

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CHAIRS** held on **TUESDAY, 7TH OCTOBER, 2014** at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Meric Apak, Jenny Headlam-Wells, Alison Kelly and Don Williams

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Awale Olad

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Sarah Hayward, Leader of the Council, and Pat Callaghan, Deputy Leader of the Council

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting.

MINUTES

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

It was moved, seconded and agreed that Councillor Alison Kelly be elected Chair for the meeting.

RESOLVED -

THAT Councillor Alison Kelly be elected Chair of the committee for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Awale Olad, Chair of the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF PECUNIARY, NON-PECUNIARY AND ANY OTHER INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were none.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

There were none.

6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There were none.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED –

THAT the terms of reference of the Joint Chairs of Scrutiny Committee as set out in the order of business be noted.

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2013 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

9. THE LEADER'S ANNUAL STATEMENT TO FULL COUNCIL 14TH JULY 2014

Consideration was given to the Annual Leader's statement, as considered at the full Council meeting on 14th July 2014.

The Leader and Deputy Leader gave the following key responses to Members questions;

Housing and Regeneration

The Leader agreed to provide Councillor Don Williams with information relating to the number of commercial property voids that there were in the borough.

ACTION BY: Leader of the Council

When the Council originally applied to the Government to be allowed extra borrowing to build Council housing it was told that it would only be allocated £129,000. No reasons were given as to why Camden was allocated such a low figure. Since then the Council has re-applied for housing funding and it has now been allocated £11 Million. Again no reasons were given as to why the Government changed its mind on granting the Council a higher funding allocation.

The Council was able to meet its financial obligations in relation to borrowing to build Council housing. Greater flexibility from the Government to allow Camden to borrow more, would enable the Council to go some way in meeting the demand for social housing in the borough.

The Government and HS2 had a poor record of consulting and engaging with the local community regarding their proposals. The Council had a strong record of undertaking meaningful consultation and active engagement with the local community regarding its Community Investment Programme (CIP). These CIP initiatives were delivering badly needed homes (e.g. Gospel Oak and Maiden Lane), school refurbishments and places, all of which the local community were playing an active role in helping to shape, something that HS2 were not allowing to happen.

The Council's CIP was delivering one of the biggest capital programmes in the country. Members and officers were constantly reviewing and monitoring the programme to ensure it was being delivered.

Private Rented Sector Landlords – Licensing

Camden was currently consulting on a scheme to licence private rented sector landlords. The aim of the scheme is improve the quality of the properties, help with rent stability for tenants, enable landlords to fully understand their roles and responsibilities, and produce a comprehensive list of all private rented sector landlords operating in the borough.

Schools

The Council and the local community had worked together, along with the Institute for Education (the proposed sponsor), to try to set up a secondary school on the Wren Street site. This proposal was turned down by the Government, again no reasons for its decision were given. The proposal to see a secondary school established south of the Euston Road was still being taken forward by the local community. Who would be submitting a new bid to the Department for Education soon, but this time without a sponsor. The local community would need a sponsor for the proposal to be eventually taken forward, and the Council hoped that any such sponsor would wish to work within Camden's family of schools and would share the boroughs aims.

Ofsted Inspection – Child Sexual Exploitation

Ofsted had carried out a thematic inspection in Camden on child sexual exploitation. Camden was 1 of 8 local authorities to be inspected. This inspection involved a review of the statutory functions of Camden's Safeguarding Children's Board in relation to this matter. The Council was arranging a development session for Members on child sexual exploitation with Professor Jenny Pearce on 6th November. All Members had a responsibility to report this, so Members would be expected to attend the training session. Overall the country did not seem to be learning any lessons from the past in relation to child sexual exploitation. It was time that a national inquiry was set up to look at the causes of child sexual exploitation and why it happened in some places but not others.

Corporate Parenting Board

The Council had set up a cross-party Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) that had a joint chair, and sought to ensure that looked after children and young people placed in and out of borough, had the best opportunities in life. The CPB was seeking to ensure this through the children having stability in their family lives, improving their educational outcomes, and increasing the numbers in education, employment and training.

Mental Health Issues

The Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Board saw tackling mental health issues as one of its key priorities, as in Camden 1 in 7 of the population had a mental health issue. People from more deprived areas of the borough were more likely to suffer from mental health issues, than those from the more affluent parts of Camden. The HWB work with partners to challenge the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems, along with helping the Council and partners to develop practical schemes (e.g. specific apprenticeship schemes) that would help people get back into employment. Unfortunately Jobcentre Plus did not seem to have been very successful in supporting people with mental health issues, to get back into employment.

Young People's Mental Health initiative

An innovative Council led project is being set up in the old Jack Taylor School site to help 16 – 25 year olds with mental health problems have access to a young people centred facility. This initiative sought to improve early identification, better engagement and support, improve their wellbeing by ensuring their wider needs (such as access to housing, sexual health and relationships, substance misuse and employment) were addressed.

Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) priorities

The HWB was working with partners to seek to reduce the health inequalities that exist for the people of Camden. In doing this it had identified the following as being its key priorities;

- healthy weight healthy lives – this had an action plan in place that sought to ensure a healthier food environment; healthier physical environment; development of good integrated treatment pathways; and ensure effective communication and collaboration with all partners involved. One of the ways this was being progressed was through the healthier catering commitment, whereby Camden's Food Safety Team were encouraging food businesses to make healthy changes to the way they prepared and displayed their food, especially those business close to schools. Other initiatives included the Active Space Project that was seeking to build innovative outdoor facilities in Camden Schools, to help improve children's physical activity, and reduce childhood obesity levels. Camden had secured funding for a two year Breakfast Club pilot for all primary schools which should help tackle food poverty, childhood obesity, improve school attendance and educational attainment. This initiative sought to ensure that at the end of the contract the breakfast club would be self-sustainable. The growing for health project was seeking to improve mental health wellbeing and behavioural outcomes by involving the socially isolated and people with substance misuse problems, in community food growing projects.
- complex families – this scheme was seeking to reduce the number of families with complex needs. This was being done through building stronger families, so that they could improve their own situation. The approach sought to ensure that the family had just one key worker representing all the agencies rather than one from each. This was leading to a more streamlined provision, better levels of satisfaction and user experience, along with possible cost savings for the service providers.
- Alcohol – here the aim was to change the current fragmented approach through the establishment of a multi-disciplinary alcohol harm reduction officer group. Also the establishment of independent domestic and sexual violence advocates were being sought to deliver training to staff working across a range of hospital settings, and help develop clear referral pathways. These advocates would be based in the Royal Free and UCL hospitals. Also awareness was being raised through the Don't Bottle It Up, Dry January, Reducing the Strength, and Quiet Streets campaigns.

The HWB recognised that it still had work to do including helping to reduce health inequalities; seeking to improve educational attainment; taking forward the health issues arising from the Equalities Task Force report; and achieving this with a reducing budget.

The Leader thanked Councillor Pat Callaghan for leading the HWB so successfully, as she was aware that HWBs were not working as well elsewhere in the country.

Living wage

Camden was one of the first Council's to sign up to become a living wage employer. As part of this commitment the Council has sought to bring in a minimum earnings guarantee, and had agreed to remove its lowest salary spine point so that no member of staff would earn less than £20,000 per year. The Council was working with contractors to ensure that they paid their staff the London Living Wage. The Council was also looking to provide school loans as well as providing schemes geared around helping adults to get back into work. Poverty pay was one of the biggest problems facing the country, it was a scandal that so many people in work lived in poverty.

Foster Carers

The Council had sought to attract local residents to become foster carers and to retain existing foster carers. One of the ways this was being achieved was through exempting foster carers from paying Council Tax. Out of borough foster placements were very expensive for the Council and disruptive for the child. This initiative had seen an increase in enquires from members of the public expressing an interest. This initiative was unique to the Council and was not linked to any funding stream to pay for its cost.

Empty Homes Council Tax supplement

The Council was using the ability to charge an extra supplement for empty private sector homes to bring such homes back into use. The evidence was that this was working with a number of homes being brought back into use.

Financial Strategy

The Council was facing a huge financial challenge as the Government had decided to reduce the amount of revenue grant Camden received by £70 Million. This was on top of the £93 Million that the Council had to save during the last administration. This reduction in Revenue Support Grant, the 8th highest in the country, meant the Council would be faced with having to make real cuts in service provision. The Government had sought to penalise boroughs like Camden with its high levels of need and deprivation to favour the more affluent parts of the country when allocating resources.

It was unclear why the current Government were targeting Local Government when looking to reduce Government spending overall. Local Government had not only proven itself to be the most efficient part of government, but large parts of its work was preventative (e.g. improving ill health through the work of HWBs in turn saving money for the NHS). This in-turn saved money for the public purse overall.

The Council was constantly looking at innovative ways that services could be delivered as well as using such approaches to deliver savings. Examples of this included Greenwood Place (Centre for Independent Living), where services for

Joint Scrutiny Committee Chairs - Tuesday, 7th October, 2014

people with special needs would now be delivered in one location. This would not only mean a better level of service being provided in a modern purpose built building, but with the closure of the buildings currently all providing the specific services, this would mean a cost saving to the overall budget. The Council's reablement service was another example of innovation leading to better services, and to an overall saving to the public purse. Here the extensive support given to people leaving hospital led to a 56% reduction in those people then needing further care as a result of their hospitalisation.

As part of its future financial strategy the Council may look at the possibility of collocating services in libraries, or allowing a café to be located in a library to off-set costs. These proposals were not without controversy, as they would mean a reduction of space available for books.

Only sound financial planning and listening to the views of the local community regarding the identification of key priorities would enable the Council to come through this challenge.

Councillor Alison Kelly, then thanked the Leader and Deputy Leader for answering the chairs of scrutiny's questions.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 7.35 pm

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Gianni Franchi

Telephone No: 020 7974 1914

E-Mail: gianni.franchi@camden.gov.uk 020 7974 1914

MINUTES END