

MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 21 July 2021
(7:01 - 9:07 pm)

PRESENT

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

Cllr Andrew Achilleos	Cllr Saima Ashraf	Cllr Evelyn Carpenter
Cllr Irma Freeborn	Cllr Syed Ghani	Cllr Jane Jones
Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe	Cllr Fatuma Nalule	Cllr Ingrid Robinson
Cllr Paul Robinson	Cllr Darren Rodwell	Cllr Muhammad Saleem
Cllr Dominic Twomey	Cllr Maureen Worby	

13. Appointment of Chair of the Assembly and other Appointments

The Head of Law opened the meeting and invited nominations for the position of Chair of the Assembly for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year, following the resignation of Cllr Kangethe from the position due to her appointment to the Cabinet. Nominations were also sought for other vacancies on committees.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Note the appointment by the Leader of the Council of Councillor Kangethe as Cabinet Member and Champion for Disabled People on 22 June 2021 and Councillor Kangethe's resignation as Chair of the Assembly on that date;
- (ii) Approve the appointment of Councillor Bankole as Chair of the Assembly for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year;
- (iii) Note Councillor Nalule's appointment to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with effect from 9 June 2021; and
- (iv) Approve the appointment of Councillor Akwaboah to Audit and Standards Committee and Councillor Nalule to Licensing and Regulatory Committee to fill vacant positions.

14. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were recorded for Councillors Akwaboah, Alasia, Aziz, Bremner, P Bright, S Bright, Butt, Chand, Channer, Dulwich, Fergus, Geddes, Gill, Haroon, Jamu, Keller, Khan, Lumsden, Martins, McCarthy, Miah, Miles, Mullane, Oluwole, Paddle, Perry, Quadri, Rahman, Ramsay, C Rice, L Rice, E Rodwell, Shaukat, L Waker and P Waker, who were unable to attend the meeting due to the social distancing arrangements within the Council Chamber.

15. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

16. Minutes (27 April 2021)

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2021 were confirmed as correct.

17. Minutes of Sub-Committees

The Assembly received and noted the minutes of the JNC Appointments, Salaries and Structures Panel held on 20 April 2021 and the JNC Investigation and Disciplinary Panel held on 10 May 2021

18. Death of Former Councillor Marie West

The Assembly noted with deep regret that former Councillor and Mayor of the Borough, Marie (Margaret Mary) West, passed away on Tuesday 8 June at the age of 80.

Marie was first elected to the Council to represent the former Triptons ward in May 1998 and went on to become a councillor for the newly-formed Whalebone ward in May 2002, which she served until stepping down from the Council in May 2010.

Members paid tribute to Mrs West, fondly remembering her as having a formidable presence despite being small in stature.

The Assembly held a minute's applause as a mark of respect.

19. Leader's Statement

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

Witten: The Leader expressed his condolences to the residents of Witten, who had recently been hit by the flash floods in Germany.

Welcome: The Leader gave a warm welcome to:

- The new Chair of Assembly, Councillor Bankole;
- The newest Member of the Council, Cllr Nalule; and
- The newest Member of the Cabinet, Councillor Kangethe.

Euro 2020: The Country was proud of the England national football team for reaching the final of the recent Euro 2020 tournament. The Leader commended the players' conduct both before and after the tournament and strongly condemned those who had targeted some of the players with racial abuse.

Changes to Cabinet: To reflect the deep and growing inequalities highlighted by the pandemic, the following changes had been made to Cabinet:

- Councillor Kangethe joined Cabinet as Cabinet Member & Champion for Disabled People and took on strategies and actions to improve support

for people with physical and learning disabilities. Councillor Kangethe would also be working closely with the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement;

- Community empowerment work would be led by Councillor Ashraf;
- Councillor Geddes became the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Economic Development; and
- Councillor S Bright would take on the role of raising aspiration.

Extreme Weather: Since the last meeting the Borough had been hit by a tornado and flash flooding. Thankfully no residents were hurt; however, this highlighted the problem of climate change. In response to these incidents the Leader would be broadening the role of Member Champion for Climate Change.

The Leader then asked the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health integration to provide the Assembly with an update on the current COVID-19 situation.

The Cabinet Member advised that there had been 81 new cases of COVID-19 in the Borough today and 637 new cases in the last week. The all-age case rate had risen to 299 per 100,000 residents.

While there had been no deaths in the Borough, the risk and impact of long covid on residents was underestimated and the Cabinet Member asked that residents and visitors to the Borough continue to wear masks for the foreseeable future.

