



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

21<sup>st</sup> May 2020

### Labour councillors press for scrutiny of coronavirus recovery process

Bexley's Labour Group of councillors have expressed their concerns following the decision by all Conservative councillors to not allow early scrutiny of the council's coronavirus recovery strategy at the Council AGM held on 20<sup>th</sup> May.

The amendment to include a committee in the first week in June followed a letter sent by Leader of the Labour Group to the Leader of the Council on 12<sup>th</sup> May requesting this meeting be set up. Conservative councillors also rejected an amendment asking that all councillors turn their cameras on at virtual meetings of the planning and licensing sub-committees, to avoid any potential legal challenge if it was believed a councillor had left the room during the determination of an application.

Speaking after the meeting, Cllr Daniel Francis, Leader of the Labour Group said: "The council finds itself in unprecedented times. At the start of this public health crisis, we offered our full support to the Conservative administration. However, as we plan for recovery we are rightly asking to be able to scrutinise the council's plans for recovery as is happening in councils across London. It was disappointing that the Conservatives argued this committee couldn't be added to the calendar as the chairs of scrutiny committees had only just been elected, but then went onto agree two budget scrutiny meetings in seven and nine months' time which required the same approval process."

He continued: "The Labour Group also argued that all councillors should switch on cameras at the planning and licensing sub-committees in order to ensure confidence they are present for the entirety of a committee decision. It was disappointing therefore to hear that any decision would be taken as part of the council's protocols going forward and that there would be a conversation afterwards despite there being less than two weeks until the first virtual planning committee."

The meeting also received an apology to the newly elected Mayor from Conservative front bench member Cllr Philip Read following his breach of the council's rules for tweeting during the meeting.

-ENDS-

#### Notes to editors: Labour's amendments which were rejected by Conservative councillors

- To add a Covid-19 recovery strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Committee Structure and calendar (based on the same membership of the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee) to be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020.
- The Labour Group proposes that all members on any virtual meetings of the Planning and Licensing Sub committees are visible during the entirety of meetings, i.e. cameras 'on', and that this be incorporated into working conventions. This practice would eliminate potential legal challenge as to a member being present for the entire item, prior to voting. With cameras 'off', there are no means to verify that a member was present, only that their device was connected to the meeting.