

LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CABINET

Tuesday 19 October 2004

7.30 pm - 8.35 pm

PRESENT:

| | | |
|--------|---------------------------|---|
| Chair: | Councillor Clyde Loakes | Council Leader |
| | Councillor Keith Rayner | Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder, Corporate Services |
| | Councillor Liaquat Ali | Portfolio Holder, Community Engagement and Equalities |
| | Councillor David Blunt | Portfolio Holder, Environment |
| | Councillor Jenny Gray | Portfolio Holder, Strategic Innovation, Performance and Learning |
| | Councillor Loretta Hodges | Portfolio Holder, Housing |
| | Councillor Chris Robbins | Portfolio Holder, Culture, Learning and Leisure. |
| | Councillor Barry Smith | Portfolio Holder, Community Safety and Protection |
| | Councillor Graham Smith | Portfolio Holder, Health and Social Care |
| | Councillor Simon Wright | Portfolio Holder, Regeneration |

COUNCILLOR M.M. NASIM

At the Leader's request, Members and all present stood and observed a minute's silence in remembrance and respect for Councillor M.M.Nasim, who passed away following a heart attack on 29th September 2004.

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence - all Members were present.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

59. MINUTES OF CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21st September 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

60. FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet noted the Forward Plan for the four month period 1st November 2004 to 28th February 2005.

61. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT: MONTH 6 (SEPTEMBER)

Cabinet received a report on expenditure, up to 30th September 2004. The report concluded that the overall picture appears to be one of widespread pressures on a variety of demand-led and income budgets, but no large single problems as seen in previous years have so far emerged. Cash flow remains very strong, and the 2003/04 outturn provided some funds which are being held to deal with unavoidable pressures.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet noted the report.

62. IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The report provided an overview of progress against Key Improvement priorities up until 30th September 2004.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet noted the report and the additional information provided by the Community Safety and Protection Portfolio Holder about the success of the recent Street Warden Recruitment Campaign and the positive feedback on the Crime and Disorder Audit undertaken in-house for the first time this year.

63. IDEa PEER CHALLENGE REPORT

Cabinet received the final IDEa Peer Challenge Report putting forward recommendations to assist the Council in preparing for last week's visit by CPA inspectors to assess the improvements made since the 2002 assessment.

The focus of the challenge was based on the nationally established Local Government Improvement Programme of peer reviews. The report set out the significant progress made in moving from recovery to improvement and provided a focus upon those areas where the organisation needs to concentrate its effort.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet noted the report and welcomed the Deputy Leader's suggestion that given the very helpful and accurate response from the Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review Team, a similar approach be adopted for future Corporate Assessment Reviews.

64. GREENSPACE AUDIT AND POSITION STATEMENT

Arising from a recent Best Value Review and subsequent audits and inspections of Waltham Forest's Greenspace service, Cabinet received a report "A Greenspace Strategy for Waltham Forest 2004-2009" which provided the Council with an audit and position statement of existing provision and a framework for action over a five year period designed to improve the Borough's parks and green spaces so that they become more attractive, accessible, safe and sustainable for everyone.

Cabinet noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission had considered the proposed strategy at its meeting on 12th October 2004. Councillor Matharoo, the Chair of the Commission, informed Cabinet that the Commission welcomed the proposed strategy and had put forward the following recommendations:

- i) Park keepers should continue to be used within local parks;
- ii) Action should be taken to keep park keepers based permanently at Abbots Park, Leyton Manor and Cann Hall Parks and
- iii) Given the concern around security, there should be continued liaison between the Street Wardens, Police Community Support Officers and Police Officers to develop actions to deal with anti-social activity in parks.

In presenting the report, the Portfolio Holder for the Environment explained that at this stage, Cabinet was not being asked to approve the proposed strategy but to note its contents and to agree to commission an integrated study to ensure that the strategy is not dealt with in isolation but becomes part of the Council's wider strategic objectives.

Cabinet did not agree the financial implications set out in paragraph 7.1.1 of the report.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed to:

- a) note the contents of the Strategy and the action plan;
- b) commission an integrated health and well-being, greenspace leisure study, considering the ecological implications.
- c) accept the Overview & Scrutiny Commission's recommendations as set out above.

