

MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 15 July 2015
(7:00 - 8:13 pm)

PRESENT

Cllr Tony Ramsay (Chair)
Cllr Syed Ghani (Deputy Chair)

Cllr Syed Ahammad	Cllr Sanchia Alasia	Cllr Jeanne Alexander
Cllr Saima Ashraf	Cllr Abdul Aziz	Cllr Melanie Bartlett
Cllr Sade Bright	Cllr Laila Butt	Cllr Evelyn Carpenter
Cllr Peter Chand	Cllr Faruk Choudhury	Cllr Edna Fergus
Cllr Irma Freeborn	Cllr Cameron Geddes	Cllr Rocky Gill
Cllr Kashif Haroon	Cllr Chris Hughes	Cllr Jane Jones
Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe	Cllr Eileen Keller	Cllr Danielle Lawrence
Cllr Mick McCarthy	Cllr Giasuddin Miah	Cllr Margaret Mullane
Cllr James Ogungbose	Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole	Cllr Moin Quadri
Cllr Hardial Singh Rai	Cllr Chris Rice	Cllr Lynda Rice
Cllr Darren Rodwell	Cllr Faraaz Shaikat	Cllr Danielle Smith
Cllr Sam Tarry	Cllr Dominic Twomey	Cllr Lee Waker
Cllr Phil Waker	Cllr John White	Cllr Maureen Worby
Cllr Dan Young		

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Simon Bremner	Cllr Josephine Channer	Cllr Amardeep Singh Jamu
Cllr Dave Miles	Cllr Liam Smith	Cllr Bill Turner

11. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Minutes (20 May 2015)

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2015 were confirmed as correct.

13. Minutes of Sub-Committees

The Assembly received and noted the minutes of the following:

- JNC Salaries and Conditions Panel – 20 May 2015
- JNC Appointments Panel – 7 July 2015 *
- JNC Appointments Panel – 8 July 2015 *

(* The Chair agreed that those items could be considered at the meeting under the provisions of Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.)

14. Leader's Statement

The Leader of the Council presented a verbal statement updating the Assembly on a range of matters which included:

- The Ambition 2020 project, which would establish the Council's priorities and ambitions between now and 2020 against the backdrop of further cuts by the Government. The Council's budget was expected to reduce from the current level of circa £150m to nearer £80m by 2020/21 and, as a result, the coming years of austerity would be hugely challenging for residents and the Council. The Leader stressed the importance of continuing the Council's proud legacy of supporting the most vulnerable in its community and commented that the Ambition 2020 project would be perhaps the Council's biggest undertaking ever, as it sought to deliver new ways to fund the services that the local community expected the Council to provide.
- The Growth Commission, which would complement the Ambition 2020 project and oversee the development of a clear picture of what Barking and Dagenham should be like as a place to live and to work in the future. The Commission would be led by Mike Emmerich, who was instrumental in helping to develop the devolution plans for Manchester, and a key focus would be how the Council could make the most of opportunities to improve housing, access to jobs and skills levels.

The Leader advised that both initiatives would be formally launched in the next few months and he would keep all Members informed of progress. In conclusion, the Leader referred to what he saw as the Borough's "Triangle of Ambition":

- Led by the community;
- Facilitated by the Council;
- Invested in by our partners.

- The plans for a Youth Zone that were being presented for approval at next week's Cabinet, which would see the creation of a state of the art facility for the Borough's young people and the first of its kind in London.
- The appointment of new senior directors to the Council who would help deliver the Ambition 2020 plans, together with the simultaneous work by the Chief Executive to deliver savings in management costs as the Council moved forward.
- The visit of Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh to Barking and Dagenham on Thursday 16 July 2015, which was the highlight of the Borough's 50th Anniversary celebrations that had so far attracted an estimated 30,000 people to events such as the Barking Folk Festival.

15. Appointments

The Assembly **resolved** to agree the following appointments to Council committees and/or other bodies:

- Chadwell Heath Community Trust Board – Councillors Bright, Jamu and White;
- Admissions Forum - Councillor Kangethe;
- Children’s Services Select Committee - Councillor Quadri;
- Pensions Panel - Councillor Fergus.

