

Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21st March 2021.

Progress of the People and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met in March to continue their work Programmes and look at the key issues affecting the Council and how the challenges were being met.

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee 7th March 2022.

Health of the Borough.

The Committee met on 7th March and received an update on public health in the Borough from Professor Dominic Harrison. The Committee were informed of the actions that had been taken by the Council and other directors of public health in the northwest following the government's decision to step down restrictions and reduce testing. He outlined local guidance that included the continued wearing of masks in shops, on transport and public places, the continued testing when symptoms are displayed and self-isolation where necessary. 75 year olds would be eligible for a 4th jab in spring along with vulnerable adults and this would be administered through GPs. Professor Harrison drew attention to the recent infections which now included one third reinfections with one of the two Omicron variants. The Committee were informed that in the future it was assumed that the virus would follow a cycle like the cold virus and that it would re appear in the population in summer and if not by autumn.

The Committee discussed the effects of long covid and it was noted that about 2%-4% of those who had had Covid were likely to suffer from long covid and this was not related to the severity of the infection. The symptoms of long covid were similar to those ME. The complex issues including the effects on mental health that young people would have in future years and the lack of access to face to face GP was discussed and members were informed that the borough had the 8th lowest number of GPs per population in the country and this has been raised with the CCG.

The Committee requested that they continue to be kept informed of the situation relating to Covid and especially how the long term effects of covid will be dealt with in the borough. The Committee also requested that they be kept informed of the efforts to ensure that the ratio of GP's to the population of the borough is increased.

A Child of the North

The Committee received a joint presentation from the Strategic Director Children's Services and The Director of Public Health on the Child of the North report. The report had been published in December 2021 by the Northern Health N8 Research Partnership Science Alliance and written by over 40 leading academics from across the North of England. The report highlighted the inequality for children growing up in the North of England compared with those in the rest of the country. The report called for policies to reduce child poverty and increase funding for preventative services. 18 recommendations were outlined that addressed the greater risk for children in the north of becoming involved with statutory Children's Services, the care system and acute mental health services.

The Committee discussed the ways in which the recommendations affected the outcomes for children and how we could make sure that a difference was achieved. The Committee considered ways that all members of the Council were aware of the challenges outlined in the findings and requested that a presentation be made to all members and partner organisations in the delivery of services to children. Members were also conscious of the need to ensure that the delivery of all council services consider the implications for children in everything they do. The Committee noted the implications of the Report on Child of the North and the negative

outcomes for children in the borough in comparison with those in the South of England and recommended to the executive member that a seminar be held for all members outlining the findings of the report, the implications for the children and ways that the Council can shape its policies and services to mitigate the effects on children in the borough. The Committee also asked that the Executive Board be recommended to consider the introduction of a paragraph on all policy reports outlining how the recommendations affect the outcome of children in the borough in a similar way to how financial and legal implications are outlined.

Send Methodology Testing Feedback

The Committee were presented with the findings of the joint Ofsted and CQC methodology testing pilot that had been carried out to see how well local areas fulfil their responsibilities for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The borough had been approached by Ofsted and the CQC to support them to test their new methodology for local area SEND inspections.

The process had been carried out over three weeks in November 2021, the purpose being-

- To test out some new ways to gather evidence about the way children and young people with send are supported
- Provide the inspectorates with valuable information about how well possible new approaches work in practice and help to identify where further improvements or thinking was needed.

The Committee were informed of the work that had been required by the departments and Health partners and the challenges that had been met. These had included meeting very tight deadlines in tracking evidence and gaining consent from parents and carers of children and young people. Members were informed feedback which included the following -

- Dedicated and passionate staff who know children and young people well
- Send support services- school staff highlighted the valuable support.
- Clear examples of creative approaches to provide support.
- Practitioners were positive to find a way around things
- Practitioners appreciated practical hand holding with additional support to access
- Children and young people and parents and carers views were listened to and acted upon.

The members were informed of the areas that they were aware needed to be looked at and address and the steps being taken to improve together with the areas that had been exacerbated by covid. The Committee thanked the Children's Services Department and Partners for all the hard work that had been put in to the SEND Methodology Testing and welcomed the positive outcome.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 14th March 2020

The Committee looked at the key areas of their work programme for the year and developments that had taken place following initial scrutiny. The Committee also looked at the issue of trees in the borough and how we manage them.

Trees.

The Committee looked at the issue of trees as a scrutiny topic for a number of reasons including ash die back, the recent storms, planting initiatives and public concerns. The Council is responsible for the care, development and maintenance of tens of thousands of trees owned by the Council, which are located in Council parks, open spaces and on the highway. As a

Council we are committed to maintaining the health and longevity of all Council trees through appropriate management including:

- Appropriate works will be undertaken on dead or unhealthy trees.
- Tree works is undertaken by fully qualified arborists, in line with management surveys and plans.

The Council did not generally undertake works to otherwise healthy and well-formed trees for reasons of:

- Size
- Leaf, seed, twig or flower litter
- Shade or blocked views
- Interference with transmitted signals, e.g. television, satellite channel access
- Honeydew exudation
- Reduced security by virtue of concealment
- Alleged root damage to property.

The Committee noted that the Council does not have a responsibility for tree on private land or un-adopted land.

The Committee looked at the issue of Ash dieback and the effects that this will have on trees in the borough and across the country. Ash trees are the third most common tree in Britain, they are present in woodlands, hedgerows and parks and gardens across the country and have a cultural significance in our urban and rural landscapes. They are also a valuable habitats for over 1,000 species of wildlife. It is estimated that there are more than 60 million ash trees outside woodlands in the UK and that the majority will become affected with ash dieback in years to come. Members were informed of the main issues for the council arising from die back and the work that was to be done on an ash die back plan which required the council to identify the number and condition of ash trees on Council owned land and or near the highway. Members were informed that public safety was the priority for assessing what action to be taken.

The Committee looked at the process for reporting issues with trees and residents responsibilities and the management issues with council owned trees. The Committee were also informed of the recent decision at the Finance Council to increase resources to deal with tree related issues.

Members looked at the targets for tree planting in the borough to help mitigate climate change and how the planting of trees was progressing. The Committee supported the work of to involve community groups and schools in this. Members requested that the planting of value added trees such as fruit trees be investigated which could enhance community areas. The Committee also suggested that schools involvement be sought in helping compile the tree audit as this could be a learning activity.

Waste and Recycling

The Committee were updated on the progress of the waste and recycling collection. 98 tonnes more recycling had been achieved in the year to December and this represented real progress. Blue bin collection of waste card and paper had also increased with very little spoiled content which generated greater income to the council. Grey Bin collection content had also improved with contamination down from 36% to 24%, a significant improvement. Members were informed of the proposal to engage an additional education officer in order to boost collection further. The Committee will continue to monitor the collection and recycling rates.

Cemeteries and Burials

The Committee were updated on the progress in identifying and establishing new cemeteries in the borough. Tests were ongoing at two sites and the outcome would be reported to the committee in the next municipal year.

Sylvia Liddle, Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Suleman Khonat, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee