

MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 25 January 2017
(7:02 - 9:27 pm)

PRESENT

Cllr Syed Ghani (Chair)
Cllr Edna Fergus (Deputy Chair)

Cllr Syed Ahammad	Cllr Jeanne Alexander	Cllr Abdul Aziz
Cllr Melanie Bartlett	Cllr Simon Bremner	Cllr Sade Bright
Cllr Laila M. Butt	Cllr Evelyn Carpenter	Cllr Peter Chand
Cllr Faruk Choudhury	Cllr Irma Freeborn	Cllr Cameron Geddes
Cllr Rocky Gill	Cllr Kashif Haroon	Cllr Chris Hughes
Cllr Amardeep Singh Jamu	Cllr Jane Jones	Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe
Cllr Eileen Keller	Cllr Danielle Lawrence	Cllr Mick McCarthy
Cllr Giasuddin Miah	Cllr Dave Miles	Cllr Margaret Mullane
Cllr Moin Quadri	Cllr Tony Ramsay	Cllr Linda Reason
Cllr Chris Rice	Cllr Lynda Rice	Cllr Darren Rodwell
Cllr Faraaz Shaukat	Cllr Danielle Smith	Cllr Sam Tarry
Cllr Dominic Twomey	Cllr Jeff Wade	Cllr Lee Waker
Cllr Phil Waker	Cllr John White	Cllr Maureen Worby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Sanchia Alasia	Cllr Saima Ashraf	Cllr Josephine Channer
Cllr James Ogungbose	Cllr Hardial Singh Rai	Cllr Bill Turner
Cllr Dan Young		

44. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

45. Minutes (30 November 2016)

The minutes of the Assembly held on 30 November 2016 were confirmed as correct.

46. Minutes of Sub-Committees

The Assembly received and noted the minutes of the:

- JNC Salaries and Conditions Panel held on 30 November 2016;
- JNC Appointments Panel held on 13 December 2016; and
- JNC Appointments Panel held on 9 January 2017.

47. Leader's Statement

At the request of the Leader, the Chair asked the Assembly to stand for a minute's

silence for the two victims of the fire which took hold of a maisonette in the Borough that morning and for Duran Kageearma who was tragically murdered in Dagenham on 12 November 2016.

The Assembly stood for a minute's silence.

The Leader then presented a verbal statement updating the Assembly on a range of matters since the last meeting, including:

- The first-ever freight train to travel from China to the UK entirely by rail. The train had left the city of Yiwa on an 18-day journey and covered 7,500 miles and seven countries before arriving at Barking's East London Terminal this week. The Leader and the Mayor greeted the train upon arrival and presented gifts to the Chinese Ambassador;
- The new Vicarage Field development in Barking Town Centre which would deliver around 900 new homes and a state of the art shopping centre. The development would also include a 150-bed hotel, affordable space for start-up businesses, a cinema, gym, music venue, 3-form entry primary school and new healthcare facilities. The development was expected to bring more than 1,000 jobs to the Borough; and
- The Councils ability to deliver on its ambitions against significant challenges, which had resulted in Barking and Dagenham being known as the Borough of Aspiration.

48. Appointments

There were no appointments.

49. Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum and Young Mayor Annual Report 2016

The Assembly received the BAD Youth Forum's 15th Annual report, introduced by Erik Stein, Group Manager for Youth Services who was accompanied by representatives of the Youth Forum.

The Forum was made up of 60 young people who were elected from schools and youth groups in the Borough in January 2016. Amongst the initiatives undertaken during the year was the creation of sub-groups, which considered the following:

Mental Health and Voluntary Work Sub-Group: The Sub-Group focused addressing the stigma around mental health issues and how to get young people talking about the subject. The Sub-Group developed a questionnaire for young people on a range of mental health and, arising from the results, made an infomercial to raise awareness, break the stigma and get young people to talk about mental health. The infomercial was then shown to the Assembly.

Young Mayor's Sub-Group: The Sub-Group focused on the activities of the Young Mayor for 2016. Various events were attended by the Young Mayor during the year and fundraising activities included a stall at the summer festival, attendance at the Youth Parade, non school uniform day, a bucket shake at ASDA

and a Halloween Movie night. In total, £1363.17 was raised by the Sub-Group for the Young Mayors chosen charity, Richard House's Children's Hospice.

