

MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 2 March 2022
(7:00 - 8:20 pm)

PRESENT

Cllr Toni Bankole (Chair)
Cllr Faruk Choudhury (Deputy Chair)

Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah	Cllr Saima Ashraf	Cllr Abdul Aziz
Cllr Simon Bremner	Cllr Princess Bright	Cllr Sade Bright
Cllr Laila M. Butt	Cllr Evelyn Carpenter	Cllr Josie Channer
Cllr John Dulwich	Cllr Irma Freeborn	Cllr Cameron Geddes
Cllr Syed Ghani	Cllr Kashif Haroon	Cllr Amardeep Singh Jamu
Cllr Jane Jones	Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe	Cllr Mohammed Khan
Cllr Olawale Martins	Cllr Giasuddin Miah	Cllr Dave Miles
Cllr Fatuma Nalule	Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole	Cllr Glenda Paddle
Cllr Moin Quadri	Cllr Foyzur Rahman	Cllr Tony Ramsay
Cllr Chris Rice	Cllr Ingrid Robinson	Cllr Paul Robinson
Cllr Emily Rodwell	Cllr Muhammad Saleem	Cllr Faraaz Shaukat
Cllr Dominic Twomey	Cllr Maureen Worby	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Peter Chand	Cllr Rocky Gill	Cllr Eileen Keller
Cllr Donna Lumsden	Cllr Mick McCarthy	Cllr Margaret Mullane
Cllr Simon Perry	Cllr Lynda Rice	Cllr Darren Rodwell
Cllr Lee Waker	Cllr Phil Waker	

64. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

65. Minutes (26 January 2022)

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2022 were confirmed as correct.

66. Minutes of Sub-Committees

The Assembly received and noted the minutes of the JNC Appointments, Salaries and Structures Panel held on 28 February 2022.

The minutes were tabled at the meeting and set out the interim arrangements that would be in place when the current interim Chief Executive left the Council.

Arising from the recommendations of that meeting, the Assembly **resolved** that:

- (i) Fiona Taylor be appointed as the Council's interim Head of Paid Service, in accordance with Section 4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989;

and

- (ii) Alison Stuart be appointed as the Council's interim Monitoring Officer, in accordance with Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

67. Leader's Statement

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement presented a verbal statement updating the Assembly on a range of matters since the last meeting including:

Situation in Ukraine - The Deputy Leader strongly condemned the actions of Russia in Ukraine and sent a message of hope and solidarity to the people of Ukraine in such devastating times.

The impact of the pandemic - The last four years had been difficult with the impact of Brexit, the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. For every 100 families, the pandemic had added an extra 11 to the poverty line, and the impact was felt heavily in London Boroughs. Before the pandemic there were long waiting times for the NHS and now over six million people were waiting for operations. The cost of food was now rising by 5% and energy bills rising by as much as 50%. Despite this, the Council would continue to support its residents during these tough times.

The Last Four Years - The Council has met many of its promises since 2018 including the building of the Youth Zone and delivering more than 2,000 council-built homes with 80% going to local families. Transport links to the Borough would be improved going forward with a new overground station in Barking Riverside and a boat service linking Barking to London along the Thames. Going forward, employment opportunities for local people would increase with the film studios and three London markets moving to the Borough. The investment in the Borough over the last four years added up to circa £4 billion and had the potential for 1,000s of new jobs.

Women's Empowerment Month - The Council had a great line-up of events for Women's Empowerment Month, details of which could be found on the Council's website.

Claire Symonds – The Acting Chief Executive would be leaving the Council in April and the Deputy Leader paid tribute for the way she had steered the Council through Covid and been at the heart of the Council's modernising agenda which had changed the way services looked and felt.

68. Appointments

There were no appointments.

69. Budget Framework 2022/23 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 - 2025/26

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced the Council's proposed budget framework for 2022/23 which incorporated the following:

- Proposed General Fund revenue budget for 2022/23;
- Proposed level of Council Tax for 2022/23;
- Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022/23 to 2025/26;
- Draft capital investment programme 2022/23 to 2025/26; and
- Update on the Dedicated Schools Grant and Local Funding Formula for Schools.

The Cabinet Member reminded Assembly that the budget framework for 2022/23 was prepared in the context of consistent reductions in the grant provided by the Government and the cumulative impact of austerity measures since 2010. For every £1 the Council received a decade ago, the Council received just 63p today.

In accordance with paragraph 10.3.2 of Part 2, Chapter 3 of the Council Constitution, the budget was put to a recorded vote and was **agreed** as follows:

For: Councillors Akwaboah, Ashraf, Aziz, Bankole, Bremner, P Bright, S Bright, Carpenter, Channer, Choudhury, Dulwich, Freeborn, Geddes, Ghani, Haroon, Jamu, Jones, Kangethe, Khan, Martins, Miah, Miles, Nalule, Oluwole, Paddle, Quadri, Rahman, Ramsay, C Rice, I Robinson, P Robinson, E Rodwell, Saleem, Shaukat, Twomey and Worby (36)

Against: None (0)

Abstain: None (0)

(Note: Councillor Butt was not present during the vote having left the chamber prior to the vote and returning thereafter.)

