



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Environment and Residents Services Select Committee Minutes

Monday 16 January 2012

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rachel Ford (Chairman), Robert Iggulden, Wesley Harcourt (Vice-Chairman), Ali De-Lisle, Lisa Homan, Jane Law, Matt Thorley and Gavin Donovan

Other Councillors: Nicholas Botterill (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Asset Management), Mark Loveday (Chief Whip and Cabinet Member for Strategy) and Greg Smith (Cabinet Member for Residents Services)

Officers: Loveday Cole (Parking Enforcement Manager), Michael Galt (Corporate Safety Manager), Hitesh Jolapara (Deputy Director of Finance), Mark Jones (Director of Resources), Chris Lloyd (Library Service Manager), Gary Marson (Principal Committee Coordinator), Dave McNamara (Assistant Director, Finance and Resources), Dave Page (Assistant Director, Safer Neighbourhoods), Dave Taylor (Head of Parking Services), Ovo Ukeleghe (Civil Enforcement Supervisor) and Jane West (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Governance)

Others in Attendance: Mark Vickers (Metropolitan Police)

30. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

The Committee noted that details of the action taken to promote and encourage residents to 'self help' with the gritting and clearance of local footpaths in the event of snow and ice, as recommended at the previous meeting, would be circulated to Members.

RESOLVED that –

- a) the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Residents Services Select Committee held on 8 November 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record; and
- b) progress with the acceptance and implementation of recommendations be noted.

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Jean Campbell.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Lisa Homan and Wesley Harcourt declared personal interests in the Barons Court Library update since they were trustees of the Citizens Advice Bureaux, which was assuming management of the service. As the interests were not prejudicial both Councillors Homan and Harcourt remained in the meeting and participated in the debate thereon.

33. LANE RENTAL TASK GROUP FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee noted the final report and recommendations of the Public Utilities Lane Rental Task Group, as endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 7th December 2011. The recommendations would now be submitted to Cabinet.

34. REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2012/13

Members gave consideration to the Cabinet's proposals for the Council's budget and Council Tax for 2012/13, budget projections to 2014/15 and the changes to the 2012/13 revenue estimates as they related to the new Transport and Technical Services (formerly Environment Services) and the Environment, Leisure and Residents Services departments.

Members received details of the Formula Grant award from Government, budget assumptions, growth and savings proposals, risks, balances and earmarked reserves. It was noted that there would be a £6.4m reduction in funding from Government by way of Formula Grant and core revenue grants. Some £57m of savings had been identified in the three year period to 2014/15 although there remained a funding gap of nearly £9m in the final year. The Council debt was forecast to be reduced to £108m from a peak of £176m in 2004. A reduction of 3.75% in Council Tax levels would see the Band D charge brought down to £782 against a London average of £1,015.

Growth and savings proposals at departmental level were examined in detail. Members were informed that savings of £5.55m were forecast in Transport and Technical Services budgets, principally due to more efficient and increased enforcement of traffic restrictions. Growth would be restricted to £172,000 as a consequence of new flood management responsibilities. The net budget for the ELRS department was unchanged from 2011/12 at £35.5m with additional costs of waste disposal and internal recharges offset by commercialisation and income generation activity, staffing productivity savings, the reconfiguration and rationalisation of services and Tri Borough related efficiencies.

Members took the opportunity to enquire about the extent and assurance of tri borough savings. It was noted that some £3.4m of savings were currently

attributable to the integration of services with scope for more to be identified in future years. A robust challenge process provided confidence in the savings earmarked for delivery in 2012/13 although it was recognised that further work was required to firm up the benefits in subsequent years.

In considering the levels of fees and charges Members debated whether the increased fees for sports pitches was likely to effect participation levels and the viability of local clubs. It was noted that the levels of charges had been benchmarked against neighbouring boroughs and demand for the pitches was high. It was suggested that there had been no reduction in participation rates in the borough in recent years. The Committee agreed to investigate trends in this respect in more detail at a future meeting. Cemeteries and library charges were currently the subject of a full review process and would remain at 2011/12 levels until its conclusion, at which point the revised proposals would be presented to Cabinet.

Issues in respect of a variety of other service areas were raised by Members including the effect of mild winter weather on the highways maintenance budget, the introduction of cashless parking facilities later in the year, the roll out of additional pay points around the borough upon the closure of the H&F Direct payments office and the reasons for the prioritisation of the mutualisation of school traded services over other Council services.

RESOLVED that –

a report on levels of participation in sport and utilisation of sports facilities in the borough be presented to a future meeting.

35. CIVIL ENFORCEMENT OFFICER SAFETY

Members gave consideration to the level of assaults against the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers, formerly known as Parking Enforcement Officers, together with actions being taken to mitigate the risk.

The Committee noted trends which showed the most serious 'code red' incidents, those where a Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) had been subjected to a physical assault, or felt it was imminent, had increased year on year, from 17 in 2008/09 to 31 in 2010/11 with a further rise likely in the current year. Members also heard verbal testimony from a CEO, Ovo Ukeleghe, of the risks he and his colleagues faced and his experiences of serious assault.

