



London Borough of Hackney
Scrutiny Panel
Municipal Year 2020/21
Date of Meeting Wednesday, 13th May, 2020

Minutes of the proceedings of
the Scrutiny Panel held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare
Street, London E8 1EA

Chair	Councillor Margaret Gordon
Councillors in Attendance	Cllr Ben Hayhurst, Cllr Mete Coban, Cllr Sharon Patrick, Cllr Sophie Conway, Cllr Sade Etti, Cllr Polly Billington, Cllr Anna Lynch, Cllr Anthony McMahon, Cllr M Can Ozsen and Cllr Ian Rathbone
Apologies:	Cllr Penny Wrout
Co-optees	
Officers In Attendance	Ajman Ali (Interim Group Director, Neighbourhoods and Housing), Martin Bradford (Overview and Scrutiny Officer), James Goddard (Director, Regeneration), Henry Lewis, David Padfield (Interim Director, Housing Services), Cathal Ryan (Service Manager, Children and Families Service), Tim Shields (Chief Executive), Gilbert Stowe (Divisional Head of Tenancy and Leasehold Services), Timothy Upton, Ian Williams (Group Director of Finance and Resources), Sarah Wright (Director, Children and Young People's Service), Amanda Neuth (Legal Services), Jarlath O'Connell (Overview & Scrutiny Officer), Philippa Lewis (Programme Manager IT) and Mario Kahramann (IT Programme Manager)
Other People in Attendance	Mayor Philip Glanville (Mayor), Councillor Clayeon McKenzie (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Councillor Sem Moema (Mayoral Adviser Private Renting and Housing Affordability), Councillor Caroline Selman (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and the Voluntary Sector), Chief Supt Marcus Barnett (Hackney Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police) and Ed Sheridan (Journalist, Hackney Citizen)
Members of the Public	
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1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies for lateness were received from Cllrs Hayhurst and Wrout.

1.2 The Chair stated that this was the first formal meeting of a Hackney Scrutiny Committee which was taking place virtually under the government's new guidance as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. She read out the guidance for how the meeting would operate and the expectations for behaviour from all participants. She reminded everyone that the meeting was being both recorded and livestreamed via the Council's YouTube channel and that everyone needed to be mindful of this.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 Cllr Gordon stated that the meeting would also be a joint one with Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission and that item 4 related to that Commission's work and would be chaired by Cllr Patrick.

2.2 She welcomed Members of Living in Hackney to the meeting and also all the stakeholders and officers as well as the Mayor and Chief Executive.

3 Declaration of Interest

3.1 Cllr Lynch stated that she was employed by NHSE and NHSI and currently working on the emergency response on Personal Protective Equipment.

3.2 Cllr Gordon stated that she was a solicitor and an advisory lawyer for the government's legal department, advising the Department of Work and Pensions on pensions issues.

4 Living in Hackney on the Impact of Covid-19 in relation to Housing and Domestic Violence

4.1 Cllr Patrick took the Chair and stated that there were two aspects to this item. A briefing on the impact on Domestic Violence support services locally of the Covid 19 lockdown and a briefing from Housing Services providing an overview on how they are supporting residents across council, Registered Provider and Private Rented Sector housing.

4.2 Members' gave consideration to the briefing papers in the agenda pack about the impact of Covid-19 on patterns of domestic abuse within the borough and information about the service responses for DV and ASB/Noise. She welcomed for this item:

Detective Chief Superintendent Matthew Barnett, BCU Commander,
Metropolitan Police Service

Cllr Caroline Selman, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and the
Voluntary Sector, LBH

Sarah Wright (SW), Director of Children and Families, LBH

Cathal Ryan (CR), Service Manager for the Domestic Abuse Intervention Service, LBH