16. Senior Management Appointments

(The Chair agreed that the report could be considered at the meeting under the provisions of Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.)

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the recommendations of the JNC Appointments Panel which, earlier in the day, had interviewed candidates for three Strategic Director posts as part of the senior management restructure. In response to a question from Councillor McCarthy, the Chief Executive confirmed that the posts were graded CO6 (£131,757), as approved by the JNC Salaries and Conditions Panel at its meeting on 15 May 2015.

The Assembly **resolved** to approve the following appointments, subject to satisfactory references, where appropriate, and the agreement of start dates:

- Strategic Director, Finance and Investment – Jonathan Bunt;
- Strategic Director, Service Development and Integration – Anne Bristow;
- Strategic Director, Customer, Commercial and Service Delivery – Claire Symonds.

17. Council Constitution - Pensions Panel Terms of Reference

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services presented a report on the Pension Panel’s consideration of a review of its governance arrangements which had led to proposed new terms of reference for the Panel.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Panel’s Independent Advisor (IA) had carried out the review and had concluded that there was an overall high level of governance of the Pension Fund and positive decision-making by the Panel during 2014/15. The IA had made a number of recommendations to enhance the existing arrangements, which included proposed new terms of reference aimed at giving greater emphasis to the Panel’s administrative and governance responsibilities under new regulations which came into effect in April 2015.

The Assembly **resolved** to approve the revised terms of reference of the Pensions Panel as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

18. Treasury Management Annual Report 2014/15

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services introduced the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2014/15 which set out the key areas of performance during the year.

The Cabinet Member referred to the Council’s existing borrowing commitments and confirmed that they did not include any ‘toxic’ LOBO (Lender Option Borrower Option) arrangements which a number of neighbouring Local Authorities were tied

into and which had been the subject of a recent “Dispatches” programme on Channel 4. In response to questions from Councillor Gill, the Cabinet Member confirmed that:

- The Council’s four LOBO loans totalling £40m were at fixed rates that were subject to 10 year reviews and the Council retained the right to settle without penalties in the event that the lender wished to increase the interest rate; and
- The remaining £61m from the £150m loan facility from the European Investment Bank would be drawn down as required to support the Council’s regeneration programme.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Note the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2014/15;
- (ii) Note that the Council complied with all 2014/15 treasury management indicators;
- (iii) Note that £89m was borrowed from the European Investment Bank to fund the urban regeneration and economic growth programme of Gascoigne Estate (East) Phase 1 and Abbey Road 2;
- (iv) Approve the actual Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2014/15, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report; and
- (v) Agree to maintain the delegated authority given to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to proportionally amend the counterparty lending limits agreed within the Treasury Management Strategy Statement to take into account the additional cash holdings resulting from the £89m borrowed from the European Investment Bank.

19. Questions With Notice

Question 1

From Councillor Ahammad

“Can the Cabinet Member for Central Services advise on the progress that has been made in developing stronger industrial relations and better workforce cohesion across the Council?”

Response

Councillor Twomey, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services, suggested that the Council’s relationship with its staff and the Trade Unions who represented them remained strong despite the difficult decisions that the Council had taken in recent years, many of which had impacted significantly on staff at all levels, in order to achieve the savings that were required as a result of the Government’s austerity measures.

Councillor Twomey referred to the recent pre-start industrial dispute with the

GMB Union but pointed to a range of measures that he believed had helped to maintain relationships with the Trade Unions, which included the Council's efforts to minimise compulsory redundancies wherever possible, the consistent and sound application of Change Management policies, the significant efforts to communicate regularly and effectively with staff and their representatives and the Trade Unions' approach to dealing with change in a positive way. He concluded by reiterating the Council's commitment to constructive two-way communication with the Trade Unions and to continuing to do the right thing by the workforce and by residents despite the challenges that the Council was facing.

