

## London Councils

Minutes of the London Councils Leaders' Committee held virtually on 13 October 2020

Cllr Georgia Gould chaired the meeting

Present:

BARKING AND DAGENHAM  
BARNET  
BEXLEY  
BRENT  
BROMLEY  
CAMDEN  
CROYDON  
EALING  
ENFIELD  
GREENWICH  
HACKNEY  
HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM  
HARINGEY  
HARROW  
HAVERING  
HAVERING  
HILLINGDON  
HOUNSLOW  
ISLINGTON  
KENSINGTON & CHELSEA  
KINGSTON  
LAMBETH  
LEWISHAM  
MERTON  
NEWHAM  
REDBRIDGE  
RICHMOND UPON THAMES  
SOUTHWARK  
SUTTON  
TOWER HAMLETS  
WALTHAM FOREST  
WANDSWORTH  
WESTMINSTER  
CITY OF LONDON

Cllr Darren Rodwell  
Cllr Daniel Thomas  
Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE  
Cllr Muhammed Butt  
Cllr Colin Smith  
Cllr Georgia Gould  
Cllr Tony Newman  
Cllr Julian Bell  
Cllr Nesil Caliskan  
Cllr Danny Thorpe  
Mayor Philip Glanville  
Cllr Sue Fennimore  
Cllr Joseph Ejiofor  
Cllr Graham Henson  
Cllr Damian White  
Cllr Roger Ramsey  
Cllr Jonathan Bianco (Deputy)  
Cllr Steve Curran  
Cllr Richard Watts  
Cllr Elizabeth Campbell  
Cllr Caroline Kerr  
Cllr Jack Hopkins  
Mayor Damien Egan  
Cllr Stephen Alambritis MBE  
Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz  
Cllr Jas Athwal  
Cllr Gareth Roberts  
Cllr Kieron Williams  
Cllr Ruth Dombey OBE  
Mayor John Biggs  
Cllr Clare Coghill  
Cllr Ravi Govindia  
Cllr Rachael Robathan  
Ms Catherine McGuinness

Apologies:

HILLINGDON

Cllr Sir Ray Puddifoot MBE

Officers of London Councils and London Boroughs were in attendance.

### 1. Apologies for Absence and Announcement of Deputies

The apologies and deputies listed above were noted.

### 2. Declarations of interest

Cllr Julian Bell declared an interest in that he was a member of the TfL Board.

### **3. Minutes of the Leaders' Committee 7 July 2020**

The minutes of the Leaders' Committee meeting of 7 July 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

### **4. Covid-19 Response: Rapid Identification of Lessons Learned**

The Chair reminded members that at its meeting in July it had agreed that a rapid identification of the lessons learned from London local government's collective response to COVID 19 between March and July 2020 should be undertaken. Mike Cooke, the former Chief Executive of the LB Camden, had been commissioned to undertake the work and the Chair invited him to present a summary of key findings.

Mr Cooke reported that he had undertaken 25 interviews to underpin his work. He acknowledged that this was a fast moving situation and there was always a risk of 'laf' and he was conscious that some issues had already moved on since undertaking the work. There was a strong sense that boroughs had coped very well, had kept most services going and had done an excellent job in supporting the most vulnerable members of their communities. He itemised a number of areas where boroughs felt that the response had gone well. By the same token, there was a widely held view that the response had, in its earlier phases, been more difficult than it needed to be. He set out areas where things had gone less well.

Based upon his findings, Mr Cooke had made some recommendations to Leaders' Committee as well as to chief executives.

Members made the following comments:

- the rapid identification of lessons learned was widely welcomed by Leaders and members felt that it was a balanced and very helpful analysis;
- governance and structures needed to be appropriate to enable London to live with Covid-19;
- the toll on individuals leading the response to the Pandemic should be considered as well as the support that could be shared;

- London as a region should be able to make effective and flexible Pandemic decision making, and, within that, the relationship between local and central government should also be considered.

The Chair thanked Mr Cook for his work and for presenting the findings.

Leaders' Committee noted the identified findings from the lessons learned exercise and agreed the establishment of, membership and terms of reference for, a London Councils Pandemic Steering Committee.