- 4.2 Cllr Selman thanked the Commission for focusing on these key concerns adding that home was not a safe place for many and increased pressures for those stuck indoors added to existing economic and social pressures. The key focus was to reach victims in need of support and to ensure there was enough resilience to meet demand. As well as the current increase in referrals they were expecting a further increase after the lockdown when more would feel more comfortable to report.
- 4.3 CR stated that there had been a 73% increase in high risk cases in Hackney during April as well as a 60% rise in reporting since 23 March. Demand had been met by redeploying staff. The team chaired fortnightly meetings with the statutory partners and third sector providers of domestic violence support services. The focus was to look at all current barriers to access, to ensure they're aware of difficulties, to ensure adequate risk assessments have been done and that all vulnerabilities in the system are met and ensuring the work between partners is joined up. He described the social media campaign which is now running in various settings. This was a key part of their 4-pronged approach to ensure key messages got out to the public. The messages were: it is safe to leave the home; there is support out there; if you can't leave safely there are ways to reduce risk. They'd also worked to ensure Mutual Aid groups etc were able to identify and properly respond and there was a need to provide a raft of training to partner agencies in the community to ensure that victims were properly identified and supported. He added that there remained sufficient capacity in the Refuge Providers across London and that they were fully staffed. They did however expect a surge as lockdown eased.
- 4.4 MB stated that these were difficult times but that the Met Police's partnership working in the borough had been improved and strengthened. They had not seen any rise in reporting of domestic violence to them however. There had actually been a 10% reduction in cases compared with 23 March to 30 April 2019. There had been a 15% reduction in reporting and a 19% reduction in arrest rates. They were expecting a surge after lockdown and were working hard to increase confidence in reporting. He stressed that there was no reduction in the police service capacity to respond to reporting or enforcement because of Covid 19 and if victims come forward they were in a position to do everything possible to help them seek justice and security.
- 4.5 SW stated that further to CRs update she could report that referrals to Children's Service were up 10% compared with the same period last year. Overall referrals in the service however were down 50% because they normally came via the schools. She echoed MBs comments on the strength of local partnership working. They had also increased capacity in the Domestic Violence service to respond to the increase in demand.
- 4.6 The Members then asked questions of the officers and stakeholders on the domestic violence briefings and the following key points were noted in the responses:
- (a) Chair commented that the rise in reporting to the Council's DV service but not to the Police was significant. She added that she had not seen any of

Wednesday, 13th May, 2020

the posters referred to despite frequently walking around the borough and asked if the information on the council's website could be presented more clearly. She asked how the team was dealing with inter-generational violence and tackling the perception that the service was just for women and children and abuse within couples. She asked if the current large capacity in Refuges was more of a sign of failure than success.

- (b) The Vice Chair asked to whom the updates referred to from the DV Partnership were sent. She asked about whether the DV Protection Orders would still be applied during Covid 19.
- (c) CR replied that posters had been sent to parks, schools, Childrens' Centres, the Homerton Hospital and while there had been a delay in authorisation for them going into pharmacies, this had now taken place and they would be displayed both in the public areas and in the consulting rooms of pharmacies. Regarding the DV service website, he added that at the top of the page they had clearly demarcated a section on Covid 19 and how to contact the service during lockdown. On intergenerational abuse, that was something they dealt with regularly and they got referrals from many sources including older adult children. They worked with both perpetrators and victims and he urged anyone with concerns to contact them. On Refuge capacity MOPAC had made 87 beds available across London via the three support agencies involved and there was still capacity. These can be accessed via the VCS groups. Plans were also being made to cope with an expected surge following lockdown.
- (d) MB stated from 23 March to the date of the meeting 74 DVPOs had been authorised and they were working closely with the CPS and the courts including the specialist DV Court. Even if the court was closed they had procedures to have these issued and nothing in terms of support for DV had waned or stopped.
- (e) SW replied that two cohorts of social workers had been trained as part of the initiative they were running with Waltham Forest Council. The approach, adopted from the US, focused on working with the victim to support her as a mother and not hold her responsible for the partner's behaviour but also working with fathers to hold them responsible for their behaviour as fathers. They were looking closely at online training as part of this ongoing project. The work was being evaluated by Stirling University and the feedback so far had been positive. This represented an important change focused on keeping the children with the non-abusing partner.
- (f) Members asked whether there had been a drop in Emergency Department/A&E attendances due to Covid as it was often the first point of call for many victims of abuse. They also asked about supporting victims of non-physical harm. SW reiterated that if anyone contacted the council or partner agencies they would get support
- (g) The Chair thanked all officers for their briefings and repeated that she looked forward to seeing the posters and that the profile of support for intergenerational abuse be raised within the service so that the public

know whom they can turn to. She particularly thanked the Metropolitan Police for all their work during the lockdown.

