

Council Forum 7th July 2021

Progress of the People, Place and Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met in July and September and looked at how the borough was meeting the challenges of the Covid19 pandemic and other issues.

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5th July 2021.

Youth Forum Update

The Committee received an update on the work of the youth forum. The Forum were very busy looking at a range of issues that affected young people in the borough. The current issues being examined included:-

- Vaccination and supporting the drive to get people vaccinated
- Young people and crime
- Mental health in young people
- The website and accessibility together with links to poverty.

The previous meeting had looked at the review of safeguarding and the youth forum would be getting involved to give the perspectives of young people. The views of young people would also assist in the vaccination programme achieving maximum take up by dispelling myths and fears and promoting immunisation.

Update on Covid19 and Public Health

The Committee looked at the current position with regard to COVID 19 in the borough. The rates of infection and the methods being used to reduce this and ensure that there was a maximum uptake of the vaccine in all sections of the community to break the cycle of infection. The Committee looked at the use of surge testing and close work that was being undertaken with the NHS and other partners. The Committee were informed of current vaccination rates in the borough and the uptake by age groups. The Committee looked at the rates of current hospitalisation and the lobbying that was being carried out to recognise the links between rates of infection and deprivation in areas. The Committee were keen to support the work being done to try and get younger people of school age vaccinated to break the cycles of infection and that ideally this should be done before the end of the summer term.

Members discussed efforts that were being made to ensure maximum vaccination and the myth busting and members of the youth forum would get involved with this work from a young person's perspective.

The Committee complemented officers on the work that is being carried out to seek to reduce infection in the borough.

Update on the impact of Covid19 on Residential and Domiciliary Care Market.

The Committee received an update from the Strategic Director Adults, Health and Strategic Commissioning on the impact of the pandemic on the residential and domiciliary care market.

The Committee were informed that the Covid-19 Pandemic had presented an unprecedented peace time challenge. In particular the health impact on vulnerable adults had been the greatest resulting in emergency policies being put in place by Government and subsequently NHS and Local authorities. Covid-19 has had a major and sustained impact on social care in

England. Impacting on an already under resourced and neglected Policy area. There have been 27,179 excess deaths among care home residents in England since March 2020, a 20% increase overall. 9,571 excess deaths reported among people receiving domiciliary care, a 62% increase. Social care staff have been statistically at higher risk of dying from Covid-19 compared generally to others of the same age and sex. Wider health impacts are harder to measure but significant. The workforce have been exceptional and continue to work long hours, annual leave has been impacted and there is a risk of fatigue and burnout. The Policy response to Covid-19 was complex and evolving with multiple demands from different sources.

The Council's Help Hub had been supplying essentials and food and volunteer support to keep people safe and resilient. Targeted support was provided for those on the national shielding programme, who needed it. Apart from the elderly and frail, Adult Social Care also provides services and support for vulnerable adults, including homeless people and other vulnerable groups. All have been adversely impacted by Covid.

The Committee were informed of the unprecedented demands on the Council and Adult Social Care had been working under significant pressure and demands since March 2020. The service had been working 7 days a week and 12 hours daily to meet demand from the NHS but also supporting registered care settings and our most vulnerable. Since March 2020 the Home First service was required to develop further to meet the requests from central government and adhere to 'Hospital Discharge Service : Policy and Operating Model (2020)'. New pathways such as discharge to assess and designated settings have been introduced. The Council had done everything to help the regulated care sector and have been fair and proportionate. Some authorities had chosen to do other things based on their resources. Funding support for the Care Sector for Infection Prevention Control, testing and workforce support has been fully passed through to recipients as quickly as possible.

The Committee were informed of the key issues going forward. Many of these impacted on regulated care and on the core issues such as PPE, Infection Prevention Control, testing, vaccination, quarantine, isolation etc. the Council has done everything it could to support the regulated and domiciliary care sector.

The Committee recognised the work that had been undertaken in the domiciliary care sector to ensure that the residents were safe and secure and that their needs were met.

