

MINUTES OF MEETING Overview and Scrutiny Committee HELD ON Monday, 23rd November, 2020, 7.00 - 10.25 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Peray Ahmet (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Erdal Dogan, Ruth Gordon, Khaled Moyeed, Mark Chapman, Luci Davin, Yvonne Denny and Lourdes Keever

ALSO ATTENDING: Mark Chapman, Luci Davin, Yvonne Denny and Lourdes Keever.

14. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda item 1 regarding filming at the meeting and Members noted the information contained therein.

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

16. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared a personal interest in relation to the deputation at Agenda Item 5, as she was a Noel Park Ward Councillor.

Cllr Moyeed declared a personal interest in relation to the deputation at Agenda Item 5, as he was also a Noel Park Ward Councillor.

Lourdes Keever declared a personal interest in relation to the deputation at Agenda Item 5, as her son was a leaseholder on the Noel Park estate.

18. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

Sarah Klymkiw presented deputation to O&S on the 23rd of November and outlined the following.

Leaseholders advised by Council to be patient and to pursue payment plans which are flexible and can be relinquished. The leaseholders were offered 25 years to pay the

debt or to resolve the remaining payment when selling property. So far there had been no conversations about alternatives to the Pods.

As of the evening of the 23rd of November, the leaseholders had yet to receive a response to their section 20 observation legal letter.

After speaking at full Council, the Leader had written to the deputation to advise that the December decision on the Noel Park Pods had been delayed until 19th January 2021. There had not been a confirmation of continuing meetings with the leaseholders. The leaseholders had been promised a further programme of engagement which suggested a series of meetings. The leaseholders wanted this to be a continuing dialogue and to present their case and be listened to.

In response to questions, the deputation provided the following information:

- Further to acknowledging the shocking notices and letters received by the leaseholders and highlighting the need to save on the cost of temporary housing of leaseholders, the deputation was asked about the red line in terms of the brick extensions. The deputation believed that there were three alternative options to the Pod and one of those was not to have a Pod at all. In the 1970's residents were asked by the Council to have a choice in having a Pod and at least five flats had refused. Therefore, it was known that there could be a solution without a Pod. The second option was a brick-built extension, and the current cost was not known. However, in 2015 a study was completed which showed that a brick built extension would cost the same as a replacement Pod of around £25k. The option of the rebuilt brick extension was not taken forward as it meant rehousing tenants. However, the deputation were aware that when works were being done on Noel Park estate, tenants were being moved and felt that this option should be offered to Gladstone Avenue tenants to be rehoused whilst the work is completed. It was not fully known how long these works would take and timescales of 3 months and 6 months was suggested and so this part of the proposal would be incomplete. The third option would be to re-clad the existing Pods and remove the asbestos. The deputation contended that this was being done to other properties in Noel Park. This would cost less than a new Pod, around £20k for a double pod and £10k for a single pod. This was another viable option the leaseholders felt could be put forward to tenants.
- The cost of decanting residents was too high when the brick-built extensions were £25k in 2015. The deputation questioned that given the cost of the replacement Pods had now doubled, it was likely to be more cost effective to decant residents and have a brick-built extension. At the time this was discussed, it was envisaged that the works would be between 6 weeks and 3 months and not the longer period now suggested. However, there was not enough information provided on these possibilities and there had not been any real consultation with residents in the past on these options.
- The deputation spoke about their shock of receiving a section 20 notice and payment demand. A number of leaseholders negatively impacted by the pandemic through loss of work, furlough, redundancies. Leaseholders were

faced with uncertainty and unknown bills for payment. Also, there was the added anxiety that the bills received later on could be even higher. The deputation had received a bill for £108, 450 which automatically caused significant anxiety alongside trying to learn Council processes and understand how to appeal against this situation, talking to strangers to ask them to care about the situation was overwhelming.