20. Treasury Management Annual Report 2020/21

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2020/21, which set out the key areas of performance during the year.

The Cabinet Member alluded to the major economic factors that had impacted on the UK economy during the 2020/21 financial year, with the COVID-19 pandemic being the main issue, and commended the Council's prudent approach to borrowing and vigorous assessment of investment opportunities which, coupled with the excellent work of the Treasury Management team, had resulted in the Council outperforming its targets and benchmarks in a number of areas. Key highlights within the report included:

- Total treasury investments held at 31/3/2021 was £210.17m (2019/20: £347.29m);
- Total cash held at 31/3/2021 was £45.19m (2019/20: £6.79m);
- Interest for 2020/21 was £8.8m (2019/20: £8.8m) compared to a budget of £6.5m;
- The Council's average treasury interest return for 2020/21 was 1.62%, which was 1.31% higher than the average London Peer Group return of 0.31%;
- The Council's average return on its commercial and property loans was 4.46% for 2020/21 (2019/20: 3.63%);
- Interest payable for 2020/21 totalled £32.8m (2019/20: £34.17m);
- Capitalised interest of £1.5m in 2019/20 and £3.0m in 2020/21 had been

transferred to the Investment Reserve;

- The Council borrowed £60.0m of long-term General Fund borrowing in 2020/21 at an average rate of 1.28% and an average duration of 31.7 years;
- The total long-term General Fund borrowing at 31/3/2021 was £600.4m;
- The value of short-term borrowing at 31 March 2021 was £67.5m; and
- Total Council borrowing was £1.16bn at 31 March 2021, within the 2020/21 Operational Boundary limit of £1.25bn and Authorised Borrowing Limit of £1.35bn.

The Assembly **resolved** to:

- (i) Note the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2020/21;
- (ii) Note that the Council complied with all 2020/21 treasury management indicators;
- (iii) Approve the actual Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2020/21, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report; and
- (iv) Note that the Council borrowed £60.0m from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) in 2020/21.

21. Motions

There were two motions before the Assembly.

Motion – To Increase Canopy Cover

Moved by Councillor Achilleos and Seconded by Councillor Ghani

“The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham recognises the far reaching benefits provided by trees such as tackling climate change through natural carbon capture, improving air quality and people’s well-being, boosting local biodiversity, and assisting with flood management.

In November last year the council, working with external partners and the community, planted the ‘Forest of Thanks’. A woodland creation project which delivered 32,000 trees in Parsloes Park. Whilst providing a way to commemorate those tragically lost to the pandemic and as a testament to the sacrifices of our key workers, it was also a statement of intent in our fight against climate change.

As the largest Miyawaki forest in Europe – a method of planting native trees that significantly increases environmental gains such as biodiversity, carbon capture and water retention, the ‘Forest of Thanks’ is a truly awe-inspiring legacy project.

However, data provided to Friends of the Earth in December 2020 by aerial survey company Bluesky International Ltd, suggests total canopy cover in Barking and Dagenham is less than 10%. It is worth noting that this data only includes trees over a certain height which differs based on species, so our ‘Forest of Thanks’ is not yet accounted for. Although, this project alone will not bring us in line with the 16% average of urban canopy cover in England.

Considering this data and the importance of trees in the face of a climate and ecological crisis, this council resolves to set an ambitious target to double canopy cover within the local authority area by 2040. This will include but will not be limited

to, further woodland creation in our parks and open spaces, and an innovative approach to street tree planting.

This council also resolves to write to the Environment Secretary to request more funding for councils to increase canopy cover.”

A number of Councillors spoke in strong support of the motion and the motion was **carried** unanimously.

Motion – Fairer Funding for Schools

Proposed by Cllr Carpenter, seconded by Cllr Twomey

“With 9 out of 10 schools judged Good or Outstanding, the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham remains committed to delivering the best possible education opportunities for all children. We are proud of our schools and those who work in them.

The impact of the pandemic over the last year means there has never been a greater need to increase funding for our schools which play such a vital role in our children’s and young people’s learning and development.

The government’s own Education Recovery Commissioner recently called on them to invest £15bn in our schools to repair the damage caused by the pandemic. Instead, they have chosen to invest less than 10% of this, or £1.4bn. The government has spoken of its commitment to levelling up the poorest parts of the country, but it has broken this promise.

The government’s funding commitment to schools, amounting to just £50 per pupil per year, is woefully inadequate. In some instances, our schools are being forced to make cuts to staffing and resources. Parents and teachers and all those who work in our schools deserve better and feel rightly let down.

