

London Borough of Hackney
Scrutiny Panel
Municipal Year 2020/21
Date of meeting Monday, 5 October, 2020

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

Chair Cllr Margaret Gordon

Councillors in Attendance: Cllr Sade Etti, Cllr Sharon Patrick, Cllr Ben Hayhurst, Cllr Peter Snell Cllr Mete Coban, Cllr Polly Billington, Cllr Sophie Conway

Apologies:

Officers in Attendance Ian Williams (Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources), Bruce Deville (Head of Governance and Business Intelligence), Ian Chilvers (Special Projects Manager)

Other People in Attendance Mayor Philip Glanville and Cllr Nick Sharman

Members of the Public None

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Councillor Margaret Gordon in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies for lateness were received from: Cllr Sade Etti, Cllr Sophie Conway and Cllr Polly Billington.

2 Urgent Items/ Order of Business

2.1 There were no late items and the agenda was as published.

3 Declaration of Interest

3.1 Cllr Margaret Gordon declared that she was an Advisory Lawyer with the Department of Work and Pensions and would not participate in any discussions on benefits or pensions.

4 Annual report of Complaints and Members Enquires

- 4.1 The Annual Report of Complaints and Member Enquiries is a standing item on the Scrutiny Panel work programme. This report provides an annual summary of the council's complaints, Member Enquiry and Mayor and Cabinet casework processes.
- 4.2 The Head of Governance and Business intelligence introduced and highlighted key data within the report. In summary:
- Complaints overall fell by 14% in 2019/20. This continued a downward trend where the number of complaints have fallen by 23% since 2016/17;
 - Approximately 50% of complaints were concerned with the provision of housing services, the majority of which concern housing repairs;
 - The number of complaints has fallen across all service areas with the exception of children's social care (where there has been a significant increase) and housing repairs (marginal increase);
 - The number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman has also fallen and the outcomes have been more favourable to the Council's position;
 - High levels of Members Enquiries and Cabinet Casework were recorded in the report which is indicative of strong member engagement and support for residents.

Questions from members of the Panel

- 4.3 How does the Council ensure that the complaints service is productive and that individual service areas learn from public complaints about service provision?
- There is learning from the complaints process, which is indicative in the data presented in the report which shows a declining number of complaints.
- 4.4 How accessible is the complaints service to the public? Are the public aware of how to make a complaint and are satisfied with the outcomes of this service?
- Details of the complaints process is fully described on the council's website and this is the main medium through which complaints are submitted. Details of the complaints process are available in many of the council's public buildings with instructions on how to make a complaint.
 - At every stage in the progression of a complaint, complainants are provided with further information on the next stage and what options are available to them if they are not satisfied with the process (at end of Stage 1 or 2). At the final stage of the complaint process, complainants are given the opportunity to escalate their concerns with the relevant Ombudsman or Designated Person (for housing complaints).
- 4.5 Members were concerned that the time taken to process Members Enquiries which was now on average taking 24 days. Why had the time taken to process Member Enquiries increased and what was being done to reduce this processing time?
- The response time to Member Enquiries was of concern to the service and to the Mayor. The proposed review of this service would not only encompass how such enquiries could be dealt with quicker, but also ensure

that there is value added to the process so that the council further understood the nature of the complaint and how to resolve similar issues in the future.

- The review would also try to address how the Member Enquiry process could be adapted to respond to the varying nature of enquiries, which ranged from simple requests for information through to the resolution of very complex service issues. This would help to streamline and hopefully sped up the Member Enquiry process.

4.6 What is the public perception of the complaints service, is this regularly assessed?

- At present the only the housing service surveys complainants to assess their satisfaction with the process and outcomes of their complaint. Analysis from this survey is then fed back into the operation of the complaints system in the housing service.
- In May 2020 the housing service undertook a review of its procedures which led to a number of developments. New procedures have been put in place including that all complainants are contacted in person via telephone (or other preferred medium) within 3 days of making a complaint. This development has helped officers to better understand the nature of the complaint and more effectively support its resolution. Within the new procedure, the initial contact officer will also remain the sole point of contact for the complainant which helps to bring continuity to the process. It is hoped that these developments would also contribute to a speedier resolution of the complaint.
- New systems would be reviewed before the end of the year as this coincided with the need to provide a self-assessment to the Ombudsman to support compliance with the new Code for housing complaints.

