

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUSINESS PANEL

Tuesday, 1 November 2016 at 7.05 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Hall (Chair), Gareth Siddorn (Vice-Chair), Liam Curran, Brenda Dacres, Carl Handley, David Michael, Jamie Milne, Hilary Moore and John Muldoon

ALSO PRESENT:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jim Mallory

25. Minutes

Minutes 5 – New Bermondsey (Formerly Surrey Canal Triangle – Compulsory Purchase Order

The Chair asked to be updated about complaints received regarding the conduct of Councillor Smith made by Solicitors acting for Millwall Football Club. The Head of Business and Committee reported the Monitoring Officer had carried out an investigation in conjunction with external Counsel and would be formally reporting the outcome to the Standards Committee on 9 November 2016. The Chair said the Millwall Football Club had written formally to all Lewisham Councillors, and he would send this correspondence to the Chief Executive, for his response, and the Chief Executive's response to be circulated to Business Panel Members .

Councillor Dacres asked if there had been any update following their call-in to the last Mayor and Cabinet meeting. The Chair said there had been no update, and this was the second Business Panel meeting since the call-in. The Chair suggested Business Panel Members request to see the document mentioned in the 'Guardian' that had resulted in the delay to their call-in being considered at the Mayor and Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Curran asked what happens now following the call-in been suspended. He asked whether any new decision made would be brought to Business Panel at the initial stage. The Principal Lawyer said she could not give an update now but would confirm that the call-in would be dealt with based on the previous information from the September meeting.

Councillor Handley asked whether Cabinet had received additional information that led to the call-in being postponed, and was told by the Head of Business and Committee that the call-in remained live until it had been considered formally by Cabinet. The Head of Business and Committee confirmed the adjourned consideration would allow external investigation of the document mentioned by Councillor Smith at the Cabinet meeting on 28 September 2016. Business Panel agreed to forward the correspondence from Millwall Football Club's Chairman to the Chief Executive with a recommendation that he replies and circulates this to Members.

The Chair requested that the report on the Housing Action Zone bids be circulated to Business Panel Members. Business Panel also requested an update on what the Joint Committee agreed and how it would progress the work.

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RESOLVED that:

- i. the recent correspondence from Millwall Football Club be forwarded to the Chief Executive, for his response, to be circulated to all Business Panel Members.
- ii. the minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2016, which was open to the press and public, be confirmed as a true record of the proceedings.

26. Declarations of Interests

None received.

27. Outstanding Scrutiny Matters

Report noted.

28. Notification of Late and Urgent Items

Report noted.

29. Decisions Made at Mayor and Cabinet on 19 October 2016

Financial Forecasts

The Head of Financial Services introduced the report.

The Chair asked how much the Council had spent on external counsel fees lately, and was told that the figures were not currently available but could be produced. Councillor Muldoon asked why Adult Services was £2m overspent in August, and in October it was overspent by £3m. The Head of Financial Services said he did not know the answer to that but would find out and report back.

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The Chair said he had noted that there was a big shortfall in the amount of savings made and the forecasted savings. He asked whether there were additional savings to be made by April. The Head of Financial Services said the shortfall was currently £9m and he was aware that the Mayor would be meeting with Heads of Service to review budgets to address the shortfall.

Councillor Dacres stated that Business Panel Members were hoping they would have sufficient time to consider budget proposals, but because of the lull between reports they were now concerned this might not be the case. The Chair concurred, and Members were told that it was unlikely that they would receive lots of reports

before the Christmas period. The Head of Financial Services assured Members that they would have sufficient time to scrutinise the reports.

The Head of Financial Services informed Panel Members that some money had been set aside to cover risks, and potential pressures, and things would become clearer towards the New Year. Councillor Dacres said the Council might be setting itself up for heavy budget pressures and cuts, and Business Panel Members were concerned. The Chair thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED that the decision of the Mayor be noted.

Private Rented Sector Discharge Policy

The Private Sector Housing Agency Manager introduced the report.

The Chair said the Housing Select Committee had made recommendations for this report, and asked whether they were considered at Mayor and Cabinet. The Private Sector Housing Agency Manager replied that the report to Mayor and Cabinet was to seek approval for consultation, and the recommendations from the Housing Select Committee would be included in the consultation process. She said a report would go back to the Housing Select Committee in January 2017.

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Panel Members stated that they would expect a thorough equalities impact assessment to be done as part of the process. It was noted that this would be done after the consultation process. The Chair said officers should ensure the Housing Select Committee get an update before the report is agreed at Mayor and Cabinet. The Chair said there seemed to be a lot of people in temporary accommodation and this is of great concern to Business Panel Members.

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The Private Sector Housing Agency Manager said officers were aware of Members' concerns, hence they have been looking at creative ways to address the problem. She stated that currently a 4 bedroom house would cost £1,800 a month in Lewisham and around £600 in Birmingham. The Private Sector Housing Agency Manager said officers were looking at encouraging people to relocate where there were affordable rented properties, as part of the solution.

The Chair asked if officers thought there was a crisis in the private rented sector, and was told Lewisham was facing a crisis. Panel Members were also advised that this problem would become worse as local housing allowance had been frozen. Councillor Dacres asked if the tenants were required to put down a deposit, and was told that the Council would fund the deposit for a lot of the prevention work. Councillor Dacres asked what type of checks were made on prospective properties and was told those that were needed to meet the statutory requirements, but the tenants were also being trained to be aware of safety, and minimum standards that should be met by Landlords.

Councillor Muldoon said according to the Autumn statement Pensions Funds were being utilised through investments to meet the demands of affordable housing. He said there were a variety of funds that could be tapped into, and officers would

need to do proper research and look at various possibilities. The Private Sector Housing Agency Manager said officers would be looking at all available options. The Chair requested an update on the implementation of ownership proposals from the Housing Act to be sent to Business Panel Members.

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RESOLVED that the decision of the Mayor be noted.

30. Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees Work Programmes 2016/17 - verbal update

The Head of Scrutiny said some savings meeting were expected which could affect the work programmes. She asked Chairs of Select Committees to tell Scrutiny Managers what changes they would require.

Report Noted.

31. Exclusion of the Press and Public

32. Decision Made by Mayor and Cabinet on 19 October 2016

No confidential decision was requested for further scrutiny.

33. Decisions Made by Mayor and Cabinet (Contract) on 19 October 2016

No confidential decision was requested for further scrutiny.

34. Decision made by an Executive Director Under Delegated Authority - Managed Service for all Interpretation, Translation and Transcription Services - Contract Award

This decision was not requested for further scrutiny.

Meeting ended : 8.50pm

Chair