Question 2

From Councillor Kangethe

"An exciting report is going next week to Cabinet on a proposal for a Youth Zone in Parsloes Park. If agreed, it will be the first of its kind in London. Would the Leader explain how will this be supported?"

Response

Councillor Rodwell, Leader of the Council, advised that he had visited two similar projects in the north of England earlier in the year and was very excited at the prospect of Barking and Dagenham hosting the first Youth Zone in London, bringing 21st century youth provision to the Borough through state-of-the-art facilities specifically designed for young people.

In respect of the costs associated with the construction and running of the Youth Zone facilities, Councillor Rodwell explained that the Cabinet would be asked to agree to the Council meeting 50% of the construction costs, in the form of a £3m capital grant, with the remaining £3m being met from investment secured through The Queen's Trust and the Jack Petchey Foundation. OnSide Youth Zone, the registered charity behind the Youth Zone concept, had also been successful in securing the full revenue funding for the project for at least the first three years and Councillor Rodwell spoke on the enthusiasm that was building amongst the local business community toward the project, exemplified by the offer by the Chair of Agilysis, the Council's partner in the Elevate East London joint venture, to lead the Youth Zone Board once it was established.

Councillor Rodwell added that he felt that the project represented a clear message that, in spite of the Government's austerity measures, the Council was committed to improving the life choices and life chances of its young people and the local community as a whole and he encouraged all Members to support the project.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Kangethe enquired as to local job opportunities.

Councillor Rodwell confirmed that the Youth Zone facility would create approximately 15 full-time jobs, 40 part-time jobs and 100 volunteering opportunities, as well as there being opportunities for local businesses to be involved in the design and construction phases of the project.

Question 3

From Councillor Choudhury

“Can the Leader please provide an update on the festivities which have marked the 50th anniversary of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham?”

Response

Councillor Rodwell referred to several of the dozen or so major events that the Council planned to stage in the 2015 calendar to celebrate the 50th anniversary which, alongside another 70 other events being delivered by local schools, arts organisations and community groups, represented, by far, the biggest 50th Anniversary celebration programme of any London borough.

The highlight of the calendar was the Royal visit to the Borough which had been referred to earlier in the meeting and Councillor Rodwell spoke of his immense pride that Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh had chosen to visit the Borough.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Choudhury sought clarification of the costs associated with the programme of events.

Councillor Rodwell advised that the total costs were expected to be in the region of £700,000, with the majority being met through sponsorship, grant funding and contributions from the business community and other bodies / organisations, alongside a contribution from the Council of £200,000.

Question 4

From Councillor Shaukat

“Can the Cabinet Member for Finance explain how the Chancellor’s Emergency Budget is going to benefit residents in Barking and Dagenham?”

Response

Councillor Twomey suggested that there was limited positive news in the Emergency Budget for the Borough’s residents and pointed to the increase in personal tax allowances, increased funding for the NHS and the raising of the national Living Wage to £9 per hour by 2020 as examples. He stressed, however, that the Government’s plans to cut tax credits for working people and the £12bn package of cuts under the Welfare Reform banner would impact on a significant proportion of Borough residents and eliminate any gains that they could have expected.

Councillor Twomey advised that the Chancellor’s plans would also significantly impact on the Council in several areas and he referred, in particular, to the cut in social housing rents by 1% per year. He explained that although the move would be of benefit to those not in receipt of housing benefit who earned less than £40,000 a year, the impact on the Council could be a reduction in the amount available to invest in its housing stock by over £30m by 2020. He also alluded to a range of other measures announced by the Government that were likely to have a negative impact for the Council and its residents.

Question 5

From Councillor Haroon

“Given the challenges faced by residents in private rented properties in the Borough, could I ask whether the Cabinet Member for Housing would consider creating a lettings agency which could offer a better deal to local residents who are being priced out of the housing market?”