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 6th September 2021

Lancashire and South Cumbria Pathology Collaboration

The Committee looked at the planned formation of a single pathology service for Lancashire and South Cumbria by 2023. The benefits were outlined, together with the challenges that the delivery of the single service would face. The Committee were informed that the main thrust behind the proposals was to ensure that there was a consistency of service across the South Cumbria and Lancashire footprint and to ensure that the service was delivered as cost effectively as possible using the technology that was developing. The model would use a hub and spoke model with services delivered in hospital where results were needed as an emergency and more routine tests being done in the central hub. The central location was to be developed at Samlesbury, close to the motorway network and also closer to the main users of the service based in East Lancashire and Preston. The Committee looked at how the service would be provided and the demands of all service users would be met, from GPs to hospital trusts. The Committee also focused on the way that areas at the edge of the patch would be served by the service as opposed to at present. The importance of the samples being delivered within time scales was discussed and the ways that this would be addressed. The Committee were informed of the time line for the delivery of the proposed changes and

the stages that needed to be completed including the building of the hub. Assurances were given to the Committee that the religious needs of sections of the community to bury bodies as soon as possible would continue to be met under the revised arrangements. The Committee would be kept informed of the proposals and how they affect the residents of the borough.

Proposed Enhancements to Acute Stroke Care and Rehabilitation Services for Lancashire and South Cumbria

The Committee received a briefing on the proposals for the enhancements to the acute stroke care and rehabilitation services in the area. The Committee were informed that strokes were the fourth largest cause of deaths in the UK and remained the leading cause of disability. One third of stroke survivors were no longer able to live independently and across Lancashire and South Cumbria there were now over 3,500 strokes per year. The Committee were informed of the current arrangements for stroke care in Lancashire and South Cumbria and that these did not provide the highest quality of care required. The enhancements proposed would seek to ensure that the population of South Cumbria and Lancashire received the best care wherever they lived, all day, every day.

Members discussed the patient's views on the proposals and were informed that the patient wishes had been sought and were in favour of the proposals as they delivered better outcomes for stroke victims in exchange for close proximity. The Committee looked at the way that ambulance support was crucial to the delivery of the proposed service and members were informed that the North West Ambulance Service had been involved throughout the process and enhancements to services were to be made where necessary to deliver this. The Committee supported the proposed enhancements and improved outcomes for patients and would keep the proposals under review.

Blackburn with Darwen Health Watch.

The Committee invited Blackburn with Darwen Healthwatch to the meeting to look at how both organisations could work better together and add value to each other's work. Sarah Johns, Chief Executive of Blackburn Healthwatch, set out the work being undertaken by Healthwatch and the consultations that they were carrying out. The work on patient experience, Long Covid and Care Homes visits were outlined and possible collaborative ways that the Committee could work with Healthwatch to the benefit of residents of the borough. The Committee were informed that Healthwatch would be invited to attend future meetings where it was felt that the input of Healthwatch would be beneficial and add value to the work of the Committee.

Additional Meeting of the Committee.

An additional meeting of the Committee has been arranged to take place on 6th October 2021 to look at issues relating to Children's Services and Schools. The Committee will look at the return to school in the autumn term and the work that had been carried out to ensure that this had been done safely, the Safeguarding Annual Review, SACRE annual report and the peer review of work on neglect. The committee will also receive an update on the work of the Youth Forum and how they are progressing in their work programme.

The Committee looked at the way that the service was seeking to meet the challenges for the future and how demand meant that future provision for an additional cemetery was required.

Cemeteries and Burials.

The Committee were informed that the average 5 year burial rate in Blackburn was 349 per annum (of which 269 are new graves and 80 re-openers). In Darwen the rate was 69 per annum (of which 30 are new graves and 36 re-openers) plus the burial of cremated remains. Due to the planning and resources required to establish a new cemetery, it was hoped to identify 2 new sites, one in Blackburn and one in Darwen, to provide burial space for at least 20 years. Investigations into various sites for burial land were continuing, with potential sites in both Blackburn and Darwen being assessed for water courses and private water supplies. Once the land investigations have been concluded, intrusive land investigations would commence with trial pits and bore holes on the sites planned. Progress on the issue would be reported to the Committee in due course.

Development of a new Household Recycling Centre

The Committee were informed of progress on the proposed development of a new Household Recycling Centre. The development of a new purpose built HWRC was continuing to be investigated, including Local Plan public consultation. Onsite intrusive land investigations were taking place to identify any issues on a potential new site off Goosehouse Lane near to the Suez recycling and recovery plant. Subject to investigations, a business case will be completed with capital and revenue projections. A report will then be presented to the Executive Board later this year, to consider the merits of the project and approval of the funding for a new HWRC.

The Committee looked at the progress of the waste collection and recycling services. The weekly waste tonnages have on occasion increased by up to 20% due to a significant number of residents being at home during COVID lockdowns, however, since the move to Step 3 in the Government's roadmap, tonnages have returned to average levels. A large percentage of the refuse collection crews have been absent from work due to the need to self-isolate or having tested positive for Covid due to family transmissions. As a result of these absences, ancillary services, such as the waste transfer station at the depot, was closed temporarily with staff redirected on to collection services for waste and recycling. The Council's waste and recycling services had continued without interruption since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and this was a great credit to the service.

