MINUTES OF MEETING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY, 26TH MAY, 2020, 6.30 PM

PRESENT:

Councillors: Lucia das Neves (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Erdal Dogan, Adam Jogee, Khaled Moyeed

Co-optees: Mark Chapman, Luci Davin and Lourdes Keever

12. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred members present to agenda item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and members noted the information contained therein.

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Yvonne Denny

14. URGENT BUSINESS

It being a special meeting under Part 4, Section B, Paragraph 17 of the Council's Constitution, no other business was considered at the meeting.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared that she was a governor of St Martin of Porres School.

Cllr Connor declared she was a governor of Tetherdown Primary School.

Lourdes Keever declared that she was the chair of the governing body of a school in south east Tottenham.

Mark Chapman declared that he was the chair of governors at both Bounds Green Primary and Fortis Green schools.

Cllr Ibrahim declared that she was a full time trade union representative for Unison at the London Borough of Redbridge. It was noted that Unison had agreed a national position on the reopening of schools.

Cllr Jogee declared that he sat on the governing body for the Greig City Academy.

Luci Davin declared that she was a parent-governor at Seven Sisters Primary School.

16. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS

None.

17. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr Ejiofor, the Leader of the Council gave a short verbal presentation to the Committee which set out some of the key actions taken by the administration in response to the current Covid-19 crisis as well as the next steps. The following key points were noted:

- A huge effort had been undertaken to transform the way that the Council worked and a number of services had to be reconfigured to fundamentally change how they operated. This was done almost overnight. The Leader characterised the scale of change being akin to implementing all of the emergency planning scenarios that the Council have conceived and tested, all at once.
- Operating remotely, limiting face-to-face contact to only when it was absolutely necessary, was crucial in changing the practical way the Council operated.
- The focus of the Council's response was to protect the most vulnerable residents. The Council also prioritised the need to support the Public Health England advice which was to 'Stay at Home' and 'Protect Lives'. The Council ensured that its staff were protected whilst also continuing to provide services to its residents.
- In addition to day-to-day services, the Council had a key role during the crisis to shield vulnerable people, to provide housing and ensure that parks and open spaces were used properly. The Council supported its NHS partners with seven-day discharge and in many cases this was being done within two-hours.
- A food distribution organisation was established which provided 300 deliveries a day.
- The entire Customer Services operation was reorganised to work remotely.
- A temporary mortuary was also established.
- Another key aspect of the Council's response was to work with our voluntary and community sector partners to create the Connected Communities programme.
- The five key issues identified for the next phase of the Covid response were identified as: a planned phased return to school; access to funding; local economic development; supporting walking and cycling and how the Council supported the delivery of services going forwards.
- The Council has received additional funding from government to support the Covid response but this had almost been spent already in providing shielding, additional housing, food supplies etcetera.
- The Committee was advised that there was a projected £45m of additional expenditure as a result of the crisis. The Council had received £15.5m from government, which left a £29.5m gap. In addition, it was anticipated that there would be a drop in income of around £8m from a loss of domestic and commercial rents and as well as £12m reduction in business rates for next year.
- The Leader set out that, combined, this left a £70m black hole in next year's budget which had been a balanced budget when it was agreed in February. The key task for the administration going forwards was to agree how it could balance the books and mitigate a £70m funding shortfall. The Leader advised

that it was crucial that Council's continued to engage with the government and kept the pressure up to ensure government promises around funding were kept.

The following points were raised in discussion of this agenda item:

