

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 15 October 2020 at 6.30 pm (Online/Virtual meeting).

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Ian Wingfield (Chair)  
Councillor Victor Chamberlain (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Humaira Ali  
Councillor Peter Babudu  
Councillor Jack Buck  
Councillor Gavin Edwards  
Councillor Sarah King  
Councillor Richard Livingstone (Reserve)  
Councillor Victoria Olisa  
Councillor Jane Salmon  
Councillor Leanne Werner  
Martin Brecknell

**OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Evelyn Akoto  
Councillor Jasmine Ali  
Councillor Helen Dennis  
Councillor Catherine Rose  
Councillor Johnson Situ  
Councillor Martin Seaton

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Norman Coombe, Head of Corporate Team, Legal Services  
Everton Roberts, Head of Overview and Scrutiny (Acting)

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jason Ochere. Apologies for lateness were received from Martin Brecknell, co-opted member.

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

There were no additional late items.

The chair informed the meeting that supplemental agenda No.1 contained the report on

the Leisure Management Contract and the Work Programme. Supplemental agenda No. 2 contained the Update on the Council's Response to Covid-19.

### **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 16 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

It was reported that the outstanding minutes would be submitted to the next meeting or approval.

The chair varied the order of business – the agenda items were considered in the following order, Item 7, Item 6, Item 5, Item 8.

### **5. LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT - MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FROM APRIL 2021 - PRE DECISION SCRUTINY**

Councillor Catherine Rose, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Environment and Roads introduced the report. The committee also heard from Rebecca Towers, Director of Leisure.

The following issues were raised by members during the discussion and responded to by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Environment and Roads and the Director of Leisure:

- Request made by OSC to have sight of the Gateway 0 report scheduled to be considered by Cabinet in spring 2021 (ahead of cabinet consideration).
- Observations made that recommendations to cabinet were just for 'noting' as opposed to positively making decisions. Practical impact is that end up in the position where constantly renegotiating contract all the way up to 2023 in what is a significant decision. Concern raised over governance and transparency.
- Appearance in the report that free swim and gym is being put on the negotiating table with everyone active (paragraph 4). Concern expressed over this manifesto commitment which has been delivered and should be considered non-negotiable.
- Query over analysis and options appraisal - issue over whether there should be a closed session at OSC to enable discussion of closed/commercially sensitive information due to contract negotiations.
- Challenges over contract even before Covid-19, question over whether should be bringing in house or considering other options before 2023.

- Implications of moving to tier 2 and 3.
- Committee members expressed difficulty in conducting scrutiny of the issue without information on the risk and benefits for the different options and not having access to the closed information.

**RESOLVED:**

1. Overview and scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet consider again, the long timescales involved in continuing the contract with the current provider post April 2021 until its expiry in 2023, and makes it clear that arrangements for leisure provision may well change in advance of that date, including the preferred option of in-house provision.
2. Overview and scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet also makes clear a commitment to the continued offer of Free Swim and Gym and states that this is not a negotiable element in discussions with the current contractor.
3. Overview and scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet carries out another evaluation of this contract in April 2021, as we run the risk of just funding the current service until 2023 without getting value for money for the council and our residents.

**6. UPDATE ON COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The committee received an update on the Council's response to Covid-19, including how the recommendations of the overview and scrutiny committee agreed by cabinet on 16 June have been implemented. Stephen Gaskell, Director of Response and Renewal introduced the item and highlighted some of the progress in connection with community hubs, emergency planning response, council plan, Southwark's outbreak prevention control plan and schools re-opening.

The committee heard from Councillor Helen Dennis, Cabinet Member for Social Support and Homelessness, Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, Councillor Evelyn Akoto, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Community Safety and Councillor Catherine Rose, Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Roads.

Councillor Ali updated the committee in respect of issues concerning children returning to schools, she particularly mentioned pavement widening outside schools, school bubbles, public health support, lack of track and trace, delivery of laptops to vulnerable children for covid-19 wave 2, nursery provision and children's centres.

Councillor Akoto provided the committee with an update on matters relating to Covid-19 at borough level. Councillor Akoto provided the committee with information in respect of the seven day incident rate, testing capacity and the establishment of a second testing site and the new test and trace team.

