

London Borough of Islington

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 22 February 2024

Non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 22 February 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Williamson (Chair), Convery (Vice-Chair),
Chowdhury, Jackson, Clarke, McHugh, Ibrahim,
Weekes, Staff and Hamdache

Also Present: **Councillors:** Ward

Councillor Flora Williamson in the Chair

175 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Apologies were received from Cllrs Chapman and Pandor.

176 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
None.

177 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**
None.

178 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 January 2024 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

179 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**
The Chair provided an update on evidence received as part of the scrutiny review of Complex ASB. Visits had been held with the Safeguarding Adults Board, the Housing Intensive Team and the Street Outreach Team. A further session would be held to observe a MARAC meeting and Islington Law Centre had also been invited to contribute evidence to the review.

180 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**
None.

181 **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMPLEX ASB - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item D1)**
Miriam Bullock, Deputy Director of Public Health, together with Liz McGrath, Clinical Director, and Jane Palmer, Criminal Justice Pathways Coordinator, of Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust (C&I), presented to the committee on taking a public

health approach to ASB, and in particular on the links between mental health, drug and alcohol needs, and ASB issues.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- C&I's drug and alcohol services worked closely with council services, including the Street Population team, the Cuckooing Team and Housing Officers. The service offered outreach work that sought to engage people in treatment and offered rapid prescription of opiate replacements. C&I also worked closely with council officers through the MARAC process, as well as with GP surgeries, voluntary sector partners and others.
- Following a question on the impact of austerity on drug and alcohol services, it was advised that additional investment had been made into the service in recent years, including extra investment to develop new pathways into treatment for those in the criminal justice system. Outreach services had continued to be funded despite the financial challenges facing public services. The most significant challenge was getting people to engage in treatment and stay in treatment. There were no waiting lists in drug and alcohol services.
- Outreach work had developed over recent years by targeting outreach at hard to reach groups, including women and those in the criminal justice system.
- It was asked if the provision of supervised injection facilities in Islington would allow for better opportunities for intervention. In response, it was commented that this could be considered a harm reduction approach, however there were already opportunities for intervention through needle exchanges and other services. Services were proactive in engaging with clients and welcoming them into treatment services.
- In relation to mental health, a member commented on the need to consider the mental health of those experiencing ASB, as well as that perpetrators of ASB may have mental health issues.
- It was commented that mental health services could recommend rehousing to housing providers if they are aware of ASB issues affecting the mental health of their clients.
- Following a question on barriers to accessing drug and alcohol services, it was commented that women tended to have increased complexity of need and face stigma in accessing services. Addiction services were now linking with other women's services to make them easier to access.
- It was reported that some of those accessing addiction services had positive outcomes. This was particularly the case when addiction issues were not intergenerational. When there was a history of addiction in families, then issues could be much more entrenched.
- Councillors welcomed the holistic approach to viewing ASB through a public health lens, as detailed in the report, and queried how a public health approach to ASB could have a wider impact on policy. Officers emphasised that housing was a strong determinant of health; roughsleeping, homelessness and insecure housing tenure could have a significant impact on both physical and mental health, as could overcrowding and damp and mould issues.
- A member commented on common mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression, how these could manifest as ASB issues, and the

need to address the drivers of these issues, including the housing crisis, housing density, cultural issues around alcohol misuse, and other factors. Islington had one of the highest rates of mental health prevalence in London. An early intervention approach would focus on determinants of poor mental health before needs escalate.