Response

Councillor Ashraf, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, advised that the private rented sector was now the fastest growing housing sector in the Borough, with over 17,000 privately rented properties. The Council’s Landlord Registration Scheme was helping to address rogue landlords but it was apparent that more needed to be done. Councillor Ashraf had, therefore, asked officers to explore the possibility of the Council establishing its own lettings agency, which would let properties on behalf of private landlords and be managed via the Housing Management team.

Councillor Ashraf outlined the potential benefits for residents and the community as a whole of such an arrangement and also referred to other initiatives aimed at improving the availability of good quality, affordable housing for local people.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Haroon asked whether the new letting agency was intended to be a profit-making venture.

Councillor Ashraf confirmed that was not the case, albeit that the Council would recover its full costs through the management fees for the services provided.

Question 6

From Councillor Miah

“Can the Cabinet Member for Crime and Enforcement advise whether any damage was done to the Abbey ruins recently by the unauthorised travellers’ camp?”

Response

Councillor Butt, Cabinet Member for Crime and Enforcement, confirmed that no damage had been caused to the Abbey ruins as a result of the encampment but commented that the actions of the Travellers had effectively denied legitimate users’ access to the public space.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Miah asked whether there had been any costs to the Council arising from the illegal encampment.

Councillor Butt advised that the total cost was approximately £1,800, which covered the eviction process and the securing of the site to prevent reoccupation.

Question 7

From Councillor Miah

“Can the Cabinet Member for Crime and Enforcement also advise if there is anything we can do to protect the Abbey ruins for the future seeing that it is a valuable heritage site?”

Response

As heritage matters fell within the Leader’s portfolio, Councillor Rodwell responded that he had asked officers to look into what action could be taken to protect the site, which was the Borough’s only scheduled listed monument and of such local and national heritage significance. One option would be to erect a permanent fenced boundary, although Councillor Rodwell added that any installation would need a design that was sensitive to the location and may require archaeological investigation and approval by Historic England. If that proposal was to progress, the likely cost would be in excess of £100,000 and would be subject to a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of a wider scheme to transform the area.

Question 8

From Councillor P Waker

“It is now increasingly recognised that in the London area the ‘affordable’ rent housing, which can be up to 80% of market rent, is now even more unaffordable and not suitable for most working people. Could the Cabinet Member for Housing tell the Assembly the number of social rent housing expected to be built in the Gascoigne East project and the percentage this is of the total number of flats and houses expected to be built?”

Response

Councillor Ashraf advised that only Phase 1 of the Gascoigne East project had received detailed planning consent. Of the 421 properties planned for that site, 51 units were expected to be for private sale, 190 units for shared ownership and 180 units for subsidised rents. Half of the rented property would be let at 50% market rent (equivalent to a social rent) and half at an 80% rent. There were 6 x 4-bed houses in Phase 1, currently designated as 50% market rent units, with the remainder being flats.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Waker asked whether the project would be reviewed as it did not appear to be delivering the initial plans for the level of social market rent properties.

Councillor Ashraf agreed to consider the matter.

Question 9

From Councillor McCarthy

“Can the relevant Cabinet Member please advise the Assembly what level of dialogue we have with the Traveller community to ensure that when they visit the borough we work together to minimise disruption to the rest of the

community?”

Response

Councillor Butt advised that a protocol was in place which had been agreed with relevant partners of the Community Safety Partnership and followed both statutory guidance and best practice. It was noted that for every encampment there was early discussion to assess the intentions and needs of the Travellers and Councillor Butt outlined some of the arrangements that were in place.

Supplementary Question

Councillor McCarthy referred to the national body that represented Travellers' interests and asked why the Council was not engaging at that senior level as part of the best practice approach.

Councillor Butt agreed to look into the issue and respond direct to Councillor McCarthy.

Question 10

From Councillor McCarthy

“Can the relevant Cabinet Member please advise the Assembly if he is aware of any regeneration impact on our borough, particularly in Barking Riverside, of the extra public funding handout to West Ham United FC by the London Legacy Board to move to the Olympic Stadium which is estimated to be £702 million, as this stadium will have cost nearly £1bn of taxpayers' money by the time West Ham United FC move in on an annual rent of £2m?”

