

London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 16 June 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at Town Hall on 16 June 2022 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Kay (Chair), Ozdemir (Vice-Chair), Chowdhury, Jackson, Clarke, Chapman, Heather, Staff, McHugh, Pandor, Weekes, Ibrahim and Russell

Also Present: **Councillors:** Comer-Schwartz, Ward

Councillor Jenny Kay in the Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Councillors Graham, Nargund and Nathan.

2 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

None

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 31 March 2022 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

5 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE (Item A5)

RESOLVED:

Membership of the committee will be corrected for the remaining committee cycle 2022/23
Membership and Terms of Reference were agreed

6 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A6)

None.

7 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)

None.

8 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - EXECUTIVE PRIORITIES 2022/23 (Item C1)

Councillor Kaya Comer-Schwartz, Leader of the Council, presented her Annual report, highlighting the following points:

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- We have engaged with over 6000 local people through Let's Talk Islington and the Inequality Taskforce have examined how we can improve the lives of local people. Their recommendations will be ready in the coming months and then we will be focused on taking action.
- We've invested further in our youth services, despite continuing Tory austerity, creating places to go and things to do for our young people
- Our roll-out of people-friendly streets and school streets gathers pace - creating a cleaner, greener, healthier Islington for our residents
- We raised £1 million with our Islington Greener Futures fund to support our net zero carbon work and giving local people a real stake in it
- We cut Council Tax for lower-income households, helping people struggling with the Tory cost of living crisis, as well as know how people are struggling right now
- We've already put in place free swimming for kids and older people at our leisure centres during the May half term and we'll be doing so this summer too
- Cllr Ngongo is getting to work on ensuring every Islington child moving into year 7 has access to a laptop or tablet. Ensuring that we never return to a time when a child from a less well-off family is unable to complete their school work at home
- Our new Estate Champions team is getting up and running, supporting estate residents with capital works, as well as ensuring that our £10 million Thriving Estates programme is delivered
- We'll see the first of our 750 new council homes ready to be moved into on the Andover, the Harvist and more across the borough. Providing new social housing for people who need it
- And we are making the school gates safer and healthier by making our incredibly popular School Streets permanent, as well as introducing them to schools on main roads
- Add in executive bit

Members raised the following concerns and questions:

- a) Drug crime is still a problem in the borough and has really detrimental impacts on the lives of residents and the levels of police resourcing are not high enough. It was hoped that the new Executive Member for Community Safety will raise the issue of more police resources in the borough. It was also suggested that the anti-social behaviour service was not fit for purpose and that the plan to improve it needs to be implemented.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that we know crime is an issue and there are issues with police resources. As a member of the Safer Communities Board for London, Cllr Comer-Schwartz noted the city-wide efforts to support policy around drug related crime, but agreed that more can be done locally. The new Executive Member for Community Safety is looking at the anti-social behaviour strategy, as a key priority.

- b) Whilst they were positive about People Friendly Streets, members expressed concern about the impact of LTNs on boundary road traffic, particularly the north end of Blackstock Road which has seen a significant increase in traffic and on the residents living on main roads and requested that the issues are addressed as soon as possible and that the council does more to encourage non-motorised deliveries.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that we know there are issues on boundary roads and we will continue to monitor it and look at ways to alleviate the issues. There have been significant decreases in pollution across the borough because of council measures. The council will look further into the impact of pollution on main roads and I will take the point about main road pollution back to the Executive Member.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to speak to the Executive Member for Environment and Transport regarding main road pollution.

- c) Although we have invested a lot of money in resolving damp problems in homes, especially in Girdlestone Walk and the Andover, the problems still exist. We've got a policy and need to make sure it happens in practice. This committee recently did a review on staff performance arrangements are we are looking forward to Executive response.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that while there has been a reduction, damp on estates is a multi-layered issue – some of it is structural but it is also due to overcrowding, so it's important that we continue to build at scale ourselves and push developers to build genuinely affordable housing, with the target of 750 affordable homes. Cllr Comer-Schwartz thanked the committee for it's work on performance management and advised that it was very helpful and that conversations were continuing.

- d) There is still a significant income gap in the borough and we should review the Fairness Commission's proposals in relation to businesses in the borough again.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz agreed that stronger conversations were needed about what the big companies in the borough can do.