Councillor Dennis updated the committee on community hubs and future arrangements with the voluntary sector, incident rates in care homes (none), testing for residents and staff in care homes, PPE supply chains, hospital discharges, homelessness and no

recourse to public funds.

Councillor Rose reported on the impact of Covid-19 on the environment and public realm. Councillor Rose touched upon the work needed to facilitate and accommodate functioning services such as retail, opportunities around modal shift of transport and the way people move around (to work and school etc.), impact on residents on estates, the work of keyworkers on estates, work of contractors in relation to refuse and recycling, parks and public spaces and how they are used (socially, for fitness and sense of wellbeing – changed in light of Covid-19).

Questions were asked around the following areas:

- Establishment of cross party working group – decision of cabinet
- Collection of data around the different groups
- Reach of council communications
- Social care workers and use of infection control fund
- Targeted communications to businesses around best practice and social distancing
- No Recourse to Public Funds – Uncertain immigration status of EEA citizens in light of Brexit
- Testing of under 15s for coronavirus (asymptomatic)
- Help for people with long term coronavirus symptoms (particularly with furlough scheme coming to an end).

Action point - Data presented to health and wellbeing board to be circulated to overview and scrutiny committee members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the update on the Council's response to Covid-19 be noted.

**7. SCRUTINY REVIEW - REGENERATION (NEW SOUTHWARK PLAN)**

The committee received presentations from Councillor Johnson Situ, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Planning and Transport and Councillor Martin Seaton, Chair of the Planning Committee.

Councillor John Situ gave an overview of the council's approach to regeneration, achievements and challenges.

In addressing the committee Councillor Situ, set out the reasons for engaging in regeneration as a local authority. The following areas were highlighted:

- Access to best quality standard of housing that is affordable and secure
- Opportunities for Jobs
- Good quality open spaces
- Access to good quality education in premises with good quality facilities
- Good quality libraries

Councillor Situ reconfirmed that it was the local authorities role to reduce inequalities as much as possible and meeting the housing needs of the families on the council's housing

waiting list. Councillor Situ also stressed the importance of having clarity and vision on what the council wanted to achieve, and the values that underpin that vision. He reported on the council's visions and commitments and explained that they would be delivered through the policies set out in the New Southwark Plan, Area action plans, area studies, heritage studies' conservation plans and also in the Council Plan.

Councillor Situ touched upon affordable housing, workspaces to support SMEs and small businesses, open spaces in key opportunity areas, climate emergency energy and carbon off-setting, the importance of developing strong relationships with the community, the development of the Consultation Charter and community review panel (Old Kent Road), and engaging with communities at the earliest opportunity.

Councillor Situ also stressed the need to have the ability to be practical and flexible in light of the planning system and planning lag. He reported that In recent years the council have undertaken Area studies, such as the one in Camberwell. The Area studies enabled the co-ordination of development in an area.

Councillor Situ went on to highlight achievements through investment, lessons learned and challenges as detailed below:

#### Achievements through investment

- Significant number of homes approved in recent years
- In last few years, have seen best number of genuinely affordable homes (number one in London for Social Housing Starts – 783 Starts in last financial year)
- Nine out of ten primary schools achieving good or outstanding
- Over 60% of secondary schools achieving five A stars
- Schools have seen significant investment (both primary and secondary)
- Significant upsurge of 'green flags' for parks across the borough

#### Lessons learned

- Winning the trust of communities – development of the Consultation Charter
- Transparency – being transparent about viability assessments and all the work the council does.
- Being explicit about concerns with the policies the national government are putting forward.

#### Challenges

Achievements are in jeopardy over the next few years due to current government and the planning white paper which will make it more difficult:

- To deliver genuinely affordable housing
- To respond to the climate emergency
- For local communities to have their voice heard at planning meetings

Current system based on planning gain and a downturn in the economy represents a big threat in delivering aims – new jobs, genuinely affordable homes, investment in schools and public open spaces

Closing remarks

Health inequalities within society - planning and regeneration has a key role in addressing this.

Climate emergency remains a pivotal part of all work moving forward.