4.7 The Mayor noted that the review of Member Enquiries and Casework was a manifesto commitment from 2018. The roll-out of the One-Case system (to manage all casework) would now take place in November 2020 (having been delayed to the impact of Covid). The new system would be more responsive and compatible to how the Mayor and Cabinet office was working. A member reference group had been established to provide member insight to guide and inform the development of the final system to be implemented. The new system would better enable the Council to use member insight to develop and improve services for the local community.

4.8 The Panel reiterated concerns about the length of time that Member Enquiries were taking to be processed and that it would maintain oversight of this in the coming year. The Chair thanked officers and the Mayor for responding to questions from the Panel.

5 Update on the Impact of Covid 19 on Hackney's Housing Service

5.1 The Mayor and Cabinet are held to account in public as part of a Cabinet Question Time Session. The Mayor's Question Time is the responsibility of the

Scrutiny Panel and the Mayor is given advance notice of the topic areas the Panel would like to focus questioning. The agreed areas for this session were:

- Lessons learned by the council and what could be done differently;
- Long term financial implications on our communities;
- How the council aims to reduce inequalities particularly systemic racism;
- How the council plans to engage the whole community in building back better.

5.2 The Mayor presented to the Panel highlighting responses to the questions posed above:

5.2.1 Lessons learned so far:

- What was clear from the outset was that the pandemic was not like other emergency situations, and that there would not be a return to 'business as usual' and that this issue would be all consuming for the Council and the borough as a whole.
- In this crisis, the council has frequently and consistently stepped in to deal with national policy and infrastructure failures. This has been seen in relation to PPE, testing and contact tracing. Although the council is in part reliant upon central government support to develop its local response (to establish the legal framework for actions and for funding), this has not stopped the council from stepping into the breach when such support has not been forthcoming, for example the initial humanitarian response to the pandemic.
- It was important to ensure that front line services were resilient and were able to operate effectively throughout the pandemic, particularly housing, waste collection, parks and other environmental services. It was also important to maintain the accessibility of contact services throughout the pandemic so that residents could continue to contact the council for the services they needed.
- The Council had also been very clear in its commitment to keeping staff and workplaces safe and effective arrangements have been put in place to help staff work from home.
- It was also important to maintain the council's commitment to democratic accountability even within the emergency response situation, and the Mayor and Cabinet held wide ranging consultation and engagement sessions within the community and have supported the continuation of scrutiny and other governance structures throughout this time.
- Developing a sub-regional response can be challenging given that the administrative structures and geographical footprints vary for different service areas, for example Inner North East London Health and the London Forward (economic regeneration).
- The Council is aware of the pressures that staff have been under for many months now and is very conscious to support their health and wellbeing. The Council is working on an autumn and winter plan to ensure that staff are fully supported and are able to work and continue to provide the services that local residents need.

- It was important to reiterate the Council's commitment to prioritise saving lives and not structures within the pandemic response, and that much had been learnt from the prioritising NHS capacity above all other services in the first part of this pandemic. Access to good local data on PPE, testing and a detailed knowledge of how the virus was spreading and impacting on local people remains critical to the boroughs effective response.
- Local partnerships in both the statutory and voluntary sector have been essential in helping to develop an effective borough wide response to the pandemic. The strength of the local community and voluntary sector has also helped to improve local resilience.

