

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 12 October 2022 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Wingfield (Chair)
Councillor Irina Von Wiese (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Suzanne Abachor
Councillor Victor Chamberlain
Councillor Ellie Cumbo
Councillor Jon Hartley
Councillor Laura Johnson
Councillor Sunny Lambe
Councillor Margy Newens
Councillor Jason Ochere
Councillor Leo Pollak
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted Member)
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted Member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Finance
Councillor James McAsh, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development

OFFICER SUPPORT: Debbi Gooch, Legal Services
Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were no late urgent items.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5. NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

The committee heard from Althea Loderick, Chief Executive, Southwark Council.

By way of introduction Althea informed the committee of her areas of focus since her arrival at Southwark, which were getting to know the borough, the people, the businesses, the partners, voluntary, community and faith sector. Undertaking Ward visits, which would continue.

Althea outlined her priorities upon arrival to the borough in relation to:

- Cost of Living Crisis
- Design and deliver the Council delivery plan – significant area of focus.
- Development of a new Borough Plan (Southwark Borough Plan to 2030) which expresses the vision for Southwark as a place in 2030. The plan to be co-developed across the council and with council partners, businesses, residents and communities.
- Southwark Stands Together, the council's commitment to tackling racism, discrimination and inequality in Southwark, and for her as chief executive a real focus on what that means for the workforce and the way in which the council works.

Althea stated that one of the things that attracted her to Southwark was that it was already a high functioning council, as such upon arrival she did not see the need to make lots of changes, however she stressed the importance of the council being the right shape and operating the right way to achieve the priorities that she was here to deliver. This would mean paying attention to what would be necessary to ensure that the council was a people powered council, and to ensure that those values of equality and fairness ran through the way the organisation operates and that the council was structured appropriately to deliver on the plan as one council working collaboratively, and in partnership across the council and across all that makes up Southwark.

Following the Chief Executive's initial address, questions, comments and discussion were held along the following lines:

- Request for feedback to ward members, arising from issues raised during Ward visits
- Change in governance arrangements in relation to diversity and inclusion/ Southwark Stands Together.
- Conversations to date around future use of 160 Tooley Street in light of change in how office space and use has changed [since the Covid 19 pandemic].
- Change in flexible working arrangements.
- Borough Plan to 2030, including how work will be undertaken with Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the development of the plan.
- Promoting a culture of problem solving and innovation, being set from the top to address long standing problems organisationally, and in different communities, and services.
- Cost of running 160 Tooley Street, and any long term vision for a purpose built Town Hall.

The following key points were made in response to some of the questions asked:

Ward visit feedback

- Chief Executive's PA provides initial feedback to Chief Executive, and then follows up with her on how matters have been dealt with.

Use of Office Space (Tooley Street)

- Programme underway which involves reviewing the use of all council buildings/council estate.

Governance around Southwark Stands Together

- Chief Executive will be chairing the oversight board for delivery of the Southwark Stands Together work streams (previously chaired at director level reporting to the chief officer team).

Changes to flexible working arrangements

- Flexible work continues to be available where it is appropriate for those arrangements to be in place.
- No intention to completely abandon flexible working.
- Impact of changes to flexible working arrangements in terms of adverse effects on staff is being monitored. Expecting to receive feedback from staff and through the trade unions.
- Working with Director of HR to ensure there is consistency and fairness in respect of management decisions in respect of work life balance applications.

6. COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022 - 2026

The committee heard from Joseph Brown, Cabinet Office manager.

Joseph explained that his team oversaw the performance processes in relation to the Council Delivery Plan. Joseph took the cabinet report as read and gave an overview of the direction of the plan.

Joseph informed the committee that the plan covered a four year period, it had seven themes, 62 objectives and 173 individual commitments. The council was in the process of developing the measures and milestones that would describe success against the commitments over the next four years. The performance challenge process which is led by cabinet would begin in November and would cover the first two quarters of the year (Q1 and Q2). The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive would lead the challenge process quarterly, with a publication of an annual report which would include an overview, narrative and commentary against the commitments, with detailed responses to each measure and milestone that sat beneath the commitments.