- 4.7 Members gave consideration to the report from Housing Services and the Chair welcomed to the meeting:

Cllr Clayeon McKenzie, Cabinet Member for Housing Services
Cllr Sem Moema, Mayoral Advisor Private Renting and Housing Affordability
David Padfield (DP), Director of Housing Services
James Goddard (JG), Interim Director Housing Regeneration
Gilbert Stowe (GS), Housing Officer

Members also gave consideration to a slide presentation from the Cabinet Member.

- 4.8 In his briefing Cllr McKenzie highlighted that both managers and unions had implemented existing business continuity plans but these had not been up to the unprecedented scale of this crisis and so had to be quickly adapted and there had been great cross service co-operation within the Council. Housing Officers had to respond within a service where the bulk of the staff had to work from home and there was a need to adapt policies and procedures, for example, temporary suspension of Section 20 Notices. He also described the Let's Talk Project which was key to supporting many residents and the need for face to face contacts to continue. Emergency Repairs still had to take place and the Voids Team still arranged viewings because of the urgency involved. The Residents Safety Team still had to do fire and safety inspections often with wary residents and the Grounds Maintenance Teams still kept green areas looking their best. Many TMO workers had volunteered to deliver food to those on the Shielding List and he read out some messages of gratitude which the TMO's and tenants had received. He added that many blue-jacket staff had been applauded by residents when delivering essential items and a true Hackney Spirit was in evidence.
- 4.9 DP gave further details on the service. There had to be swift action to check vital services could be sustained. 70% of staff were still available at any one time. They had switched to urgent only repairs service and for a period gas servicing had to be suspended because of the government guidance on entering people's homes. Access to properties had been an issue at times as people were reluctant to even let gas repairs services in. Most of the capital work had also been suspended and they were in talks with contractors about how to re-start. Housing Offices were closed and the frequency of inspections reduced. Court actions and evictions had been suspended. Rent staff made visits to help people with repayments and there was help to older people re their post office payments. Rent arrears had increased by more than £1m and 4000 telephone calls had to be made to the most vulnerable residents including leaseholders. Those requiring shielding were directed to appropriate help and those just outside the guidelines but needing support also were assisted. The Residents Participation Team worked with those who were isolated and depressed. The Voids Team kept their work going and regular communications to residents continued. In relation to ASB there had been a significant increase during April. Normally 260 cases but now 900 cases, a 370% increase during lockdown. Drug use, verbal abuse and intimidation had also increased. The Council was using telephone and warning letters to these residents. They also

Wednesday, 13th May, 2020

urged residents to use the 'good neighbour' app on their phones to record noise disturbance and they worked closely with enforcement and with legal to process the more serious cases. They were also reviewing the 'Good Neighbour Agreement'.