5.2.2 Long term financial implications

- It is accepted that the government's financial support to businesses, local residents and indeed to the Council assumed that financial impact of the pandemic would be contained in Q1 and Q2. As events unfold, it is clear that the financial impact has been far wider and likely to be more prolonged than initially anticipated. As a result there are serious funding questions which as of yet remain unanswered going forward.
- The Council had recently published its Inclusive Economy Strategy and would actively use all its assets and resources to deliver on its objectives. The council had numerous tools and processes at its disposal which can ensure that local residents and businesses get the help that they need (e.g. planning policy, community assets, job support).
- It was noted that the longer term financial issues to the council presented by Covid would be addressed more fully in the next item.

5.2.3 Reducing racial inequalities

- The Council aims to be a truly anti-racist Council were articulated within commitments given at Full Council in June 2020, and officers were actively working to ensure that positive and tangible measures were being taken to support these commitments.
- The Council had received external challenge on its plans to be an anti-racist council through local partners, including Hackney Community & Voluntary Sector.
- A community strategy sub-group had been established to help further develop antiracist practice and to support wider inclusion. This group would seek to identify and share good practice from across local agencies (e.g. ELFT and elsewhere) to help combat systemic and institutional racism.
- It was acknowledged that scrutiny had played an important role in highlighting local racial inequalities in terms of school exclusions, adverse childhood experiences and local stop and search policing. This work was important not only to highlight local racial inequalities but to hold leaders to account and to make improvements.
- It was hoped that a further update on this work to combat systemic and institutional racism would be presented at Full Council at its next meeting in October 2020.

5.2.4 Engaging the Community in building back better

- How communities will be engaged in the future has been set out in the revision to the Corporate Plan. The Council has sought to use co-production processes to support engagement in local service development and improvements and there were many examples of this across the Council which include the Ageing Well Strategy, the Young Futures Commission, Child Friendly Borough SPD and Shoreditch Park public realm improvement. At this time, the preferred approach of the Council would be to engage and involve the community around specific and distinct policies and services rather than a borough wide conversation.
- A larger borough wide conversation was expected to take place next year with the support of IPSOS Mori to gauge what local residents feel about the borough.
- The Council would not seek to reinstate its role in the distribution of food to vulnerable residents, for although it was recognised that this response was required in April, the Council had invested additional capacity building and coordination into the community and voluntary sector to empower them to deliver their own response and to support local resilience.
- New community facilities would be opening in the coming weeks including Clapton Common Community Centre (community resource) and the Marie Lloyd Centre on Queensbridge Road (hub for older people's services). Both these developments have been produced with the community and demonstrate how the council is using its assets for the wider benefit of local residents.

Questions from the Panel

5.3 Has there been any discussions with the government (central or regional) about the differing levels of lockdowns and how these may affect local residents? Are such lockdowns likely to be borough specific or London wide? How much notice would the borough be given?

- A London Escalation Framework has been developed to ensure that the Mayor of London, Secretary of State and London Councils are involved in what might happen next. There is weekly contact and support through London Councils to maintain regional oversight and to guide interventions.
- The government has proved to be an unreliable partner in what it asks of residents, businesses and local government where policies and practice have too frequently been implemented with no consultation and with little time given for relevant agencies, services or the public to prepare.
- In terms of a future emergency response and possible lockdown, there was a strong belief among stakeholders that London boroughs should move together in recognition that ward and borough boundaries were porous and that there is considerable cross borough traffic. Although there were varying levels of covid infection across London, it was likely that any escalation would be on a London wide basis rather than any singular ward or specific borough. It should be noted that in terms of the prevalence rate for Covid, London was still some way behind other areas of England.

5.4 What additional support will be available for businesses during the likely second wave of the pandemic? How is the council working with other local authorities to support its offer to local businesses?

- One of the reasons why London boroughs want to move together is to protect London's businesses and wider economy. The government has announced a series of support packages which the council has effectively distributed to local businesses. This direct support is due to end soon together with the furlough scheme. The problem with the new Job Support Scheme was that there is an expectation to pay part of employees' wages, which will still be very challenging for those businesses which have lost substantial parts of their income. Direct support for business for businesses is only triggered when there is a lockdown and businesses are required to close and would equate to payments of £1,500 per business every 3 weeks. The council's position is that more sector specific, and targeted support is necessary to help areas of business under particular strains (e.g. service sector and night time economy).
- The extent to which local businesses have been impacted by the pandemic is illustrated by the fact that 44,000 people working in Hackney have been furloughed. The next weeks will be critical for these workers and businesses as the furlough scheme comes to an end.