Response

Councillor Geddes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, advised that the decision to fund the alterations to the Stadium involved the Government, the Greater London Authority, the London Legacy Development Corporation Board and the London Borough of Newham. He added that while some would question whether it was a sensible way to spend public money, there was no reason to believe that the money allocated to that project was redirected from other projects in the area.

Question 11

From Councillor Young

“Could the Leader of the Council please explain how he plans to further include the public and local stakeholders in local decision-making?”

Response

Councillor Rodwell stated that the Council was totally committed to involving residents and local stakeholders, such as the business community and voluntary sector, in local decision-making and he referred to various events, public consultations and other community engagement initiatives that had taken place in recent months.

Question 12

From Councillor Young

“Could the lead member for environment please outline any plans she has to change the terms and conditions of front line staff in the next two years and what impact she feels it will have on individual workers?”

Response

Councillor L Rice, Cabinet Member for Environment, referred to the budget set by the Assembly in February 2015 which included a number of savings that affected front line staff, including those in Environmental Services who were involved in the recent pre-start industrial dispute. With regard to those staff, Councillor Rice confirmed that a commitment had been made not to make any further changes to terms and conditions, as part of the negotiated settlement, until 31 March 2017 at the earliest. Councillor Rice also referred to the minimum Local Living Wage rate of £9.20 per hour and other aspects that made up Council staff’s package of remuneration.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Young asked whether the commitment to not make any further changes to terms and conditions until 31 March 2017 would be extended to all other front-line staff.

Councillor Rice agreed to respond in writing in respect of the Environmental Services division.

Question 13

From Councillor Gill

“Could the Cabinet Member for Education please explain what capital investment plans have been agreed to replace the dilapidated buildings at Barking Abbey Comprehensive School and how will any plans be funded?”

Response

Councillor Carpenter, Cabinet Member for Education and Schools, advised that there had been discussions between the Council and the School Governing Body regarding major investment to support improvements to both sites of Barking Abbey School. However, the limited funding available and the considerable demand for new school places meant that priority had to be given to school expansion projects, and Barking Abbey’s Governing Body had not wanted to expand the School.

Councillor Carpenter also referred to bids submitted last year in partnership with the Governing Body for funding for improvement works under Phase 2 of the Government’s Priority Schools Building Programme. Despite the school being visited by surveyors representing the Department for Education, the bids were unsuccessful for reasons unknown and attempts were ongoing to obtain copies of the DfE surveys.

It was noted that a commitment of £300,000 had been made in the Council’s current Capital Programme to address the most urgent improvements at the School but Councillor Carpenter stressed that significant investment was only likely to be available if the Governing Body was to support expansion proposals.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Gill asked whether the Council could explore the use of the £61m funding from the European Investment Bank which remained unallocated at the current time.

Councillor Carpenter advised that she was unable to answer that point but reiterated her view that expansion was the way forward, particularly given the popularity of Barking Abbey School.

Question 14

From Councillor Gill

“Could the relevant Cabinet Member please explain what actions the Council has taken to deal with the concerns raised by local residents about the speeding problems and recent accidents in Upney Lane? Has there been any partnership working with the local Police?”

Response

Councillor Butt confirmed that, in conjunction with the Longbridge Safer Neighbourhood Policing Team, a recent speed survey in the area had shown average speed levels to be within the 30mph speed limit and a review of road traffic accidents had not identified speed as a contributory factor. Therefore, there was no immediate intention to implement any further traffic calming measures in Upney Lane. Councillor Butt added that in view of the road's status as an important bus route servicing a busy Underground station, if it was felt that further measures were required to calm traffic speed then enforcement by the Police would be preferred over engineering solutions.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Gill asked whether speed cameras could be introduced to the area.

Councillor Butt agreed to respond in writing to Councillor Gill.

Question 15

From Councillor Tarry

“Could the relevant Cabinet Member please explain why the Children's Safeguarding budget was overspent by £6.5m gross for the 2014/15 fiscal year?”