- 4.10 Members asked questions of officers and the following points were noted:
- (a) Members thanked all in Housing Services for their efforts and commented that it had been humbling to see so many re-purpose their skills at this time of crisis. Members asked what financial support the government was making available so that the council could continue to pay contractors for capital works and how the service was ensuring that the investment made in housing stock in the lead-up wasn't jeopardised. DP replied that there was no government assistance for this. They were implementing Cabinet Office guidance. He gave the example of one contractor sitting on a supply of very expensive fire doors which otherwise would have been fitted. They had put in place an order so that those doors belonged to the Council and its asset were protected in case the contractor went bankrupt in the interim.
 - (b) Members asked how residents not on social media were being supported. The Cabinet Member replied that they had extended the shielding list which had revealed a lot of new cases of those who were struggling with feeling alienated and isolated. It had thrown a spotlight on those needing ongoing assistance however and there needed to be a degree of caution as there was a limit to what they could do with finite resources. He provided assurance that these residents would not be forgotten. GS added that there were 400 lonely and isolated tenants that they had identified a key subset of these were phoned on a frequent basis. They were working with Adult Services on this and the VCS so that support could transition smoothly to the voluntary sector where it could continue on a more sustainable basis.
- 4.11 The Chair stated that Housing Services were doing excellent work and asked officers about the support to those in private rented sector.
- 4.12 The Mayoral Advisor (Cllr Moema) stated that the issues she and the Interim Director of Housing Regeneration faced were similar to those outlined earlier. They had welcomed that the Section 21 eviction notices has been paused for two months as this would delay many becoming statutorily homeless. There was also much work going on in signposting. Many in the private rented sector had never experienced applying for Universal Credit before so they had to help them to maintain their tenancies. On another aspect there had been a massive drop off in the numbers coming forward to make complaints as these had often come via councillors surgeries. The challenge was to separate out longstanding issues with those which were Covid-19 related. Another issue raised by an estate agent was around people moving in and out of properties when a short tenancy came to an end. She added that there also needed to be changes in the ways in which Housing Associations were compelled to report and what they had to report. Overall a key issue would be the impact of Covid-19 on short term lets in the borough.
- 4.13 JG added that one of the challenges was around the reporting regime for Housing Associations. They only had to report on 3 metrics (gas, fire, repairs) in the situation reports and, on others, only weekly by exception. They had

asked the main 16 housing associations in the borough a range of questions on voids, repairs, gas repairs, asbestos, ASB and 11 had replied. Generally they had the same kind of issues as council providers such as lack of PPE for staff coming into personal contact. A key focus has been on voids and the need to increase housing supply. The Housing Associations had offered 74 voids (60 coming from the larger ones) and this was a lower figure than normal so they were analysing this data. The focus of the Housing Regeneration team, like others, was changing during the crisis and they were triangulating information received from a number of sources including councillors' case work.

- 4.14 The Chair asked for a brief update on work in Private Rented Sector and the reports of a planned rent strike by residents in Somerford Grove. JB replied that the dispute with the landlord didn't directly affect the council. The key issue went back to government guidance. The Council expected landlords to meet certain minimum standards and the government guidance was often unclear. The Mayoral Adviser added that they had offered assistance to the residents and had been very careful in the advice and support they gave but there had been different interpretations of the situation within that building. While she was sympathetic to the plight of the residents, it would be remiss of the council to encourage anyone to stop paying their rent and it was important that all parties found a way to work through the issues.
- 4.15 On the general issues in the private rented sector JG added that while case work had dropped significantly during lockdown they were expecting to be hit by a wall of complaints once things reopened, for example, on the issue of rough sleepers.
- 4.16 The Chair commented that the concern was about the situation tenants would find themselves in in a few months' time when they might be laid off work. The Mayor Advisor agreed and stated that the situation in the private rented sector was the same as in social housing. New cohorts of people across different industries – porters, cleaners, couriers were being hit. The focus was to help them apply for Universal Credit so that when the furlough assistance was ended by the government Housing Needs might be better prepared to deal with the expected increase in cases.
- 4.17 The Chair stated that they had run out of time but thanked all for their input.

RESOLVED: That the reports be noted.

5 Scrutiny Panel Cabinet Question Time on the Impact of Covid-19

- 5.1 Cllr Gordon took the Chair and explained that a key element of the scrutiny function was to hold the Mayor and Cabinet to account, in public, as part of a Cabinet Question Time Session. The Mayor's question time session was the responsibility of the Scrutiny Panel. The current pandemic (Covid-19) had had a significant impact on the UK, its economy and the daily lives of people, she added. Local authorities had to refocus their support offer to local residents whilst keeping key services operational. Councils also had to ensure their resources were best placed to help with immediate challenges presenting now and in the future. The Mayor and the Chief Executive had been invited to

discuss how the Council was responding to the pandemic, the lessons learnt, strengths, weaknesses and the resilience of the Council and had been asked to address these three particular questions:

1. The Council's preparations and response to the crisis particularly for vulnerable residents.
2. How the Council was working with partners, voluntary sector, local businesses and trade unions.
3. How the Council was reviewing the long term impacts of the pandemic on the borough.

