

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**COORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING**

**1000 hours on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2023, Committee Rooms 3 and 4,**

**Council House, Victoria Square, B1 1BB**

**Action Notes**

**Present:**

Councillor Albert Bore (Chair)

Councillors: Jack Deakin, Mohammed Idrees, Ewan Mackey, Kerry Jenkins, Saima Suleman, Alex Yip, Roger Harmer, Deirdre Alden.

**Also Present:**

Richard Brooks, Director - Strategy, Equality & Partnerships

Jamila Mensah, Programme Manager, Partnerships Insight and Prevention

Saba Rai, Behaviour Service Integration manager, Adult Social Care

Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Ed Brown, Committee Officer

**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chair advised the meeting to note that this meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's meeting You Tube site ([www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6\\_5dnVnYlw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw)) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Akhlaq Ahmed, Mick Brown and Chaman Lal

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None.

**4. ACTION NOTES – 17 March 2023**

The Action Notes of the meeting on the 17 March were agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

- That the action notes of the formal meeting held on 17 March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**5. CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER**

**RESOLVED:**

- That Action Tracker be noted

**6. UPDATE REPORT ON THE CUSTOMER SERVICES PROGRAMME**

The Chair of the Customer Services Task and Finish Group provided a verbal update.

Key points highlighted were:

- At its January meeting, the Co-ordinating O&S Committee noted that Task & Finish Group on the Customer Service Programme had completed its review of the recommendations submitted to service leads for Bereavement Services, Housing Repairs, Waste Management and Highways, and agreed that the Task & Finish Group should take further action to ensure that the identified end-to-end customer service improvements were implemented.
- The Committee also supported the Task & Finish Group in undertaking further work to scrutinise how senior managers are responding to feedback from the Customer Standards Workshops to embed the Customer Service Strategy.
- A meeting had been arranged for 20 April between the Chair, the Assistant Director (Programmes, Performance and Improvement), the Assistant Director (Customer Services) along with Overview & Scrutiny officers, to programme the further work of the Task & Finish Group.
- Results of staff engagement conducted during the roll out of the Customer Standards Workshops between September 2022 and March 2023 was now available and would be presented to the Task & Finish Group at an early date.

**RESOLVED:**

- That the verbal update on the work of the Customer Services Task and Finish Group be noted.

## **7. REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

(See Document No 1)

A report of the Ukraine Response Task and Finish Group, chaired by Councillor Bore, was submitted, updating the Committee on the outcome of the Ukraine Response Task and Finish Group, which reviewed the Council's response to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the key issues and performance of the programme following the initial report to the Committee on the 27 of January 2023.

The Chair thanked the officers involved as their assistance had been invaluable. He noted that the end-point had been achieved in a short period of time. He emphasised that the report was a critique of the programme rather than a criticism and it was important to try and look back in a positive way and learn lessons. He drew attention to the recommendations on the report on how the experience of the programme could be used to inform both similar work in the future and the rest of the current programme.

The Chair stated that whilst the relevant Cabinet member was not present, they would need to respond to the report in due course.

The Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships presented the report, and the Key points highlighted were:

- There was a great deal of information presented in the report. This reflected the large amount of work undertaken by the team.
- Two important lessons stood out from the experience which would need to be disseminated across the organisation:
  1. The importance of engaging early with the communities affected This had initially not been done very effectively, however, efforts had been made to get this right with involvement of the Council's new public participation team. This is now an exemplary programme through its engagement with stakeholders, hosts and guests, with these efforts now being reflected back in positive feedback.
  2. There had been challenges concerning the undertaking of contracts in this environment and there had been too much risk focussed on a single provider. As such there was a need to diversify the risk and spread it across a range of providers.
- It was acknowledged that the team had been faced with situations in which they were constrained regarding who they could contract with.
- The team were pleased to take on these lessons and disseminate them.

Committee members made comments and raised questions. The following were among the main points raised:

- The task and finish process was acknowledged as a good process. It was important when a new challenge arose that lessons were learned quickly. This process should be an important part of the toolkit for scrutiny going forward. It was important to look at lessons when things did not go to plan in order to consider what could be done in future.
- There was an impression that in such situations it was inevitable that the immediate response would come from the community. Bureaucracy was often time consuming and slowed the process down, therefore it was good for the Council to work with community organisations from the outset, as often they would be the first to start galvanising a response. This was a lesson also learnt from Covid. The members of the community who stepped in to support the Ukraine Response were thanked.
- This was a very new way of responding to a refugee crisis, however, this further highlighted the need to learn from the experience as Birmingham was a City of Sanctuary.
- The issue of English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision was raised and the need to get refugees proficient in English as quickly as possible was stressed. It was recognised that there were many people in the city with multiple language skills and this could be a resource.
- The issue of integration in schools was raised and demographic stresses were recognised, particularly with regard to a peak in the birth-rate 10-12 years ago meaning that there was pressure on school places for this particular age-group. Therefore, it was important to engage with schools where refugee children of that age-group were coming in. Feedback from schools on tackling pressures on school places where there is a need to respond to a refugee or similar crisis was welcomed.
- Officers had been diligent in making the programme happen and had provided an innovative way of how the Council could act in a short period of time due to the commitment of officers.
- There had been issues surrounding misconceptions and frustration from residents. Such misconceptions had led to the frustration seen at the January scrutiny meeting.

