

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Policy Overview Committee held on Tuesday 8 September 2020 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M J Davis (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs. M I Peters (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs. S P Butterfill
Councillor L H K Edie
Councillor R A S Jones
Councillor D T Nicklen
Councillor T Oliver
Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE
Councillor Mrs. R F Storey

ABSENT: None

Dartford Borough Council Officers

Sheri Green	– Strategic Director (External Services)
Mark Salisbury	– EARS/CSU Manager
Nick Chapman	– Assist. Environmental Health Manager
James Fox	– Scientific Officer

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman welcomed Members and Officers to the second virtual meeting of the Council's Policy Overview Committee (POC), and confirmed that the proceedings were being streamed live via YouTube.

He advised Members that the first virtual meeting of the POC on 16 June 2020 had attracted 91 views on YouTube, which he considered to be a significant success. He also confirmed that Members had received the follow-up information on GP practices in Dartford [June meeting Min. No. 56 page 6 second bullet point refers], and asked that the appropriate NHS representative be invited to the March 2021 POC meeting.

There were no apologies for absence.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

62. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE POLICY OVERVIEW MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2020

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RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Policy Overview Committee held on 16 June 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of those proceedings.

63. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman confirmed that there were no urgent items for Members to consider.

64. TO CONSIDER REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other Committees for Members to consider.

65. REGULATION 9 NOTICE

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the contents of the Regulation 9 Notice [Forward Plan] for the period 14 August 2020 to 31 December 2020.

66. AIR QUALITY ANNUAL STATUS REPORT 2020

The report from the Council's Scientific Officer (SO) enclosed at Appendix A, the Council's Air Quality Annual Status Report for 2020.

Members were asked to note the contents of both documents prior to submission of the 2020 Air Quality Annual Status Report (Appendix A), to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), in fulfilment of Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 for Local Air Quality Management, a statutory requirement for all local authorities.

The covering report from the SO provided Members with a summary of the principal points contained in the 2020 ASR, including details of pollution levels across the Borough and within the four declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), plus an update on the progress in developing the Council's new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) to reduce emissions and pollution within the four designated AQMAs. The SO and the Council's Assistant Environmental Health Manager (AEHM), were in attendance to respond to Members' questions.

The Chairman commended the 2020 ASR and covering report to the Committee as positive documents which confirmed that vehicle emissions and pollution levels in Dartford for the period under review had fallen. He proposed that debate proceed on the basis that Members had read both documents, and that the SO and the AEHM respond to any questions or concerns that Members might have. In that context, he asked if there were any specific reasons for the positive decrease in emission and pollution levels recorded in the 2020 AQA.

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The SO advised Members that improvements in vehicle manufacture, and the increasing advent of electrical cars, were the two main contributory factors that had achieved the reduction in emissions and pollution levels in Dartford for the period under review. No specific data was available for the number of electrical vehicles operating in Dartford, but registration of electrical cars had risen sharply in the period under review, albeit from a low starting point.

The Chairman sought confirmation that the aim of the annual Air Quality Status exercise was to continuously improve the reduction of emissions and pollution levels in the Borough, *not* merely to meet Government targets.

The AEHM advised Members that there were no recognised safe levels for emissions and pollution, and that the aim was to drive towards the lowest possible levels for both vehicle emission and overall pollution levels. In response to a follow-up question from the Chairman, concerning the location and instalment of passive diffusion tubes, the SO advised that current sites and any possible relocations/additions of diffusion tubes, would form part of the current update exercise of the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) being undertaken by Bureau Veritas (BV) a specialist external environmental consultant.

In response to a variety of further questions and expressions of concern from the Chairman and other Members, the AEHM and SO confirmed the following points:

- Potential 'pinch-points' in Dartford's roads network continued to be assessed as part of the review of the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) including; the A2 Junction and Dartford Crossing, the potential impact of the Ebbsfleet Garden City Development, and the proposed London Resort development in the Swanscombe Peninsular; in terms of increased vehicles and consequent emission levels;
- Traffic levels at the 'Blue Star' Junction for the A2/M25 at both the Brent side of the Fleet estate and Queens Gardens at the West end of the estate, were not currently monitored, given that housing in those areas was set well back from the road and vehicle emissions therefore posed less of a risk to residents;
- The review of the current AQAPs [produced in 2001 and 2009] and the production of a new AQAP for the Borough, involved multi-staged pieces of work, including complex and detailed computer modelling being undertaken by BV, in the absence of such expertise within the Council;
- The initial run of computer modelling by BV had indicated that the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) along the A226 at London Road could be potentially be revoked [given the fall in recorded vehicle emission levels]. However, a final decision on revocation of the long-standing AQMA would not be taken until a further run of computer modelling had been undertaken by BV. Those results were expected later in the year, and would be presented to Cabinet for decision on the retention or revocation of the AQMA. Any changes to the existing AQMA arrangements approved by Cabinet, would be subject to

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consultation with partners, Members and the public, prior to implementation [report para 3.35 refers];

- The second part of the BV modelling exercise would concentrate on motor vehicle types and models as primary pollutants, and include the consideration of measures to combat emissions dependant on the pollutant source, including implementation of engine stop and re-start measures for queuing traffic as appropriate;
- The Council were not required to monitor particles smaller than PM10 and had no equipment capable of assessing PM2.5 sized particles. However, the new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) being developed with the aid of Bureau Veritas (BV), would include appropriate measures to reduce PM2.5 particles, as well as other priority pollutants [report para 3.13 refers].