She welcomed to the meeting: Mayor Philip Glanville and Tim Shields, Chief Executive.

- 5.2 The Mayor stated that he echoed the Chair's opening remarks on the economic and human impact on the borough. There had been 200 registered deaths and 142 of them had been Hackney residents. The Council had of course taken part in a pandemic flu exercise previously but it turned out that this was a very different proposition and indeed this was a lot worse. With something like a flu pandemic you preserved the rest of capacity of council to continue but this pandemic was had been all encompassing. He paid tribute to the council staff who had moved to remote working very quickly and to making sure front line services had kept running. Close partnership working with the NHS was critical and the crisis needed a political response not just operational ones, thereby leaving the administration to focus on frontline aspect. A Cabinet Sub Committee on response to Covid-19 had been set up comprising himself, Cllr Selman and Cllr Kennedy and initially it had met daily. It now meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Work had to take place to ensure that the governance structures returned promptly and there was also a need think of the impact beyond the immediate health crisis. They knew that shielding and humanitarian aid would be needed and setting up multiple new services to lead on the humanitarian effort was important. They were now moving on to the ongoing work on befriending and on mitigating the impacts of isolation. He had set up fortnightly meetings with the Voluntary Sector and especially HCVS and Volunteer Centre. Weekly meetings had been set up with the Hackney Borough Police and with the CCG as well as weekly meetings with other boroughs via London Councils. This had been important in getting a sense of how the government was coping. They were now on the second set of surveys to gauge the local impacts. It was essential to respond quickly with grants packages for local businesses and 80% of those had been issued already. He also worked with the VCS on how to challenge the government to come up with the right packages of support. There would be a need to look at resilience and befriending and tackling social isolation. There would be a need to respond to expected increases in levels of domestic abuse reporting once lock down had eased and to look also at the longer term impact on young people and to continue to advocate for greater funding. The Council was also working with the GLA in relation to emergency housing for rough sleepers. There would of course be further phases of this crisis and resilience to that needed to be addressed as we moved to the next stage. In terms of what happens next the focus would be on the principle of 'Build Back Better'. The Council's key strategic docs would need to be revised including the Community Strategy and

Sustainability strategies. Young Futures initiative and Ageing Well Strategy would also need revising.

- 5.3 The Chief Executive stated that the pandemic was having a huge impact on the borough, affecting every part of our community as well as the staff. It touched on every aspect of work. There had been a great emergency response over the first few months giving humanitarian assistance and ensuring staff were safe and could deliver services. At the outset the Council had set some key priorities to govern this work: To preserve, life, welfare, property, environment, to protect and assist the most vulnerable and to minimise disruption. To assist the other key local organisations, to monitor and protect the welfare of staff and to facilitate a fast recovery to what will be a 'new normal'. In the first phase the council had provided emergency food to 2000 residents via the Food Hub in Hackney Wick and the helpline that was linked to that. It had distributed millions of pounds of business grants to businesses and ensured that essential services could continue. The calls on Adult Services and Children's Social Care were many and complex and even Refuse Services were affected because collecting refuse from those with Covid was complicated. Great work was done to ensure proper social distancing in parks. The council had to ensure that the children of key workers or those in vulnerable categories could still go to school. He had spoken to staff meetings including some of 700 and 800 workers and this important internal communications work would also have to continue.

In a more normal crisis, such as a flood for example, it would be got through using the relevant business continuity plans and it would be followed by as quick as a possible a return to normal. This was unprecedented however and its effects would go on and there would be as yet unseen impacts. The financial impact alone would be significant and this was set out in stark terms in the recent detailed report to Cabinet. While we had Business Continuity Plans for every service this tested them to the limits, he added. He stated that the government had issued further guidance on the previous Sunday which would have to be examined. He added that the experience taught us a lot about the resilience of staff in working from home and it also meant more needed to be done about supporting their health and wellbeing.

