

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.05 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2014

**ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman (Chair)
Councillor Rachael Saunders (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor David Snowdon

Co-opted Members Present:

Memory Kampiyawo – (Parent Governor Representative)
Nozrul Mustafa – (Parent Governor Representative)
Rev James Olanipekun – (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Alibor Choudhury – (Cabinet Member for Resources)

Officers Present:

Ruth Ebaretonbofa-Morah – (Head of Financial Planning & Development)
Emily Fieran-Reed – (Head of Community Safety Partnership,
Domestic Violence & Hate Crime, Community
Safety, Communities Localities and Culture)
Chris Holme – (Acting Corporate Director - Resources)
Ekbal Hussain – (Financial Planning Manager, Chief Executive's
and Resources)
David Galpin – (Service Head, Legal Services, Directorate Law
Probity and Governance)
Frances Jones – (Service Manager One Tower Hamlets, Corporate
Strategy and Equality Service, Chief Executive's)
Antonella Burgio – (Democratic Services)

COUNCILLOR MOTIN UZ-ZAMAN IN THE CHAIR

INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair opened the meeting and asked members to note the revised budgetary papers which were tabled at the meeting. These were:

- Summary of Changes to the Budget Report submitted to February Cabinet

- Proposals for additional Police Officers in each Ward and an additional council tax discount

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for lateness were received on behalf of Councillor Amy Whitelock-Gibbs.

Councillor Alibor Choudhury submitted an apology for absence on behalf of Mayor Rahman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made

3. SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT - MAYOR

The Chair noted the Mayor's apology for absence and informed the Committee requested that it be noted that he was disappointed that the Mayor had not attended to fulfil the invitation to share his plans and priorities with Committee in the context of the forthcoming budget.

4. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 General Fund Capital and Revenue Budgets, Medium Term Financial Plan 2014-2017 and Strategic Plan 2014-15

The Committee considered the report titled 'General Fund Capital and Revenue Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan 2014-2017' that had been presented to Cabinet on 5 February 2014 and also the two amendments proposed at this meeting. Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources, Chris Holme (Acting Corporate Director, Resources) and Robin Beattie (Service Head, Strategy & Resource, CLC) answered questions from the Committee.

The Cabinet Member provided a summary presentation to the Committee; he reported that the revisions concerned funds identified for:

- GRO/CLC/01: Community Safety – Extension of PTF1 for 17 months, maintenance of PTF2 at current levels and addition of PTF3 involving provision of 20 additional Police Officers in the borough. He noted that the work of Officers secured under PTF1 and 2 had helped to deliver the Borough's community safety targets over the last three years.
- GRO/RES/01: An additional Council Tax reduction of £25 for residents who currently receive a partial Council Tax discount, including of elderly and disabled residents and those on low incomes.

The Chair invited Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to discuss the revised proposals.

The Committee explored in depth the proposal GRO/CLC/01 raising the following issues to which The Cabinet Member for Resources and relevant officer gave the following responses:

- Impact on the level of reserves: The Committee noted that these growth bids would require a reduction in reserves to the minimum level set by Council of £20million. They asked the S151 Officer to comment on this. *It was explained that the minimum level of reserves had been set by Council in 2013 when they agreed the Budget – under that Budget, reserves would be reduced to £20million in 2015/16. Under this proposal, reserves would be kept at £20million into 2016/17.*
- Clarification on the additional resources offered by the extension of PTF1 and creation of PTF3: *–It was explained that: 16 Police Officers were provided under PTF1 for the period 2012/13, 19 Officers were provided under PTF2 for the period 2014/15. PTF1 would be extended to end jointly with PTF2 on 30 September 2015. Under PTF3, 20 Officers would be provided for a 3 year period 2014/15-2017/18 under similar principles. Officers obtained under PTF3 would be additional to those deployed at present.*
- The timetable for recruitment of the new PTF3 officers: *The Committee was informed there are outstanding discussions with the Metropolitan Police concerning the timetable for recruitment however a provisional implementation date of October 2014 was being assumed at this point.*
- The distribution of the PTF3 officers in the borough and concerns that these resources should be deployed at the times when crime was most likely to occur: *The Committee was informed that it was expected that there would be one officer per ward and that these officers would be ring-fenced to work just on that ward level through an agreement with the Borough Commander which is currently being negotiated. It was also stated that officers would also contribute to borough-wide initiatives such as Dealer a Day.*
- Members were keen to understand how the increase in numbers of officers funded by the Council through the PTFs related to the number of officers in the borough funded by the Metropolitan Police: *They were informed that information on officer numbers in the borough was not available.*
- The Committee welcomed the proposal for additional officers but asked for an assurance that the officers would be deployed in each ward at times when the community needed their presence. *The Cabinet Member and officers advised the Committee that the Executive was committed to ensuring that PTF3 officers work on local community safety priorities and that OSC would be informed as agreements are put in place about the deployment of these officers.* Members also requested a material assurance that the additional Police resources would not be used to compensate for the reduction in Police numbers by the Mayor of London/Police Authority