Young Inspectors Sub-Group: The Sub-Group looked at sexual health and undertook inspections to pharmacies within the Borough which had signed up to the "Come Correct" scheme. The Young Inspectors undertook 125 visits to 29 pharmacies looking at the environment, whether a demonstration was received on how to use condoms, information about STI's and guidelines for those who were under 16. Feedback from each of the visits was given to the pharmacies and follow up inspections were undertaken.

Following the presentation, a number of Councillors paid tribute to the hard work of the Forum during the year, particularly in relation to addressing the stigma around mental health. The mental health infomercial made by Youth Forum members was found to be very powerful and the Assembly asked that the video be placed on the Councils website and other of social media platforms. In response to questions, the Forum advised that the infomercial was filmed and edited by members of the Youth Forum.

50. Licensing Act 2003 - Statement of Licensing Policy 2017-2022

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety introduced a report on the draft Statement of Licensing Policy for 2017 – 2022 which set out the principles by which the Council would discharge its responsibilities, as a licensing authority, in relation to the sale of alcohol, regulated entertainment and late night refreshment.

In particular, the Cabinet Member referred to the two new key provisions within the policy, the first relating to sound limiting devices, when required, and the second relating to restrictions on licensed premises that were within 400 metres of schools and colleges.

The Assembly welcomed the new provisions and sought clarification of the representation received during the consultation process from the Musicians' Union in relation to sound limiters, which an officer provided to the Assembly.

The Assembly **resolved** to adopt the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Statement of Licensing Policy 2017-2022 in respect of the Licensing Act 2003, as attached at Appendix A to the report.

51. Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Investment presented a report on the proposal to retain the existing Council Tax Support Scheme and £50,000 discretionary hardship fund, in order to continue to support low income households in exceptional financial difficulties.

The Cabinet Member advised that officers would be looking into how many residents used the discretionary hardship fund and may amend the fund accordingly.

In response to a question, the Assembly was advised that the collection rate for

Council Tax 2016/2017 would only be known at the end of the financial year.

The Assembly **resolved** that the Council Tax Support Scheme implemented for 2016/17 be retained for 2017/18.

52. Options for the Appointment of an External Auditor

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Investment introduced a report on the appointment of an external auditor, following the closure of the Audit Commission and the end of the transitional arrangements after the 2017/18 audits.

The Cabinet Member explained that when the current transitional arrangements would end on 31 March 2018 and the Council would become responsible for the appointment of the external auditor.

There were three options open to the Council which detailed in the report, together with the advantages/benefits and disadvantages/risks of each:

- Option 1 – To make a stand-alone appointment;
- Option 2 - Set up a Joint Auditor Panel/local joint procurement arrangements; or
- Option 3 – Opt into a National Procurement Scheme: the “Appointing Person” arrangement offered by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd

The Assembly noted that the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee had initially considered the report and asked the Assembly to consider option 2.

The Assembly **resolved** endorse Option 3 as set out within the report and that the external auditor for the Council and for the Pension Fund, from 2018/19, be appointed by the Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd.

53. Appointment of Statutory Chief Financial Officer

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the appointment of a statutory Chief Financial Officer following recent changes to the senior management structure which included the deletion of the posts of Strategic Director of Finance and Investment (the former Chief Financial Officer) and the Strategic Director for Customer, Commercial and Service Delivery and the creation of the new post of Chief Operating Officer from 1 January 2017.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Ratify the appointment of Claire Symonds as Chief Operating Officer with effect from 1 January 2017; and
- (ii) Appoint Claire Symonds as the Council’s statutory Chief Financial Officer.

54. Motions

Moved by Councillor Mullane and seconded by Councillor Carpenter:

“Barking and Dagenham Council is against the re-introduction of Grammar Schools as there is no evidence that they increase social mobility. Indeed, the

contrary is true. These schools have only ever serviced the needs of the few and this Council is determined to give all children the opportunity to achieve academically.

Bringing back Grammar Schools would introduce divisive selection in our Borough. What is required is an inclusive, strategically planned education system that enables every child to thrive, learn and prosper and allows local industry and businesses to benefit from the achievements of Barking and Dagenham's young people.

Barking and Dagenham Council needs to be able to continue to play a full part on providing good schools where and when they are required in our Borough. Changing the status of schools and introducing selection will be a waste of time and resources of the Council, preventing them from producing good outcomes for all and helping local schools to recruit and retain the best teachers.

This Council will write to the Secretary of State for Education and the Prime Minister urging them not to allow the introduction of such schools in Barking and Dagenham."

