

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.15 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2015

COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - THALL

Members Present:

Councillor John Pierce (Vice-Chair)	
Councillor Mahbub Alam	
Councillor Asma Begum	(Scrutiny Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing)
Councillor Denise Jones	(Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services)
Councillor Dave Chesterton	(Scrutiny Lead for Development and Renewal)
Councillor Peter Golds	(Scrutiny Lead for Law Probity and Governance)
Councillor Abjol Miah	(Scrutiny Lead for Resources)
Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim	

Co-opted Members Present:

Victoria Ekubia	(Roman Catholic Church Representative)
Dr Phillip Rice	(Church of England Representative)
Rev James Olanipekun	(Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Alibor Choudhury	(Cabinet Member for Resources)
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Apologies:

Councillor Joshua Peck	(Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
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Officers Present:

Stephen Adams	(Finance & Resources Manager)
Chris Holme	(Acting Corporate Director, Resources)
Kevin Kewin	(Service Manager, Strategy & Performance)
David Knight	(Senior Democratic Services Officer)
Dean Riddick-McGregor	(Labour Group Adviser)

COUNCILLOR JOHN PIERCE (VICE-CHAIR) IN THE CHAIR

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joshua Peck.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest received.

3. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 General Fund Capital and Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (Revised Proposals)

The Committee received and noted a report that outlined the General Fund Capital and Revenue Budgets, Medium Term Financial Plan 2015-2018; Tower Hamlets Multi-Faith Burial Ground; Cabinet Budget Decisions 4th February 2015 and Movements in the 2015-16 Budget since January, 2015 Cabinet Report. The main points of the discussion may be summarised as follows:

The Committee:

Additional Police Officers Ref: GRO/CLC/07/15

- Noted that this proposal demonstrates the Council's continued commitment to addressing residents' key concerns around crime and ASB while counteracting cuts to local policing levels imposed at regional level. In addition, in so far as the MOPAC subsidy arrangements allow the Council to secure additional police at reduced rates this can be argued as being value for money.
- Expressed concern with regard to what happens when these officers are abstracted from normal duties in the Borough for events going on, in and around London e.g. Football resourcing; demonstrations, Carnivals etc. Is this good value for money or should LBTH make more use of the Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) to provide an additional uniformed presence on the borough's streets within the Council's control which helps residents to feel safer.
- Noted that whilst resources could be used to expand the numbers of THEOs the funding of additional police officers through Council resources gives LBTH greater influence in being able to direct these resources to Council Priorities. In addition, the MPS are the sole provider of policing services. Therefore, the incidences of abstractions will need to be monitored closely.
- Noted that Police officers have more powers than THEOs to tackle local issues (e.g. mid-level drug dealing), which justifies this expenditure.

- Wanted to see the removal of the wording in the report “buy 5 Police Constables and one Sergeant” and insert the wording “match fund the cost of 5 Police Constables and one Sergeant”.
- Was advised that these officers would go through an induction.
- Would wish to see a Service Level Agreement in place before any funding was agreed with the MPS. In addition, it would wish to see the “targeting” of those police officers to include a focus on mid-level drug dealers operating in LBTH.
- Was concerned that the funding for these officers would be realised through those savings achieved through the deletion of the post of Chief Executive from the staffing structure.

