

# MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

Wednesday, 22 January 2025 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jacq Paschoud (Chair), Tauseef Anwar, Yemisi Anifowose, Atkinson, Paul Bell, Peter Bernards, Chris Best, Andre Bourne, Bill Brown, Natasha Burgess, Suzannah Clarke, Will Cooper, Mayor Brenda Dacres, Dall, Sophie Davis, Amanda De Ryk, Sian Eiles, Ese Erheriene, Billy Harding, Edison Huynh, Mark Ingleby, Mark Jackson, Eva Kestner, Louise Krupski, Ayesha Lahai-Taylor, Aisha Malik-Smith, Joan Millbank, Hilary Moore, John Muldoon, Rosie Parry, John Paschoud, Kim Powell, James Rathbone, Rudi Schmidt, Aliya Sheikh, Sakina Sheikh, Luke Sorba, Eva Stamirowski, Hau-Yu Tam, James-J Walsh, Luke Warner, Carol Webley-Brown, Susan Wise and Walker

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Laura Cunningham, Councillor Chris Barnham, Councillor Liam Curran, Councillor Liz Johnston-Franklin, Councillor Jack Lavery, Councillor Oana Olaru-Holmes, Councillor James Royston and Councillor Liam Shrivastava

## 1. Minutes

The Speaker moved, the Deputy Mayor seconded and the Council RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2024 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

## 2. Declaration of Interests

None.

## 3. Announcements or Communications

There were seven announcements as follows:

The Mayor welcomed Grove Park resident, Stephen Kenny, together with his friends and family, to the meeting. She announced that Mr Kenny was receiving a special recognition award for his exceptional contribution to the Grove Park community.

Cllr Clarke gave a brief speech highlighting Mr Kenny's work on projects including saving the listed Baring Hall, work with the Grove Park youth club, the creation of an urban national park – a green corridor in Grove Park that had received national recognition that the council had adopted into its infrastructure delivery plan – as well as identifying sites for new homes, and raising hundreds of thousands of pounds for community projects.

Cllr Clarke presented Mr Kenny with a book of letters from people who had written in to thank him and celebrate his work. Len Duvall, Assembly Member for

Greenwich and Lewisham, was in attendance to celebrate Mr Kenny's achievements.

The Mayor presented Mr Kenny with a bouquet of flowers and a glass plaque, and the Council stood to give him a round of applause.

The second announcement was made by the Mayor. The Council heard that Lewisham was one of just two London authorities, and one of 10 nationally, that had been awarded Pathfinder funding for early help and intervention for children and families, reflecting the significant improvement to Lewisham's children and family services.

The Mayor then announced that 18 January 2025 had been the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the New Cross fire in which 14 young people tragically lost their lives.

The Speaker invited Councillor Bell, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, to make the fourth announcement. Cllr Bell shared information about breast and cervical cancer screening in the borough, following reduced uptake post-pandemic. He stressed the importance for regular screening for early detection and treatment and urged people to be proactive about making appointments for screening.

The Speaker made the remaining three announcements. She shared that Pat Merry, a former council officer, and Chair of the Corbett Community Library was awarded a British Empire Medal in the King's New Year Honours list, for her services to the community in Catford.

The Council also heard that the Mayor's chosen charity for 2024/25, Urban Synergy, brought home first prize from the London New Year's parade, the first win for Lewisham since 1998, and winning them £15,000 which would go towards supporting Urban Synergy's mission to help 50,000 young people by 2027 through mentorship, skills development, and work experience programmes. Lastly, the Speaker acknowledged the upcoming Holocaust Memorial Day, on 27 January, noting that it was 30 years since the Bosnian genocide. The Council stood to observe a minute's silence.

#### **4. Petitions**

Councillor Schmidt presented a petition on behalf of residents of Clement and Pendennis Houses in Deptford, calling for the installation of a saddle gate.