The government has added insult to injury following their decision to alter funding for the most disadvantaged pupils by moving the goalposts for those eligible to the Pupil Premium. This equates to a £150 million funding cut in places like Barking & Dagenham.

It is not only in our children and young people’s interests, but also in the interests of the long-term prosperity of communities up and down our country that the government thinks again.

The London Borough of Barking & Dagenham therefore calls on the government to reverse its decision to cut the Pupil Premium and reinstate the Education Recovery Commissioner’s recommendations which would provide the funding our schools need so we can deliver the best by our children.”

Comment from Section 151 Officer

The Government had provided additional funding to allow schools to increase their provision for disadvantaged pupils as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each school would receive funding from the Covid Recovery Premium Fund (£6k per

primary school, £22k per secondary school) and had access to register for the National Tutoring Programme and Summer School funding. The COVID Education Recovery Plan (worth £1.4bn nationally over three years) would provide £50 per pupil to support tutoring courses and provide training and support to teachers.

The Section 151 Officer stated that the funding fell far short of the funding required to support the most disadvantaged pupils in LBBB to catch up on the learning they had lost over the past 16 months. The prolonged period of lockdown followed in many cases by multiple periods of self-isolation would have a significant impact on the educational achievement of the most disadvantaged pupils.

In addition, the Department for Education (DoE) had changed the timing of when they calculated pupil premium funding. Instead of using January as the annual point for measuring numbers of eligible pupils, the government had used October 2020 data. This change was introduced without notice or consultation. Many children would have become eligible during the period between October 2020 and January 2021, in part due to the effect of the pandemic. Additional funding to support the needs of these pupils (£1,345 per pupil in primary and £955 per pupil in secondary) would not be received.

Nationally this had created a £150m funding shortfall for the 2021-22 school year. It was estimated that the funding shortfall for schools in LBBB would be £1.2m. The Section 151 Officer stated that the DfE should have made this change only after consultation with schools and with consideration of funding a transition period to address shortfalls arising from this change. In the context of increasing need it did not seem the correct approach to move the funding goalposts in this way. As a borough with significant levels of deprivation, this change was likely to disproportionately affect schools in LBBB. The Government should consider introducing an interim payment to make up the shortfall created by this policy change.

A number of Councillors spoke in strong support of the motion and the motion was **carried** unanimously.

22. Questions With Notice

Question 1

From Councillor Paul Robinson

Would the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration update the Assembly on the success of the vaccine roll out in Barking and Dagenham?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration advised that the vaccination uptake for Barking and Dagenham continued to improve. As of 18 July 2021, a total of 110,063 (61.7%) Barking and Dagenham residents had had their first dose and 78,102 (43.8%) their second dose.

Thanks to outreach and engagement work by the Council, there was now a higher uptake among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities (BAME) in the Borough.

Question 2

From Councillor Paul Robinson

Can the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and Schools Improvement explain what support is being offered to families, children and our schools in cases where a class bubble has to isolate?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and Schools Improvement

The Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and Schools Improvement advised that in terms of teaching and learning, isolating pupils attended class remotely. Schools maintained contact with self-isolating pupils and checked attendance where necessary.

Free School Meal (FSM) provision had continued in schools throughout the pandemic. For pupils isolating that were eligible for FSM, the school provided the family with a voucher or hamper until the pupil could return to school.

Question 3

From Councillor Saleem

Can the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement update the Assembly on what events will be taking place to mark the centenary year of the Becontree Estate?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement

The Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement advised that the programme was underway

The biggest event would be the Becontree Weekender on 14th and 15th of August, right in the heart of the estate at Parsloes Park – part of the free Summer of Festivals programming. The Saturday would see the Becontree100 Festival, in partnership with Love Music Hate Racism. This would be followed on the Sunday by the Roundhouse Music Festival.

Information on all events could be found on the website - www.becontreeforever.uk.

Question 4

From Councillor Nalule

This borough has a proud history of raising football legends – from Bobby Moore to Bobby Zamora. Following the outcome of the Euro 2020 finals and the disgraceful increase in racially motivated attacks, what will this Council be doing to unite our community and honour these football heroes?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement

The Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement advised that there was never justification for racist abuse. The Council celebrated the players' behaviour both on and off the pitch.

The Council would continue to use national days, awareness months and other celebrations across the year and to celebrate all aspects of diversity and inclusion, and would continue to stand with the Black Lives Matter movement.

To honour footballing heroes of both past and present, Sebastian Court had been renamed Bobby Moore Court.