a. In response to a request for clarification on the extent to which further funding was expected from central government, the Leader advised that in addition to the 15.5m of funding already secured, the administration was anticipating another tranche of 'spend it now' money to cover immediate costs, but there was no indication yet of how much that would be or when. The Committee was advised that the government had committed to reimburse councils but it was anticipated that some of the spending would be more likely to be reimbursed than others. The Leader set out that they expected to receive all of the money spent on protecting the shielded cohort and most of the expenditure in areas such as housing, where there was some degree of discretion in how the money was spent. However, in areas where additional expenditure occurred such as food security, it was anticipated that councils would have to make an argument that this was Covid-related. The Leader set out that all councils, along with voluntary and community organisations would be lobbying government collectively to make sure that it kept its promises.
b. The Chief Executive advised the Committee that, to date, the Council had received two tranches of initial funding. The Secretary of State had set out his approach in a number of speeches during the crisis and it was evident that the government's message had shifted from an initial commitment to do whatever it took to the need for council's to share some of the financial burden. There were concerns across local government that the government was seeking to row back on some of its commitments and would likely argue that some of the responses to the crisis entailed a level of discretion and councils effectively chose to do them.
c. The Committee noted concerns around the extent to which the financial impact of the crisis had been shared with residents and questioned what pressure was being put on local big businesses to assist with funding. In response, the Leader advised that the Council was still working out what the financial impact was going to be and that a report would be coming to Cabinet in June which set this out in detail. The Leader confirmed that he wanted to have a conversation with residents about the cost of shielding and providing 300 meals a day etcetera but this needed to be done when all of the information was available and the Cabinet report would form part of this process. In respect of businesses, the Leader advised that he would like to see large businesses work with small businesses as part of the community wealth building programme to ensure that the local economy came out of the crisis in reasonable health. It was commented that a number of large businesses had also been dramatically affected by the crisis.
d. The Committee sought clarification on whether there was a sense of the proportion around the expenditure that was in some way discretionary. In response, the Director of Finance set out that the authority had a major food need during the crisis and work was underway to assess how it could continue to address the level of need that existed. It was noted that addressing these financial pressures would be difficult going forward but that the authority was not unique in that respect.

e. In response to the recent high profile child protection case, the Leader acknowledged that the most important duty for a council was safeguarding and keeping young people safe. Following an Ofsted inspection in 2018 significant changes were made with new resources and new management in the disabled children team. The Lead Member for Children and Families would be attending the next OSC meeting at which point the administration would have had time to reflect and possess a greater understanding of the issues raised in the case. The Leader noted that OSC would be undertaking a Scrutiny Review in to this issue and that the Chair would be meeting with the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member next week to discuss this.
f. In relation to concerns about the reopening of the borough's schools, the Leader commented that Haringey had a disproportionate number of BAME school children and that Covid-19 had a disproportionate impact on the BAME community, therefore the impact of reopening schools in Haringey would not be the same as in some other local authorities. The Leader emphasised that when schools reopened the key priority was to ensure that it was safe. It shouldn't be a one size-fits-all approach or done to a set timetable. Some of the key issues were anticipated to be around class sizes, access/egress points and deep cleaning. The Leader emphasised the need for school governors to be ultimately responsible and the need for governors to sign off risk assessments before any individual schools were reopened.
g. In response to a question, the Leader confirmed that Cabinet were meeting regularly to discuss the financial impact on the authority as well as the specific impacts on individual portfolios.
h. In relation to concerns that the authority had performed poorly in relation to distributing the first tranche of small business grants and what lessons were being learnt, the Leader acknowledged that the authority had encountered some challenges and that there was scope for improvement. In mitigation, the Leader set out that Haringey had a much higher number of small and single trader businesses than many other authorities. There was also an issue with the database that was issued containing inaccurate and old data. As a result the Council would not be able to achieve a 100% score on the percentage of grants distributed.
i. The Committee sought clarification around the potential consequences to the Council's strategic priorities as a result of the financial impact from Covid-19. In response the Leader acknowledged that there would be some impact on the Council's ability to undertake some of the activities planned, especially at the pace that it wanted. As the country came out of lockdown, the administration would be examining what its key priorities would be but its main goal would be keeping the recession at bay locally, particularly through community wealth building. The Council signed pledges with residents, businesses and the voluntary sector at the start of the crisis and assurance was given that the Council would be working closely with these groups to deliver its priorities going forwards.
j. In response to a question around what actions the local authority was taking to ensure consistency with the reopening of schools, the Leader set out that school governance was fragmented and that school governors were ultimately responsible for what went on in schools. The local authority's role was to provide advice and guidance. The Council was talking to governing bodies to ensure consistency and putting forward key areas for consideration, such as

PPE and the flow of buildings. Both the government and the unions had set 5 tests for schools to reopen. The Leader reiterated the importance of school governors ensuring that their respective schools were properly risk assessed before reopening.

k. In response to a further concerns expressed around safeguarding, the Leader advised that the administration was reviewing the effectiveness of the changes made to the disabled children team and that this would be completed by the time the Cabinet Member attended the next OSC meeting.

l. In relation to consultation with parents, the Leader set out that the administration was committed to work closely with stakeholders as set out in the three pledges made at the start of the lockdown.