Members of the Assembly spoke in support of the motion and expressed their concerns in relation to the proposed reintroduction of Grammar Schools. The reintroduction of Grammar Schools was not welcomed in the Borough, particularly as the Assembly felt that schools within the Borough were currently inclusive of all students and the proposal would be divisive in the community.

The motion was **carried** and resolved accordingly.

55. Questions With Notice

Question 1

From Councillor McCarthy

"There has been an increase in incidences of fly-tipping at Eastbrookend Cemetery car park. The cemetery is one the most special places along with our other two cemeteries within the Borough. Can the Council install a camera to deter and be used as a tool to prosecute these criminals who have no respect for our dead? If there are similar instances at our other two cemeteries I would like to see them get the same enforcement aids."

Response

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene advised that the Enforcement Service had a small number of cameras that could be deployed in areas where there was persistent fly-tipping. Officers would be carrying out a survey of Eastbrookend Cemetery during the week to identify the viability of installing a camera in the area and advise Councillor McCarthy accordingly.

Question 2

From Councillor McCarthy

“We have had a tragic death on Dagenham Road since the last Assembly. Will the relevant Cabinet Member work with local councillors and residents to make improvements to road safety on Dagenham Road to encompass speed cameras, new road surface and traffic calming measures and whatever suggestions come forward from a review of the area?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety advised that the tragic accident remained under Police investigation. Council representatives had met with Metropolitan Police Traffic Management Officers on 16 January 2017 to discuss the circumstances behind the fatality and were waiting the Police report which would support a review of highway's issues in the area.

Supplementary Question

Councillor McCarthy requested that Ward Councilors be included in future discussions on the matter and be updated on progress.

The Cabinet Member advised that Councillors should contact her regarding the issue.

Question 3

From Councillor Mullane

“Can the Cabinet Member for crime confirm she is doing everything within her power to ensure the Police service is at full capacity in regard to posts being filled and confirm the current position?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety advised that the Metropolitan Police applied a formula for allocating resources to Boroughs. The Council had long argued that the formula, over 10 years old, no longer adequately reflected the needs of the Borough. The Cabinet Member advised that ahead of a full review by the Police, it had been accepted that the Borough needed five neighbourhood officers and the posts were recently appointed to. Furthermore, the number of Schools and Youth Engagement Officers had been doubled.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Mullane advised that she had been made aware that the statistics of Police Officers for the Borough included those who were sick and/or on secondment and asked the Cabinet Member to take this up with relevant officers at the Metropolitan Police.

The Cabinet Member confirmed she would discuss the issue with relevant officers.

Question 4

From Councillor Mullane

“Can the Cabinet Member responsible for crime explain whether the Council is encouraging the Police to take pro-active steps towards crime rather than the current re-active response and if, year on year this is an increase or decrease?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety confirmed the Police were proactive within the Borough and took the opportunity to detail operations on anti-social behaviour, wanted violent suspects and, knife and gun crime which had recently taken place in the Borough.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Mullane advised that the statistics on “Stop and Search” within the Borough were based on the last census and therefore not accurate and asked for the Cabinet Member to raise this with relevant officers.

The Cabinet Member confirmed she would discuss the issue with relevant officers.

Question 5

From Councillor Chand

“Given the recent media coverage surrounding the crises in social care and the NHS, can the relevant Cabinet Member please report on how services in Barking and Dagenham are coping during these difficult times?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration advised that despite comments from the Prime Minister, there was a need to address the crisis in the NHS. Due to problems within the NHS, additional pressured was placed on local authorities, in particular social care. This winter almost 25,000 people a month had attended local A&E department's, only 85% were seen within four hours which was not good enough.

Supplementary Question

With reference to the very high number of people attending local A&E services each month, Councillor Chand questioned the impact on services once King George Hospital A&E closed.

The Cabinet Member advised that as certain conditions had to be met at Queens Hospital before the closure could proceed she could not envisage the closure taking place next year, or even the following year.

Question 6

From Councillor Miah

“Will the Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety provide a progress update on the Council’s landlord licensing scheme?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety advised that the Council had received 12,000 licence applications since the scheme was launched in September 2014. 10,500 of the properties had been inspected by the council and 85% met the standard either at the time of the inspection or following minor improvements as recommended by the Council. The Cabinet Member detailed enforcement action undertaken following the introduction of the scheme and inspections, which included the successful prosecution of 25 landlords.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Miah asked what would happen when the current scheme finished.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Council was currently working on a new scheme which would seek to further improve conditions and property management services.

