

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

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

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 15 JULY 2015

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

Members Present:

Sir Ken Knight (Chair)	(Commissioner)
Max Caller (Vice-Chair)	(Commissioner)
Alan Wood (Member)	(Commissioner)
Paul Rowsell (Member)	Deputy Director, Democracy, Department of Communities and Local Government

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Peter Golds	(Leader of the Conservative Group)
Councillor Rachael Saunders	(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services)
Councillor David Edgar	(Cabinet Member for Resources)
Mayor John Biggs	Mayor

Officers Present:

Chris Holme	– (Service Head, Resources & Economic Development)
Louise Russell	– (Service Head Corporate Strategy and Equality, Law Probity & Governance)
Ann Sutcliffe	– (Service Head Corporate Property and Capital Delivery, Development and Renewal)
Simon Kilbey	– (Service Head, Human Resources and Workforce Development)
Meic Sullivan-Gould	– (Interim Monitoring Officer, Legal Services, LPG)
Michelle Hall	– (Temporary Committee Services Officer)
Matthew Mannion	– (Committee Services Manager, Democratic Services, LPG)
John Williams	– (Service Head, Democratic Services, Law Probity and Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Chris Allison (Commissioner).

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

3. BEST VALUE PROGRAMME REVIEW BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Best Value Programme Review Board Terms of Reference were noted.

4. DRAFT BEST VALUE PLANS - 6 MONTH UPDATE REPORT

Stephen Halsey, Head of Paid Service, introduced the 6 month update on Best Value Plans. He stated that the individual plans would be introduced by the relevant officers but that overall he thought the Council had demonstrated strong performance. He noted all the actions where progress had been satisfactory as well as a few areas of slippage.

He also asked the meeting to note the booklet setting out the role of the Commissioners that had been circulated recently at the Council's Staff Conference. The main points of the discussion on the Update Report may be summarised as follows:

Statutory Officer Recruitment

Moving on to the individual plans, Simon Kilbey, Service Head, Human Resources and Workforce Development, introduced the Action Plan on Statutory Officer Recruitment. He reminded the meeting that this was to support the recruitment process for the three Statutory Officers. He reported that the processes to recruit to the Corporate Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the Director, Law, Probity and Governance (Monitoring Officer) had been completed and that the officers were due to start in the next few weeks.

The process to recruit a new Chief Executive was on track to meet the deadline with the advert having now closed. Appointment Sub-Committees were due to meet shortly and the appointment would then be submitted to Council for final approval.

The Commissioners stated that the process to recruit the first two officers had been good and they were happy to endorse it. They were disappointed that the Council had needed further Directions to proceed on the Chief Executive recruitment process but noted that it was now on schedule.

Procurement Action Plan

Chris Holme, Acting Corporate Director, Resources, introduced the Procurement Action Plan. He explained that the report set out the issues that had been found and the actions taken to remedy them. He said that significant process had been made and many improvements had already been actioned.

In particular he highlighted that a lot of progress had been made in relation to ensuring ethical procurement and the social value of contracts. There was now much better information for officers and Members to help monitor contracts. Officers were also examining how to bring contracts together on a Pan London basis to look for better opportunities.

Following discussion Chris Holme agreed to present the Council's procurement procedures to the new Executive to ensure they had an opportunity to review the arrangements.

The Commissioners **noted** the Action Plan

Grants Action Plan

Chris Holme, Acting Corporate Director, Resources, introduced the Grants Action Plan. He highlighted that this had been a resource intensive exercise with testing timescales but that significant work had been carried out. A new Mainstream Grants process had been developed with work to ensure it was seen as transparent and objective. There were opportunities for Members across the Council to be involved.

On the current grants round, he reported that the decision making meeting would be on 29 July with a cross-party meeting on 23 July.

The Commissioners acknowledged the amount of work that officers had undertaken. They also commented on the good public attendance at the open meetings that had taken place so far.

They stated that this was an area of decision making power that they would be happy to hand back to the Council once the processes were properly in place. In particular they were keen to see the Cross-Party Forum develop and to ensure it had a good geographical spread of Members. They also invited Lead Members to attend their fortnightly grants meetings with officers should they wish.

Councillor Rachael Saunders, Deputy Mayor with special responsibility for Grants and the Third Sector, highlighted that the new Mayor wished to ensure the decision making process was open and transparent and had full commitment to cross-party discussion as well.