#### **5. Public Questions**

Supplementary questions were asked and answered as follows (paraphrased):

##### **Supplementary to PQ5**

Mark Morris: What are the estimated final dates of completion of every part of the pedestrian improvements relating to the Catford Station links project?

Cllr Walsh: None of the monies collected from developers have been given back to developers. The scheme planned for an underpass – we are improving the route as part of the strategic cycle network, to be completed in June 2025. Completion of the remainder is forecast for June 2026.

**Supplementary to PQ13**

Jean Branch: Wouldn't it have been better to continue to support Assemblies until the strategic review was completed? And how much would the strategic review cost?

Mayor: The review is needed to ensure that we reach a wider community, engaging in a more strategic way. We appreciate the work undertaken by the various amenity societies and volunteers. Councillors will ensure that there is an improved mechanism for community engagement which is fit for this century.

**Supplementary to PQ21**

Mark Bennett: Did leaseholders receive independent legal advice before signing gagging orders and did Lewisham council pay for this advice?

Cllr Cooper: All leaseholders will have had access to legal advice. I cannot comment on court proceedings.

**Supplementary to PQ22**

Mark Bennett: On time FOI responses are down from 82% to 64%. When will the council hit its target?

Cllr De Ryk: We are embarking on a records management programme in February which will improve performance and accessibility.

**Supplementary to PQ27**

John McGrath: are there any companies in the Local Government Pension Scheme that don't live up to the Pension Investment policy currently that can be identified by name?

Cllr De Ryk: Pension Fund investments are long term investments. The Pensions Investment Committee (PIC) is undertaking a thorough review of all investments. We have received assurances from fund managers and the PIC continues to speak to each fund manager to make clear our concerns about our investment portfolio. I am unable to name any companies directly - we have passive investments, and it is very difficult to single out individual companies. We are doing our best to invest responsibly, ethically and to keep up to date with the international situation as it evolves.

**Supplementary to PQ29**

Hazel Ho: will the council commit to conducting a review of oracle licenses so the council does not appear complicit in violation of international law?

Cllr De Ryk: we cannot commit to a review of our core accounting system. We do regularly review systems for performance but not mid-contract for something that is not directly performance related. I will take your question away and talk to officers, but the bottom line is that it is a central system for the whole working of the council and its transactions.

### **Supplementary to PQ37**

Alia Al Ghussain: Will the council consider actively supporting and advocating for the creation of the London CIV ethical investment fund?

Cllr De Ryk – we would all welcome more options for the London Collective Investment Vehicle. The PIC is actively advocating for funds that reflect our views.

## **6. Member Questions**

Supplementary questions were asked and answered as follows (paraphrased):

### **Supplementary MQ1**

Cllr Moore: what steps is the council taking to support employers to pay the London Living Wage (LLW) in Lewisham?

Cllr Powell: the council is a LLW employer. Through the council's procurement, we insist that employers pay the LLW. We are also actively supporting employers to become accredited by giving financial help and incentivising via a reduction in business rates. There are currently 102 LLW employers in the borough, with over 7600 employees receiving a living wage.

### **Supplementary MQ3**

Cllr Muldoon: how has council encouraged uptake of healthy start initiative?

Cllr Bell – uptake has been encouraged by using LIF data to identify households eligible but not claiming health start vouchers, and a billboard advertising campaign to promote healthy start across the borough. We have worked with the borough of sanctuary lead and Feed the Hill to tailor a list of free and low-cost food support. The Household Support funding had been used to extend the community food justice grants programme. We have also undertaken research to understand the experience of people accessing food aid provision.

### **Supplementary MQ4**

Cllr Tam: There have been ample allegations of abuse made towards UCKG where a current cabinet member is a senior staffer. Will the council follow suit with the Diocese of Southwark by issuing an apology for including UKCG on its interfaith walk and retracting awards it has given to UCKG?

Mayor: All councillors have their employment listed on their Register of Interest which is published on the council's website. The council does not have a relationship with the UCKG. I and this council condemn any form of abuse or trauma caused to anyone by any organisation or institution. Anyone who has suffered abuse can talk to our safeguarding team for help and assistance. The welfare of survivors of abuse in this borough is our priority, not using this as a political football.

