

ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH

COMMUNITY SAFETY & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 7.00 PM

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Members:

Councillor David Stanlely (Chair), Councillors Angela Cornforth, David Gardner, Olu Babatola, Roger Tester and Charlie Davis.

Officers

Scrutiny Manger

Under Standing Orders

Councillor Adel Khaireh, Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities

Councillor Sizwe James, Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability & Transport

Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Environment

Others in attendance

Terry Powley – Chair of the Greenwich Parks Forum

Dave Stevenson (GPF Treasurer and Friends of Kidbrooke Gardens)

Sue Gay (GPF member and Friends of East Greenwich Pleasaunce)

The Chair made introductions and advised that the meeting was being held under emergency Regulations and some of the Council's procedures had been amended accordingly.

Item

No.

I Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence was received for Councillors Averil Lekau and Rajinder James.

Apologies for lateness was received from Councillor Charlie Davis.

2 Urgent Business

There were not items of urgent business.

3 Declarations of Interest

Resolved –

That the list of Councillors' memberships as Council appointed representatives on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies be noted.

4 Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 27 September 2020 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

5 Safer Neighbourhood Panels Review Update

The report was presented by the Chair who provided a brief update on the review. He confirmed that the review group had met with the Chief Inspector of the Police and advised on the questionnaires that were circulated to police sergeants and councillors. He stated that following initial discussions with the police and the Safer Neighbourhood Board, there was a consensus on the areas that required improvement adding that the aim was to produce a model of good practice and present the final report at the June meeting of the Panel.

In response to questions, the Chair confirmed that the review was benchmarking best practice using guidance from the Mayors Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) and the Metropolitan Police who were carrying out a London wide review on safer neighbourhood panels. He added that the review was also looking at a case study from Tower Hamlets.

In addressing the panel, Councillor Jackie Smith the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Enforcement explained that Safer Neighbourhood Panels fell under the domain of the Police and informed them of local needs and concerns. She advised on the previous work carried out by the Chair of the Safer Neighbourhood Board and highlighted the Woolwich Riverside Ward Panel as an example of a good, functioning neighbourhood panel.

The Panel

Resolved –

To note the update on the review into safer neighbourhood panels.

6 Cabinet Member Update - Park Investment Fund

The item was presented by Councillor Adel Khaireh, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities who confirmed that the Parks Investment Fund was approved at the October 2020 Cabinet and had committed to carrying out priority works in 11 parks across the Borough. He advised that the project team included officers from different departments and confirmed that DRES officers had agreed to schedule the planned maintenance of these parks at the same time. He confirmed that works would be starting on Bostall Gardens, Shrewsbury Park and Saint Marys Gardens and should be completed by the end of the financial year.

The Cabinet Member also provided an update of the planned works to be carried out at Plumstead Gardens, Charlton Park, Bostall Gardens, Rockliffe Park, Eaglesfield Park, Twinkle Park and Maryon Park. He confirmed that officers had been in regular contact with the respective friends of park groups.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the maintenance costs of the projects were contained within the existing Parks and Open Spaces budget and that works on the park's infrastructure, such as walkways, would be part of the planned maintenance programme carried out by DRES. He advised that these could be impacted by the increasing budget pressures however, the Council was committed to maintaining the completed works.

In addressing the meeting, the Chair of the Greenwich Parks Forum welcomed the planned work and the recognition of the importance of Greenwich parks. He suggested that the funding and any subsequent rounds would be better spent across all the parks on a number of key themes which would include; developing ecological diversity, extending amenities and deepening access.

In response, the Cabinet Member thanked the Greenwich Parks Forum and friends of parks groups for their support throughout the process and confirmed that their recommendations would be considered as part of any new funding commitments.

In terms of performance, the Cabinet Member confirmed that Royal Greenwich had obtained 13 green flag awards for parks across the borough and had already achieved its 2018 target of planting 2222 trees by the year 2022. He advised on the opening of 2 new playgrounds in Glyndon and Shooters Hill wards and highlighted the importance of parks during lockdown.

The Panel

Resolved –

To note the verbal on the Parks Investment Fund.

7 Cabinet Member Update - Street Services

The item was presented by Councillor Sizwe James, Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Transport who confirmed that the pandemic had created significant pressures for the waste collection and street cleansing services and that, as statutory functions, it was necessary to adapt the way the frontline services were delivered whilst maintaining the health, safety and wellbeing of staff. He highlighted the safety measures undertaken by the Council to provide a covid-secure working environment and stated that staff had been working extremely hard throughout the pandemic leading to an increase in positive feedback from residents.

In terms of the impact on waste services, the Cabinet Member advised on the higher than normal levels of absence and the need to redeploy back office staff to enable full-service coverage. He stated that due to the levels of uncontrollable absence there were considerations to reduce collections to fortnightly however, this was not actioned due to a reduction in absences and the levels of outstanding work. He added that the situation was being monitored closely and consideration would be given to any changes to collections accordingly. He detailed the extra work the service area had undertaken including collection of non-hazardous clinical waste from testing sites.