Councillor Peter Golds, Leader of the Conservative Group, highlighted concerns of the level of secrecy that people had felt surrounded the grants processes and stated the decision making in public was important for transparency.

The Commissioners **noted** the Action Plan.

Property and Disposals Action Plan

Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Property and Capital Delivery, introduced the Property and Disposals Action Plan. She took the meeting through the steps that had been completed including achieving Cabinet approval in April. There was also a meeting planned for the next week to go through the plans with the new Mayor and Lead Member.

It was noted that the Asset Strategy looked five years ahead and it drove the disposals policy. In addition, the need for the Council to vacate Mulberry Place was also key to the considerations.

The Commissioners requested that the Action Plan set out more fully the impact of housing growth on the requirement for school places and ensuring the impact was properly recorded.

The Commissioners **noted** the Action Plan.

Communications Action Plan

Louise Russell, Service Head, Corporate Strategy and Equality, introduced the Action Plan. She explained that considerable work had been undertaken to address the issues raised and that a revised Communications Protocol had now been established. Relevant officers had received training including those supporting the previous and current Mayor. It was also noted that a review of East End Life concluded that it was the best value method for delivering council communications to the Borough.

A new Publicity Plan looked at ensuring value for money and in particular looked to expand the Council's digital presence.

Councillor Peter Golds expressed serious concern as to how East End Life had operated in the past and felt that operational protocols were being ignored. He also questioned whether it was financially sustainable.

The Mayor highlighted the surveys which showed that residents found East End Life useful and informative although it was important to ensure it had proper balance.

The Commissioners stated that they were not yet convinced that East End Life was the best value option and there was still work to do on the alternative options available. They felt that Best Value had not yet been achieved. Therefore, discussions would continue with the Mayor, officers and Members. In addition, it was recognised that consideration needed to be given as to whether internal communications should be included in the Action Plan.

The Commissioners **noted** the Action Plan.

Organisational Culture Action Plan

Louise Russell introduced the Organisational Culture Action Plan. She highlighted that this covered two areas, firstly investing in staff and making them feel proud of being part of the organisation and secondly building trust between Members and officers. In particular she highlighted:

- The new Member Code of Conduct that had been considered at the Standards (Advisory) Committee; and
- The priority the new Mayor was placing on Transparency and the changes he had made, for example by attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and by answering questions at Council.

Stephen Halsey, highlighted the success of the Staff Conference which had involved participation from the Mayor and Commissioners. It had emphasised the need move on from the past with both openness and confidence.

Councillor Peter Golds expressed concern about how perceptions of secrecy can lead to antagonism and that it was extremely important to revise the Constitution to deal with many of the issues that had arisen.

The Commissioners noted that work on Member engagement was continuing and in particular the work of the Standards (Advisory) Committee and also that the Governance Review Working Group (GRWG), with the support of the Local Government Association had a significant role to play in this area.

Louise Russell and Meic Sullivan Gould, Interim Monitoring Officer, reported that officers and the GRWG would also revisit areas such as the Member Development Training Programme (looking at all the roles that Councillors play such as Cabinet Member, Committee Chair, Ward Councillor etc.), the Member Allowance scheme, Access to Information and more.

The Commissioners supported the comments and concerns raised and highlighted the importance of tackling these issues to their work at the Council. They undertook to continue discussions with Members and officers on a regular basis to ensure progress.

The Commissioners **noted** the Action Plan.

Elections Action Plan

John S. Williams, Returning Officer, introduced the Elections Action Plan. He highlighted that it had been concerned specifically with the operation of the elections held in May and June 2015 both of which had been successfully delivered. However areas of improvement had been noted for future elections and work in a number of areas was ongoing.

The Commissioners **noted** the Action Plan and **agreed** that the elections had been administered successfully. However, they highlighted that the budget allocated was significantly greater than other comparable authorities and that this should be a focus for the future.

Summary

Stephen Halsey concluded the officer presentations by reporting that Best Value review was due to be presented to Cabinet shortly for agreement before final submission.

Sir Ken Knight noted the submission of the draft plans and thanked all officers and Members for attending and contributing to the meeting and to the plans.

The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.

Chair, Sir Ken Knight
Best Value Programme Review Board Quarterly Meeting