65. POLICY & RESOURCES REVIEW 2005/06 TO 2007/08

At its meeting on 22nd July 2004, the Council approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2004-08, taking a further step towards sustainable budgets and a prudent level of reserves. The strategy

envisages Council Tax increases in the range of 3-8% and cuts in controllable budgets of 2.5-5% over the next three years.

This year's Policy & Resources Review report outlined the current financial position and the assumptions that have been made as part of the medium term financial strategy, including investing £1.5 m in service improvements, particularly those set out in the Improvement Plan, and put forward proposed cost reductions in order to achieve savings and allow resources to be aligned to Council priorities.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Council needed to make decisions on 2005/06 savings as early as possible as a matter of good practice, so that work on implementing them may start as soon as possible.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed the following recommendations:

- a) to make reductions to budgets through improved procurement, in the light of contract savings, in areas as set out in Appendix C1 of the report to an estimated value of £500,000 and in IT related equipment to an estimated value of £250,000;
- b) to restrict inflation increases on certain cost types set out in Appendix C2, resulting in an estimated reduction in budgets of £700,000;
- c) to accept service proposals totalling £255,000 set out in Appendix C4 for reducing staffing and other costs in the light of an ongoing review of support functions following the introduction of SAP;
- d) to increase fees and charges above inflation in the areas set out in Appendix C3, with the exception of the proposed £100,000 additional income from car parking fees, to yield an estimated £100,000;
- e) to reduce the use of agency staff and avoidable consultancy costs to provide ongoing savings of £350,000 in 2005/06 on the basis set out in Appendix A; and
- f) to agree the implementation as soon as possible of departmental savings amounting to £2.8m as set out in the schedule attached to these minutes.

Cabinet noted that the total Policy Review savings included corporate savings amounts to £4.963m.

66. CUSTOMER FIRST-CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

The Customer Services Strategy is key to providing excellent services and is intended to be the catalyst in changing customers' perception of the services they receive and the mindset of the service providers. The report to Cabinet

proposed a customer services strategy for the Council to be implemented over the next three years. The strategy has three themes: corporate customer care standards, customer care awareness and training and customer relationship management.

REASON FOR DECISION

Customer care and a significantly improved customer focus represent key elements of the Council's aim to provide excellent services.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed to:

- a) the customer services strategy – *Customer First*
- b) the phasing out of the CLARENCE brand as part of the Council's rebranding exercise and standardise on Waltham Forest Direct brand.
- c) the freephone telephone number for CLARENCE being retained pending the full implementation of the rebranding exercise.

67. REGENERATION & INVESTMENT STRATEGY FOR WALTHAM FOREST

The Council's Improvement Plan for 2004/05 prioritises the production of a Regeneration Strategy for the Borough, which would be completed by March 2005. The report to Cabinet summarised the process and content for the production of a Regeneration Strategy which will play a key role in co-ordinating a coherent vision aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty.

REASON FOR DECISION

The production of a Regeneration Strategy for Waltham Forest is a priority in the Council's Improvement Plan for 2004/05. The Council's Improvement Plan significantly affects all wards in the Borough.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed to adopt the Regeneration and Investment Strategy.

68. HOUSING OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Cabinet received a report which set out the process for the housing stock options appraisal. The options appraisal must demonstrate that an ALMO is the best option for delivering decent homes and must demonstrate widespread support for a range of stakeholders, including residents, members and staff.

REASON FOR DECISION

The aim of these proposals are to bring all council houses owned by Waltham Forest up to a decent standard by 2010. These are key decisions because the performance of the ALMO will have a significant impact on tenants throughout the Borough.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet agreed to:

- a) confirm that an ALMO is the preferred option of the authority for delivering decent homes by 2010 and that this will be delivered in partnership with its preferred managing agent Ascham Homes.
- b) formally approve the continued partnership arrangements with Ascham Homes in order to secure additional funding for Decent Homes in Waltham Forest subject to receiving a two stars rating in the next housing inspection which will be no later than July 2005.

69. FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES' SERVICES BY THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL CARE INSPECTION: 5th - 8th JULY 2004

Cabinet received a report on outcome of the Commission for Social Care's follow-up inspection of child protection services conducted from 5th to 8th July 2004. The report acknowledged the considerable improvement made in the delivery of child protection services and stated that the systems in place to safeguard children are stronger.

Members commended the Executive Director for Community Services and her staff for the improvements that had been made in Children and Families' Services and also referred to the successful organisation of the recent Looked-After Children Day at Gilwell Park.

REASON FOR DECISION

The inspection report is part of the evidence that will determine the star rating of the Social Services Department in November 2004. The star rating is an important element of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment judgment.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet noted:

- (a) the contents of the report of the CSCI follow-up inspection of child protection services in July 2004;
- (b) the updated inspection plan and
- (c) the on-going improvements in the delivery of child protection services and systems for safeguarding children.

70. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Cabinet received reports from the following Portfolio Holders:

- a) The Leader
- b) Deputy Leader and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder

In presenting his report, the Deputy Leader and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder drew attention to the following successes:

- (i) SAP- will show a clear saving of £3.7m by the end of the financial year.
- (ii) As a result of the Legal Services Value for Money Review, there is a more structured workload in Legal Services; the service is being provided at a competitive price; and its reputation has increased.

- c) Community Engagement and Equalities Portfolio Holder
- d) Environment Portfolio Holder
- e) Housing Portfolio Holder
- f) Culture, Learning and Leisure Portfolio Holder
- g) Health and Social Care Portfolio Holder
- h) Regeneration Portfolio Holder

71. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Cabinet was reminded that its next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 24th November 2004 and not Tuesday, 23rd November 2004 as originally programmed.

72. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item in accordance with Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 7, 9 and 12 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

73. ARCADE SITE-PROPOSED REPORT

Cabinet considered a further report on the commercial development of The Arcade site following its decision in July 2004 not to increase the agreed contribution towards the scheme as requested by the developers.

The report put forward three indicative options for the site and updated Cabinet on the discussions that have taken place with the developers on a revised scheme within the context of the Council's master plan for Walthamstow town centre.

Cabinet also had before it the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission which considered the report at its meeting on 12th October 2004.

REASON FOR DECISION

The development of the Arcade and Town Centre is a key decision for Cabinet due to the significant level of expenditure and impact on the Borough as a whole.

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet:

- (i) agreed not to proceed with the current scheme for the development of the Arcade site;
- (ii) indicated that its preferred option for the development was Option 1 as set out below which will be prepared and costed in a full report for the next Cabinet meeting:-

Option 1 relates to the site area, which has been cleared and is ready to be developed. This site, for which Henry Boot Developments have secured planning permission for a mixed-use scheme, is enclosed to the north by two storey Victorian houses, the EMD Cinema and a two-storey block containing the HSBC Bank with offices above. This option would now exclude the library use, which would be substituted by additional commercial and residential development. This option would result in a land value receipt to the Council.

(iii) accepted the Overview & Scrutiny Commission recommendations that Cabinet:

- a) does not proceed with the current scheme;
- b) pursues Option 1 as outlined in the report to Cabinet;
- c) aims to increase the retail floor space of the retail outlets to establish Walthamstow as a Metropolitan Town Centre;
- d) investigates the allocation of funds arising from Option 1 towards regeneration, to include the development of the present Library and possible investment in the EMD Cinema;
- e) agrees that any decision to increase the retail floor space should take full account of the quality of potential retailers and the continuing viability of existing retailers; and that
- f) any decision to increase the retail floor space needs to take full account of the transport infrastructure for the longer-term development of Walthamstow as a Metropolitan Town Centre.

74. JIM WINTOUR-HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

Cabinet placed on record its thanks to Jim Wintour for the valuable contribution he has made to the development of Housing Services in Waltham Forest and for his work as Acting Director-Community Services and wished him well in his new role as Managing Director of Gravesham Borough Council.

(Chair)

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