

London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 25 March 2021

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Virtual Meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 25 March 2021 at 7.00 pm.

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

Also Present: **Councillors:** Lukes and Gill

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

- 268 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Councillor Picknell. Apologies were also received for lateness from Councillors Hyde, Jeapes, O’Sullivan, Bell-Bradford, Chowdhury, and Gantly
- 269 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
None
- 270 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**
None
- 271 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**
RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them
- 272 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**
None
- 273 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**
The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions
- 274 **COVID 19 UPDATE - VERBAL (Item C1)**
Linzi Roberts – Egan, Chief Executive made a verbal presentation to the meeting, and was accompanied by Councillor Sue Lukes Executive Member Community Safety
- During consideration of the report the following main items were raised –

- Noted that transmission rates had risen in the last 7 days, from 60 to 90 cases, caused primarily in a rise of cases at a halls of residence in the borough. Work was taking place to the college and local residents to limit the spread
- Refreshing the local outbreak management plan, and Councillors were urged to promote the Lateral Flow tests to residents
- Vaccinations – there had been a high level of take up, and it was hoped that this will increase further once the confidence level of residents is seeing no ill effects of others having the vaccine
- There has been a good take up of the vaccination from Bangladeshi and some Asian communities, however take up is lower in some BAME communities, and work is continuing to take place on this. There had been a successful vaccination programme at the Finsbury Park Mosque, and the Islington Business Design Centre was opening as a vaccination site, which was extremely accessible for residents of the borough
- Noted that there were only 2 GP vaccination hubs at Bingfield surgery and Hanley Road surgery, and that the Council were looking to set up more community hubs to encourage residents to have vaccinations who may have difficulty in travelling
- A Member made reference to problems in that some residents who were currently shielding had had in obtaining a vaccination visit from a GP, and that she would notify Councillor Lukes of the details to investigate
- Targeted work was taking place with communities to break down barriers existing preventing them from obtaining a vaccination
- Discussion took place as to guidance for Town Centres and businesses once lockdown is eased, and it was noted that guidance was being looked at in this regard
- Noted that all testing was free from the NHS and the Council, however residents may be asked to pay for a test if they planned to go abroad and needed proof that they were not symptomatic
- Noted that a Members briefing on the latest position would be circulated in writing by the Chief Executive

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

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PERFORMANCE UPDATE - QUARTER 3 WELL RUN COUNCIL (Item C2)

Councillor Satnam Gill, Executive Member Performance and Finance was present, together with David Hodgkinson, Director of Corporate Resources, and outlined the report

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

- Noted the responses to the queries raised at the last meeting outlined in the report
- Noted due to COVID 19 lower collection levels for business rates and Council Tax the collection rate in February shows that the collection rate is likely to be 2.1% less for Council Tax, and 8.5% less for business rates against pre-

COVID targets. Noted that this was a much better level of collection than anticipated

- The customer centre has operated as an emergency only service since March 2020. Numbers of visits in person are minimal, and so there is no comparison with previous years. There has been no significant change to call numbers and the number of online transactions remain consistent
- Sickness absence has reduced marginally since Q2. This reflects a common picture across London and long term sickness remains the main driver of sickness absence and staff are being supported with access to wellbeing support and homeworking equipment
- Agency workers account for 11.4% lower than the London average
- With furlough coming to an end it is anticipated that there may be further pressures on collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and it is hoped to extend the £150 CTRS to assist the poorest residents. In addition residents will be encouraged, and assisted, to claim all benefits that they are entitled to
- Discussion took place as to the issue of summonses for non-payment, and that although there was specific legislation around this area, the Council did assist residents as far as possible before any summons was issued
- Noted that a summons was not issued to those residents on the Council Tax relief scheme

The Chair thanked Councillor Gill and David Hodgkinson for attending

276 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (Item C3)**

Councillor Satnam Gill, Executive Member Performance and Finance was present and accompanied by David Hodgkinson, Director of Corporate Resources, during which the following main points were made –

- There is a net COVID 19 related funding gap of approximately £8m in the current financial year. Any residual shortfall not funded by Central Government would significantly weaken the council's balance sheet and reserves, which would then be replenished in future financial years
- In addition, the Government has provided a range of specific COVID 19 funding streams that the Council is allocating and/or administering as part of the local response to the crisis. This includes grants to support businesses closed due to COVID 19 restrictions, or that have been significantly impacted for periods of national restrictions and local alert levels. Noted loss of income in E&R due to pandemic
- COVID 19 has impacted on the delivery of the Capital programme. The revised forecast outturn is based on the current profile of spend continuing to the end of the year, with further slippage of £31m to future financial years
- Noted that the Council were confident that the financial position for the following year would be a balanced budget, and noted that additional Government funding had assisted in meeting the majority of the shortfall in the budget caused by the pandemic

- In response to a question about the dedicated schools grant, and the potential problems caused by the loss of pupils on school rolls, due to BREXIT and residents moving out of London, it was stated that the projection was that London would have a surplus of school places both at primary and secondary level, and an officer group was looking into the implications of this. Noted that the GLA were also looking into falling school rolls across London. Members were informed that once the financial outturn report had been concluded this could be circulated to Members, and that this would include details of school finances
- Noted that as mentioned at the previous meeting details of the new Performance Management system would be circulated to Members, once this was available

The Chair thanked Councillor Gill and David Hodgkinson for attending

277 **MONITORING REPORT (Item C4)**

Reference was made to the scrutiny topic for 2021/22 and discussion took place. During the discussion the following main points were made –

- Various proposed topics were suggested – BAME under representation at senior level, Performance management, and focus on COVID 19 as this was a continuing pandemic and the implications on Council finances. The Chair stated that any further suggestions should be notified to her for submission to the 20 April PPS meeting, with a view to taking a final decision at the June meeting once the new membership of the Committee had been appointed at Annual Council in May
- The Committee noted that in terms of undertaking a scrutiny review during the next municipal year, there was limited time available, due to all scrutiny reviews needing to be completed in March 2021, due to the local elections taking place. Reference was made to the fact that it may be necessary to set up a sub-committee dependent on the scrutiny review topic decided

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, and that any proposals for scrutiny topics for the municipal year 2021/22 be notified to the Chair, for consideration at the PPS meeting on 20 April, and then for final determination at the June meeting of the Committee

The meeting ended at 8.45 p.m.

CHAIR