5.5 Given the national problems with testing, is there scope for any testing work to be commissioned and provided locally?

- Although testing capacity reduced in the borough over the summer months, this has now returned with London being placed on a watch list. There are 4 sites across Hackney (Mare Street, Dalston and the mobile testing unit in Stamford Hill and Hackney Marshes). Given the ongoing digital divide and allocation of appointments, the Council believes that there is a need for a return to walk-in testing services. It is clear that the outsourced testing services have not been operating effectively and should be returned to the public sector. The Council was however reluctant at this time to endorse localised commissioning of testing.

5.6 How is the authority using local data on Covid transmission and infection to target preventative interventions?

- National messaging is critical in preventative initiatives. The biggest risks to transmission remain the same however, lack of social distancing, not wearing masks in public spaces and poor hand hygiene. The Public Health team continues to assess local outbreaks and monitor routes of transmission. It should be noted that the infection rates across the borough vary widely, and outside the Stamford Hill cluster, there were few consistent geographic patterns of infection. Pan London there have been notable clusters of infection among students though this had yet to develop in Hackney.

- 5.7** In response to an infection rate for covid of 50 cases per 100,000 population, the Mayor of Tower Hamlets recommended that households did not mix. Would a similar approach be taken in Hackney?
- Whilst the Council has been close to issuing such localised advice, this approach is problematic as it is not backed up by or corresponds with national messaging. This local approach can cause confusion among residents and is of course difficult to enforce. There is currently an infection rate of 65 cases per 100,000 population in Hackney which places alongside a small number of other boroughs with the highest rates of infection in London. There was however a much larger group of boroughs (10-13) who have a slightly lower rate of infection at around the 50 cases per 100,000 population.
- 5.8** Many structural problems remain in preventing covid cases occurring in care homes, including access to testing, low pay for staff and sick pay provision for care workers. The Council may however be able to influence the discharge practices of local hospitals into care homes which may prevent local transmission. How is the Council working with local hospitals on this issue as a second wave emerges?
- Much was learnt from how Covid 19 impacted on care homes in the first wave, and the Council is still pushing for regular monthly testing of staff to help them identify and contain cases. There are however many idiosyncrasies in working with housing with care and domiciliary care services.
 - The Mayor offered to give feedback on this issue more fully in writing as he did not have this information to hand.
- 5.9** The digital divide can be seen in relation in many spheres including access to GP services and on-line teaching in schools. Could an update be provided on the development of a borough wide strategy to extend Wi-Fi provision and the improve access to digital devices to the wider population?
- The Council alone cannot meet the local shortfall on the digital divide where it was estimated that over 3,000 digital devices were required locally. It was noted that schools have a new duty to provide their curriculum digitally from October, which would increase pressures for local devices and connectivity. The Council has helped deliver devices to local children and young people in need and a local appeal to recondition old devices has yielded over 200 laptops. The council hopes to establish some form of 'library service' for laptops for local residents in need.
 - The Council has progressed in its Wi-Fi extension strategy and plans to install free Wi-Fi in priority areas which include local hostels and community buildings.
- 5.10** In relation to BAME communities and a prospective second wave of infection, has there any additional messaging from national or local public health bodies to prevent transmission? Is there any other support we can provide to BAME communities locally?

- It was apparent that a number of people who were on the original shielding list were at lower risk than some who were omitted from that list. Using local data and analysis (e.g. GP lists), more bespoke advice was being provided to those groups of people at greater risk.
- The best precautions that could be taken were those measures which are used to protect ourselves from infection: maintenance of social distancing, wearing face masks and good hand hygiene. These core messages were important and residents should maintain these when they visit people's homes or have visitors at their homes. It was acknowledged that this was a significant leap in preventative behaviour.