## **5. Supporting Councils to improve services and practice by addressing Racial Inequality**

The Chair began the item by noting that there had been a disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME communities in London, and that the work in the report addressing racial inequality recognised that context. She was grateful for the work that Cllr Butt, Portfolio Holder for Welfare, Social Inclusion and Empowerment, Kim Smith, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and London Councils officers had begun..

Cllr Butt introduced the report by informing members that:

- the Pandemic had further highlighted some of the structural inequalities that minority communities faced;
- the work presented an opportunity for boroughs to influence and tackle barriers to equality across London;
- as well as approaching the issue from a pan London perspective, it was also important to look at individual boroughs had provided support for minority communities;
- a lot of work had already been carried out on improvement in boroughs;
- the sharing of best practice was crucial as was the commitment to follow that best practice.

Members made the following comments:

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- there was recognition that BAME communities were under-represented across London in local government leadership roles, and it was important for development programmes to address diversity issues when identifying future talent;
- the current work of the London Crime Reduction Board in connection with MPS's efforts to build community trust and confidence in policing was recognised;

- there was value in collating borough activity and sharing best practice, although recognising that all boroughs were different;
- through the Greater London Employers Forum, issues of diversity and career progression were being actively discussed by London HR Directors;
- the work of various boroughs – Ealing, Sutton and Camden – as well as the City of London Corporation on various aspects of this agenda was cited.
- the City of London had set up a Tackling Racism task force and were consulting on the future of certain historic statues.

Cllr Butt thanked members for their input and agreed the importance of capturing good practice and in sharing examples to improve services, and the creation of opportunities for people to progress through leadership.

Leaders' Committee:

- Noted the progress made to date in co-designing a programme of activity with the Portfolio Holder and senior borough officers, including the diagram at Appendix A
- Agreed the London Councils' statement set out in Appendix B of the report.

## **6. Local Government Finance Update**

The Director of Local Government Performance and Finance introduced the report, commenting that:

- the report set out an update covering three areas: Covid-19 financial impact; the comprehensive spending review; and business rates reform;
- regarding Covid-19, since the report had been drafted the boroughs' monthly financial returns for September had been received, which had showed little change from previous months; the funding gap remained at £1.4 billion;
- however additional support would be made available via the projected income from sales, fees and charges (£230 million), a number of additional funding streams (£200 million) and a potential £170 million in recently reported Government support, which would reduce the gap to around £800 million;
- the spending review was due at the end of November, and a summary of the London Councils response was appended to the report: there was strong emphasis within the response on securing greater certainty on the future financial position;
- within the response one of the asks related to the treatment of DSG grant deficit, where a statutory override to the accounting arrangements had been asked for; this

had now potentially been agreed by Government, and would provide some short term certainty for those boroughs with deficits;

- ongoing lobbying was taking place and Leaders were invited to do the same with their local MPs
- regarding the business rates review, the first submission to Treasury had now been made, and the second part of the review would look at potential alternatives to supplement or replace the current business rates system;
- Government had also asked for boroughs' intentions regarding the London pool, and the report recommended continuance of the pan-London business rates pool on the same basis as in 2021-22.

In response to a question from a member, asking whether some Covid-19 costs initially incurred by boroughs would eventually disappear, it was confirmed that while there were some one off costs relating to setting up arrangements, many of the costs would continue, and there might also be increased costs arising from future demand. These would be built into the estimated future funding requirements. It was felt that housing costs should be included as part of that requirement.

Leaders' Committee:

- noted the latest government funding announcements and estimated financial impact of Covid-19 on London local government;
- noted the lobbying activity with regard to the CSR and the Fundamental Review of Business Rates; and
- agreed in principle to continue the pan-London business rates pool on the same basis as currently in 2021-22.

## **7. Planning White Paper**

Cllr Rodwell introduced the item which set out a draft London Councils response to the Consultation on the Planning White Paper. It informed members that the White Paper constituted proposals aimed at simplifying the planning process, but that there were concerns across boroughs regarding increased centralisation and the potential impacts on the ability of local residents to have a voice about proposed developments.