- The final bill for the works may not be received until 2022 by leaseholders and this was also impacting on life choices. The leaseholders also knowing that there could be an alternative way and these suggestions/ proposals not being taken forward was upsetting.
- The co-opted member suggested the deputation seeking a report from Homes for Haringey which was drafted in the 1970's when the Pods were added, and which provided the reasoning and logistics on this decision.
- The deputation spoke for herself and her Pod which was fine, as far as she was aware, but referred to Leaders comments on safety of the Pods at full Council and questioned if Homes for Haringey had an understanding of the condition of the Pods on Noel Park.

The Chair added that there was a mixed picture in relation to the conditions of the Pods.

The deputation felt that leaseholders was not being listened to by Homes for Haringey, the only option being offered was payment plan options.

The deputation expressed their constant feeling of frustration, despair, and anger, and felt the Cabinet should fully consider the impact of the decision on leaseholders which will cause financial ruin for some leaseholders and their families. The deputation spoke about having a wider view about equal improvement of life chances and making sure that by benefiting the life chances of some people, it was not ruining the life chances of others.

The deputation wanted the Cabinet decision in January to be delayed, allowing more time for consultation and dialogue.

The Chair moved to a recommendation that this issue is sent back to the Housing and Regeneration Panel and compile some recommendations to go forward to Cabinet.

The Chair advised that it would be perhaps better to move the decision from the January Cabinet to allow opportunity for options to be explored.

The Leader outlined that a report was planned for January Cabinet and expressed that he has misspoken about the safety aspect of the Pods at full Council.

19. MINUTES

The Chair requested that an update on the Citizen's Panel be brought to the March Committee meeting.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of 15th October were agreed as a correct record.

20. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Children & Young Peoples Scrutiny Panel on 29th September 2020 were noted, and any recommendations contained within them were approved.

21. LEADER'S UPDATE ON PRIORITIES AND COVID-19 RESPONSE.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Ejiofor gave a presentation to the Committee which set out the administration's Phase 1 recovery and Phase 2 response to the current Covid-19 pandemic. The Leader commented that the Committee may wish to provide a scrutinising role on the administration's response, going forwards. The Chief Executive, Zina Etheridge was also present for this item. The presentation was included in the second dispatch agenda pack at pages 3-16. The following arose during the discussion of this item:

- a. The Chair commented that she was concerned that children's centres remained largely closed, whilst schools were open and that there seemed to be a gap in the recovery of services for younger children.
- b. The Committee commented on the borough wide letter that was sent out to all residents last week on Covid-19 and sought clarification over the fact it was dated September. The Committee emphasised the need for these communications to go out in a variety of different languages as a matter of course and also sought clarification on how much the letter cost to send out to all residents. In response, the Leader advised that the date was a typographical error and agreed to provide a written response to the Committee members on the cost of the letter. **(Action: Leader of the Council)**. The Leader emphasised the importance of consistent public health messaging.
- c. In relation to a question around business loans and the support offered to businesses, the Leader advised that the Council had agreed to stay the loan repayments to local businesses during this period. The Leader agreed to provide additional information to the Committee on the number and status of loans given through the Opportunity Investment Fund, as well as information on businesses that had gone bust. **(Action: Leader of the Council)**.
- d. The Committee noted concern with the economic impact of the pandemic and questioned what the administration was doing to mitigate the impending crisis around poverty and joblessness. In response, the Leader highlighted the work done by the Council around addressing food poverty during the crisis and he advised that work would continue with voluntary sector partners to continue to deliver a response around tackling food poverty. Cllr Chandwani was also in the process of setting up the welfare assistance scheme. The Leader advised that the administration was also looking into how and whether the eligibility for free school meals could be expanded to help some of the poorest families in the borough.