- The Committee wished to understand the comparative costs of funding Police sergeants, and THEOs – *It was explained that costs of Police sergeants and THEOs were similar. However THEOs were able to dedicate their activities to Council priorities while Police Officers were required to respond to priorities set at New Scotland Yard and might not always be able to be deployed effectively or consistently for local issues of most importance to residents. Hence many urban local authorities took a mixed approach to the management of ASB supporting the local police in partnership whilst also maintaining a visible civil enforcement capability.*
- On whether SNT ward forums could be involved in the deployment of the additional officers - *Members were informed that high level discussions were presently being undertaken but the Council would consult with SNT Forums on operational matters. A Committee Member noted that the activities of PCSOs were followed by community leaders via social media and this was a valuable resource.*
- A Committee Member noted that the opportunity to direct activities in PTF1 and 2 had been missed and asked for an assurance that this would be done for PTF3 – *the Committee was informed that priorities were agreed strategically across the Council, however policing was intelligence led. Agreements targeting police resource to local priorities formed the basis of both PTF1 and PTF2 agreements with anti-drug activity being a particular focus. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to pursue its local priorities and also undertake robust discussions concerning how the additional resource paid for by the Council would be used. A committee Member noted that policing in the borough not only needed to address criminal activities e.g. drug dealing but also needed to go deeper to help eradicate the underlying cultures that produce criminality. He argued it was necessary therefore to compel the Borough Commander that the MET provide necessary support to the authority.*
- A Committee member referred to an incident where a problem on an estate had not been resolved because of disputes between the Police, THEOS and the Housing Association about responsibility for the tackling the issue and asked how better communication would be ensured between each of the agencies responsible for community safety – *It was explained that a multi agency approach was used for all issues to ensure that each carried out its duties via a plan for coordinated action between the agencies.*
- On the reduction in number of Met. Police in the Borough – *Members were informed that this information was not available since the MET stopped publishing policing numbers at Borough Level in 2011. Members were shocked to learn that no information on the number of officers lost due to recent cuts by the London Mayor could be provided to the Council and noted that this information was important in order to assess whether there were issues with Officer turnover and to determine whether the Council funding was to be used to make up a deficit. The Chair agreed to write to the Borough Commander to*

request further information on the number of police officers on the borough and how this has changed over recent years.

Members then considered the summary of changes to the budget report submitted to February Cabinet and noted the sum identified for the 'development of the New Civic Centre'. The following issues were raised:

- An explanation of the limited costs advised in the report was requested before the forthcoming Budget Council meeting giving as much information as possible.
- Members noted that exempt information made available to Members on this matter did not detail fully the alternative options considered before the selection of the recommended option.
- Additionally they wished to receive clear information on what capital assets were to be disposed to fund the new Civic centre
- *Members were advised that the full budget report to be submitted to Budget Council incorporated an entry within the capital programme for development of a new civic centre, utilising £10m of "prudential borrowing". These were already factored into the medium term financial plan. The amendment proposed a further £1M from General Reserves as additional resources to support this development.*
- *The S151 Officer noted that once full costs of the development have been identified, it would be necessary to agree the amended capital programme and this was a matter for Full Council.*

Members lastly considered the proposed Council Tax Reduction Discount noting that residents in the borough were already able to apply for a discount of up to 100%.

- A Member asked how the reserve being used to fund this reduction would be replenished in the following year. - *It was explained that the reduction, which would apply to those in receipt of partial council tax reduction, would be funded as set out on page 3 of the supplementary agenda paper. The Committee was informed that the monies would be primarily offset through additional savings in 2015/16 and 2016/17. There could be a small cost element as the proposal may require some minor administrative and system changes.*

Following the discussion, the Chair wished the Committee's concerns on some critical matters relating to the proposal for additional Police Officers as advised in the resolution of the response to be conveyed to the Executive Mayor and to Council as part of its budget response in order that these may be included as part of negotiations with the borough Commander and MOPAC. These are listed in the resolution to this minute.

At the end of the debate the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Resources, Acting Corporate Director, Resources and Service Head, Strategy & Resource, CLC and the other officers that had attended the meeting for their contributions. He **Moved** that the Committee note the budget amendments and asked officers to provide the information requested above.

All the above information was to be presented to Members before the budget Council meeting.

Resolved

1. That the report be noted.
2. That officers be requested to provide the information set out above to Members of the Committee in advance of the Budget Council meeting.
3. That the Chair write to the Borough Commander expressing the Committee's concerns around the control of the deployment of Police Officers purchased by the Council under PTF1,2 and 3 and request the Mayor to do the same
4. That the following comments of the Committee be highlighted and circulated to the Executive Mayor and then on to Full Council as part of the budget setting meeting:
 - *It was important that in making this provision, the Council's funds were not being employed to compensate for the Mayor of London's cuts to the Police service*
 - *The Committee was disappointed that no data was available to enable the reduction in the numbers of Police Officers in the borough to be quantified and were of a view that information would enable to Council to understand if there was a transfer of expense from the GLA*
 - *Since the employment costs of THEOs was not dissimilar to those of Police Officers, the Committee was of a view that Council would be better recommended to purchase additional Police Officers who would be able to operate with full police powers which were not otherwise available to THEOs. This would better fulfil the wishes of residents for community safety throughout the borough as THEO activity was focussed towards ASB, markets and entertainment zones in the Borough.*
 - *It was important that the Police Officers' duty timetables/rotas were planned around times of need to ensure that their leadership was available to the community at times when incidents were more likely to occur.*
5. **ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**
 - 5.1 Arising from examination of the Corporate Grants Board minutes that were circulated to the Committee, the Chair queried the grounds for the exempt classification of these documents and was advised that the Head of Legal Services would provide a written response at the next committee meeting. Noting that the contents of the documents did not appear to contain sensitive information, the Chair advised that his wish was that where ever possible information should be publicly accessible.
 - 5.2 The Chair reported a comment made by the Mayor at a Cabinet meeting that he had no confidence in Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and wished

it to be recorded that he was disappointed in the Mayor's comments and felt these were inappropriate. He then invited the Committee to give their views on this matter and the following comments were made:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committees were a legal requirement and therefore had a statutory role to fulfil.
- It was noted that, at the instruction of the Mayor, a review of OSC had previously been carried out by an independent body the results of which stated that Overview and Scrutiny Committee performed well, and noted additionally that if any change were necessary it was that a tougher approach could be taken towards Cabinet. A member requested that the comments arising from the review be reported back to Cabinet. The Chair also requested that this review be made available to OSC Members.
- A Member reported that the role that Overview and Scrutiny Committee performed in regard to children at risk was examined as part of an OFSTED review of the Council's Children's Services. This had found that the Committee was performing as required.
- It was noted that Cabinet Member for Children's Services had found the Scrutiny Post-16 Education Review to be useful. Additionally the Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services had sought to engage with her opposite Member in Cabinet but this had not been acknowledged
- The Mayor's failure to attend give an account was a breach of the Constitution
- The Mayor's failure to attend might be perceived that he did not wish to be challenged.
- The Chair noted and expressed his disappointment that whilst the submissions and comments of all Members attending OSC were recorded in the minutes, this was not reciprocated at Cabinet meetings where the Chair regularly spoke to the agenda item(s) reserved for OSC matters. He stated that, in his view, the Mayor had not engaged and therefore OSC had not had opportunity to engage with Mayoral priorities. He noted that, as Chair of OSC, his wish was to engage with the Mayor and for this to be reciprocated so that the work of overview and scrutiny might progress.
- The Chair noted that, the reports of Scrutiny Lead Members would be presented at forthcoming meetings resulting from their investigations and contrasted these with the Mayor's comments that were reported.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No resolution to exclude press and public was passed

**7. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR
CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 8.12 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
Overview & Scrutiny Committee