Response

In the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Social Care's absence, Councillor Rodwell responded to the question and advised that there had been significant pressure on the Children's social care budget for several years which had, historically, been managed by drawing down on the departmental reserves, which no longer existed. In addition to the existing year-on-year pressures, the unprecedented growth in the child population had further exacerbated the problem and Councillor Rodwell referred to several areas where significant pressures were being experienced as a result.

Question 16

From Councillor Tarry

“Could the relevant Cabinet Member please explain what actions are being taken to ensure the overspend in Children’s Services referred to in the previous question is not repeated in future years?”

Response

Councillor Rodwell confirmed that significant work was underway to reduce costs, with a number of external challengers being asked to review processes and help identify areas where spend could safely be reduced. Councillor Rodwell advised that details of progress would be shared with all Members over the months ahead.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Tarry asked whether the overspend was likely to impact on other Council services.

Councillor Rodwell commented that all was being done to reduce the overspend position but he was unable to give a firm commitment at the current time, bearing in mind that the Council had a legal obligation to balance its budget and there were limited reserves available.

Question 17**From Councillor Mullane**

“Can the Cabinet Member for Housing confirm if the Environmental services are being transferred to the Housing service on the housing estates in Village Ward?”

Response

Councillor Ashraf responded that since the transfer of caretaking services in January this year, officers in Housing and Environmental Services had continued to work well together to improve the quality of the service the residents were receiving and initial feedback from Tenant and Resident Associations was positive.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Mullane commented that the response did not answer her question and asked whether the previous caretaker would be returned.

Councillor Ashraf stated that she was unable to comment on an individual but would contact Councillor Mullane to discuss the matter.

Question 18**From Councillor Mullane**

“Can the Cabinet Member for Housing confirm that in the capital works that are being undertaken in Village Ward, that local and small firms have been given proper consideration and assistance in their bids, and have made the list of approved contractors?”

Response

Councillor Ashraf referred to the commitment that the Leader of the Council

gave in October 2014 to encourage and support local firms in bidding for Council works contracts, setting a target of at least 25% of Council work being undertaken by companies based in Barking and Dagenham or one of the neighbouring Boroughs. In the most recent round of procurement within Housing a total of 17 companies were appointed, five of which were based in Barking and Dagenham and a further six from neighbouring Boroughs.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Mullane asked whether the Cabinet Member would support ward councillors meeting with officers to discuss local procurement plans.

Councillor Ashraf indicated her support.

Question 19

From Councillor P Waker

“Can the relevant Cabinet Member assure the Assembly that a document will be prepared and shared with Councillors that will look to minimise the damage of Government policies to increase rents for some working people and to take tenants’ money to subsidise the Right To Buy in Housing Associations.”

Response

Councillor Ashraf confirmed that reports on that issue and the impact for the HRA of a number of other Government proposals were being developed and would be shared with all Members. She also advised that a joint study with 25 other London Boroughs was being carried out to assess the social impact for London, the east London area and specifically Barking and Dagenham, of the Government’s plans relating to Housing Association Right To Buy and the forced sale of higher-value Council homes proposals. That report was due to be presented to the London Assembly’s Housing Committee on 16 July 2015 and Councillor Ashraf agreed to keep all Members informed of progress.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Waker asked whether the Cabinet Member would be willing to pull on as many ideas as possible.

Councillor Ashraf welcomed input from all Members.

Question 20

From Councillor Quadri

“Can the Cabinet Member for Crime and Enforcement clarify what progress is being made in tackling anti-social behaviour in the Borough?”

Response

Councillor Butt confirmed that the Council, working with its partners, was taking a very proactive stance on addressing anti-social behaviour and she was pleased to advise that reports of anti-social behaviour continued to decline, with a further 32% reduction over the last year. Councillor Butt referred to the various initiatives that had contributed to the drop in reports to the Police and the Council.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Quadri alluded to a local problem of refuse bags being left out on the street and Councillor Butt agreed to discuss his specific concerns after the meeting.