5.11 In respect of local residents who have no recourse to public funding, are all located in temporary accommodation?

- The Council has a commitment to support people who have no recourse to public funding such as the homeless and rough sleepers. The council continues to support the Isolation Fund which provides funds to vulnerable groups to help them self-isolate in the event of a positive diagnosis.
- It should be remembered that those with no recourse to public funds were also likely to include those people who were until recently working and not just those who are left destitute by the asylum system.

5.12 How is the Council supporting those tenants who have gone into rent arrears having lost their job in the pandemic?

- The council's position is that it does not want to see local tenants who have accrued rent arrears arising from unemployment as a result of Covid to be evicted. The council was encouraging all tenants to contact them if they have fallen into rent arrears, whether this is the result of covid or other historical reasons to ensure that they can access support that they may need. Contact with the council would help tenants to develop agreements with the Council and if eligible, additional help could be made available in the form of discretionary funds. The council had also funded independent advice and guidance through the voluntary sector to help and support residents with rent arrears and other financial concerns.

5.13 How have the Mayor and Cabinet members found the process of lobbying central government, in particular through letters to ministers?

- Whilst writing to the central government is a useful tool to support policy change, it was not a panacea for effecting change. Also given the necessity for the Council to evidence such policy change requests, letters to the government were also a very resource intense way to make the case for change. The Mayor noted that scrutiny adopted a very similar approach, and would welcome similar contributions from the Chairs of scrutiny to help effect change to policy at the national level.

5.14 The government announced the start of the Kickstarter Programme to help develop youth employment opportunities. Can you provide further information on how this programme will work in Hackney, how the council intends to work

with local stakeholders and how the programme will embody council ambitions to develop an inclusive economy?

- The Council is still to determine its position in relation to Kickstart, and would want further reassurance about the principles and quality of the interventions within the scheme. The council's stated ambition is to create good quality jobs and apprenticeships and would like to see this embodied within the programme. The Council has developed Memorandum of Understanding with local colleges and further education to support this ambition and was investing in a new adult skills service (with the Education Service, Hackney Opportunities and Hackney Works).

5.15 How can the Council ensure that London Development Corporation is working to deliver clear outcome measures (e.g. employment opportunities) for its work in Hackney Wick?

- The Council is clear that whilst this is a four borough partnership local intelligence and information was needed at the local (ward level) to ensure that opportunities were maximized. The Council were reassured about the work that was taking place by its regeneration team and the engagement of partners for this work in Hackney Wick. Where appropriate, the Council would challenge the LDC to do more to measure the impact of its work.

5.16 What are the political implications of the longer term budget challenges?

- At the outset of the pandemic, government messaging to local authorities was to spend what was needed to support local communities. The Council has kept a very full and detailed record of additional expenditure incurred through responding to the pandemic as well as the loss of income from fees and charges. Whilst some funding has been recouped, further requests have been submitted.
- There are concerns as to how significant shortfalls expected within the Council's Collection Account (Council Tax and Business Rates) will be reconciled in this year's accounts and if this can be spread across future budget years.
- The national budget for this year had been postponed and it was not clear whether the national spending review would take place as planned. This lack of direction from the central government was giving rise to considerable financial uncertainty across local government. Given the ongoing financial uncertainty, it was likely that the government's current financial settlement for the Council would be rolled over for a further year.
- There were also still unresolved funding issues for local government which continued to place strains on local finances. The Council has continued to campaign and lobby for change in respect of SEND funding, residents who have no recourse to public funds and Public Health yet these funding issues remain unresolved. Due to sound financial management, the Council was however in a relatively strong financial position. The Council would however, alongside other local authorities, continue to lobby government for an improved settlement overall for the sector.

5.17 There is a local challenge to local policy development and implementation, particular in relation to proposed development on Morning Lane and the establishment of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. How can the Council work better to ensure that the views of all sections of the community are represented and brought on board with such developments?

