

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE BEST VALUE PROGRAMME REVIEW BOARD QUARTERLY  
MEETING**

**HELD AT 6.10 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2017**

**ROOM MP702, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE,  
LONDON, E14 2BG**

**Members Present:**

Mayor John Biggs (Chair)	(Executive Mayor)
Alex Powell (Member)	(Deputy Director, Audit, Intervention & Improvement, Department of Communities and Local Government)
Max Caller (Member)	(Commissioner)
Chris Allison (Member)	(Commissioner)
Will Tuckley (Member)	(Chief Executive)
Anna Wojtowicz	(Representing Ashling Lyon, Department of Communities and Local Government)

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Sirajul Islam	(Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management & Performance)
Councillor Rachael Saunders	(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services)
Councillor David Edgar	(Cabinet Member for Resources)

**Officers Present:**

Zena Cooke	– (Corporate Director, Resources)
Aman Dalvi	– (Corporate Director, Place)
Sharon Godman	– (Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Equality)
Afazul Hoque	– (Interim Service Manager, Strategy, Policy & Performance)
Denise Radley	– (Corporate Director, Health, Adults & Community)
Antonella Burgio	– (Democratic Services)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Commissioner Sir Ken Knight and Ashling Lyon of DCLG.

Apologies were noted from Cllr Danny Hassell, Chair of General Purposes Committee and Debbie Jones, Corporate Director for Children.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made

## **3. UNRESTRICTED MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2016 were agreed and approved as a correct record.

## **4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **4.1 Best Value Plan Update**

The Chair informed all present that:

- since the last meeting there had been an exchange of letters with the Secretary of State regarding progress on the Best Value Action Plans.
- on 16 January 2017, the Deputy Director, Local Government Stewardship at the Department for Communities and Local Government wrote to Mayor Biggs advising that that the Secretary of State had amended the current Directions.
- the letter outlined that the exercise of functions relating to grants was returned to the Council subject to oversight by Commissioners, that functions for procuring and entering into contracts was returned to the Council and that the team of Commissioners was reduced from four to three.

The Chair acknowledged officers' work in progressing the action plan.

The Chief Executive and Divisional Director for Strategy Policy and Equality provided supplementary information arising from a Best Value Workshop on 17 January 2017. The supplementary information outlined the Council's progress against remaining actions in the Best Value Action Plans

### **Statutory Posts**

The Chief Executive:

- outlined the Council's intentions and process for recruiting to the statutory Monitoring Officer role. The long-listing and short-listing interviews would be
- completed by March-end 2017. To ensure that there were appropriate interim arrangements, interviews had been held and Graham White appointed as Interim Monitoring Officer and Corporate Director for Governance.

Commissioner Caller advised the Board that he would discharge an oversight role as he done during previous recruitments to statutory officer posts with the intention of assuring the Secretary of State of the task's completion. The Chair supported the timescale proposed and the Chief Executive confirmed

that recruitment consultants had already been engaged and were expected shortly to deliver a long-list of candidates and advertising to meet the time frame.

Commissioner Caller suggested that the Council may wish to move onward to explore how it intends to deliver best value in the context of continuous development. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Authority had undertaken work with the LGA in this regard.

### **Elections**

The Chief Executive:

- noted there had been positive feedback relating to the conduct of recent elections in the borough.
- noted that the Direction to appoint a Returning Officer had been completed.
- advised that, responding to Sir Eric Pickles' review of elections in December 2016, the Government supported a recommendation that local authorities which had previously experienced significant cases of electoral fraud or were at high risk of fraudulent activity should participate in pilot schemes to explore ways in which this could be reduced. It had been suggested that Tower Hamlets might take part in a pilot and the Authority was in discussion with the Cabinet Officer around how to deliver the pilot and was exploring what forms of ID would be appropriate.
- noted that a process of checking postal votes against signature and National Insurance number was already in place, an action arising from the directions relating to electoral matters.
- advised that there would be early engagement with the new Borough Commander to ensure that Police support, , developing work programme for election planning and delivery of the 2018 local elections. The Chair noted that engagement had delivered benefits in the delivery of recent elections.

Commissioner Caller referenced the letter on behalf of the Secretary of State dated 16 January 2017 and

- noted that the directions that remained in force related to the functions of dismissal and appointment of the Election Returning Officer.
- noted that Commissioners had provided support during the delivery of recent elections.
- recommended that the Council should accept the invitation to take part in the pilot. This would enable the Council to provide additional evidence towards fulfilment of the directions. The Chair agreed that the Council should accept the invitation.

### **Communications.**

The Chief Executive:

- advised that the Divisional Director for Communications, Commissioners and he had discussed how the communications business programme might be progressed. Actions identified included;

guidelines for political group leader columns, and a timeline for procurement for publication of statutory notices.

- noted that statutory notices were now published in East London Advertiser as the Council's weekly publication had ceased.

The Chair highlighted:

- that there had been a negative budgetary impact of £500,000 arising from costs of placing statutory notices through a commercial outlet and a loss of advertising revenue previously accessed via the weekly publication. Commissioners had acknowledged these financial impacts.
- that the additional expenditure had become necessary in the context of savings required of local authorities. Therefore, the Council would explore other suitable means of publication.

### **Property**

The Corporate Director for Place advised that the three actions identified in were being progressed and on-going work would take place over the coming months and next year.

In relation to Mellish Street, Commissioner Caller informed the Board that this property matter had been raised by the Secretary of State and had been addressed by Commissioners since the property had been let on a short-term arrangement unsupported by the appropriate processes. Commissioners therefore wished to ensure that arrangements in respect of this matter were regularised.

### **Grants**

The Chief Executive informed the Board that the Secretary of State had written to the Council 16 January 2017 and issued new oversight Direction in respect of grant-making. Powers for grants decision making had been returned to the Council with Commissioner oversight of the process. The form which the oversight would take would be agreed between the Council and Commissioners. The Corporate Director for Resources advised that Commissioners had written to the Mayor and Chief Executive 24 January 2017 setting out key elements. This letter had been considered at the Grants Determination Sub Committee pre-agenda meeting and the approach suggested was accepted. The Chair noted the framework outlined in the letter and advised that he would respond to Commissioners. Councillor Saunders commented that Sub-Committee Members had noted the framework for moving forward and intended to review how grants were made exploring the suitability of other forms such as commissioning. The Corporate Director for Resources advised that a report on co-commissioning which had previously been presented to Commissioners had been adopted by the Authority. Commissioner Caller confirmed that a framework for had been developed by the authority and cleared through the Commissioners. He also advised that the Council was able to make changes to its policy on payment of grants but it was necessary to do so through via proper process.

The Chair and Corporate Director for Resources noted:

- applications for grant funding are scrutinised by Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee established for this purpose and reciprocal arrangements with the meetings of Grants Determination Sub-Committee were in place.
- the Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee had now met over several cycles.
- Proposals for the restructure of the Third Sector Grants Team were being progressed, these would be shared with Commissioners in due course.
- the current 3-year MSG Programme was due to end in 2018, therefore preparation work had begun on a policy approach to the superseding grants programme. Resources officers would engage with relevant departments across the Council and THCVS will also be invited to engage in this developmental work.

### **Organisational Culture**

The Chief Executive informed the Board of measures to address organisational culture:

- the Council intended to continue to webcast Council meetings.
- pre-meetings are held to ensure that the gathering together of Councillors and officers was managed and that Councillors had an understanding of how the expectations of the management can be delivered. The Chair noted that some political groups had been unwilling to engage in pre-meetings. Councillor Saunders advised that, historically, Group Leaders had met with the Chief Executive prior to Council meetings to discuss the delivery of the meeting. However in recent times these meetings had not taken place due to the style of Member engagement.
- the work of the Clear Up Team was progressing and a full report would be made to the Clear Up Board once all cases had been investigated or dismissed. An interim report would be made to Commissioners in February 2017.
- concerning the annual renewal of declarations of interest, work was being undertaken to integrate timely reminders into the process. Commissioner Caller requested that Councillors and senior officers should receive such reminders, that councillors should also be encouraged to update their declarations of 'other interests' regularly. Councillor Saunders confirmed that Members already received three different types of reminders.
- the next milestone would be to ensure that improvements are maintained beyond the termination of the directions. The Divisional Director for Policy, Strategy and Equalities confirmed that timelines for actions after the directions had ended would be built into the forward plan.

The Chair:

- asked officers to consider how the end of the directions would be manifested.
- suggested that some residual elements of Commissioner oversight might occur and that actions would continue to be monitored via correspondence of evidence. He asked that officers consider what methods of monitoring would be appropriate should such circumstances occur. Commissioner Caller suggested that the Council write to the Secretary of State suggesting what post- directions arrangements might be appropriate, this would demonstrate the Council's learning and how it will follow the principles of Best Value improvement.
- noted that once the directions were withdrawn the Council would necessarily need to periodically remind itself of lessons learned.

The meeting ended at 6.55 p.m.

Chair, Mayor John Biggs  
Best Value Programme Review Board Quarterly Meeting