- e) How will the new Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion work within the Executive and different council departments to ensure the issues are addressed right across the borough and avoid the issue becoming siloed because it is now a separate portfolio?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the council needed a strategic leader in this space to hold every department to account, in a similar way to how the very good work on race equality was taken forward last year, although we can still do more. The next big focussed piece of work will be around disabilities. Whilst equality is remains part of each and every Executive Member's role, the new

role will ensure there is a continued challenge to what the council does.

- f) Will the Council commit to building bigger homes to rehouse families and pressure developers to do the same?

Cllr Comer Schwartz advised that with our council homes, we need to do more work on developing an overcrowding strategy, as overcrowding causes multi-layered issues for the families within these properties, including the effects on children's education and the general mental health of the family. We will use as many levers as possible and I have already spoken to Cllr Ward, Cllr O'Halloran and the Chief Executive.

- g) We can be proud of the work done to disinvest the pension fund from fossil fuel investments, but I would like this committee to do further scrutiny on other investments and I would be interested in your views on the fairer council tax scheme some councils signing up to interested in your views

Cllr Comer Schwartz responded that the committee can, of course, choose to review investments and advised that decisions relating to investments are taken in the view of what is ethical but also what is right for the workers past and present at the council. The council has recently taken an early bold stance over Russia, which was morally right and also right for the workers here at the council.

Cllr Comer Schwartz advised that we will definitely look into the fairer council tax scheme. The Chair clarified that the scheme referred to relates to contractors paying fair taxes. Cllr Comer Schwartz advised that she would look into it and report back to the committee on the scheme.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to look into the Council's for Fair Tax Deceleration scheme and report back to Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the findings.

- h) Our Children's centres are well regarded and a vital service but some of our most deprived communities are not accessing them as much as others. I understand that 30% of children who have a right to attend, don't go.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz acknowledged that access into early years on ongoing issue. The Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, is working with voluntary groups with expertise to make sure this is addressed in our new education strategy, but in the meantime Bright Start are already doing a lot of outreach work and we are also supporting the voluntary groups who are doing similar work.

- i) Whilst there are issues with main roads in terms of excess traffic, noise and danger, NO² pollution is being reduced by the ULEZ and PM2.5 particle pollution, which is really damaging to health, is evenly spread across the borough regardless of where you live, so reducing traffic across the borough as

a whole is the best strategy to reduce exposure to pollution.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that it was also important to understand people's experience and we need to be conscious of other issues, such as noise disruption if that's what residents are experiencing.

- j) Overcrowding is definitely a big contributing factor, but active ventilation is a big factor to damp in homes - more efficient windows have caused active ventilation to reduce leading to problems in some homes with mould and a getting a fix for that would be incredibly helpful.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that we know how important ventilation is, especially post-Covid. We know that damp and mould are a health issue. We have a lot of older housing stock, which makes it difficult. We have invested in pioneering schemes like the ones at Girdlestone Walk and the Andover, which show something can be done, and we will continue to look at every avenue to help reduce the problems.

- k) We know about the energy price hikes, which have already had a big impact on the council with costs going up so much, is it keeping you awake at night and impacting on our ability to deliver services? Is there anything else relating to the cost of living crisis that you are worried could make it very difficult to deliver the programme?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the financial situation was definitely keeping her up at night; energy bills and social care pressures particularly. On energy prices, the council is very concerned and not knowing what the government is going to do makes it harder for the council to plan. That no long term strategic budget has been set by the government for local authorities is damaging. Key issues like business rates have not been addressed and it's hard to support local businesses while this is still unknown. Residents across the borough are struggling and the council needs to set a budget that will address this. I think of every single resident who is going through their energy bills tripling, the staples of food and cleaning products going up in price so much and inflation being so high. It's so important that we remain committed to London Living Wage, creating new jobs and the packages of support we've put in place. I am exceptionally proud that we set a budget as a collective – every councillor, I am sure, is kept awake at night and we will all continue to put our residents at the heart of what we do.

- l) We are at the start of a 4 year term and we want to know what we can do as a committee to support delivering the priorities. Have we got timelines for when things will be realised, so we can hold the council to account on the key priorities for residents?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that a corporate plan is being developed which will outline how and when priorities will be delivered. All Executive Members will be working on a timeline, so they can ensure progress is made. We will be able to

bring the corporate plan to you over the next few months.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to ensure the Corporate Plan is submitted to the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

- m) May be holding onto bad things from the pandemic as well as the good things – 222 Upper street people still having issues where there is no-one to speak to in person. Phone lines are issue as well – I’ve been on hold as a resident for 54 minutes. We are not giving people the level of service you would want us to. Is it on your radar and what more can we do?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that 222 Upper Street is now opened again for residents to make appointments and drop in. It took longer than we would of liked, but we had to make sure that staff concerns were addressed. More can be done to ensure that residents who are reporting issues are seeing meaningful change. Calls on repairs have been an issue, but the Executive Member for Homes and Communities is working on it and making sure that we apply at lot of the lessons we learnt through the We are Islington approach.

