



LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CABINET

Wednesday, 19 May 2004

6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Chair: Councillor Clyde Loakes	Council Leader
Councillor Tarsem Bhogal	Best Value and Performance Portfolio Holder
Councillor Loretta Hodges	Housing Portfolio Holder
Councillor Mohammed Nasim	Partnerships Portfolio Holder
Councillor Keith Rayner	Corporate Services Portfolio Holder
Councillor Eric Sizer	Environment Street Portfolio Holder
Councillor Barry Smith	Community Safety Portfolio Holder

167 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor G. Smith, Social Services and Health Portfolio Holder and Councillor Robbins, Lifelong Learning Portfolio Holder.

168 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

169 MINUTES OF CABINET

The minutes of Cabinet on 20 April were agreed.

References from Scrutiny

170 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONSULTATION SCRUTINY PANEL

The report set out the actions proposed by the Management Board to implement the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Matthew Davis, a member of the Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel, spoke in support of the proposals in the report and asked that the underlying principles, aimed at ensuring effective consultation by the Council, continue to be prioritised.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Effective consultation is essential to develop services that involve users and stakeholders, and is considered to be a vital element in ensuring an improved performance in Council Services.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed the proposals put forward by the Management Board as set out in the report.

171 COUNCIL'S CAR PARKING SCHEME REVIEW

Councillor Peter Herrington, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided separate majority and minority recommendations.

Councillor Herrington noted that the Car Parking Scheme was set up with two main objectives, firstly as part of the Council's Green Travel Plan and secondly to be a source of income for the Council. It was noted that the Scheme had not achieved either of these objectives and was running at a loss.

A majority of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission members considered that the Scheme was not successful and recommended that it be discontinued. A minority considered that the Scheme had not been in operation for sufficient time to be evaluated and recommended that it be continued, but with exemptions for essential car users, and be further reviewed in 6 months.

The Leader asked that the report be referred to Management Board for further consideration on the basis that the principle of charging for car parking be maintained but with the primary aim of achieving the objectives of the Green Travel Plan. He expressed concern that implementation of the Green Travel Plan had so far been disappointing.

The Leader further asked that Management Board in particular consider the issue of essential car users.

REASON FOR THE DECISION

Cabinet had requested a report on the Scheme following its review by officers.

CABINET DECISIONS

(1) To refer the report to Management Board for further consideration, with particular regard to the Green Travel Plan and the issue of charges to essential car users.

(2) To ask Management Board to urgently review progress on the Council's Green Travel Plan.

172 CALL-IN REQUESTS

No items had been called in for pre-decision scrutiny.

173 FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet noted the Forward Plan for the period June to September 2004.

Performance Monitoring Reports

174 MONTHLY BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Strategic Finance informed the Cabinet that collection of Council Tax was below the level reached in April 2004 and this was due to problems with the new collection system. April is a critical month due to start of year spending, however expenditure appears to be within the budgetary constraints.

The Council is currently awaiting the outcome of the efficiency review of Revenue and Benefits Services.

REASON FOR DECISION

It is best practice for Members to monitor the Council's budget, focusing on high risk areas on an exception basis.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet noted the report.

Forward Plan Key Decision Reports

175 HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

The report set out the aims and objectives of a human resources strategy for the Council, and a detailed action plan for achieving them.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Human Resources strategy brings together all issues relating to staffing, including policies to ensure the Council has staff who have the right skills and who are well trained and motivated to provide excellent services, and that the Council is able to attract and retain the best staff. The strategy is critical to the Council's strategic aims and objectives, and it therefore a key decision to be taken by the Cabinet.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed the Council's Human Resources Strategy.

176 UPDATE ON THE LOCAL PROCUREMENT INITIATIVE

The Portfolio Leader for Corporate Services introduced the report. He commented that a proper Procurement Plan would create savings in costs for the Council and also was important to local businesses as it would stimulate the local economy.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Council's local procurement initiative (LPI) aims to tackle major barriers to economic opportunity for small firms within the borough. It will enable them to benefit from public procurement opportunities. It will encourage best value in procurement in the public sector and support competitiveness, collaboration and sustainable business growth.

It is also consistent with Government policy through the "National Procurement Strategy" which requires local government to consider support to local business through procurement.

CABINET DECISION

(1) To approve the proposals on local procurement initiative set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

(2) To note the adoption of the local business initiative across all Council Directorates as part of the Corporate Procurement Strategy.