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Approve a base revenue budget for 2022-23 of £181.895m, as detailed in Appendix A to the report;
- (ii) Approve the adjusted Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) position for 2022- 23 to 2025-26 allowing for other known pressures and risks at this time, as detailed in Appendix B to the report, including the revised cost of borrowing to accommodate the capital costs associated with the implementation of the MTFS;
- (iii) Delegate authority to the Finance Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services, to finalise any contribution required to or from reserves in respect of the 2022-23 budget, pending confirmation of levies and further changes to Government grants prior to 1 April 2022;
- (iv) Delegate authority to the Finance Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services, to make arrangements for one-off £150 Council Tax energy rebate payments to be made to all households in Bands A – D and establish a discretionary fund for households in need who would not otherwise be eligible;

- (v) Approve the Statutory Budget Determination for 2022-23 as set out at Appendix D to the report, which reflects an increase of 1.99% on the amount of Council Tax levied by the Council, an Adult Social Care precept of 1.00% and the final Council Tax proposed by the Greater London Assembly (8.8% increase), as detailed in Appendix E to the report;
- (vi) Note the update on the current projects, issues and risks in relation to Council services, as detailed in sections 8-10 of the report;
- (vii) Approve the proposed projects/allocations of funding as set out in paragraphs 9.5 and 9.6 of the report and delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Community Solutions, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement, to approve and enter into all necessary contracts, agreements and other documents in order to implement such arrangements;
- (viii) Approve the Council's draft Capital Programme for 2022-23 totalling £522.625m, of which £66.813m are General Fund schemes, as detailed in Appendix F to the report;
- (ix) Approve the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in section 12 of the report;
- (x) Note the update on Dedicated Schools Funding and approve the Local Funding Formula factors as set out in section 13 and Appendix G to the report;
- (xi) Approve the increased rates for Early Years Education as set out in section 13 of the report; and
- (xii) Note the Chief Financial Officer's Statutory Finance Report as set out in section 15 of the report, which included a recommended minimum level of reserves of £12m.

70. Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022/23

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services presented the draft Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2022/23 which, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, set out the Council's borrowing, investment and funding plans for the year ahead. The report was considered and endorsed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 21 February 2022.

The Cabinet Member summarised the report, highlighting the excellent work of the Council's Treasury team. The report also underpinned and enabled the Council to deliver on its aspirational development programmes through sound investments and loans.

The Assembly **resolved** to adopt the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022/23 and, in doing so:

- (i) Noted the current treasury position for 2022/23 in section 4 and prospects for interest rates, as referred to in section 8 of the report;

- (ii) Approved the Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23 outlining the investments that the Council may use for the prudent management of its investment balances, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (iii) Approved the Council's Borrowing Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (iv) Noted that the Capital Strategy 2022/23, incorporating the Investment and Acquisitions Strategy, shall be updated and presented for approval in April 2021;
- (v) Approved the Capital Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2021/22 - 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report;
- (vi) Approved the Operational Boundary Limit of £1.60bn and the Authorised Borrowing Limit of £1.70bn for 2022/23, representing the statutory limit determined by the Council pursuant to section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003, as referred to in Appendix 3 to the report;
- (vii) Approved the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2022/23; the Council's policy on repayment of debt, as set out in Appendix 4 to the report;
- (viii) Noted that changes made to the Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code, published in December 2021, would be fully implemented for the 2023/24 TMSS; and
- (ix) Delegated authority to the Finance Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services, to proportionally amend the counterparty lending limits agreed within the Treasury Management Strategy Statement to consider the increase in short-term cash held from borrowing.

71. Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020/21

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration presented a report on the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020/21.

The Cabinet Member advised that the report set out the key achievements, work of the partners, information around the priorities and how the BDSCP had worked to improve the safeguarding and protection of children across Barking and Dagenham from April 2020 to March 2021.

Key achievements included:

- The establishment of the new structure and arrangements in Barking and Dagenham as outlined in *Working Together 2018*;
- A Neglect and Early Help Thematic Subgroup, which met monthly and oversaw the implementation of the Early Help improvement programme;

- Excellent Partnership working to strengthen the Child Death Review procedures in line with guidance; and
- The Safeguarding Children Partnership, alongside the Community Safety Partnership, had continued to work relentlessly to tackle serious youth violence and child exploitation in all its forms.

The Assembly **resolved** to note the Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020/21, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

72. Audit and Standards Committee Annual Report 2020/21

The Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee presented the Audit and Standards Committee Annual Report 2020/21.

The Chair explained that the report was being presented late owing to a delay in the external audit and, going forward, the Committee's annual report would be presented to the Assembly at the same time as other Committee annual reports.