Cllr Tam proceeded to continue talking over the meeting and the Speaker reminded her to behave respectfully.

The Mayor offered to meet Cllr Tam in person to discuss her concerns.

## **7. Setting the Council Tax Base, the NNDR Tax Base & Discounts for Second Homes and Empty Homes**

The recommendations were MOVED by Councillor De Ryk, SECONDED by Councillor Rathbone and it was RESOLVED to:

1. note the Council Tax Base calculation for 2025/26, as set out in the annual Council Tax Base government return, attached at Appendix A;
2. agree a Council Tax Base of 92,585.3 Band D equivalent properties for 2025/26;
3. agree a budgeted Council Tax collection rate of 96.0%;
4. agree no changes be made to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) for 2025/26, that eligible claimants make a minimum contribution of 25% towards their council tax;
5. agree the continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount of 100% for care leavers up to the age of 25, as set out in section five of the report;
6. agree that the existing policy of a 0% discount for second homes be continued for 2025/26, as set out in section five of the report;
7. agree a 100% premium be applied to second homes after one year, as set out in section five of the report;
8. agree that the existing policy of a 0% discount for empty homes Class A (an empty property undergoing structural alteration or major repair to make it habitable) be continued, as set out in section five of the report;
9. agree that the existing policy of a 0% discount applied immediately for empty homes – Class C (a substantially empty and unfurnished property) be continued, as set out in section five of the report;
10. agree that the Long Term Empty Property homes premium of: 100% for properties empty between one and five years, 200% for those empty for over five years, and 300% for properties that remain empty for 10 years or more continues, as set out in section five of the report;
11. agree the continuation of the existing policy of a 25% 'sanctuary' discount to ensure residents eligible for a single person discount are not financially worse off as a result of housing a refugee, as set out in section five of the report;
12. agree the continuation of the discretionary War Disablement Pensions and War Widow Pensions scheme discount as set out in section five of the report;
13. note the proposed 2025/26 National Non Domestic Rate (NNDR) estimated net yield of £60m, based on current information available.

14. agree to delegate the approval of the final 2025/26 NNDR1 form to the Executive Director for Corporate Resources for submission by the deadline of 31 January 2025.

## **8. Statement of Accounts 2023/24 and Annual Report 2023/24**

The recommendations were **MOVED** by Councillor De Ryk, **SECONDED** by Councillor Kestner and it was **RESOLVED** that Council:

- i. Approve the agreed audit adjustments to the draft Statement of Accounts and Pension Fund Accounts 2023/24, included within the Audit Findings Reports for 2023/24;p
- ii. Approve delegation to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, to agree:
  - any changes to agreed audit adjustments included within the audit findings report
  - the final Statement of Accounts 2023/24 for publication
  - any changes to the Auditor's Annual Report (VFM) 2023/24
- iii. Note the management representation letters; and
- iv. Note the Auditor's Annual Report (VFM) 2023/24,

## **9. Constitution Update**

The recommendations were **MOVED** by Councillor De Ryk, **SECONDED** by Councillor Wise and it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. note the contents of this report;
2. approve the amendments to the Constitution endorsed, by the Governance Committee as set out in paragraphs 4.2, 4.4, 4.7, 4.9, 4.11, 4.13 and 4.14 of the report;
3. approve the holistic review of the Constitution as set out in section 5 of the report.

## **10. Polling District Review**

The recommendations were **MOVED** by Councillor De Ryk, **SECONDED** by Councillor Wise and it was **RESOLVED** that Council:

- 1.note the Returning Officer's proposals for changes to Lewisham's polling scheme; and
- 2.approve the revised polling scheme (with their proposed changes) for implementation at all elections from 31 January 2025.

## **11. Motions**

Cllr Ingleby proposed the motion, which was seconded by Cllr Schmidt. The motion was **CARRIED**.

The meeting ended at 20:56.