- There had been issues surrounding how the contracts were awarded to PwC and Refugee Action. With PwC the focus is on pro-bono work leading to a substantial contract, whilst in this case it was made clear this wasn't the expectation, this is something that the Council needs to guard against. In relation to the Refugee Action contract, it was recognised that Council officers were restricted on the organisations they could approach. In this instance, Refugee Action were the only organisation that could take on the work. Officers had not had the freedom to approach multiple organisations. Residents had seen the Council as responsible, and this misconception had built frustration and misunderstandings amongst residents.
- A lesson that could be learned from the contract awards was the need for early diversification to allow a big pool of potential contractors to be drawn from.
- Another key lesson was the need for openness and transparency from officers who worked on delegated authority.
- Residents needed to know what the Council was doing and that the Council was acting to the best of its ability.
- There was a need for early readiness and the ability to respond quickly.
- It was desirable that there would be good follow-up on the recommendations going forward.
- This work had been unprecedented for Birmingham both in its scale and in terms of the trauma faced by the refugees.
- The programme had taken time and learning and there was a need to acknowledge the work of the public sector and charities and the goodwill of residents.
- The officers were again thanked as the programme would not have happened without their hard work. It was further stressed that the next steps were important and the lessons-learned approach needed to be taken. Whilst the task and Finish work was important to scrutiny, it would only be effective if officers and members committed to seeing it through.
- It was positive that there had been a cross-party approach to the report as there was a need to be united in this kind of work.
- The need for transparency and openness was reiterated, and it was highlighted that scrutiny should be a 'critical friend' all the way through the process. The importance of understanding Council processes and the need to inform others

about how these worked and any constraints were stressed as this could mitigate misunderstanding, miscommunication and misconception.

- There remained challenges across the city in terms of the housing response. It was necessary to consider what could be done to make offers better.
- Task and finish groups were seen as a useful tool to have to understand different processes.
- In response to a query about the role of housing associations and the private sector, the Committee were informed that there was an issue of housing provision, and the government would not financially support housing refugees. Refugee Action had sub-contracted to Spring Housing, however, this was done to signpost guests/refugees rather than providing practical support, such as assisting with property viewings, as part of the helping them to move on to their own accommodation. It was recognised that there was a need to engage with the market such as housing associations, and the Council's housing team were working with these organisations via their usual forums so guests could learn how to move on and be supported. However, it was recognised that capacity would always be a challenge.
- It was ultimately expected that over 300 Ukrainian households would come through the programme who would ultimately need to move on from their accommodation and be rehoused in the city following the end of their hosting arrangement. There was existing pressure on housing in the city, both in social and private housing. A support package had been created to support guests moving into the private rental accommodation. This had worked successfully so far with around 50 families allocated to move on and 44 being processed. People were competing for housing resources.

**RESOLVED:**

- That the Committee submit final recommendations, set out in Appendix A, to the Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Community Safety and Equalities for a formal response.
- That the full report, provided at Appendix B, setting out the supporting evidence be noted and submitted to the Chief Executive, for the Chief Executive to report back to the Committee on any management actions arising from consideration of the full report.

## **8. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Chair informed the Committee that he would be in discussion with members about the future of scrutiny and he had emailed out on the morning of the meeting to both the opposition groups and the Labour group the recommendations that he would be putting forwards in terms of future remits. He also intended to discuss with the Committee over the coming weeks how they might set about their work in 2023/24 as there were lessons to be learned from the current municipal year.

### **RESOLVED:-**

- That the Customer Services Task and Finish Group continue into the next municipal year.
- That the work programmes updates for the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.
- That the response to the Homes for Ukraine Task and Finish Group be included in the Committee's work programme for 2023/24.
- That the Committee note that the Scrutiny Inquiries on Children and Young People's mental health and on Child Criminal Exploitation would continue into the new municipal year and that the Inquiries would continue under the existing terms of reference including the Lead Committee and membership of the Task and Finish Groups.

## **9. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)**

There were no requests for Call In for Co-ordinating OSC.

## **10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business.

## **11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that next meeting of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 10:40