- n) You’ve revised the Executive portfolios bringing together finance and planning and homes and communities, what key success measures are you hoping this will achieve? There could be a concern about an imbalance of Executive roles, will this be something you will be keeping an eye on?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that bringing together of some of the portfolios was about ensuring that the Executive had the infrastructure in place to deal with the challenges of big projects. It was important that we learnt from the experience that was gained with the Holloway development – a focus on finance is a really important element of development and this will allow us greater focus on infrastructure. Bringing together Homes and Communities was a natural step after the pandemic. Mutual aid and our neighbourhoods are intrinsic and resident engagement how we bring communities together. All the Executive roles are important, some may have more statutory roles, but all form part of a team.

- o) This committee is tasked with looking at crime and disorder, are there any plans to work with neighbouring boroughs on ASB on the borough boundaries, will the new Executive Member for Community Safety be looking at that?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that working with other local councils on community safety is ongoing work and the Executive Members are meeting their equivalents in the neighbouring boroughs. There is a close relationship between Islington and Camden due to the shared Borough Commander, but more work can be done to make sure the councils are working more closely on shared concerns. I would like us to work better across London on the issue. We know that county lines and child criminal exploitation are at least London wide if not national issues.

- p) Are there any plans to review practices – it has taken a very long time for a shed audit on estates to be completed. Are there any plans to review practices generally and for shed auditing in particular?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the Thriving Neighbourhoods scheme could look at estate sheds, to ensure they the council is delivering what residents want on estates and that she will take it back to the Executive Member for Homes and Communities.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to liaise with the Executive Member for Homes and Communities regarding estate sheds.

- q) Local organisations find it difficult to compete against big companies for contracts. Most small local voluntary organisations struggling to survive. How can we make sure that local organisations get priority when contracts are awarded? If they find difficult we should offer some kind of training or support and we would like to make sure that they employ Islington residents.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the council has pledged to ring fence funding to our voluntary sector organisations, including VAI who we are working with the ensure that we have a strong and mature partnership and that capacity and leadership within the sector is developed and we have done a lot of work to support the voluntary sector bidding for contracts.

- r) It is important that all our services are culturally appropriate, a relative who is not in Islington was offered culturally inappropriate food by their local council.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that more can be done to support local businesses to provide culturally appropriate food and ensure there is a sustainability in local businesses to be able to cater for all communities. Other boroughs have run projects on culturally appropriate food with businesses, so that is something the council can consider and I am keen to look at.

- s) Senior staff do still not reflect the demography of the borough, how can we change that?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the Personnel Sub-Committee and key officers have done a lot of work on diversity within the workforce, but work needs to be done within the council and across the sector to create the pipeline to increase diversity across all levels of public organisations. The officers have done an important piece of work about recruitment at senior level and we see a real disparity in the breadth of experience by ethnicity. It's really vital that London Councils and the LGA we work together as a sector to create pipelines to increase diversity.

- t) There is an issue with the Redundancy policy, I have been made aware of something happening that I don't think is right.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that she needed more information about the issue and they should talk on it further.

- u) 95% of casework and issues raised during the last election campaign relate to Housing and residents told us not getting the service they need from the Housing team. I met an older resident who has been waiting for years for a lift. Officers must understand that people waiting on the housing list for 10 years are frustrated.

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that housing should be driven by a resident focused approach and it's important that the council provides housing that will allow elderly residents to be able to maintain full lives with support, such as the examples on the Holloway site.

- v) I used to work in the voluntary sector and ran a computer class for older people. I know work with older people, a lot of whom don't know how to use mobile phone or computer, can we think about how we can give them 1:1 service?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that having council services online is important but a lot still needs to be allowed to happen in person or over the phone, we know that digital only services can lead to exclusion and we need to ensure that we don't increase that. We ensure that information is available in our Libraries as well as on line and we are going to support Adult and Community Learning to extend digital training. The digital sector within social care is going to be increasingly important, so need to make sure our older residents comfortable with that.