m. In response to concerns around the need for clear messaging, the Leader set out that if Members had any particular examples or areas where they thought messaging could be improved they should let pass this on to the Leader's Office. (**Action: All).**

n. In light of the role played by care workers, the Committee sought assurances that all new care contracts would provide the London Living Wage and sick pay as a minimum. In response, the Leader advised that the administration had made a commitment that all council contracted care workers would receive the London Living Wage and they were sticking to this commitment. The Leader advised the administration was not able to move all care workers on to the new contracts before the outbreak of the Covid pandemic but the Council was paying those staff a bonus in lieu of this and as soon as it was possible to do so, all council contracted care staff would be moved to a new contract that paid the London Living Wage. The Committee was advised that there were also a number of small providers in the market in Haringey and therefore not all care workers in the borough were Council contracted.

o. In relation to the provision of sick pay to care workers, the Leader agreed to come back to the Committee with a response on sick pay. **(Action: Cllr Ejiofor).**

p. In response to a question around whether Haringey was looking at how it could participate locally with test, track and trace, the Leader acknowledged that this was being looked at. The Leader agreed that he would come back to the Committee with a written response on this and further assurances about access for those who needed to be regularly tested. **(Action: Cllr Ejiofor).**

q. The Committee sought assurances around what was being done to make cycling safer in the Borough, particularly in light of an anticipated increase in demand following the end of the lockdown. In response, the Leader advised that a meeting was taking place later in the week to look at a number of proposals in this area and pull together a deliverable programme. It was hoped that Covid crisis might afford the Council with opportunities to deliver a safer and more cycle friendly borough.

r. In response to concerns about opportunities for residents to have a chance to feed into these proposals, the Leader acknowledged the need for a strategic piece of engagement on the broader long term outputs but also advised that there were some actions that needed to be done quickly, such as supporting social distancing on pavements. The Leader advised that the administration was committed to undertaking engagement with stakeholders on the longer-term strategy at a suitable juncture.

18. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING & ESTATE RENEWAL

Cllr Ibrahim, Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal gave a short update to the Committee around her portfolio. Sean McLaughlin, MD Homes for Haringey and Alan Benson, AD for Housing were also present. The following key points were noted:

a. In relation to the Housing Delivery Programme; 350 Council homes had received Planning Permission and 331 of those homes had started on site. Of the £62.8m grant from the GLA's Building Council Homes for Londoners programme, the Council has drawn down £11.9m for the homes started.
b. Cabinet had agreed 27 sites of Council-owned land to put into the programme. It was anticipated that by the autumn, a site would be identified in every ward in the borough. Cabinet will be asked to approve seven new sites at its upcoming meeting in June, which included Kerswell Close.
c. The Cabinet Member advised that there had been an inevitable impact on the Housing Delivery Programme caused by Covid-19 as work on six active sites as well as procurement, consultation and planning decisions had all effectively ceased due to Covid. Work ceased entirely on four of the six sites, whilst Melbourne and Ashley Road remained open but with limited work taking place. The Cabinet Member advised that work had subsequently resumed on five of the six sites but with reduced on-site capacity. It was anticipated that work on the Red House would not resume until September at the earliest, due to the existing building being used for Temporary Accommodation.
d. External capacity remained a significant challenge, tender deadlines had to be extended as firms had furloughed staff and disruptions to supply chains prevented them from costing bids. Delays had also occurred with undertaking site surveys.
e. In response to the Covid crisis, a number of sites had been opened as temporary homeless hostels. These included the Travelodge on the border with Islington which had 104 rooms, 24/7 staff on site, all units were self-contained and residents were receiving daily food deliveries. All residents and staff had been tested at the Travelodge and there was also a mobile library and arts initiative on site. At Pramwood there were 30 residents living in self-contained rooms and all residents had been tested. The Red House had 40 self-contained rooms and Covid-19 testing was booked to take place this week. Other sites included the Shelton hotel and the Green Rooms.
f. The Cabinet Member advised that due to the huge demand on Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation, there were still some people being housed out of borough, such as 30 people at the Ramada in Barnet.
g. The Committee was advised that current level of families presenting as homeless was lower due to the stopping of evictions but new cases were still happening due to domestic violence and temporary arrangements with friends or family coming to an end, for example. In response to an increase in calls related to domestic abuse, the Cabinet Member set out that additional capacity had been put into Hearthstone.

The following was noted in discussion of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate renewal's verbal update:

a. The Chair sought assurances around the Firs House fire and what was being done in relation to concerns around the roof design and impact on the spread

of fire. The Chair also requested assurance around what was being done to assure residents who lived in buildings with a similar roof design. In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged these concerns and advised that the building in question was scheduled to be part of an existing fire safety investigation programme, which would have involved intrusive inspections due to the need to inspect roof spaces. The building in question had a pitched roof added to it in 2002.

b. Sean McLaughlin advised the Committee that the cause of the fire was still being investigated by the emergency services. The MD HfH advised that in relation to the fire, it was contained within one dwelling and from that point of view the structural integrity of the building held up. The MD HfH reassured the Committee that they were aware of the potential fire risk from fire travelling between roof spaces and as a landlord they were carrying out a programme of fire safety inspections. The programme was due to complete at the end of this calendar year to identify those roof spaces where fire breaks needed to be installed. This programme had been delayed due to the intrusive nature of those inspections, as well as a shortage of qualified people able to carry out inspections. The MD HfH advised that an assessment would need to be made when lockdown measures were eased to examine how quickly HfH could get back on track with completing the programme of fire safety inspections.

c. The Committee sought further clarification on how the timetable for the delivery of 1000 new Council homes would be effected. In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that there would inevitably be a delay due to Covid-19. The Council was on target to achieve delivery of a certain number of homes by the end of the administration, but Covid had resulted in a number of Housing Delivery Programme changes. The Cabinet Member set out that the administration was hoping to get the programme up and running again as soon as possible. The AD for Housing commented that work on the six schemes that were underway had stopped and were in the process of being resumed, however due to ongoing social distancing the delivery of these sites would be slower that they would have been. The AD for Housing advised that it was difficult to know the impact on delivery and overall the number of houses that would be delivered at this stage. It was hoped that another 25 sites would be started this year, however this could be undermined if there was a second spike in Covid infections.

d. The AD for Housing advised the Committee that it was not envisaged that there would be an impact on GLA funding as no other housing association or local authority were able to meet delivery timetables either so everyone was in the same situation. The GLA were speaking to the government about revising the timescales/dates that organisations could draw down the money.

e. In response to a query about the number of completed housing units delivered, the Cabinet Member advised that no new builds had been completed, but clarified that the whole process took around 18-24 months and that the Council had to build up its entire housing building capacity from scratch. The Council had however purchased 92 units from IBSA that were in place and being used for housing but these were not new builds. The Cabinet Member reiterated that 350 homes had started on site but none of those homes were ever projected to have been completed by now. Most of the new homes built as part of the housing delivery programme were due to be completed within the last six months of the four-year term of the administration because of effectively

starting from scratch and the fact that there was a long process involved in designing, acquiring planning permission and building new homes.

f. In response to a follow-up question, officers advised that a number of new homes should be delivered by the end of the administration, but that it would not be 1000 as per the manifesto commitment.

g. In response to questions around the ongoing housing of rough sleepers, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that the government's decision to house all rough sleepers had resulted in significant improvements in relation to the welfare of rough sleepers and their individual health and wellbeing. The Cabinet Member reassured the Committee some form of housing would need to continue especially until there was a vaccine in place. The Council was working closely with other boroughs on how to move this forward. There was a pan-London steering group to deal with rough sleepers which was responsible for organising health checks etcetera. The group was led by the London boroughs collectively and there was agreement that that homelessness provision could not go back to how it was before the crisis.

h. In relation to funding, the Committee was advised that the government had announced £160m in funding for housing rough sleepers but there was no information yet on how to bid for the funding. Similarly, there was a lack of clarity about how this would affect those with no recourse to public funds. The Chair commented that she would like to follow up on this issue going forwards. **(Action: Clerk).**

i. In relation to further questions around fire safety inspections and how much progress had been made with the programme, the MD HfH advised that 9 packages of capital works were issued in 2018 on fire safety works and a good deal of those did involve compartmentation issues both in roof spaces and in-between buildings. The MD HfH advised that with compartmentation issues it was much easier to identify the problem than it was to fix and for timber framed buildings this involved a three stage process. HfH had recently had a report on 28 blocks which would be brought forward for Cabinet approval to release capital funding for improvement works. The Committee was advised that the fire brigade were particular keen to prosecute compartmentation breeches of regulations and had a specific team to do this. It was noted that the fire regulations were that a building was legal as long as it met the fire regulations in place at the time of construction. HfH advised that they were proceeding on the basis that they wanted to identify any gaps in compartmentation and would be producing a plan to rectify any fire risks that existed in those properties.

j. In response to a question around the number of people still sleeping on the streets in Haringey, the Cabinet Member advised that there were 13 people currently on the streets and each one had an active offer of accommodation and they were informed of this offer on a daily basis.

19. FUTURE MEETINGS

22nd June 2020
20th July 2020

CHAIR: Councillor Lucia das Neves

Signed by Chair ……..

Date ……