- Whilst the Council would always prefer to advance such initiatives through a process of co-production, in this instance this has had to be balanced with the need to act urgently. The pressure on major traffic routes in London is not unique to Hackney and is not the product of the introduction of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. In south west London, Wandsworth had stepped back from LTN's yet traffic congestion was still prevalent and had impacted on local bus times. The Council had developed the LTN schemes and would now be engaging with local communities to understand how these were working in practice. This Mayor met regularly with the Cabinet member and officers to assess local traffic and other data to understand how the schemes were working. Residents were urged to feedback their views on the schemes, particularly those aspects of the schemes which were not working as could be expected, so schemes could be refined and improved.
- The biggest threat to community engagement and involvement in planning, regeneration and change was the prospective Planning Bill which would reduce the ability of local residents to shape the communities in which they live.

5.18 The Chair thanked the Mayor for attending and responding to questions from members of the Panel.

6 Quarterly Finance Update

6.1 The Group Director for Finance and Resources presented the Council's monthly Overall Financial Position (OFP) Report from July which sets out the latest budgetary position for 2020/21. The following key points were highlighted:

- Of the £3.7 billion grant the central government has paid to local government Hackney has received £21.35m.
- Under the previously notified scheme, the Council has submitted a return to central for the loss of income due to the pandemic. Within this scheme the council would bear the loss of the first 5% of any lost income and would be compensated for £0.75 for every £1.00 of losses thereafter.
- Although the necessary legislation had not yet been passed, it was expected that local authorities would be able to spread losses within the Collection Fund (Council Tax and Business Rates) over a three year period.
- There was no indication from the government if further funding would be provided to local government to support it through a likely second wave of the pandemic. The Council was also still awaiting notification of the funding that it would receive to support the administration of the Isolation Scheme.

- The General Fund position forecast for the end of the year was an overspend of £64.4m gross. After the application of the Government's emergency funding (£21.4m), the smoothing of losses from the Collection Fund over three years and anticipated compensation from the government for losses incurred, the Council was forecasting a £13m loss of which £9m was Covid related and £3.6m non-Covid related.
- The HRA is a ring fenced housing account and was facing a number of financial pressures resulting from Covid. The HRA was forecasting a loss of income from housing rents which would require a drawdown of £1.5m from reserves. Housing teams were working hard to mitigate expected losses.
- The Capital Programme Report detailed significant investments in feasibility studies as well as a range of capital investments.

6.2 The Deputy Mayor Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply also highlighted a number of issues within the report and the work being undertaken to lobby central government.

- A key ask from central government was financial certainty. At present local authorities did not know what their financial settlement would be for 2021/22 or the amount for which they would be compensated for supporting local pandemic relief. The Council would need this information soon to support effective financial planning and in setting a balanced budget for 21/22.
- A partnership approach has been adopted with central government where it was accepted that the Council would step-up and deliver services to support the pandemic response and would incur and bear the costs of additional spending. This roll would become very challenging however if central government did not properly compensate local authorities or if there was a reduction in next year's financial settlement.
- For many years central government has reduced grant allocations to local authorities which has required them to find alternative sources of income. Therefore the losses that councils face as a result of failing revenues from these alternative income sources (waste, parking etc.) was significant worry to Hackney and other local authorities.

Questions from the Panel

6.3 In relation to 2.10 on page 55 of the OFP report, how would the £13.6m budget shortfall would be bridged? What impact would this have on reserves?

- The Council would use a range of measures to bridge this financial shortfall which included the use of contingencies, use of surpluses from the Collection Fund (funds collected above anticipated rate) and the use of reserves. The Council would also seek to defer spending on other 'investments' which would provide additional flexibility in responding to shortfalls.
- In relation to the Capital Programme, the Council was looking to pare back revenue spending to deal with the cost pressures within this programme. It was apparent that there were a number of projects which could not take

place due to Covid or staff working from home, which means that these allocated funds could be diverted elsewhere.