The Committee noted the progress on the Household Recycling Centre and the hard work that had been undertaken by the service to ensure that services were maintained during a very difficult and challenging time.

The Economic Recovery of the Borough.

The Committee looked at the work that was ongoing on the economic strategy for the borough. The economic strategy included development of housing, commercial and town centre projects within the Borough, Disposal of Council's surplus strategic assets for housing and commercial developments and Strategic Planning functions and development of the Council's Local Plan and Policies.

One of the parts of the strategy was to Bring Empty Homes back into use through negotiation and enforcement. This had returned 1000 houses to use in the borough in 3 years. A further key part of the strategy was securing developer contributions for local infrastructure and

engagement with investors and developers. There was a rolling pipeline of over 200 projects, with annual priority projects agreed via Executive Board. 35 projects had been completed since 2017.

The Committee thanked the Executive Member for the work on the strategy and would consider the next steps in the development and the publication of the Local Plan at a future meeting.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 13th September 2021.

The Committee looked at the way the Council can take action where private owners were failing with their duty to maintain the property and were having a detrimental effect on the whole of the community. The Committee were informed of the interventions that the Council had delivered through compulsory purchase and the properties that had been delivered back into the housing stock for use.

The Committee were informed of the powers that the Council had at their disposal and how these could be used to drive improvements. These were-

- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – Section 215
- Building Act 1984
- Housing Act 1985, Section 17 – Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs)
- Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Section 59, 80,
- Anti-Social Behaviour Crime & Policing Act 2014 – Section 43 – 58
- Public Health Act 1936 – Section 78
- Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949

The Committee looked at examples that had resulted in improvements in the borough and the way that the officers had worked with land owners to ensure that they fulfilled their legal duties and the steps that had to be taken under each power should negotiations not produce results. The Committee were informed of the limits of powers and the duty of the magistrate's court to consider cases brought by the Council. The Committee discussed the level of fines that were imposed by courts and the way these differed from case to case and personal circumstances. The level of deterrent was discussed and the alternative wordings that could assist in delivering a tougher message that would make people think before they failed to take action.

The Committee discussed the issues that related to adopted highways and cleaning and especially back alleys. Members highlighted the issues that they faced from residents bringing issues to them which related to un-adopted areas and how many of them were unaware of their responsibilities and requirements as the land owners. That the officers be thanked for their informative and helpful presentation. The Committee agreed that the Strategic Director, Place be requested to draw up a list of the top ten hot spots for member's information and the possible actions that we could use to make a difference in these areas. The Committee also asked that ways of helping communities in keeping areas clean such as assisting in monitoring known dumping hotspots be considered and reported back to the Committee. The Committee also requested that consideration be given to leaflets to be given to residents of areas adjoining non adopted highways informing them of the difficulties that the Council faced in cleaning non adopted back alleys and their responsibilities.

Work Programme for the Committee

The Committee agreed that the next meeting would look at the issues relating to trees in the borough. This would include looking at the issues of ash dieback.

Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee 26th July 2021

Digital Response to the Pandemic in Blackburn with Darwen

The Executive Member and Strategic Director attended the meeting and updated the Members on the work on the digital strategy and how this had developed rapidly to meet the needs of the Council and its partners to deal with the pandemic and support residents of the borough. The Committee were updated on the Council's web site that had been redesigned in 2019 and the applications behind the front pages. The Committee were informed that in February 2019 the Council had signed up to the National Local Government Digital Declaration. This was a set of principles and approaches and allowed us to access free GDS training credits which were used to develop our capability around Agile Service Design and User Research. This also brought us together with many peers and opened up sharing and learning across the country. The Committee looked at the efforts that were directed to ensure that those left behind in the digital delivery of services and engagement were being supported and enabled. The Committee were shown how the Council now used data to understand the needs of residents and how services were used and accessed. Members asked if the digital development could assist in tracking member's case work and this was something that would be looked at as process management. This may free up members to work with those that could not get access digitally. The Committee were reminded that people would remain at the heart of the design process and this followed the Gov.uk model that was highly successful.

The Committee would continue to look at the implementation of the digital strategy and seek to ensure that it met the needs of the organisation, the residents and service users in the Borough without leaving anyone behind.

Meeting of the Committee, 11th October 2021.

The next meeting of the Committee meeting has been rearranged to take place after the meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The meeting will look at corporate performance and progress on the Council budget.

Sylvia Liddle, Chair, People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Suleman Khonat, Chair, Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

David Harling, Chair Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.