Following Joseph's initial presentation, questions, comment and discussion were raised along the following lines:

- Potential for amendments/refresh of the Plan if there was a change in National government.
- Capturing in the plan pressing long standing strategic development issues that need a performance management drive (housing asset management strategy and housing allocations scheme given as examples).
- Request for continuation of quarterly update to the overview and scrutiny committee in line with previous cabinet member commitment.
- Improvement of public transport commitments, including responses of TfL, and how new funding settlement agreed by government will impact on the council's ability to make the needed major transport investments.
- Commitment to funding local community groups to deliver events and festivals (importance of community cohesion).
- Cancellation of annual fireworks event/display.
- Potential for large number of Ukrainian refugees presenting as homeless, following private accommodation arrangements coming to an end – whether there is provision to address this problem as and when it arises.
- Climate commitments and whether they are as ambitious as they could be.
- Involvement of deputy cabinet members in the performance challenge process.
- Areas for innovation - Fly tipping, and ease of reporting / introduction of 'free' and regular bulky waste disposal (cost of cleaning up vs cost of providing free service and also factoring in negative impact on residents).
- Tree planting and ensuring they survive.

7. CLIMATE EMERGENCY - PERFORMANCE AGAINST SMART TARGETS

The committee heard from Councillor James McAsh, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development in relation to the climate emergency and performance against the climate emergency smart targets.

The committee also heard from Tom Sharland, the Climate Change Programme lead.

Councillor McAsh provided information to the committee on how performance against the smart targets would be reported on and how the committee would be able to scrutinise performance. Councillor McAsh reported on actions and issues that had arisen since the new version of the climate strategy and action plan was approved by cabinet in July 2022. There had been:

- Approval of the first application for the green building fund - £70,000 to retrofit properties on Tustin Estate, Manor Grove.
- Continuation of lobbying work in terms of transport – proposals to cut bus services serving Southwark
- Calling on the government to extend the Bakerloo Line
- Various scoping exercises underway (Green Homes Advice Service, Carbon Neutral Procurement Strategy, Climate Change training for officers)
- Work started on the council's first climate adaptation strategy, which would be linked up with the climate strategy annual review in 2023, with a view to integrating the two policies.
- Bids for finance for works the council could not afford to do on its own (decarbonisation schemes – money for operational estate, social housing decarbonisation fund).
- First schools Let's Go Zero Schools Network – target was to get 10 schools signed up, this had been exceeded.

Councillor McAsh explained that measuring progress would be undertaken quarterly, and that the first full quarter had not yet been completed since the plan was adopted. Progress would be reported quarterly, and would be available online through the online tracker which would be easily accessible on the council website. There would also be an annual progress report to cabinet. Councillor McAsh invited overview and scrutiny committee to receive the annual report ahead of it being reported to cabinet to enable scrutiny ahead of cabinet receipt/approval, or alternatively presentation to overview and scrutiny committee half yearly.

Following Councillor McAsh's initial presentation, questions, comment and discussion took place along the following lines:

- Solar energy panels in school buildings
- Installation of heat pumps on estates and in schools, and the need for energy descent in order to meet net zero.
- Consumption of meat/dairy products, and the climate impact – awareness

raising in places where council is involved in the provision of food, schools etc (lack of information around this in the action plan).

- Brake emissions from electric vehicles and future capacity to charge them, and need for focus on getting people out of their cars altogether.
- Areas where the council could go further with climate action
- Promoting food production in the borough, using planning, enabling and co-ordinating powers.
- Bringing other large landowners, landlords and developers in the borough into a framework similar to the council, in terms of promoting climate action (retrofitting etc)
- Council house building – Potential for repurposing/future proofing what is being developed now so that they can be adapted in the future without very costly redesigns.
- Green jobs - definition
- Green buildings fund – Council meeting requirements of green buildings standards
- Work being undertaken with housing associations to ensure they are working towards the goal of making Southwark carbon neutral and properties energy efficient.
- Quantifying Scope 3 Emissions
- Establishing standards of effective carbon reduction with contractors / introducing carbon neutral and procurement policies for contractors.
- XR Southwark comments on climate action plan
- Frequency of pension fund performance assessments, particularly where funds are invested in fossil fuel companies.

The following key points were made in response to some of the questions asked:

Solar energy panels in school buildings / Let's Go Zero Schools Network

- Let's Go Zero Schools Network meetings starting from week beginning 17 October. Will be covering topics such as climate education through to how to retrofit school buildings.
- Intention is to channel schools through the network, providing information and access to services
- Targets in the action plan around solar PV on a range of buildings.

Heat pumps on estates

- Initial scoping and discussions are taking place.
- A lot of focus is on the bidding opportunities that are coming up, and how that can help access the funding needed for heat pumps and energy efficiency. Funding streams mentioned – Public sector decarbonisation scheme, with focus of bid on three leisure centres; Social housing decarbonisation fund, with a focus on street properties.

Vehicle ownership

- Overall aim was to try to reduce vehicle movements and vehicle ownership across the borough. For those who need a car, preference is for them to own an electric vehicle.