- Reserves in the General Fund are set at £15m. If there was any draw down on these reserves, the Council would need to replace this next year as this amount is required by auditors to maintain financial stability of the Council. Whilst there would be no draw down on the unallocated £15m reserve, other allocated reserves would be used.

6.4 There are significant cost pressures in children's social care, particularly in relation to residential placements (£4.4m projected overspend) and semi-independent placements (£3m projected overspend). What additional support – financial and otherwise – was being provided to Children & Families to help contain these cost pressures? Are there other alternatives to residential care which could be used to support looked after children?

- The provision of children's social care has seen increased demand over recent years as a result of austerity and declining support available through welfare systems. The council made additional investment in children's social care in relation to additional demand and to enable it to respond to requirements of the Ofsted inspection process. Additional reserves have been created to help the Children and Families Service manage the peaks and troughs of service demand, and to provide children with the necessary interventions to support their transition back to their families. The service has continued to need additional support from the corporate centre as it has not managed to implement such support as quickly as planned.
- Residential placements are a significant cost to the Council where approximately £6.5m is spent on a relatively small number of young people in its care (30-35). Where young people had very challenging needs which often required unique support, placements were consequently very expensive. It would be very difficult and expensive for the Council to directly provide such placements.
- It was suggested that Scrutiny may wish to consider further in depth scrutiny of this particular budget line.

6.5 If financial pressures resulting from Covid were to continue for the medium term, which services which are discretionary funded by the council would face closure? What worst case scenario planning was the Council undertaking?

- It was difficult to predict the financial position of the Council so far in advance given the range of financial uncertainty and of course the ongoing impact of Covid. The Cabinet member reassured members that the Council was not looking to achieve savings this year. The Council was also in a relatively strong financial position compared to other local authorities. The scale of the financial shortfall to local government should not be underestimated however.

6.6 The Panel noted that despite the immediate cost pressures within budgets, the Council continued to invest in future services for the community, particularly the development of council owned sites. What action would the Council take to campaign to acknowledge the leading role that local government has taken in

combatting the pandemic in the absence of a consistent and coordinated and funded response from central government?

- The Cabinet member noted that officers have invested considerable effort and resource into clearly researching and recording the impact of covid 19 on council budgets and this would be used to make the Council's case for additional funding from central government.
- The Mayor noted that Hackney was a campaigning council from both an officer perspective and a political perspective, and would continue to lobby government about the totality of funding as well as more discrete areas of funding (e.g. no recourse to public funds, SEND). Scrutiny can play a role in developing the evidence base to support these campaigns.

6.7 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from the Panel.

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

7.1 The minutes of previous meetings held on 30th June 2020 and 23rd July 2020 were agreed.

7.2 The Panel was still awaiting a response from the Director of Communications in relation to further information requested at the last meeting. This information would now be provided in writing to the Panel.

RESOLVED:	Minutes of the meetings held on 30th June 2020 and 23rd July 2020 were approved.
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8 Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission- 2020/2021 Work Programme

8.1 Scrutiny Panel

8.1.1 8.1.1 The Chair of Scrutiny Panel noted that there were two further meetings planned for the remainder of the municipal year. Key agenda items going forward included:

- Ongoing need for budget scrutiny and budget monitoring;
- Food poverty, where external speakers would be invited;
- Update on Advice Service Review
- Chief Executives Question Time.

8.1.2 The Chair requested that members of the Panel should contact her or the scrutiny officer if they wished to make time within the agenda to follow up on how the Council learns from the Complaints process.

8.2 Health in Hackney

8.2.1 The Chair of Health in Hackney noted that the Commission would remain reactive to the public health challenge of managing Covid. The Commission would also be scrutinising how the NHS is dealing with the backlog of elective surgery, in particular the establishment of 'elective hubs'.

8.2.2 The Commission would review plans to merge 8 Clinical Commissioning Groups across north east London which would raise a number of concerns for the integrity of a locally based health systems.

8.2.3 Hackney was expected to take over the operation of the North East London Scrutiny Commission in early 2021. This would be important to help understand the different approaches of individual boroughs to compare and contrast provision.