The Chairman thanked the Scientific Officer and the Assistant Environmental Health Manager for presenting a very comprehensive and positive 2020 Air Quality Annual Status report to the Committee, and their responses to Members questions and expressions of concern. Given that the 2020 AQA report had included analysis of the higher traffic levels prevailing prior to COVID-19 lock-down measures being imposed, he expressed the cautious hope that the 2021 AQA report would continue the positive trend, and record a further reduction in vehicle emission and pollution levels for the Borough.

He asked that the views of the POC (as recorded in the meeting minutes), be noted by Officers in their formulation of the Council's new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) with Bureau Veritas, prior to the submission of final recommendations to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the contents of the covering report, together with the 2020 Annual Status Report [attached at Appendix A to the report];
2. That the views and concerns of the POC [as minuted above] be included in Officer's formulation of the Council's new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), prior to final submission to Cabinet.

67. COUNCIL RESILIENCE & EMERGENCY PLANNING (R&EP) MEASURES

The Chairman advised Members that he had intended to consider the Council's emergency planning measures and general preparedness in times of crisis, *prior* to the onset of the continuing Coronavirus pandemic. His subsequent draw-down of the topic was forward looking in aim, and *not* designed to repeat the Scrutiny Committee's recent examination of the Council's response to COVID-19 [Scrutiny Min. No 32 refers].

He confirmed that following publication of the agenda, Members had received individual copies of the DBC Resilience and Emergencies PowerPoint presentation, prepared by the Enforcement & Regulatory Services (EARS) Manager, as the responsible officer for formulating the Council's Strategic and Emergency Planning measures.

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The EARS Manager reprised his presentation for the Committee, before responding to Members questions. The presentation covered the following principal areas:

Aims and Objectives

- DBC's statutory responsibilities for Emergency Planning and Business Continuity;
- Strategic level emergency management roles and responsibilities;
- Breadth and scope of R&EP duties;
- Understanding role of DBC staff and manager roles within multi-agency Emergency Planning & Response;
- The role of the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF)

The definition of an 'Emergency' under Part 1 of the Civil Contingency Act (CCA) 2004, formulated in response to the Foot & Mouth Outbreak was:

*'An event or situation which threatened serious damage to **human welfare** in a place in the UK, the **environment** of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatened serious damage to the **security** of the UK.'*

The Council's responsibilities under the 2004 Act were:

- Risk Assessment
- Emergency Planning
- Business Continuity Management (BCM)
- Warning – Informing & Alerting the Public
- Information Sharing
- Co-operation [across multi agencies]

The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) was one of 42 local resilience forums (LRFs) set up in response to the 2004 Act, which had established a new legislative framework for civil protection in the event of emergencies in the UK. LRFs were aligned with police force areas, with member agencies working together to provide a combined response and minimise impact, when emergencies occurred.

LRFs were not legal entities in their own right, but formed a partnership of member agencies, including those defined under the 2004 Act by responder 'categories':

Category 1 responders were organisations directly involved in the response to an emergency and were subject to a number of civil protection obligations. They included: Kent Police, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, SE Coast & Ambulance Service, Maritime & Coastguard Agency, local authorities, primary care aspects of the NHS and others;

Category 2 responders were organisations that had a less direct role to play in response to emergencies e.g. utility companies, infrastructure (Network Rail) and others. The Act did *not* place stringent duties on such organisations,

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but they were required to share appropriate information and cooperate fully with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), to manage emergencies.

The Kent LRF also included members *not* categorised under the Act, but who had a significant role to play in the event of emergencies e.g. the military and the voluntary sector.

DBC Emergency Roles

- Liaison with emergency services, government, other local authorities, voluntary sector, utility companies and others as required;
- Welfare and trauma support within Survivor Reception and Rest Centres and across the wider community, including the provision of transport to evacuees as necessary;
- Facilitate repairs, demolition, clearance, public transport, and waste disposal as required, via the Council's Housing and Waste & Parks Departments, in consultation with KCC as appropriate;
- Media management (with emergency services) and provision of public information, led by the Council's Communications Manager with the support of the Leader and all Ward Members as appropriate

The Council's Integrated Emergency Management process in the event of emergencies continued to be based on the traditional layered approach of **Gold** (Directors), **Silver** (Senior Managers) and **Bronze** (Staff), as used for Brexit planning, and more recently, to combat COVID-19.