Consumption of meat and dairy products

- Climate action embedded across all council policies. Trying not to replicate actions in the plan that are being actioned in other strategies - A sustainable food strategy is being developed in public health.

Green Jobs – definition

- Green Jobs definition agreed by Central London Forward – has been adopted by many other local authorities also.

Green Buildings Fund

- Previously called the Carbon Offset Fund
- Funding put in place to employ policy officers to look at how there can be more green buildings.

Work being undertaken with housing associations

- No clear work being undertaken with housing associations. Priority is with investment in council's own housing stock.
- Council has a commitment for green buildings fund to be public available from next year. Criteria developed, with first successful application on the Tustin Estate – council now considering how this can be taken beyond its own assets.

Establishing standards on effective carbon reduction with contractors

- Initial scoping is being undertaken to see how this could be done through the procurement process.

XR Southwark

- Council due to meet with XR Southwark to discuss matters raised.

At the end of questions, Councillor McAsh, asked the committee to relay how it wanted to scrutinise reporting on the climate action plan.

8. COST OF LIVING CRISIS

The committee heard from Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Finance, and also from Dominic Cain, Director of Exchequer.

Councillor Cryan drew members' attention to the impacts the Cost of Living Crisis was having on residents, high inflation, rising interest rates, stagnation in wages and growth, the energy crisis. Councillor Cryan highlighted that the impact of the cost of living crisis was worse for people on the lowest incomes as the percentage they spent on food and fuel was greater than those with higher incomes. Councillor Cryan stressed concern with the direction of travel in terms of the national picture, with a government not keeping to its manifesto commitments, such as promises for benefits to rise in line with inflation, and issues around cuts to public sector spending. This would exacerbate an already precarious situation for many people.

Councillor Cryan informed the committee that the council had a really good network, working with the community sector and voluntary sector. Councillor Cryan explained that the council was aware of who the vulnerable people were, but what the council didn't know was who the people were who were just over the threshold to receive Universal Credit/benefits and struggling. There was particular concern around this group of people as they would have no support.

There was also concern and uncertainty around local government funding and future funding settlements, with the government's view that local authorities funding could be reduced further, and the roll back of a government commitment to a two year funding settlement, along with the potential of not taking account of inflationary costs. Councillor Cryan stressed that despite of all of this, the cost of living crisis was the council's number one priority and that local government was working with partners to respond to the crisis, and were the safety net for residents.

With regard to the Cost of Living Crisis report that was due to be considered by Cabinet, Councillor Cryan explained that the report set out everything that the council had done, which included the early response from the beginning of the year, what had been done recently and what the council wanted to continue to do. Councillor Cryan also explained that she was the lead cabinet member for the cost of living crisis but that it was a cross council response and included pieces of work supporting residents across the different council departments. Councillor Cryan highlighted that there was a lot of activity taking place in the departments of Public Health, Adult Services, Children's Services and in Housing. She stressed that the council could not support residents without the cross council response.

In terms of level of support compared to other local authorities, Councillor Cryan advised that the council had looked at other local authority cost of living funds and had not come across another local authority with a cost of living fund larger than Southwark's.

Following Councillor Cryan's initial address, questions, comment and discussion took place along the following lines:

- Identifying unknown individuals just above universal credit threshold who are at most risk.
- Take up of Household Support Fund (geographically, ethnicity and age) and targeting communication at those who have not been applying.
- Impact of energy price cap on tenants and leaseholders connected to district heating systems.
- Support being given to council staff who earn £30,000 or less.
- Non-council freehold blocks requesting to be on boarded to Laser Energy Contracts.
- Signposting residents to information and help available.
- Cost of living advice lines.
- Work being done to bring all sectors together to respond to cost of living crisis.
- Work being done around opening up council facilities to people who need somewhere warm and welcoming to go.
- Access to free healthy school meals for over 11s.
- Availability of financial provision for struggling small business.
- Climate Action Fund – potential for using underspend to fund green/cost of living objectives for example insulation of homes, advice to people on how to save energy such as switching to more sustainable sources.
- Cost of repairs, as experienced by leaseholders – need for increased transparency around how costs are calculated and the opportunities for challenge.
- Reaching out to residents in the private rent sector.
- Completion of equality impact assessment referenced in cabinet report
- Energy support fund – checking that it is reaching the right people.
- Solar panel energy that could be produced by schools, hospitals, businesses and houses.
- Increase in construction of new homes which supply 100% green energy system.