Tower Hamlets Multi-Faith Burial Ground

- Noted that within the 2013-14 budget, the Council had set aside £3 million of funding for the provision of a multi-faith burial ground. An Executive Mayoral decision (on 17th June, 2013) subsequently authorised officers to enter into an agreement to acquire a site on a 125 year lease and to establish a management agreement for its operation.
- Was informed that due to difficulties encountered in the planning process, it was considered unlikely that the original option will be able to progress, and rather than delay the process, Cabinet had agreed that the existing Agreement to Lease be terminated and alternative arrangements entered into at another existing cemetery.
- Noted that it is anticipated that the Council will enter into an agreement that 200 burials will take place each year. The financial methodology proposed is that the Council will initially pay a capital premium to enter into the long-term leasing arrangements for the site. This funding will be financed from the existing capital provision. Depending upon the initial capital investment, the cemetery provider will levy a charge on the Council for each burial that takes place. The higher the initial lease premium, the lower the charge per burial.
- Was advised that the provider will initially levy a charge to the Council for each burial. As this charge is above the fee that Cabinet has agreed to charge to bereaved families there will be a net revenue cost to the Council, estimated at £70,000 per annum.
- Noted that the Council will need to manage the client function of the agreement. This will involve the review and approval of quarterly and annual accounts, together with on-going and reactive performance management at all levels. A sum of £30,000 being incorporated within this bid to cover these costs.
- Wanted to ensure that the subsidy to bereaved families is means tested so as to address “funeral poverty”. Also those families on a low income that need help to pay for a funeral should be advised that they may be able to get a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund. Also families should be advised of the terms and conditions of the burial ground including any potential reuse of plots in the future and if they are able to purchase a plot in advance.

- Noted it would take just over an hour from the centre of Tower Hamlets via public transport to reach this cemetery and that the nearest bus stop is only a short walk away from the site, with the nearest train station a short bus ride away.
- Noted that it is anticipated that the 3,000 grave plots with a rate of 200 burials per year the site would remain viable for 15 years.

Vacant Chief Executive Post: LPG

- Noted that the LBTH constitution designates the Chief Executive Post as the statutory Head of Paid Service. The post of Chief Executive is currently vacant, and the Head of Paid Service role has been carried out by the Director of Communities, Localities and Culture. Therefore, approximately £200k of the funding associated with the Chief Executive post is not being spent and is generating a saving in the current financial year. The Executive is in favour of the current arrangements being continued, with deletion of the post of Chief Executive from the staffing structure. The deletion of this post will mean that the budget associated with the Chief Executive will form part of the savings proposals from 2015/16 onwards. The proposal will also permanently align the Head of Paid Service responsibilities with another Chief Officer post within the constitution.
- Indicated that that in the context of the Governance Review Working Party, the involvement of the Secretary of State's Commissioners and the work underway by the Human Resources Committee, it would be unwise at present to go ahead with the deletion of the funding for the post of Chief Executive from the staffing structure until agreement has been reached on the future senior management structure of LBTH.
- Noted that the Commissioners had indicated that they are keen to take forward the appointment the statutory positions of the Head of Paid Service; the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer responsible for the financial affairs of the authority (Section 151 Local Government Act 1972).
- Noted that if the post of Chief Executive is deleted then the Councils constitution will need to be revised to reflect that change.

As a result of a full and detailed discussion on the above the Chair **Moved** and it was:-

RESOLVED that the following recommendations be submitted as part of the consultation prior to Council:

A. Additional Police Ref: GRO/CLC/07/15: The Committee indicated that:

1. It would wish to see a Service Level Agreement in place before any funding was agreed with the MPS;
2. It wished to see the removal of the wording "buy 5 Police Constables and one Sergeant" and insert the wording "match fund the cost of 5 Police Constables and one Sergeant"; and
3. It would wish to see the "targeting" of those police officers to include mid-level drug dealers operating in LBTH.

B. Tower Hamlets Multi-Faith Burial Ground: GRO/ The Committee indicated that

1. The subsidy to bereaved families should be means tested so as to address “funeral poverty”;
2. Those families on a low income that need help to pay for a funeral should be advised that they may be able to get a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund; and
3. Families should be advised of the terms and conditions of the burial ground including any potential reuse of plots in the future.

C. Vacant Chief Executive Post: LPG/ The Committee agreed that:

1. In the context of the Governance Review Working Party, the involvement of the Secretary of State’s Commissioners and the work underway by the Human Resources Committee, it would be unwise at present to go ahead with the deletion of the funding for the post of Chief Executive from the staffing structure until agreement has been reached on the future senior management structure of LBTH.

4. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

Nil items.

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The agenda circulated contained no exempt/ confidential business and there was therefore no requirement to exclude the press and public to allow for its consideration.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

Chair,
Overview & Scrutiny Committee