- e. The Committee sought further information around the £17m budget gap identified in the presentation. In response, the Leader advised that this was due to a combination of additional spending due to the Covid response, a failure to meet some savings targets and a loss of income due to Covid and the lockdown. The Leader advised that this would be set out in detail in the report to Cabinet in December. It was also noted that further clarity on government support was anticipated from the Spending Review which was due later this week. The Leader advised that, whatever happened, The Council would pass a balanced budget in February.
- f. In response to a question around whether all care workers in the borough received sick pay, the Chief Executive confirmed that that this was case as far as she was aware.
- g. In response to a question around what support was offered to care workers, the Chief Executive advised that the organisation was working with those individuals who most needed support to provide group activities, even when day centres were closed, so that carers could get some respite. There had also been ongoing phone support all the way through the crisis for carers. The Chief Executive agreed to provide a written response to the Committee. **(Action: Zina Etheridge).**
- h. In relation to a question around the vaccine rollout, the Committee was advised that the policy for this was set nationally but the initial cohorts that were put forward by the JCBI prioritised care home residents, care home staff and the over 80s, as well as older people receiving domiciliary care.
- i. In response to a follow-up question around the communication strategy for particular groups, including those with disabilities & people suffering with autism, the Chief Executive acknowledged that there were a whole set of communication challenges around this including the groups mentioned, working with trusted community leaders within certain groups and also the prevalence of conspiracy theories. The Chief Executive commented on the need to build trust and work closely with NHS colleagues to get the messaging right.
- j. The Committee sought clarification on the amount of money that was expected to be received by government. In response, the Director of Finance advised that the overall pressure to the General Fund due to coronavirus was around £40m as of Q2. The authority had received £26.7m in central government funding so far and a further £8m in grant funding was anticipated. There were also ongoing costs to the HRA and collection accounts that would work through in coming years. The Director of Finance commented that the funding shortfall was coming down from an earlier estimated position of £70m.
- k. The Committee commented on the need for public health messaging for young people and the need to engage with that particular demographic. In response, the Leader acknowledged this and advised that the Council had been using a variety of different mediums to engage with young people, including a range of social media platforms.

RESOLVED

That the update was noted.

22. BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE QUARTER 1

The Committee received a report which set out the Budget Monitoring position for Quarter 1, which was considered by Cabinet in September. The Committee also received a verbal update on the Council's latest financial position. The report was introduced by Jon Warlow, Director of Finance as set out in the agenda pack at pages 27-62 of the agenda pack. The following key points were noted from the Director of Finance's verbal update:

- The total Covid financial pressure to the Council was set out in the report as £44.44m.
- The budget pressure from non-delivery of savings was identified as £8m.
- The report set out that, as of Q1, the government had provided £18.3m in un-ringfenced emergency grant funding which was effectively a subsidy to cover the additional costs to the authority from Covid. Following the recent receipt of tranche 4 funding, the Council had received £26.74m to date in un-ringfenced emergency grant funding.
- The Director of Finance advised that he anticipated that the Council would receive an additional £8m from the government to cover the costs incurred from a loss of income, such as car parking and highways income.
- As at Q1, the report highlighted that the unfunded costs of Covid were £18m, but an additional £8.3 million had been received since then.
- There was also an additional pressure on the Council's budget of £4.96m arising from non-Covid related spend. This figure had remained largely consistent.
- The biggest impact on additional costs from Covid was within Adult Social Services due to the costs of providing care packages. There was also a significant hit to income streams across the Council of around £10m.
- The cost to the HRA arising from loss of rental income had improved from around £9.6m in Q1 to a forecast position of around £4m.
- Another area of concern highlighted was around the Dedicated Schools Grant, the deficit for which had increased from last year despite additional income from government. It was anticipated that the overspend position at year-end could be £15m. This figure was ringfenced and so could not be subsumed by the General Fund. The Director of Finance advised that other local authorities were in a similar position and that there was some hope that the government would provide additional financial assistance to help cover the cost of the overspend in this area.
- The Government had allowed local authorities to spread the impact of non-collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates over three years.
- There was a significant slippage within the Capital Programme due to Covid. Much of the capital allocated for housing delivery would be rolled over to futures years.
- The Director of Finance assured the Committee that the authority did have the means to overcome the impact on its budget, regardless of the level of additional government support, but there would be a detrimental impact to the Council's resource position for next year onwards in doing so.

The following arose during the discussion of this item:

- a. The Chair sought clarification around the High Needs Block and the nature of the lobbying for resources that was taking place. The Chair also requested further information around what the recovery plan with key partners was for the

High Needs Block. In response, officers set out that it was the overspend in the High Needs Block that was driving the forecast overspend within the DSG. The Committee was advised that this was an issue across local government and that lobbying was taking place at a national level for additional financial support from central government.