Business Continuity Management (BCM)

In contrast to Emergency Planning (which was 'outward looking'), BCM was 'inward looking' and was best described as what to do for yourself to protect your business functions. Effective BCM provided a planning framework to address disruptions to service delivery across 3 (three) main areas:

- Staff (e.g. bad weather, illness)
- Facilities (e.g. IT, power loss)
- Buildings (e.g. Fire, flooding)

BCM also helped to identify the most important functions of a business (e.g. Maximum Tolerable Periods of Disruption) and helped to deal with those disrupted functions in the context of the continued running of the organisation as a whole by:

- Providing a plan to follow when an organisation is under maximum pressure to cope;
- Ensuring an organisation is able to respond effectively and quickly under maximum pressure;
- Protecting employees, service users and the organisation as a whole into the future.

In response to variety of subsequent questions from the Chairman and other Members, the EARS Manager confirmed the following points:

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- The Council's Emergency Planning procedures had been revised in light of COVID-19 and those documents, together with the Major Emergency Plan were available to the public via the Council website. He judged that the Council had been well prepared in IT terms to cope with the disruptive effects of the pandemic, and had performed well in continuing to deliver services to the public, with the exception of direct public facing roles e.g. parking enforcement, although this had now been reinstated. The Scrutiny Committee had endorsed the Council's planning measures at its last meeting [14 July 2020 Min. No. 32 refers], and in the context of the pan-Kent effort to combat COVID-19 Dartford 'stood tall';
- The measures implemented by the Council's Transformation Manager and his IT team had enabled the vast majority of staff to work effectively from home, following the closure of the Civic Centre to the public and the implementation of government distancing measures within the office environment;
- The lack of a specific 'blue-print' to combat COVID-19 [identified by the Scrutiny Committee] did *not* impact on the Council's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity measures, which were based on generic principles of co-operation with the KRF and LRFs across England: no Council acted alone in times of emergency;
- COVID-19 had highlighted a need to update specific emergency procedures in relation to combating infectious diseases, and lessons learnt had been incorporated into the wider KRF emergency procedures and those for England as a whole, including in the next KRF exercise in October to address Brexit issues, which the EARS Manager would attend on behalf of the Council;
- The KRF was a real and effective body of senior representatives from member organizations e.g. Kent Police Assistant Chief Constable, with some members bodies contributing to the staffing of a KRF Secretariat, called the Kent Resilience Team (KRT) has a 24/7 on-call capability, and also facilitates a 'hot-desking' principle for all member organisations. The various KRF group meetings took place throughout the year and considered current issues, including liaison with Essex and London LRF bodies;
- In terms of the Council's chain of command, in response to any given emergency, the EARS Manager was the initial 'out-of-hours' point of contact. He would then liaise directly on a 1 to 1 basis with the Strategic Director (External Services) or relevant senior Council service manager e.g. Head of Housing Services. In the event of a multi-response requirement, he would liaise with the Council's dedicated WhatsApp Emergency Group. Effective action in an emergency was enshrined in the '1st Golden Hour' principle, with the traditional 'blue light' services of Police, Ambulance and the KF&RS heavily involved as required. The recovery phase of any emergency involved more direct use of Council services e.g. the re-housing of residents as appropriate, and liaison with utility companies to restore services. The Council's Communications Manager and his team performed a key role during emergencies, informing the public of events, and managing public

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expectation of the Council's ability to respond via the Leader and Ward Members as appropriate.

The Chairman thanked the EARS Manager for a very comprehensive presentation and for his detailed responses to Members questions.

He asked that the meeting minutes record that he had no concerns over the Council's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Measures. The purpose of his draw-down had been to establish greater knowledge of those procedures; including the Council's chain of command in the event of emergencies; and whether any lessons learnt from the Council's effective response to COVID-19, had been incorporated into revised Emergency Planning procedures. He declared himself satisfied on all counts.

68. WORK PLAN UPDATE

The report from the Committee's Clerk, enclosed as Appendix A, an updated Work Plan document for the remainder of the 2020-21 municipal year and beyond for Members consideration.

The Chairman advised that his aim was for shorter Committee meetings with Member discussion focussed on two principal topics. Given the Committee's traditional review of the Council's Litter and Recycling Services each December, he proposed that the Committee's review of Dartford's Heath, Marshes and Country Parks presently mooted for December, be moved to a future meeting in 2021 which he would identify and advise to the Clerk in due course.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the revised Committee Work Plan for the remainder of the 2020-21 municipal year and beyond [Appendix A to the report], subject to the Chairman's proposed amendment, as recorded above.

The meeting closed at 5.55 pm

Councillor M J Davis
CHAIRMAN