In terms of the community there were specific challenges for the Charedi community for example that had to be addressed. The Council also got involved in a hot food offer to certain vulnerable residents and this was all new in terms of the service offer. The feedback received from the public had been fantastic and he had heard about them in regular check-ins with staff and directly from residents. The work of doing the day job in a crisis by for example gas servicing in housing services or in the parks team or in refuse services was to be commended. Having to pay out nearly £50m in business grants so quickly was a new challenge and it had been met.

The Council's sound financial management had meant that we were doing very well but we are still extremely stretched, he added. The Council was hit by both loss of revenue e.g. commercial waste charges, council tax, business rates etc yet we still had to pay out for many new services during this crisis.

There was much work going on in Public Health on the analysis of what is happening with the spread of the disease. The Council's new technology

system had stood up very well and we had been able to run the business with almost all staff working from home while supporting those who had to go on the frontline.

In terms of the challenges going forward, implementing social distancing would be a huge challenge as the borough opens up more and more. There were challenges on testing and tracking and tracing and in relation to the schools opening up again. We have been working amazingly well with partners especially the health partners and those involved in delivering sustainable transport.

He added that there were constant discussions with central government on funding and on new guidance and with TfL, the GLA and the health sector. There was also a huge amount of work going on with voluntary sector with particular challenges around making sure the government offer via the food hubs included kosher food, on the urgent need for grants for VCS orgs, and on the need to sustain the VCS over the longer term as we begin to climb out of this crisis.

5.4 The Chair thanked the Mayor and Chief Executive for their opening remarks.

5.5 Members asked detailed questions and in the discussion the following points were noted. The Chair began by stating she had 3 key questions:

(i) Regarding the government's announcement many residents were frightened about going back to work and what can we do to reassure them about keeping safe;

(ii) Regarding the government's evolving plans for testing, tracing and tracking of Covid cases and the new App, she stated that she was interested to learn that the Mayor and Cabinet and local MPs had made a very bold offer to test the App locally and asked how they would reassure residents on the data protection and accuracy concerns about the App, which had put its effectiveness into question and also what help would there be for those in the community who don't have smart phones. Also what ability would the private sector have to access the App and its data?

(iii) The crisis had unleashed a great Hackney Spirit and much innovation and increased partnership working and what were the more hopeful signs going forward?

5.6 The Mayor replied that he had stated on the BBC earlier that week that the main challenge for councils was that government announcements were firstly leaked in the press which created great uncertainty and then regulations appeared which have to be applied suddenly. The announcement around green spaces came out on a Sunday with the implication that the regulations would be in place by mid week as the country faced into a holiday weekend and a period of hot weather. He added that they had had weekly meeting with the trade unions and this was not the government's approach. He added that Cllr Bramble was rightly concerned about the mixed messaging around the reopening of schools. Landing information suddenly into the public domain was proving difficult he added. The Council had taken the view that there were construction sites locally that could operate now but an announcement from the Secretary of State on longer hours then came out of nowhere. He stated that

the Council was looking to reconfigure streets and pavements in the borough in line with social distancing requirements to reduce traffic and ease pedestrian and cycle traffic.

On testing he stated that two weeks previously he had written to the Secretary of State and only that day had they seen some progress such as the high level appointments onto the task force on testing of Tom Riordan, the Chief Executive of Leeds City Council, a sign that they were finally listening directly to local government leaders. He stated that it was disappointing that the government always seemed to reach first for Deloitte and Serco rather than the existing public sector infrastructure when responding to issues. This had led to a situation where the public and unions were increasingly distrustful of what was being planned. He added that the digital divide was stark and issues around community access and community languages needed to be considered. Locally too, the Charedi community, for example, wouldn't be using the technology needed to access the government's planned contact tracing App. A top down approach of using private sector always and avoiding tapping into local skills and knowledge was a mistake. He added that all across the VCS new connections were being made eg with the growth of the excellent Mutual Aid Groups and these were completely different relationships. There had also been some great work on safe discharging between the Homerton, the CCG and local GPs and that this kind of partnership approach was key to how we tackled such big issues as food poverty and unemployment.