Question 7

From Councillor Choudhury

“Can the Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Investment provide a response to the Government’s latest Local Government Finance Settlement and tell us what impact this will have on local residents?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Investment commented that the Government’s cuts were a disgrace, with the Revenue Support Grant due to decline by £27.7m bringing more misery on residents in the Borough. Councils were having to increase Council Tax to fill the gaps brought about by the Government and the looming crisis in social care. The Cabinet Member referred in particular to Surrey County Councils proposed referendum on a 15% Council Tax rise. Furthermore, the Cabinet Member confirmed that changes to the New Homes Bonus Scheme, meant that the Council would be losing out on a further £1.1m of funding.

Question 8

From Councillor Haroon

“Following the recent re-design of sexual health services in the Borough, can the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration outline how the re-designed service will improve outcomes for residents?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration advised that following the review, the service was relocated to the Barking Hospital site and increased from 20 hours a week to 40 hours a week. By consolidating services, a wider range of sexual health services were available to residents under one roof.

Question 9

From Councillor Hughes

“Will the relevant Cabinet Member update the Assembly on what progress is being made to establish a film studio complex at Dagenham East?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Economic and Social Development advised that the Council and the Greater London Authority were jointly funding a feasibility study and business case for the film studio. Consultants had been appointed following a tender process and would be looking at the demand and potential mix of facilities at the site as well as the wider social and economic benefits of a film studio.

The Cabinet Member advised that a report would be presented to Cabinet in April/May 2017.

Question 10

From Councillor Freeborn

“Can the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Cohesion tell the Assembly how the Council plans to mark Women’s Empowerment Month this March?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Cohesion advised that Women’s Empowerment Month would be marked with a programme of events and activities throughout March. The programme would include a Women’s Conference on 8 March 2017, events to help female entrepreneurs with business planning and public speaking, seminars on political issues and end with the Women’s Empowerment Awards on 30 March 2017. All events would be detailed on the Council’s website.

Question 11

From Councillor Fergus

“A number of incidents involving sexual harassment of women in Barking Town Centre have been reported recently. Can the relevant Cabinet Member outline what the Council is doing to prevent any further incidents?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety advised that women had reported feeling unsafe due to groups of men drinking in the area and the Police had launched a dedicated campaign Operation Avarice, in Barking Town Centre, in November 2016 until which had been successful. Furthermore, the Council was planning to use additional funding from the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime to improve arrangements for the reporting of all hate crime incidents in the Borough including the sexual harassment of women.

Question 12

From Councillor Ahammad

“Can the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement explain what impact the Government’s new national funding formula for schools will have on schools in our borough?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement explained that the current school funding formula had been tweaked by Government and Councils were already seeing money from London redistributed to other parts of the country. According to the figures published by the Department for Education, Barking and Dagenham schools should expect an overall reduction of £0.245m or 0.1%.

The new National Funding Formula, which was still at the consultation stage would make the redistribution more apparent, however the Council were working with the Schools Forum to develop a response outlining the Councils concerns,

Supplementary Question

Councillor Ahammad asked when the consultation would be ending and how parents were advised of the consultation.

The Cabinet Member advised that the consultation would be ending in March 2017. All school governing bodies could respond and parents could respond individually. A link to the consultation would be made available on the Councils website.

Question 13

From Councillor Shaukat

“Will the Leader update the Assembly on the Council’s plans to become London’s green energy capital?”

Response

The Leader advised that work was progressing to implement the two largest heat network areas. The first was at the Gascoigne East Regeneration area which would provide heat for 1,000 household and the second at Becontree Heath, which was subject to a £3.5m grant application to the Department of Enterprise and Industrial Strategy. Furthermore, low energy street lighting had been identified to develop new ways of delivering energy efficiency and low carbon investment in private and publicly controlled communities in the Borough.

Question 14

From Councillor Gill

“Can the relevant Cabinet Member please explain what actions are being taken to alleviate the projected overspend of £5m in 2016/17 with overspending in many areas within the Council including Children's Care and Support, Leisure, Environmental Services, Council Tax and Homelessness?”

Response

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Investment advised that that the issues the Council faced were well known, following a recent report to the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee on children’s care and homelessness and regular budget monitoring reports to the Cabinet. The Cabinet Member reassured the Assembly that every possible action was being taken to reduce areas of overspend and to achieve a balanced budget in future years.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Gill raised concerns that the overspend in Environmental Services was masked by an underspend elsewhere and felt this should be regarded as high risk.

The Cabinet Member advised there had been issues with the Environmental Services budgets for a number of years and steps were being taken to permanently address the issues.