Councillor Martin Seaton gave an overview of the planning process. He explained that the planning committee was not a whipped committee and that it was a committee imbued in the policies and regulations that impact on good quality housing, offices and other places in the borough. It was also a cross party partnership.

He considered the Southwark planning team excellent, and believed the policies in place, particularly the consultation policies helped to ensure that the planning committee were able to make decisions which were well considered.

Councillor Seaton gave an example of an area the planning committee were grappling with, this related to the Old Kent Road, where there was a clear policy to build 20,000 new homes along the Old Kent Road. He explained that the council wanted to ensure that these are good quality homes, that are policy compliant in respect of affordable home quantum, of excellent design, with appropriate amenity space for both private and wider amenity space, and fall in line with the council's climate change policies – this was a real challenge particularly as the area is quite constrained.

Councillor Seaton further explained that the challenge for the planning committee was therefore, where to make compromises in order to deliver on the core policy area of affordable homes which have private amenity space and broadly fall in line with climate change policies. This was a judgement for the planning committee and they were sometimes asked to make decisions that were a slight compromise on some of the council's policies, but satisfy core policy targets (affordable homes with appropriate space and of excellent design). The aforementioned was raised in the context of the development of new policies, particularly in opportunity areas across the borough. Where an application does not provide appropriate amenity space for families or does not comply with the affordable homes quantum, and there is not good reason for not complying, then the application would be resisted. There was a propensity to support applications that meet the council's core policy objectives.

Councillor Seaton explained that the council's new consultation policy had made it easier to involve local people in the planning process and for them to understand what the policies are and the potential implications of those policies, and either through the council or directly with the applicant, negotiate some mitigation / compromise on what the applicant sought to implement. Applicants who are receptive to local desires and local priorities who respond positively to local priorities are likely to be more successful in navigating the planning process.

Councillor Seaton touched upon protecting Metropolitan Open Land and Listed Buildings and new planning proposals which would take away democratic intervention. Councillor Seaton also touched upon the focus of regeneration in the central and northern part of the borough and also tall buildings which would be a feature of regeneration schemes in Southwark.

Following Councillor Situ and Councillor Seaton's address, members asked questions around the following:

- Long term delivery of affordable housing
- Southwark Transport Strategy – how it is evolving
- Role emerging planning policy can play to ensure vibrant town centres and high streets
- Green / open space policy – lack of spaces in the north of the borough
- Use of office spaces
- Briefing on the planning white paper
- How existing policy could be knocked by economic recession following Covid-19
- Best example of regeneration in Southwark

Following discussion the chair thanked Councillors Situ and Seaton for their contributions and Stephen Platts and Simon Bevan for their attendance.

## **8. WORK PROGRAMMES 2020/21**

The scrutiny commission chairs provided updates on the current position of the commission work programmes.

Councillor Gavin Edwards, Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

- Estate Cleaning Service
- Community Hubs

Councillor Victoria Olisa, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission

- CCG Mergers
- Covid-19 – Second wave
- Mental Health – Impact of Covid-19 on Children and Young People
- Health Inequalities

Councillor Peter Babudu, Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Commission

- High Streets and Town Centres
- Continuing Quality of Education
- Undertaking equalities brief of OSC – Equalities and Diversity Programme
- Following up with officers on Exclusion Report and Procurement report

Councillor Wingfield on behalf of Councillor Ochere, Environment Scrutiny Commission

- Continuing the work of Climate Change and Transport in the borough

A discussion was held around a potential item regarding how the council has responded to the Climate Crisis declaration. The meeting was informed that there was already a cross party working group which would feed into cabinet/cabinet member. It was suggested that any report submitted should be seen by OSC instead of undertaking a separate scrutiny review.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the work programme as at 15 October 2020, attached as Appendix 1 be noted.
2. That the following additional items be added to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the commission work programmes:
  - Tree Planting – Environment Scrutiny Commission
  - Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (Consultation) – Overview and Scrutiny Committee
  - Opportunities for Young People and Child Poverty Strategy – Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission
  - Council Plan 2018 – 2022 Refresh and Council Performance – Overview and Scrutiny Committee
  - Accessibility of Affordable Mental Health Support – Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission
  - Cladding – Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
  - Bakerloo Line Extension and Old Kent Road – Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting ended at 10.26pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**