Members gave consideration to the measures taken to reduce the number of assaults and noted the improvements in Police response to incidents following the appointment of a dedicated Parking Enforcement liaison officer. Mr Ukeleghe informed the Committee that reassurance had been provided by, amongst other things, the introduction of a new radio system with panic button and video cameras integrated into CEO's jackets for deterrent and evidential purposes. It was hoped this would overcome difficulties in securing prosecutions because of the lack of witnesses. Sentences were, however, frequently insufficient to deter and token fines were demoralising for the victim. The Committee noted that there had been Trade Union opposition to

the cameras on the basis that they might aggravate situations although so far there was no evidence that this was the case. Stab proof vests had not been well received because of their weight.

Members enquired into the relationship between incidents of assault and football matchday parking. The Committee was informed that matchdays were considered to introduce an element of risk with enforcement kept deliberately low key at the end of a game in order to avoid CEOs being caught in situations surrounded by large crowds of football supporters as they departed the stadiums. It was noted, however, that it was primarily residents adversely affected by the matchday parking restrictions who were responsible for the abuse and assaults rather than the supporters.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the strongest possible action against those responsible for assaults on Officers be supported; and
- ii) a further report be presented at a later date to update the Committee on the success of the mitigation measures

36. TRI BOROUGH LIBRARIES MANDATE

The Committee was consulted on a mandate which set out the vision and priorities for the library service within Hammersmith and Fulham. The mandate had been approved by Cabinet in December 2011 in order to ensure that the tri borough shared service was guided by borough specific policies which would meet locally determined service standards consistent with the retention of sovereignty by each participating Local Authority.

Members also noted the outcome of an options appraisal of alternative models of governance and legal formats for the delivery of the service. This had concluded that in view of the immaturity of the market and the transitional state of the tri borough library service, for the time being the in-house tri borough service should be developed to the point where it was established and possibly capable of entering the market either on its own or in a partnership. This did not rule out future outsourcing but as the full financial and service benefits of tri borough had not yet been realised, more could be achieved through this model at no significant risk.

The Committee gave consideration to the core purpose of the library provision and, in particular, the benefit of audio tape and DVD rental. It was noted that there was high demand for such services and people with visual impairment found audio books especially valuable. The charges for DVDs had been increased to ensure that they were comparable with commercial rental rates. Libraries continued to have a valuable function in the development of reading skills and literacy and the possibility of access to Kensington & Chelsea's well regarded bibliotherapy unit was welcomed.

It was emphasised that libraries were no longer stand alone facilities and offered tremendous partnership opportunities. In this respect Members were pleased to note the success of an initiative at Shepherds Bush Library which

had helped return considerable numbers of people back into work. It was hoped it would shortly be extended to Hammersmith. Digital services continued to grow and it was possible that e-books would be introduced as part of the Hammersmith Library project.

37. BARONS COURT LIBRARY UPDATE

The Committee noted a report submitted to Cabinet on 5 December 2011 which set out the latest position in respect of the reprovision of the library service at Barons Court. The Council run facility had closed on 31st December 2011 and a new community library and neighbourhood centre managed and run by Citizens Advice Bureau volunteers was scheduled to open on the same site in April. The library element, to be situated on half of the upper ground floor, would be self service and was to remain part of the Council's wider network with stock available to be accessed across the borough. Although the space devoted to the library and the quantity of stock would be slightly reduced, the full range of normal services would continue to be provided, including public internet access. The quality and range of the stock would be higher than previously with a particular focus on children.

Members discussed the value of the continuing provision of newspapers and magazines for users to read at libraries. It was noted that the newspapers were a very popular feature and even the more populist magazines could serve to encourage reading and learning.

38. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2011/12 Municipal Year. The next meeting, in February, would be devoted to a study of the impact on the local community of the boroughs three professional football clubs and the way in which the Council and its partners delivered services to and through the clubs. Members were invited to submit suggestions for topics for discussion.

The Committee noted that it would difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of the net effect of the recent temporary closure of the Hammersmith Flyover since the secondary impact of displaced traffic movement was dispersed over a very wide area of London. Transport for London's diversion programme had initially been successful in managing congestion but now that the Flyover had been partially reopened motorists were returning to the area and conditions had become more difficult. It was anticipated that the medium term programme to fully re-open the structure would be known by the end of January. TfL had committed to the completion of the works by the Olympic Games in July.

Members also noted details of forthcoming relevant key decisions which were due to be taken by the Cabinet and would be open to scrutiny by the Committee.

39. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that its next meeting was scheduled to be held on 16 February 2012.

40. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that -

under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business, on the grounds that it contains the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the said Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption currently outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information

41. BARONS COURT LIBRARY UPDATE - EXEMPT ASPECTS

The Committee noted details of a restrictive covenant possibly held on the Barons Court library building.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.05 pm

Chairman

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