- 5.7 The Chief Executive responded by stating that in relation to opening up the economy there will be a need to continue to support local businesses and residents and part of this is to give out clear advice in order to demystify the various new guidance and regulations. In terms of travel safety, while it isn't possible to give people assurances about safety, what the Council can do is to ensure alternatives are provided. On testing, tracking and tracing, councils will have a key role in helping to shape the system and make it better. The App is being tested in the Isle of Wight and there have been assurances re data protection. He added that it is not possible to comment on it in any more detail until we had more information from the pilot.

In relation to access and smartphones he was aware that the government intended to employ an army c. 15k people to work as direct contract tracers using mainly phone calls. Since the lockdown the Council and health partners had built up a significant data base of the vulnerable and so are in a better position locally to navigate through this in a much more nuanced way. Going forward he hoped the Council can build on these relationships and support networks.

- 5.8 Members asked detailed questions and in the responses the following points were noted:

(a) Members asked for further detail on the financial impacts including the lost income. The Mayor replied that there had been two tranches of emergency funding, the first one a month previously comprising £10.1m, with a second tranche of £7.4m to come and had been allocated on a per capita basis from a national pot of £1.6bn. Another £600m had been announced for Local Authorities that day which was still to be allocated. Another £6.4m hardship funding scheme had also been allocated for Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Wednesday, 13th May, 2020

and the Council had matched that with investment in its own hardship fund. Despite all this, there remained a substantial gap of £19m for the year with areas not receiving special funding as well as the impact of the loss of revenue. Unless further funding was received it was projected over the year that this gap would remain. Added to this there were savings which had been foregone. Considering, that within the envelope of austerity, half of the council's budget had already disappeared over the past decade, some real challenges would lie ahead, he added. The Chief Executive added that they had presented a very full report on the finances to Cabinet and the Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources was working hard to coordinate on behalf of the other London boroughs a response to the government's proposals.

(b) Members asked whether the Council was delivering culturally and religiously appropriate food to residents via the Food Hub. The Chief Executive replied that one of the unfortunate aspects of the government food deliveries had been that neither culturally nor diet specific foods had been issued and it had not been packaged in ways to be easily dispensed to individuals as opposed to families. Because of this, early on in the process, they had to come up with local solutions so that the local Food Hub could offer a more nuanced offer. The Council had worked to deliver kosher food parcels to the Charedi community and to incorporate their needs as part of the helpline. They had been delivering to over 100 Charedi residents in Stamford Hill. There was also a hot food offer developed with the third sector which had accommodated to the culturally specific needs of the different communities. The Chief Executive added that he was very proud of the work to deliver food parcels to those who were shielding or who were vulnerable and the Hub had flexed the offer when the government response had not been appropriate for the local needs.

(c) Members commended the letter the Chief Executive had sent to staff for its content and tone.

(d) Members asked how the Council could be more agile in supplementing the government's actions in tackling the crisis. They noted that Durham County Council had worked with its local CCG and tested residents in care homes and also set aside separate Covid areas within them. They asked further that, without undermining the government message, what ability did the Council have to quickly supplement the inadequacies of the government approach, such as being slow in getting contact tracing off the ground, and how might the Council be able to input additional support.

The Mayor replied that Members had hit several nails in the head with this question. The Council's room for manoeuvre was limited. The communications gaps had been filled by the Council in providing information through people's doors on 3 occasions with specifically targeted information for particular communities. In relation to what Durham had done, it had to be remembered that parts of the country had retained public health labs for testing eg Leeds and Durham and their local health systems were able to tap into that. We have coterminous NHS organisations in City and Hackney he added but for London wide initiatives 32 boroughs are involved. In rolling out programmes the government sometimes decided not to use existing footprints. The borough needed accessible sites for testing stations and they finally got that set up in Dalston and now a further solution is being rolled out locally for testing in care homes. The government did not seem to learn that if you centralise things in

Wednesday, 13th May, 2020

this way you will replicate the mistakes made previously and so we pleaded with them not to pursue that approach. Thanks to the LGA, the government was finally seeing the key role that local government has to play. One area which Hackney was leading on was in PPE distribution as we were the local hub for the NE London boroughs. The key was to supplement and not to duplicate.