- b. The Committee requested further details from the Director of Children's Services on the recovery plan and involvement of key partners around the High Needs Block. **(Action: Ann Graham).**
- c. The Committee sought clarification around the overall pressure on the budget from the Bernie Grant Art Centre. In response, officers advised that the Council was providing grant relief to the centre by forgoing some income that was due to be paid to Council. This amounted to around £35k. The Council would use the money due to them to pay down a grant that was due to be cleared by the organisation. In effect, the organisation would be receiving an ongoing additional grant as the Council would be paying down the debt from the grant on their behalf. The grant was around £340k over a 9-10 year period.
- d. In relation to a query around the nature of non-Covid pressures, the Committee was advised that the two main areas of pressure identified in the report were Children's Services and in Place. Overall, the level of non-Covid pressures identified was not felt to be an extreme position and the Director Finance was hopeful of reducing this figure before year-end.
- e. In relation to support for local SME business, it was noted that the Council had been active in providing business rate relief as well as business grants to the sector.
- f. In relation to a query around contingency funds and whether that effectively enabled the government to hold back funding for local government, the Committee was advised that there was some capacity to absorb financial shocks through contingency reserves. However, the Director of Finance advised that he had seen no evidence that grants from government were impacted by the level of reserve held by a particular authority. It was not thought that the level of grant received by Haringey had been impacted by its balance sheet or its financial strategy.
- g. In relation to contingencies within the capital strategy, the Director of Finance set out that a capital contingency was established within the MTFS to allow the authority to respond quickly to circumstances. However, this contingency was not used and a new financial plan would be presented to Cabinet as part of the updated MTFS in December.
- h. In response to a question, the Director of Finance advised that there was a Covid slippage of £8.3m from the £16.538m savings target for 2020/21, however, this position had improved during Q2. The Director of Finance advised that the key was how the non-delivery of these savings was picked up in future years. This would be addressed in the latest MTFS.
- i. In response to a request for clarification, the Committee was advised that the Directorate level forecast at Appendix 1 of the report showed both Covid and non-Covid related budget pressures, totalling £49m.
- j. In response to a question around contingencies in the event that the government did not provide all of the grant funding promised, the Director of Finance restated that an additional £8.3m had been received in grant funding since the Q1 position and the authority was continuing to pressure the government to fill the gap in the cost of responding to Covid-19. There was a

contingency built-in to the budget around non-delivery of savings and the uncertainty around the impact of Brexit, this would be used to offset any shortfall in the first instance.

RESOLVED

That OSC:

- I. Noted the forecast revenue outturn for the General Fund (GF), including the impact of Covid, and known and estimated levels of announced Covid funding, is a net overspend of £23.1m. This is before any further emergency grant support (Section 6, Tables 1a and 1b, and Appendix 1 of the report). This excludes the DSG forecast.
- II. Noted that Directors have been asked to focus on actions to bring the forecast overspend down before the end of the year.
- III. Noted the net Housing Revenue Account (HRA) forecast of £9.6m overspend (Section 6, Table 2, and Appendix 2 of the report).
- IV. Noted the net DSG forecast of £4.6m overspend, the actions being taken to seek to address this and the potential implications for the GF (Section 7 and Table 3 of the report).
- V. Noted the forecast budget savings position in 2020/21 which indicates that 50% (£8.3m) may not be achieved. (Section 8, Table 4 and Appendix 3 of the report). This is incorporated in the GF budget pressures addressed in recommendation I above.
- VI. Noted the proposed budget adjustments and virements to the capital programme as set out in Table 5 and Appendix 4 of the report and note the forecast expenditure of £251.5m in 2020/21 which equates to 43% of the revised capital budget (Section 9, Table 5 and Appendix 4 of the report).
- VII. Noted the budget virements as set out in Appendix 5 of the report.
- VIII. Noted the debt write-offs approved in Quarter 4 2019/20 (Appendix 6 of the report).
- IX. Noted the Council's income recovery practices, operative from 1 October 2020, following the temporary changes made since April of this year (Section 10 of the report).
- X. Noted the approach to providing assistance to the Bernie Grant Arts Centre, as set out in section 6.17.6 of the report.

23. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND STRATEGIC REGENERATION

The Committee undertook a verbal question and answer session with Cllr Adje, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration. The following was noted in discussion of this item:

- a. Cllr Adje outlined that a grant of £850k had been awarded from the GLA and MHCLG for public realm improvement works in Wood Green. Similarly, work was progressing around the Turnpike Lane Improvement Plan and phase one public realm improvement works at Northumberland Park Station were under tender. In response to this, the Committee made a plea to the Cabinet Member to engage with local residents around these schemes.
- b. In relation to a question around business intelligence groups, the Cabinet Member advised that this was part of an intelligence gathering approach of the recovery and renewal work. This involved a borough-wide event with a number of themes, only one of which was around business intelligence. The aim of the event was to gather intelligence around how the sector could support business recovery in light of Covid-19 and lockdown. The Cabinet Member clarified that as far as he was aware the group had not met since and that an all-Member presentation had been provided by Cllr Bull on work being done to support local businesses post-Covid.
- c. In relation to a follow-up question around whether any meetings had taken place in the last six months between developers, senior officers and Cllr Adje, the Cabinet Member advised that there had been no such meetings.
- d. The Committee noted concerns with disabled access in and around Wood Green, including shops not being disability access friendly, narrow pavements and a lack of dropped kerbs. The Committee requested that when developing future public realm works that these issues needed to be addressed as a priority. In response the Cabinet Member acknowledged these concerns and advised that dropped kerbs should be factored into any highways works programme and that the planning process should pick up disability access in shops. The Cabinet Member agreed to feed these concerns back to highways and planning officers respectively. **(Action: Cllr Adje).**
- e. The Committee commented on a general lack of consultation and engagement around estates and questioned what was contained within the Council's portfolio. The Committee requested that the decision on replacing bathroom pods on the Noel Park estate be delayed by Cabinet, in order that the Housing Panel have sufficient time to scrutinise this decision properly. The Committee noted that this was a decision for the Leader. The Cabinet Member advised that the Council's Asset Management plan had been considered by Cabinet and was publicly available on our website. The Asset Management Plan was regularly updated and contained a list of Haringey's estate portfolio.
- f. The Committee requested a written briefing from the Cabinet Member regarding the update he provided in his introduction on upcoming public realm works in and around Wood Green. **(Action: Cllr Adje).**
- g. In response to a question around the Voluntary Sector Assistance fund, the Cabinet Member advised that this was a pot of money set aside by the authority to assist the voluntary sector with during the Covid crisis. It was commented that the total value of the fund was roughly £200k-£300k.
- h. In relation to a question around the Bernie Grant Centre and the Voluntary Sector Assistance Fund, Cllr Adje agreed that he would ask Cllr Blake to respond back to the Committee. **(Action: Cllr Adje/Cllr Blake).**

RESOLVED

Noted.

24. BREXIT - IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BOROUGH

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the potential implications of Brexit on the Borough. The report was introduced by Jean Taylor, Head of Policy as set out in the agenda pack at pages 65-80 of the agenda pack. The following arose during the discussion of this item:

- a. In response to a question around the level of digital support in place, officers acknowledged the importance of tackling a digital deficit and advised that one of the key areas of digital support was around supporting those applying for settled status through an online process, particularly around access and then providing proof of status.
- b. In response to a further question, officers advised that they were happy that there were sufficient links into different communities in the borough, with assistance from the BRT and that barriers to information and advice had been removed.
- c. In relation to Paragraph 2.12 of the report and the point around recruitment of international social workers, the Committee requested further information on this and whether there was a particular shortage of social workers (as opposed to social care workers). The Head of Policy agreed to take this away and provide a response. **(Action: Jean Taylor).**
- d. In response to a question, officers advised that they were disappointed not to secure funding for assisting with settled status applications but advised that internal resources would be redirected to support this role.
- e. The Committee sought clarification around the finance sensitivity analysis referred to in the report, officers acknowledged that this was over a year old and was not suitable to be shared widely. The document was more a piece of modelling, rather than in-depth analysis.
- f. The Committee sought further information around which areas of staffing within the Council were affected/particularly at risk because of Brexit. The Head of Policy agreed to come back with a written response on this point. **(Action: Jean Taylor).**

21:50: Clerk's note – As per Committee Standing Order 63, the Committee agreed to suspend Committee Standing Order 18 and to continue the meeting past 22:00 hours.