In regards to the street cleansing service, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the focus was on cleaning main roads and town centres, and that there had been a reduction in residential street cleansing during the first lockdown and between June and August 2020, He advised that some street cleansing staff were redeployed to waste services during this period and that street cleansing

methodology had to be readapted, in line with social distancing rules, as the teams were no longer able to follow waste collection teams and routes.

The Cabinet Member updated panel members on fleet replacement and advised that electric vehicles had been identified as the best solution for Greenwich fleet operations however, there were a number of barriers including market availability, charging capacity and infrastructure at depots and identifying funds for increased capital requirements. He stated that the replacement cycle and the incoming requirements of the Ultra Low Emission Zone had meant that a large proportion of the fleet has had to be replaced before electric variants could be sought.

In response to questions on overspend, the Cabinet Member confirmed that, when Cleansweep was disbanded and the street cleansing function merged with waste services, the staffing budget was not transferred over to the newly formed street services department. He added that no additional funding was received when taskforce services were needed to collect fly-tipping in hotspot areas. He highlighted that the service had not received any additional funding to reflect the increase in rate fees on disposal contracts nor the increase in waste from newly built properties in the Borough.

In addressing the meeting, Councillor Olu Babatola wanted to commend the work of the local group “Tidy West Thamesmead” who were cleaning up their local area during lockdown. The Cabinet Member added that these kinds of groups were encouraged through the local champion scheme and asked councillors to get involved.

Councillor David Gardner moved that the panel formally thank the streets services management and team for their formidable work throughout the pandemic. He highlighted the difficulties in continuing the services when many other councils were unable to do the same and the appreciation received from residents.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member confirmed he would explore the possibility of a rail alternative to transporting waste to the Materials Recovery Facility and the Southwark recycling facility. He stated that he was not optimistic on the recycling rate during the pandemic and confirmed he would circulate the latest figures to the panel.

Action: Cabinet Member for Environment,
Sustainability and Transport

The Panel

Resolved –

That the update on street services be noted.

8 Cabinet Member Update - Community Safety & Enforcement

The item was presented by Councillor Jackie Smith, the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Enforcement, who confirmed that the Housing and Safer Communities directorate were leading on Covid related enforcement in conjunction with the Police. She stated that the primary focus of the local authority had been around business noncompliance and that powers and restrictions around people were mainly the responsibility of the Police. She confirmed that Safer Spaces and Environmental Health teams had contributed to Operation Boundary as an integrated approach to enforcement which had been cited by the Borough Command Unit as a model of good practice and the Minister of Housing who has requested written case studies on the integrated approach for wider publication.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel on the Covid stewards working within the town centres providing advice, guidance and visibility to members of the public and local businesses. She explained that the licensing and trading standards team had remained active and was providing advice on scam protection, ensuring licensing condition compliance and continuing test purchase operations. She detailed the work of the Environmental Health response units who had been visiting business upon receipt of complaints.

In terms of the collaboration with the police, the Cabinet Member highlighted the daily calls with police and partners within the Basic Command Unit to coordinate responses. She described the police approach to engage, explain, encourage and enforce breaches of Covid regulations and reported statistics from the local BCU and her local ward panel on issued fines.

In relation to staff, the Cabinet Member thanked the phenomenal work of all council staff and suggested that it was difficult to single out any particular area however, there were some shining stars within the safer spaces team.

In addressing the meeting, Councillor David Gardner praised officers in environmental health for their response to national guidance that was not always consistent and sometimes difficult to interpret. He stated that it would have been useful to have the Cabinet Member report in writing and if it was

generated for the Cabinet Member, then making it available to the scrutiny panel would not have created any extra work for officers.

In response, the Chair stated that he had received guidance to not include written reports on the agenda as they could not be commissioned due to the emergency arrangements. He agreed that where reports had already been prepared, then these should be included on the agenda and had expressed this view in writing to the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny. He confirmed that this had been an issue for a number of scrutiny panels and advised on the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 01 March which would review the current arrangements.

In response, the Cabinet Member stated that she had not received an officer report but rather an aide-memoire similar to the documents that the other Cabinet Members had used to present their verbal updates.

In response to questions on enforcement, the Cabinet Member advised that reporting abandoned vehicles was key to dealing with the build-up in certain areas however, she noted that on occasion some cars that looked abandoned were fully taxed and insured. She confirmed that the current tenancy patrols were managed by the Housing directorate however, there were plans to incorporate them within the wider community safety team.

The Panel

Resolved –

Noted the verbal update on community safety and enforcement

9 Chairs' Update

The item was presented by the Chair who detailed the impact of the pandemic on scrutiny meetings and the work programme. He confirmed that a number of items, including the performance monitoring of services, had to be pushed back and suggested that that the programme would need to be reviewed in March/April to identify priorities and what could be achieved in 12 months.

The Chair advised the panel on his plans to standardise performance monitoring reports and confirmed that the item would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who would be looking at introducing the approach for all departments.

The panel supported the systemic way of scrutinising services and felt that this could also include benchmarking across other local authorities, especially neighbouring boroughs.

The Panel

Resolved –

To note the Chair's update

The meeting ended at 8.36pm.

Chair