- It was confirmed that drug and alcohol services worked with the police on joint patrols as part of their outreach work.
- Following a question on drug-taking in parks and public concerns about needles, it was confirmed that there were various pharmacies and other sites that operated needle exchange schemes. C&I worked with council services to encourage those taking drugs in public to enter treatment, but building trust was key to drug-users choosing to engage in treatment.
- There were challenges around obtaining accurate data on the level of need among drug users.
- A member commented on Islington's diversity and the need for services to be culturally competent to best meet the needs of the borough's communities. It was advised that there was a specific drug treatment pathway for men from a Black African background, and both mental health and addiction services employed key workers from a range of different backgrounds. It was intended for drug and alcohol support services to be culturally aware. The services also engaged with community leaders, community centres, and had provided training to community groups with relatively lower levels of engagement to encourage take-up. There were also two workers who specialised in working with the LGBT+ community.
- In response to a question on early intervention approaches, it was noted that those with drug and alcohol dependency had typically experienced trauma, poverty, and instability in their lives. Early intervention approaches would need to consider wider determinants, including housing, education, and support for families.
- Drug and alcohol education was provided in schools as a way of engaging with young people.
- The Committee considered the difficulty of getting those with complex needs to engage with drug, alcohol and mental health support services. Unless someone was exhibiting behaviours significant enough to require them to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act, then there was no power to compel people to engage in treatment and support.
- Recently there had been increased investment in mental health services for less severe problems; it was intended to offer more community based mental health support for those with lower needs. The service offer was still being developed, but it was intended to be easier to access.
- A member asked, if the officers and representatives of C&I could do one thing to improve ASB outcomes, what it would be. In response, all agreed that addressing the housing crisis would make the biggest impact on people's wellbeing.

The Chair thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

182

12 MONTH UPDATE ON SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COVID-19, IMPACT ON COUNCIL FINANCES AND LOCAL BUSINESS (Item D2)

Stephen Biggs, Corporate Director of Community Wealth Building, and Paul Clarke, Director of Finance, introduced the report summarising progress made since the previous scrutiny review.

Although many effects of the Covid pandemic had since passed, the pressures on the local economy and council budgets had remained, with the fuel crisis, cost of living crisis and other changes over recent years. Officers summarised the work to support local businesses, and the work to address the challenging financial position in local government.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Following a question on the impact of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods on local businesses, officers commented that there was a need to find the right balance, and although some businesses thought the changes had impacted on trade, other businesses had adapted and benefitted. It was recognised that initial engagement with businesses could have been more robust, and the overall approach to engagement had developed as the People Friendly Streets programme had progressed.
- It was commented that Covid had a significant financial impact on adult social care; it was thought there was a cohort who became unwell and reliant on care services earlier due to the impact of the pandemic, or who had more complex needs than they otherwise would have done. Officers summarised the work to manage overspends in adult social care through managing demand where possible.
- A member commented on the importance of investing in the local economy through procurement and suggested that KPIs should be reviewed to enable local investment to be monitored. Officers advised that this was being considered. A member suggested that it would be helpful to have comparative data to other London boroughs.
- A member commented that work to develop new affordable workspace in the borough had been impressive, but commented on the need to audit those providing affordable workspace to ensure that they were benefitting islington residents.
- A member noted the positive work to support the local economy and council finances, commending the council for its work despite significant challenges.

RESOLVED:

That the progress since the scrutiny review be noted.

183

UPDATE ON RESIDENT EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME (Item D3)

Councillor Ward, Executive Member for Finance, Performance and Planning, Raj Chand, Corporate Director – Community Engagement and Wellbeing, and Manny Lewis, Head of Customer Access, presented to the committee on the implementation of the resident experience programme.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee noted the progress made in complaints performance, the work to update systems at the contact centre, significant improvements in telephone performance, improvements to the council's website, and new developments such as the Access Islington hubs which brought local services together to make them accessible to residents.
- The council was exploring the potential for AI in handling common customer queries, but it was recognised that this had to be considered very carefully before it was implemented. In particular, any ethical concerns about the use of resident data and system bias would have to be addressed.
- The Committee noted concerns about some residents being digitally excluded and unable to use online services. Officers commented that enabling residents to complete more simple transactions online through automated systems would free up officer time to focus on those residents who needed extra support and complex cases.
- A discussion was had on the processes for responding to member enquiries and how response times can be monitored and improved.
- Officers explained the work to develop a complaints tracking solution that would allow greater management oversight and also help to identify trends and themes in complaints.
- A member highlighted that the council website contained limited information about Access Islington Hubs and requested that this be reviewed.
- It was commented that changes and improvements to customer services would be discussed with resident working groups. The Committee noted the need for diverse representation on these groups to ensure that the needs of all communities were reflected.

The Committee noted the update and thanked officers for their attendance.

184 **MONITORING ITEM (Item D4)**
Noted.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

CHAIR