8.2.4 As the NHS was moving to a position of digital by default, there were genuine concerns about the digital divide and the accessibility of appointments and other services. The Commission would be assessing what support is being provided or planned to help local residents access such services.

8.3 Living in Hackney

8.3.1 The Chair of Living in Hackney noted that two meetings had already taken place, one of which had focused on the use of Stop and Search by the Metropolitan Police. The Commission had identified that BAME young men were disproportionately represented within stop and search figures and that the use of handcuffs had increased exponentially. The police were conducting an internal review which would be reported back to the Commission in December.

8.3.2 The Commission had yet to confirm its work programme for the year ahead but it would encompass how the Councils approach to 'building back better' in relation to local parks and green space (e.g. play areas, toilet facilities).

8.3.3 The Commission had previously reviewed Hackney Carnival and would revisit these in 2021 to ensure that these were being implemented ahead of the hoped for return in 2021.

8.3.4 The Commission would also look at the digital divide and the role that local community centres and libraries can play in developing digital access and internet connectivity to local communities in need.

8.4 Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission

8.4.1 The Chair of the Commission noted that the CYP work programme to September had focused on how education and children and young people's services have responded to Covid, in particular:

- How the most vulnerable children have continued to be supported, such as those in receipt of social care or with special educational needs
- The impact of school closures on children's studies and possibly contributing to widening educational inequalities
- Scrutinising plans to help children return to school safely.

8.4.2 For the remainder of the work programme to May 2020 the Chair noted that the following key areas of scrutiny:

- As the Covid response has had a significant impact on budgets, the Commission would be monitoring areas of high spend, in particular children's social care and residential placements, and of course SEND spending.

- Given that children and young people have missed a significant amount of schooling this year, the Commission would assess how local schools and the Council can help children catch up in their studies.
- It was clear that school closures have not impacted equally across the community and had exacerbated the local attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. The Commission therefore will be looking at effective strategies to help close the education gap for disadvantaged students.
- The Commission would also maintain oversight of the Council's response to the recent Ofsted inspection of children's social care to ensure that it remains on track to improve to an outstanding service by 2022.

8.4.3 In terms of its in-depth review for the year ahead, the Commission has agreed to investigate the growing number of adolescents entering care at age 14 and above for its in depth policy review. The Commission was currently scoping this review, but would focus on adolescents' pathways into care to identify early help interventions from across the council which may prevent them from becoming looked after children.

8.4.4 As the pandemic is changing the way that people communicate with each other and with local public services, the Commission was reviewing the way it engages and involves local communities in its work. The Commission planned to develop new structures to support community engagement in the year ahead e.g. more site visits, newsletter and social media.

8.5 Skills, Economy & Growth

8.5.1 The Chair noted that the Commission has assessed the impact of covid on local business and has consulted a wide range of stakeholders to understand what support was needed to help them recover.

8.5.2 The Commission would also be scrutinising the Emergency Transport Plan to understand the principles of this approach and the likely impact it would have in the community. The timing of this had yet to be agreed given that local data was still being collated within local schemes.

8.5.3 The Commission would also assess how local high streets had been impacted by the pandemic and to ascertain the nature and level of support that these local community hubs might require from the council and its partners.

8.5.4 As Covid will have long term impacts on different industries, the Commission would be assessing what skill redevelopment offer could be offered by the Council and training partners to help the local workforce adapt.

8.6 Audit Committee

8.6.1 The Chair noted that the Audit Committee would continue to assess financial forward planning of the Council. There were two significant risks for the Council going forward which would be monitored by the Committee these being the risks posed by Covid on the general policy making function of the Council and Brexit.

8.6.2 A deep dive into Capital Estimates would take place in the forthcoming year to help develop wider understanding and expertise in the way that capital is managed across the council.

8.7 The Chair thanked Commissions for reporting back on their work programmes for 2020/21.

9 Any Other Business

9.1 There was no other business and the meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.30 pm