The Chief Executive added that Hackney was in a position of reacting to government announcements and being expected to have the answers the following day, when official Guidance had still not been published. He gave an example that a 50 page document which had been issued at 2.00pm that afternoon laying out how we were expected to manage open spaces, however there was a need to examine closely how this could be implemented locally.

e) Members relayed concerns from businesses about phase two of the easing of lockdown and queries from smaller businesses categorised as 'non essential' about when they were going to be allowed to open. They asked what was the guidance for businesses and how would it be distributed.

The Mayor replied that he was struggling with the how things land from central government because uncertainty is sown, for example, on returning to work. The question is what bits of the economy will be returnable to, he added. Parts of economy were already saying they were not ready with hospitality stating they cannot reopen with social distancing in place and continue to be sustainable. There had been contradictions and mixed messages and an obsession seemingly with "home counties" concerns such as garden centres and golf clubs. He explained that the government had announced a week previously a discretionary fund and the council had just received the guidance on that. The Council would be able to use underspend to plug some budget holes he added. A rich seam of information had been collected on the local economy and he urged every business in Hackney to join the Hackney Business Network who had just issued some great guidance for retail on social distancing. He added that they were also communicating closely with the supermarkets.

The Chief Executive added that he was proud of the speed at which those business grants had been allocated and in the future they would go back and study how that had been achieved.

f) Members commented that the Secretary of State for Transport had announced on the previous Saturday some £2m to promote more cycling and walking and added that what was needed was not temporary measures but rather the infrastructure to be put in place to make these changes permanent.

The Chief Executive replied that the plan with 'Build back better' focused on how to build on the changes made during the lockdown. Of the £2m funding it was not clear how much was per local authority. He concluded that we do need to try and capture some of the good things that have come out of this terrible crisis and see how we can boost cycling and make travel more sustainable

g) Members commented on the tragic loss of staff at Homerton University Hospital FT and gave their condolences and asked what guarantees there had

been from the Homerton management that all the workforce would now receive optimal PPE.

The Mayor replied that he had written to Tracey Fletcher to pay tribute to those three staff members. He added that he didn't want to second guess the position around PPE as it wouldn't be helpful. Homerton had never reached over capacity and their logistical systems ensured the pressures on PPE weren't the same as in other parts of country. The Council and the Homerton were constantly checking PPE stocks he added. He added that in relation to unions, that Deputy Mayor Bramble was working closely with the NEU and the Head Teachers on the concern locally about plans to re-open schools.

The Chief Executive added that he too had sent condolences to the families of those staff who had died and added that he couldn't comment on the union issue.

h) Chair of Audit Cttee (Cllr Sharman) congratulated the Mayor for keeping meetings running and things open as part of building the community's trust. There was an issue in the medium term however and financial priorities would need to be amended and Audit Committee was looking forward to a financial framework emerging which would address this. He suggested that Scrutiny Chairs should join Cllr Rennison as Cabinet Member for Finance to explore a joined up view of the financial priorities going forward and suggested that there be a meeting on this in the next week or so.

The Mayor replied that he agreed about the need to focus also on the medium term. Huge financial pressures would lead to some difficult decision making. There has been no short to medium term decision to pull back from services or to furlough staff or to stop doing things, but we do need to have an eye to the longer term also, he added. He added that there wasn't an emergency budget around the corner and that would give us some time and space to do what had been suggested. The Chief Executive urged caution however. He highlighted that the council as an organisation had been doing an amazing job in setting up new complex systems and it had been stretched to capacity. There would be a need to reflect in time on that work and on the next steps when all officers weren't working from home and focused so much on frontline delivery. The organisation was being stretched by constant government announcements so the timing of this work would be crucial.

- 5.9 The Chair stated that she would have to draw the item to a close as the allocated time had passed and she thanked the Mayor and Chief Executive for their attendance.

RESOLVED:	That the discussions be noted.
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6 Scrutiny Panel Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 6.1 Members gave consideration to the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 3 February 2020. The Chair stated that the actions would be reported on at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:	That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.
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7 Any Other Business

7.1 There was no other business.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.20 pm