Members made the following comments::

- there was a concern that the changes to the Section 106 and CIL arrangements could contribute to further difficulties in securing adequate supply of housing in

London. It was also noted that given London land values, a national approach was potentially disadvantageous for London boroughs and local communities;

- boroughs needed to acknowledge that they had an important part to play in accelerating housebuilding;
- based upon previous planning reforms, there was a danger that the uncertainty caused by a prolonged debate over these proposals would have a destabilising impact on development activity and housebuilding;abilising effect;
- the White Paper did not sufficiently address London's mix of growth and conservation areas, or the type of housing required in the capital
- London's delivery of new housing had been adversely affected by availability and cost of land, rather than issues with the planning process

The Chair thanked members for their comments. She recognised the commitment that London needed to make regarding the delivery of housing numbers, but this made it all the more important that the right types of planning tool were available to help boroughs to deliver. .

Members thought that the draft Consultation response was a good and strong articulation of the concerns that existed in boroughs and agreed it as the basis of the London Councils response.

## **8. Secure Children's Homes**

Cllr Elizabeth Campbell introduced the report, stating that:

- the paper provided the background to a review currently being undertaken by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS), in partnership with NHS England (London Region) regarding future provision of secure children's accommodation;
- the paper summarised the setting up of a pan London commissioning model for children in need of secure placements, providing two 12 bed children's homes closer to London with an additional 6 beds for justice placements and two step down units of 6 places to support children transitioning out of secure accommodation;
- a partnership of London boroughs would be established, via a separate legal entity, to thereby reducing the risks associated with placing responsibility within a single borough.

Members endorsed the work being undertaken by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services.

## **9. Progress on Pledges - Update on Progress in Supporting Business and Inclusive Growth**

Cllr Clare Coghill introduced the paper, commenting that the implementation of the Pledges to support business had been affected by the Pandemic, but had since been reviewed. The revised Pledges would be discussed with economic development cabinet members on 3rd November, after which they would be incorporated into local recovery plans.

Cllr Coghill thanked Leaders for the involvement of their Cabinet members during the Pandemic to help protect London's businesses.

The Chair added that Covid-19 had deepened the already substantial issues regarding skills and employment within London's labour market. She noted the increase in Universal Credit claims and the high furlough rates in the capital, and also the long term impact on culture and tourism. In relation to the Pledges, one of the stated missions was to support unemployed Londoners into work via skills academies and green economy jobs

Cllr Graham Henson thanked Cllr Coghill for the work she and the Chair were doing in this area. Within his borough he recognised that there were a large number of low paid and zero hours contract workers and people currently furloughed: it was important for anyone losing their jobs that they could be reskilled, and welcomed the positive opportunities for jobs in London.

Members noted the report.

## **10. Feedback from Joint Boards**

### London Economic Action Partnership Board (LEAP)

The most recent meeting had considered:

- Covid-19 recovery;
- The Skills for Londoners Capital Fund;
- UK shared Prosperity Fund.

### Skills for Londoners Board and Business Partnership Board

The Skills for Londoners Board had now combined with the Mayor's Business Advisory Board, and at the first meeting it had discussed:

- the rapid action required to support the sustainability of adult education during the Pandemic;
- the findings from the OECD's presentation on trends affecting London's skills and labour market;
- the London recovery work;
- the evaluation of the first year of the decentralized adult education budget.

#### London Crime Reduction Board

The Board had most recently discussed:

- the work to reflect the make up of London in policing;
- the challenges of Covid-19 restrictions within the Courts system.

#### Homes for Londoners Board (HfL)

The most recent meeting had discussed:

- the Quarter 1 reduction in planning applications and housing completions;
- the launch of the new housing investment scheme.

### **11. Minutes and Summaries.**

Leader's Committee agreed to note the minutes and summaries of:

- Executive Minutes – 19 May 2020
- TEC Minutes – 11 June 2020
- Executive Minutes – 16 June 2020
- Audit Committee Minutes – 17 June 2020
- Grants Minutes – 8 July 2020
- TEC Executive Minutes – 16 July 2020
- Audit Committee Minutes – 17 September 2020



The Chair agreed to remove the press and public in that the following items were exempt from the Access to Information Regulations, and via Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Section 3) in that the items related to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).