ALMO (ASCHAM HOMES) INSPECTION

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In November 2003 the Audit Commission inspected the Arms Length Management Organisation (Ascham Homes) and judged the service as fair, with uncertain prospects of improvement.

The Portfolio Leader for Housing introduced the report and noted that it was unfortunate that only one star was achieved. She noted that the company was very new and was more likely than not inspected too early, before it was able to fully establish itself.

There is now a new director for Ascham Homes and a plan has been put in place to deal with the points raised by the inspectors as well as time frames for achieving the goals. It was predicted that within 12 months the company may be in a position to attain 2 stars.

REASON FOR DECISION

The aim of these proposals is to bring all housing accommodation owned by Waltham Forest up to a decent standard by 2010. These are key decisions because the performance of Ascham Homes and its Council nominees and the decision to pursue the option of stock transfer will have a significant impact on tenants throughout the borough.

CABINET DECISION

- (1) To note the Audit Commission report and the progress in implementing the Audit Commission's recommendations to the Council and to Ascham Homes.
- (2) To re-affirm its commitment to assist Ascham Homes (for example by implementing all the Audit Commission recommendations which are relevant to the Council), while at the same time preserving the genuine independence of Ascham Homes.
- (3) That any future Council nominees to the Ascham Homes Board should have skills that match the needs of the Board, as recommended by the Audit Commission;
- (4) To delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Housing to re-apply to Government for funds for an Arms Length Management Organisation, if necessary;
- (5) To receive a further report in November 2004 on the progress of Ascham Homes in meeting the key performance targets attached as Appendix 2 and in implementing the recommendations of the Audit Commission set out in Appendix 4;
- (6) To agree that if Ascham Homes does not achieve two or more stars in its next inspection Cabinet will consider other options.

Reports To Council

178 REVIEW OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS FOLLOWING SIX MONTHS OF OPERATION

Community Councils have been running for 6 months, the overall review was very positive, however some members felt that their role as Cabinet Champions needed to be clarified. Other comments made concerned officer presentations at meetings and the participation of the Police. A number of members commented on the need for efforts to encourage members of the public to attend the decision making part as well as the first part of the meeting where they have the opportunity to voice their concerns.

The Leader suggested that the Chairs of the Community Councils should be invited to sit on the Police Liaison Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION

The council previously agreed that a review was to be undertaken after 6 months, and that the outcome be reported to cabinet and full council.

CABINET DECISION

(1) To agree in principle, that Community Councils should be able to update the Cabinet on their decisions, and to request Officers to consult and propose appropriate options to achieve this and report back to Cabinet at a future date.

(2) That the lead officer supporting Community Councils be drawn from officers one tier below Head of Service and that appointment to this role should be reviewed annually with the first review being May 2005; this will provide a developmental opportunity for officers at this level.

(3) That the Community Councils Operational Framework be amended as set out in Appendix F of the report to identify the minimum requirements for a Community Council venue.

(4) That accessible venues are identified for use on a regular basis and the council should explore ways of assisting these venues to become properly equipped for Community Council and other public meetings.

(5) That the following amendments to the Community Council Procedure Rules be referred to the Constitutional Review Group and then full Council:

- (i) To restrict voting to those people living within the Community Council area.
- (ii) To require that a vice chair is elected for both parts of the meeting.

(iii) To require an annual election for the post of the Community Chair.

(6) That Officers be requested to explore options for the payment of Community Chairs' expenses to reflect their commitment to the work of the Community Council and to report back to Cabinet.

(7) That a targeted publicity campaign is undertaken to ensure more representative attendance by Black and Ethnic Minority communities at Community Councils.

(8) That a mechanism is established that enables the views of young people in each area, to be raised at Community Council meetings.

176 REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Cabinet received reports from the following Portfolio Holders:

- (a) Leader's Report
- (b) Community Safety Portfolio Holder Report
- (c) Corporate Services Portfolio Holder Report
- (d) Housing Portfolio Holders Report
- (e) Lifelong Learning Portfolio Holders Report
- (f) Social Services Portfolio Holders Report
- (g) Environment Street Portfolio Holders Report

177 OTHER BUSINESS

A welcome was extended to Jan Wickham, Interim Deputy Chief Executive.

The Leader extended his thanks to all members and officers for their hard work over the last 9 months which had been very productive and successful.

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Chair

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