profile court matters, delivery of housing new build programme, completed the new 4 year construction contracts framework agreement
- Committee services – COVID impacted meetings in person and virtual meetings have taken place. Guidance is awaited on future planned meetings however work is taking place on a hybrid/webcasting meeting system for the future. Casework has increased and additional resource has been allocated
- Electoral Services – successful delivery of the first annual canvas reform legislation, outreach programmes to increase registration in under registered groups. Working to ensure elections in May are delivered effectively and safely
- Registration – working on the frontline during pandemic and sadly registered over 1700 deaths, over which 400 were COVID related. Supported families and also managed to carry out over 400 wedding ceremonies and planning for weddings demand once restrictions are lifted
- Customer services/Assembly Hall – supported residents through We are Islington offer, supported residents during COVID period, and worked with Children’s Services to provide food vouchers and other assistance
- Procurement – Executive adopted a new Procurement strategy in October 2020 which has a number of significant changes
- Noted Council had received 1656 FOI requests and 251 DSAR’s and there has been a decrease since the start of the pandemic. Council has achieved an 80% compliance rate for FOI’s and 84% for DSAR’s
- Performance – COVID has presented delays in reporting performance data to Scrutiny Committees, and changes have been made to a number of performance indicators
- In response to a question it was stated that the customer services team and benefits team had been particularly effective during the COVID period in assisting residents. It was stated that in the next year it was anticipated that there would be problems in dealing with increased unemployment due to the

end of the furlough scheme, and the increase in residents on Universal Credit and loss of collection monies for the Council

- In response to a question it was stated that the Council had £16m in reserves, however this could not be guaranteed to protect against a 'perfect storm' of loss of income, Government funding reductions etc. and the Council would need to monitor the situation closely
- It was stated that one of the main ways of funding the overspend in the current and future years was to create a vacancy factor of 5% for departments. A Member expressed the view that in future reports officers should provide more details of income and savings, and possible solutions to future budget deficits to be made, including proposed transformation programmes. The Chief Executive responded that Members did consider all the budget proposals in detail before approving the Council Budget
- A Member expressed concern that with the ultra -low emission zone being introduced and residents disposing of older more polluting cars, there is a need to look at possible loss of revenues in future as this would have a significant effect on the Council's budget. However care needed to be taken in order not to penalise residents who needed their cars for work or other essential purposes

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Gallagher be requested to contact Councillor Gill with details of additional information required on savings and Transformation programmes, as referred to above

The Chair thanked Councillor Gill for attending

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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT - PRESENTATION - VERBAL (Item C3)

Julie Foy, Director of Human Resources was present and made a presentation to the Committee – copy interleaved

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

- Noted that the Council in March 2019 had moved away from an annual performance appraisal process to a continuous performance development framework
- The previous annual performance framework was viewed by managers as not particularly effective, and involved a lot of documentation and it was more effective to have more regular meetings with staff and a more continuous developmental programme. It was stated that with an annual appraisal poor performance would not be addressed for some time, nor developmental needs for staff discussed. Many organisations had moved away from annual performance appraisals for these reasons. Younger staff also required more instant feedback, and the changing demographic of the service supported this approach

- It was stated the staff survey would shortly be taking place which would provide some insight into the effectiveness of appraisal processes across the Council
- Noted that the new performance framework, which had been consulted on with Trade Unions, would identify under-performing staff at an earlier stage in order to address concerns, and to identify suitable training and development opportunities for improvement
- Ratings were being considered as part of the introduction of the Learning Management system
- A Member expressed the view that the Council needed to ensure that it had a high level, clear vision to deliver services effectively for residents and there is a need for performance management to be both effective for staff, and residents, and not just a mechanical process
- The Chair stated that some departments were more effective than others, but expressed concern that one department in particular were not assisting residents/Members in an acceptable manner and that this needed to be addressed. The Chief Executive stated that Members should get a written response to enquiries within 10 working days, and if this was not the case they should inform her
- Reference was made to the fact that the Council had not undertaken service reviews in the past, and that these needed to take place in future to address concerns
- It was noted that a further report could be submitted to the Committee at a future date, if required, on introduction of the new performance management system

The Chair thanked Julie Foy for her presentation

266 FINANCIAL MONITORING (Item C4)

The Director of Finance, Paul Clarke was present and outlined the report

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

- Overall the Council is estimating COVID related budget pressures of £52m, and after Government funding to set against these pressures, are forecasting a deficit of £8m in the current financial year
- COVID has also impacted the delivery of the capital programme, and further slippage is expected and the forecast adjusted to reflect this
- Noted that additional funding is being set aside for COVID related pressures, and there is a £5m general contingency fund, in addition to monies set aside for COVID
- A Member referred to paragraph 3.16 of the report, and that Islington Lettings remains a cost pressure with long and short term issues resulting in

a high level of write-offs of uncollected rent. It was stated that further details on this would be provided to Councillor Russell

- In response to a question it was stated that with regard to income losses, this was a concern and it was anticipated that it would take some time for income to return to previous levels particularly in areas such as parking and leisure centres. There is also uncertainty over future Government funding for Local Government which could impact the Council

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Russell be provided with further information as regards the position lettings, as requested above

The Chair thanked Paul Clarke for attending

The Chair thanked Paul Clarke for attending

267 MONITORING REPORT (Item)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The Chair thanked all the officers and Executive Members who attended the meeting

The meeting ended a 9.15 p.m.

CHAIR

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