The Committee had faced numerous challenges resulting from Covid-19 as it had affected both the internal and external audits; however, the Committee had continued to work with officers and auditors to ensure that the Committee's oversight continued to be effective. The Chair stressed the important role of the Committee within the Council and explained that robust local audit systems and transparent local authority financial reporting were key to delivering value for money for taxpayers, and for sustaining public confidence in local democracy.

In relation to Standards, the Committee was responsible for ensuring that the Council discharged its duties under the Localism Act 2011 which requires that the Council promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority.

The Chair covered the following areas of interest from over the year:

- Scrutiny of the Internal Audit Report for 2019/20;
- Concern over external audit and delays to the Statement of Accounts, which had been challenged; and
- A report on the outcome of the Redmond Review, led by Sir Tony Redmond who was appointed by the Government to review the local audit market. The Redmond Review concluded that the system was very fragile and in need of reform and made a number of recommendations to the Government.

The Chair spoke briefly about the current municipal year, with Assembly noting that the 2019/20 audit was still outstanding and its completion remained the Committee's priority. The continuing issues in local authority audits, and possible adverse effects, meant that the Committee would continue to closely monitor the actions of officers and external auditors going forward.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the Committee's Members, the Independent Advisor, Stephen Warren, the officers that had supported the Committee and others who had attended and assisted the Committee in its role or been subject to its scrutiny.

73. External Auditor Appointment for 2023/24 to 2027/28

The Interim Chief Executive introduced a report on the External Auditor Appointment for 2023/24 to 2027/28, which set out the arrangements for the appointment of external auditors and the options available to the Council.

The current contract would run until the completion of the 2022/23 financial year audit. In compliance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 an external auditor must be appointed for a financial year not later than 31 December in the preceding financial year. For an external auditor to be appointed for the 2023/24 financial year an appointment must be made by 31 December 2022.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Note the options appraisal set out in the report for appointing an external auditor for the financial years 2023/24 onwards; and
- (ii) Endorse the recommendation of the Audit and Standards Committee that the Council accepts the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) invitation to 'opt in' to the sector-led body procurement option, conducted by PSAA, for the appointment of external auditors for the five-year period commencing 1 April 2023.

74. Shareholder Governance Review

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced a report on the outcome of a review of the end-to-end governance arrangements for the four Council-owned companies of Be First, Reside, Barking and Dagenham Trading Partnership and B&D Energy Ltd.

The Cabinet Member advised that the reviews found no significant concerns regarding the companies' governance, although there were some recommendations for improvements that reflected the maturing relationship between the Shareholder Panel, which oversees the Council's interests as shareholder, and the companies. One of those recommendations related to the non-strategic reserved matters that, currently, required the approval of Cabinet on behalf of the Council. It was proposed that the Shareholder Panel should have the ability to make recommendations to the Council's Chief Executive, in line with existing delegated power parameters, to approve non-strategic matters such as minor changes to business plans, changes of companies' auditors, changes to Shareholder Agreements and the extension of Company Chairs and non-Executive Director appointments.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Endorse the proposal that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Shareholder Panel, be authorised to agree any non-strategic reserved matters requiring the approval of the Council as Shareholder;
- (ii) Note that all strategic reserved matters shall continue to be the responsibility of the Cabinet on behalf of the Council; and

- (iii) Approve the proposed amendment to the Officer Scheme of Delegation (Part 3, Chapter 1 of the Council's Constitution) as shown in paragraph 6.1(q) and (r) in Appendix 1 to the report, in order to implement (i) above.

75. Review of the Council's Procurement Governance Arrangements

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced a report on the review of the Council's procurement governance arrangements.

Following the return of the Council's procurement service from Elevate East London in 2020, officers had commenced a review of the Council's approach to procurement. Stemming from that work, a range of improvements had been identified which included the simplification of the multi-layered thresholds and multi-service oversight arrangements, particularly for low level spend, as a means of aiding compliance and enhancing procurement outcomes.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Approve the new procurement governance arrangements as set out in the report, for implementation with effect from 1 April 2022; and
- (ii) Delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Law and Governance, to implement the appropriate amendments to the Council's Contract Rules and other documents within the Council Constitution to effect the new arrangements.

76. Pay Policy Statement 2022/23

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced a report on the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23.

The Cabinet Member advised that, as required by the Localism Act 2011, the Council must agree, before the start of the new financial year, a pay policy statement covering chief officer posts and other prescribed information.

The Assembly **resolved** to approve the Pay Policy Statement for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham for 2022/23 as set out at Appendix A to the report, for publication on the Council's website with effect from April 2022.

77. Motions

There were no motions.

78. Questions With Notice

There were no questions with notice.

79. Retiring Members

The Chair and other members of the Assembly thanked those members who would be retiring from the Council in May for their service.