- g. In response to a question around supply chain issues as a result of Brexit and in particular for PPE, officers advised that they were not aware of any particular risks on this issue and that work was ongoing across different areas of the organisation to ensure that there was an ongoing supply of PPE.
- h. The Head of Policy agreed to provide an update at the next meeting in relation to a query about the value of contracts due to expire 2021. **(Action: Jean Taylor).**
- i. The Committee sought further information about the impact of Brexit on regeneration schemes, particularly in relation to anecdotal accounts that

developers were getting rid of housing stock and how this reflected on current market conditions. The Head of Policy agreed to include information on this in the next update to the Committee. **(Action: Jean Taylor)**.

- j. In relation to a request for clarification around the officer group responsible for managing the risk register, officers advised that this was a legacy group bringing together work stream leads and overseen by the Chief Executive. This function was now managed by the Council's Covid-19 Gold meetings, chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by the Leader.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered the update and noted the risks and the updated Brexit risk register.

25. COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report which provided an update on performance of Complaints, FOIs, Member Enquiries and Ombudsman cases. The report was introduced by Elaine Prado, Head of Customer Experience and Policy and Debbie Darling, Acting Corporate Feedback and Business Support Manager as set out in the addendum report pack at pages 15-33 of the agenda pack. The following arose during the discussion of this item:

- a. The Committee sought clarification as to who sat on the Partnership Improvement Group around complaints and whether there were any residents or councillors on that group. In response, officers advised that this was an internal group made up of officers at a Head of Service level, who had the authority to implement changes and the improvements sought. Officers acknowledged the relevance of hearing people's experiences and commented that they would give some further thought on how to improve this and the potential for councillors to be represented in some way. The Committee requested a written briefing on this, including how the group would improve complaint processes and who would sit on the group. **(Action: Debbie Darling)**.
- b. The Committee emphasised the importance of understanding how complaints were being dealt with in order to prevent cases being referred to the Ombudsman.
- c. In response to a request for clarification, officers advised that the number of complaints being escalated past Stage 1 in Children's Services had decreased in volume. Officers agreed to provide a breakdown of this across the different teams within Children's Services. **(Action: Debbie Darling)**.
- d. In response to a question around staffing levels following a merger of teams, the Committee was advised that there were now more people working in the Corporate Feedback team than in the previous year.
- e. In response to a question, officers advised that the number of FOIs had decreased from 1434 to 1384 in 2019/20.
- f. Officers agreed to come back with a comparative year on year breakdown of the costs of Ombudsman decisions to the Council. **(Action: Debbie Darling)**.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report were noted.

26. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

27. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee agreed that members of the Youth Advisory Board would be involved in Scrutiny as part of an initiative developed through Haringey Community Gold. It was agreed that from January representatives of the YAB would do some mentoring/shadowing with individual Scrutiny Panels and that the Committee would then consider how to further involve them in the scrutiny process at a later date.

The Chair suggested that she would also like to see the YAB do some mentoring with officers as well as panels and panel chairs. **(Action: Rob Mack).**

The Committee also commented that perhaps some thought could be given to mentoring roles on schools governing bodies.

RESOLVED

That the current work programmes for the main Committee and Scrutiny Panels at Appendix A of the report were agreed.

That the appointment of Cllr Das Neves was agreed as a representative to the North Central London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and an additional Member to the Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel.

28. FUTURE MEETINGS

- I. 12 January 2021
- II. 18 January 2021
- III. 15 March 2021

CHAIR: Councillor Peray Ahmet

Signed by Chair

Date