- w) On violence against women and girls, how are you going to address some of the structural issues, such as borough boundaries / cross cutting policy areas. I recently joined councils homeless outreach programme overnight. Women were selling sexual services at a location on the borough boundary. They are vulnerable, exposed to violence and what happens in these areas is not reported very often by residents. We know that resources are focussed where the number of reports is high and there is a 'hot spot', so how do we ensure that policy doesn't detrimentally impact on most vulnerable?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that violence against women and girls is a key priority for me. We launched the strategy last year which talks about the wide breadth of violence in our community and raising awareness about the perpetrators. I will raise the borough boundary issue with the Executive Member for Community Safety and really recommend to him the work we did in Finsbury Park about rough sleeping - compassionate outreach work is critical in this area. It's important to give wrap around intensive support to those who need it and to not criminalise vulnerable people. It is something we should share with other boroughs more.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to liaise with the Executive Member for

Community Safety.

- x) We have been very bold about what we intend to do and I am intrigued to know what you think might be needed in terms of how we set those targets to support the delivery of the bold vision, how do we collect data, is it live, how do we know when we are hitting targets, how are you owning the data that's being given to us about performance?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz responded that we need to have a refreshed look at how performance is managed. The current set of performance indicators limited in relation with our bold vision. The Executive Member for Finance, Planning and Performance had already started to work on how we get to know what we need to. We also need to be led by the data in every strategy and decision. There are some great officers in council that do brilliant work, but it should be a learning council and every strategy should be data driven, especially at a time when resources and funding are restricted.

- y) The elderly, vulnerable and even tourists, often rely on cash and the during the pandemic many retailers move to cashless. What conversations happening about that with local businesses and Transport for London?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that this isn't an issue we have looked at and agreed that it is definitely more common post pandemic. Cllr Comer-Schwartz agreed that it is very important as is the issue of access to cash with cashpoints closing as Banks close and others applying additional charges. Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that she would look into the work being done across the sector and suggested that it could be explored further through the scrutiny process.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to investigate work being done across the sector on the issues relating to a cashless society.

- z) Fairer together and Communications are still in your portfolio, can you explain a little bit about what you are planning to do?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that Emergency Response also remained in her portfolio. On communications, Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the council has recently appointed a new Assistant Director of Communications and it is really important that we make sure that Communications should be driven by resident engagement and residents are seeing us. We need to be bolder - we sometimes hear from residents that the council does nothing about something when we have a really great scheme in place. More residents need to hear about excellent schemes and projects, in particular areas that are helping the borough become more equal. On Fairer Together, we have done some really good projects, but I am really keen now to pull together a strategy and a clear action plan and how we will deliver it.

- aa) How will we measure success and will there be Performance Indicators that you can come back to us with?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that the strategy will come to the committee to get their input into it.

Action: Cllr Comer-Schwartz to arrange for the Fairer Together strategy to be submitted to the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee for comment.

- bb) Levels of violence are high within the BAME community, especially the South Asian community, but their voices are silent and they won't come forward because there is no-one who looks like them or represents them. The BAME community not accessing services because staff do not look like them. How are we going to get more people from the South Asian community working for the council?

Cllr Comer-Schwartz advised that this was why it is important that the council works out in the community with stakeholders in the voluntary sector and specialist experts in minority community's experience of violence. More needs to be done, but we are proud that the council has moved quickly to increase representation – looking around the room now there is a real change since 2019 when there were no male black councillors. It is vital to ensure that the community is seen within their council and we need to work and talk to excellent community champions about representation, we need people from all walks of life to provide that lived experience. We have been working with the LMU on a project which looked at breakdown of communities accessing the iWorks service and are targeting parents, women and minoritized communities.

The Chair thanked Cllr Comer-Schwartz for attending the meeting.

9 **SCRUTINY MONITORING AND FORWARD PLAN (Item C2)**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

10 **SELECTION OF SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC AND WORK PLAN 2022/23 (Item C3)**

The Chair highlighted the suggestions that members had sent to the Chair in the run up to the committee meeting and asked members for suggestions for the Work Plan 2022/23.

Members agreed the following:

- The main scrutiny topic would focus on how the Council can best support residents experiencing hardship in the current climate. This would include the cost of living crisis, the Council Tax Support Scheme, and related matters. The title is to be agreed.
- Other areas for scrutiny will include:

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- Digital Exclusion – initially an informal working group needed. Group to request witnesses from outside expertise, Resident Experience Programme, Contact Islington and Fairer Together hubs to be reviewed.
- Budget monitoring - increase in energy prices a topic of special focus
- Reviewing performance indicators – to be linked to new strategic plan, work to improve data insight etc

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

CHAIR