The following key points were made in response to some of the questions asked:

Targeting support

- Suggested to government that they should share more information with local authorities to enable targeted support.
- Providing support through community referral pathways, working with other organisations (61 expressions of interest received from both large and small organisations, ranging from large charitable trusts to small tenants and residents associations).
- Introducing a Low Income Family tracker to ensure people who need support can get support. This would enable the council to have further

information/data going forward.

District heating systems

- Leaseholder charges will rise, but are comparable to or below the price cap at the moment. Letters will be sent to leaseholders providing reassurance in relation to this.
- Anybody on the district heating network is eligible for the £400 payment from the government, however because district heating networks are not under the energy price cap, this is taken off of electricity bills – some energy companies will take the amount off a person's direct debit, other companies may pay directly to a person's bank account as a payment each month.

Support to council staff

- The council has been running sessions with the money and pensions service which provides council staff with information around a whole range of services that they can access, including independent financial support and advice.
- The council also has a cross departmental programme board, which includes the response for council staff. As the pressures increase over the next few months, the council will be ensuring that its response increases also.

Laser Energy Contract – onboarding of non-council blocks

- Cabinet member for council homes and homelessness is looking at what can be done around this. The council will be looking at whether it will be beneficial for non-council blocks to be onboarded or not on a case by case basis.
- The council is only tied into the Laser contract until the end of March 2023 (prices only secured for 4 years). It was unknown what the council would be offered if renewing contract, so caution was required around this.

Signposting and communication

- More work was being done around communication to residents, via the communications team, with partner organisations and with T&RAs.
- Cost of Living summit being arranged with voluntary sector, T&RAs, faith groups – information to be provided to empower them to provide help and support to individuals.

Cost of Living Advice Lines

- The council was looking at how it could have or direct people to a dedicated advice line.

Warm hubs

- Work being undertaken by Councillor Evelyn Akoto, cabinet member for health and wellbeing, and the public health department. Looking at having a network of warm hubs across the borough, also looking at what else could be provided such as activities for families with young children, provision of food, tackling isolation and loneliness.
- The Leader of the Council was writing to local businesses as well to see what help and support they can give.
- Work also being done with Community Support Alliance with a focus on cost of living support.
- There would be a briefing arranged for all ward councillors.

Access to free healthy school meals for over 11s

- This was being looked at. A working group had been established, chaired by Councillor Jasmine Ali, cabinet member for children, young people, education and refugees. The working group also included cabinet member for health and wellbeing, and Councillor Cryan. Different options were being looked at, and the council was also writing to schools in relation to universal credit and free school meals around the way the accounts were debited and whether there was scope to retain underspends on individual pupil accounts.
- This was also a strand of the Right to Food Strategy.

Small business – support beyond advice

- £18.5m already distributed to small local businesses through discretionary funding (government funding). Also an additional £2m local authority discretionary fund during Covid pandemic to help support those businesses that were not eligible for the mandatory government grant.
- The council works closely with businesses and the business improvement districts (BIDs) to support business.
- Some businesses supported recently - last part of Covid funding was released in September 2022.

Climate action fund

- £10m allocated to capital programme in July 2022
- Work was being done looking at what can be done to making homes greener and insulated to make them more energy efficient. Have applied for funding for council street properties as they tended to be the least energy efficient.
- Officers in housing looking at all the different types of grant funding available for retrofitting work.

Cost of repairs to leaseholders

- Asset management strategy and the repairs improvement plan coming to cabinet for consideration in the autumn.
- Leaseholder tribunal available to leaseholders to challenge repairs.

Residents in private rented sector

- Work being undertaken looking at fuel poverty in the private rented sector (public health and regulatory services) and how the council can support people in the private rented sector.
- The council funds Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to support people in private rented sector. In addition CAB has an energy support advice service.
- Community referral pathway can be accessed by all residents.

Equality impact assessment

- Due to the discrete separate pieces of work being undertaken by different departments, the equality impact assessments will be done separately for each piece of work as appropriate.

Supply of new homes with 100% green energy system

- Planning permission granted for a number of schemes before passive house standards commitment.
- Passive house scheme being trialled in Rotherhithe ward. The learning from this scheme will be taken forward to see how can be applied to other house building schemes going forward.

Councillor Cryan offered to come back to a future meeting after the winter period to provide the committee with an update on cost of living.

9. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF REGENERATION IN THE BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK - CABINET RESPONSE

RESOLVED:

That the cabinet response to the overview and scrutiny committee scrutiny review of Regeneration in the borough of Southwark be noted.

10. HEALTHWATCH SOUTHWARK ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022

RESOLVED:

That the Healthwatch Southwark Annual Report 2021-22 be noted.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the work programme as at 12 October be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.57 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: