



## **REGENERATION AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of the meeting of the REGENERATION AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on 15 JUNE 2005 at 6:30PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Toby Eckersley (Chair)  
Councillor Jane Salmon (Vice Chair)  
Councillors John Friary, David Hubber, Billy Kayada, Gavin O'Brien, Michelle Pearce.

**OFFICERS:** Paul Evans – Strategic Director of Regeneration  
Stephanie Fleck – Principal Lawyer, Contracts  
Carina Kane – Scrutiny Project Manager  
Bernard Nawrat – Head of Human Resources

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor William Rowe (reserve member) and Duncan Whitfield (Finance Director).

### **CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS**

The Members listed as being present were confirmed as the Voting Members.

### **NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS AS URGENT**

None.

### **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

Councillor David Hubber declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 6 as he was a member of the Standards Committee.

### **RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES**

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect to an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute File and was available for public inspection.

The Sub-Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the Minute File. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the item bearing the same number on the agenda.

## **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Regeneration and Resources Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 19 May 2005 be agreed as a correct record of proceedings and signed by the Chair.

### **1 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP [Pages 1-3]**

- 1.1 The Chair noted the terms of reference for the Regeneration & Resources Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2005/06. He advised that there had been one change from 2004/05 i.e. that the development of community councils was no longer specifically part of the sub-committee remit.
- 1.2 The Chair received confirmation from the sub-committee that nothing in the remit required further clarification.

### **2 STAFF SICKNESS [Pages 3-7]**

- 2.1 The Head of Human Resources (HR) took the sub-committee through the agenda report, explaining that the two departments with the worst staff sickness days were the Regeneration and Housing departments.
- 2.2 The Head of HR said that Housing had the highest absences in 2004/05 and this had become worse since. The reasons for this appeared to be management challenges in Housing which had diverted attention away from the management of staff absence, including the implementation of Housing Management's Best Value review and other reorganisations in Community Housing. Housing had identified the problem, and was employing three staff for a six-month period to improve its performance in this area.
- 2.3 In respect of the Regeneration Department, the sub-committee were informed that the issues were different. The staff numbers were small therefore the figures changed considerably with only a few staff on long-term sick leave, although there were a few more cases of long-term sickness. In previous years the sickness figures in the Regeneration Department had been the lowest. Issues in regeneration were that HR had a temporary staffing shortage and managers had less experience in managing sickness absence, but these were being addressed.
- 2.4 The Strategic Director of Regeneration added that the sickness cases were actively under management and there was no particular trend – some were straight-forward, others were repeat occurrences, and some were long-term sick leave as a result of performance issues. He reiterated that the small staff numbers distorted the figures in the Regeneration Department; his own departmental performance target for 2005/06 was for an average of five days sickness.
- 2.5 It was suggested that there was too much reliance on staff managing their own sickness, and the key concern was with management within the council. A question was also asked about the assistance given to the Housing Department before and after the best value review. The Head of HR said there was no real evidence that the review approach could have changed in a way that would have reduced the sickness levels, particularly given the challenging time pressures.

- 2.6 A question was asked about the role of the dedicated HR staff in Housing - whether they would just seek to manage the cases or also look at the reasons. The Head of HR said that they seemed to have a holistic approach, but the short-term goal would be to manage the current cases. Housing had the best track record at trying to manage sickness, possibly because they had more resources available for this.
- 2.7 Sub-committee members noted that paragraph 14 addressed what the sicknesses percentages meant in reality. Sickness was inevitable, but the Head of HR said that if sickness was managed well there was no reason that the average levels of council staff sickness absence should be more than 8.5 days by 2006/07. In setting the sickness performance targets the general approach was to reduce sicknesses by 10 percent annually, although this was subject to agreement by Executive. The actual level of council sickness in 2004/05 was 9.17 - from a central point of view this was still in the right direction and met BVPI targets.
- 2.8 There was discussion about whether lessons learnt were shared across the council. The Head of HR confirmed that this occurred, for example the sharing of best practice of the Environment and Leisure Department in regards to sickness management. Staff sickness information was distributed monthly to managers from the SAP payroll system.
- 2.9 The Head of HR was asked to comment on the Local Government Chronicle article [19 May 2005] which outlined a proposal that councils would be able to withhold pay from staff who take "bogus" sick leave. The Head of HR said councils already had the authority to stop pay where there was evidence of this happening. However the key problem was not short-term sickness as the process was good at picking up on this, it was the management of long-term sickness which was more challenging.
- 2.10 Further questions were asked about the patterns of sickness in the Housing Department. The Head of HR said that the fact that housing performance had worsened related to the way sickness was being managed rather than any specific trends. He undertook to provide a more detailed break-down of Housing Department figures to Councillor Pearce.
- 2.11 The Chair thanked the Head of HR for his attendance.

**RESOLVED:**

That the sub-committee:

- a) Notes the advice of the Head of Human Resources (HR) that the council target of an average of 8.5 council sick days was achievable and should be reached by 2006/07;
- b) Recommends that Executive closely monitor the impact of the temporary increase in HR staffing in the Housing Department on sickness levels, receiving a report on its progress by March 2006;
- c) Recommends that the Executive Member for Resources receives quarterly reports on trends in departmental sickness levels;
- d) Requests that the sub-committee receive the quarterly reports on trends in departmental sickness levels.

**3 COMMUNITY STRATEGY REVIEW [Pages 8-15]**

- 3.1 The Strategic Director of Regeneration explained that item was an opportunity for the sub-committee's comments to be fed into the draft 10-year community strategy. The key topics of relevance to the sub-committee ('Southwark A Place for People' and 'Opportunity for All') were the overarching principles for shaping the borough.
- 3.2 Discussion initially centred on the development of the borough: whether the council should engineer change within the various 'town centres' (such as had occurred with Bellenden) or leave areas to grow organically (e.g. Lordship Lane). Emphasising a few big regeneration schemes risked creating inequalities elsewhere. The Director commented that even if the council wanted to be entirely passive as a landowner its role went beyond just a planning authority. Members also stressed the importance of looking at the potential of an area to grow (factors such as transport and accessibility) and the range and quality on offer.
- 3.2 The Director asked whether more should be done to make the 14-odd centres in Southwark distinctive, successful character areas. Members were broadly in favour of this, noting that there needed to be the right balance of things to separate them across the spectrum. Lordship Lane, for example, had an evening economy; Peckham used to be known for its good shopping centre. It was acknowledged that there may be limits to what the council could do given factors beyond its control such as transport.
- 3.3 The sub-committee also discussed the effect of the Elephant and Castle regeneration. Members referred to the likely temporary relocation of traffic flow during the regeneration and the importance therefore of encouraging people to remain in Southwark rather than look to other boroughs. Peckham, Camberwell and Walworth Road were suggested as possible areas where people could be redirected to. The point was made that like the community strategy, Elephant and Castle also had a 10-year horizon, therefore this created the opportunity for other areas to lift before Elephant and Castle came back into competition.
- 3.4 Members also warned about being too ambitious and raising expectations as had happened in the past e.g. Peckham and Camberwell. The council was already involved in a few large-scale regeneration projects and so maybe more light touch interventions were required in the other areas. It was suggested that the council was good at the former but not so much the latter, and a change of style might be required. The Director commented that the council now had more experience in shaping a place in a way that was localised and manageable e.g. through its experience with business improvement districts.
- 3.5 In conclusion, members summarised by highlighting that the council should focus on two to three large-scale projects and do all it could to educate people that there were other places in the borough worth visiting to encourage them to stay local.

#### **4 ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES**

- 4.1 The Strategic Director of Regeneration briefly provided the background to the enterprise and employment strategies. Key points were they were part of the Southwark Alliance taskgroup structure; drafts had been consulted mainly through the Alliance mechanisms; the drafts would be considered by Executive in July/August; and overall the review had not really brought up any new issues for the council.

- 4.2 The Director informed members of other strands of work going on around enterprise and employment, namely Jobcentre Plus and Southwark Works (a work placement initiative which aimed to unblock individual's barriers to being able to work). He explained that employment targets were high compared to the numbers of people accommodated for in the Southwark Works programme, and reported that productive discussions were under way on how to grow the Southwark Works initiative. Jobcentre Plus was outside council control.
- 4.3 It was suggested that the employment programmes were geographically exclusive, and a concern was raised about whether the work of Southwark Alliance was shared with members. The Director replied that Jobcentres were located in certain places but were in principle accessible to all. He was concerned about the comment about the Southwark Alliance, noting that the council was the lead for delivering/co-ordinating its work, and undertook to ensure that material about employment and enterprise circulated to the Executive or the public was sent to the sub-committee members. He also said that he would be happy to give a briefing if there was a reasonable demand.
- 4.4 A reference was made to the community strategy topic papers, and whether the fact that Southwark had moved up in its economic deprivation rating meant that more people were getting jobs. The Director explained that the strategy topic paper was based on the current state of the economy and best guess for the future by sector. The outcome was that the borough was relatively healthy in terms of number of jobs, but there was still a disparity in terms of who had the opportunity to access the jobs.
- 4.5 There was also some discussion about the council's understanding in tackling the issues facing employment and enterprises. The Director said that knowledge was good for the employment side, but that there was less understanding of how to deal entirely with businesses competing in a market where forces were against them.

#### **MOTION OF ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:30 p.m. it was proposed, seconded and

**RESOLVED:** That the meeting stand adjourned for ten minutes for a comfort break.

At 8.40 p.m. the meeting reconvened.

#### **5 REVIEW OF OFFICE ACCOMMODATION**

- 5.1 The Strategic Director of Regeneration introduced this by explaining that there was a random collection of 59 buildings across Southwark and concerns around suitability of the buildings for the required purpose, both now and in the future. A review of council accommodation was necessary but beyond the resources of the council's accommodation staff.
- 5.2 Of the agreed £295,000 growth bid in 2005/06 for the office implementation strategy, half was resources for staffing the implementation review. The other half was for consultants to analyse the council properties and assess the market and needs of the council. The money was not part of the base budget, and £295,000 represented the best guess for carrying out the work.

- 5.3 The Director also explained that the review would consider a number of issues including technology advances, mobile-based working, the value of current sites, which sites are needed for what purpose and how to accommodate any future changes in organisational structure (e.g. if a service was no longer managed by the council). In terms of meeting room facilities, the Director said the review considered facilities for serving the basic constitutional needs of the council, not the wider meeting needs across the borough. The Director agreed to provide members with information about the scope and remit and timetabling of the review, including when the consultants would report back.
- 5.4 The Director was asked whether there was any vision to have the core base of the council situated at Elephant and Castle. He replied that this was an idea floated because the council had some control over the area, although other options were not being ruled out. Of key importance was ensuring the council was operating in buildings that were as near to the purpose as possible, and the organisation efficiently met service requirements.
- 5.6 The Chair thanked the Director for attending the meeting.

## **6 REPORT BACK: MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT**

- 6.1 The Chair said sub-committee members had received comments from Councillor Charlie Smith on the questions relating to the public interest defence in the Standards Board for England's consultation document, *A code for the future*. In response to Councillor Smith's comments, the Chair had drafted a suggested response to question 5 of the consultation document.
- 6.2 The Standards Committee had also sent in a response on behalf of the council and the sub-committee discussed the implications of this. Councillor Hubber explained that the Standards Committee response was based on legal advice and the response suggested by the sub-committee seemed more direct. The Principal Lawyer confirmed there was no problem with the sub-committee sending a response also and the Chair undertook to ensure that that it was clear that the sub-committee's response was a view from another council body and not intended to contradict any other council response.
- 6.3 Sub-committee members were generally happy with the Chair's suggested wording, but sought clarification on a couple of points. The Chair explained the response reflected the view that the nature of the confidentiality needed to be ascertained, and the member must have a genuine belief that there was a public interest. The response was intended to state a case when the public interest defence should not be available. The sub-committee amended the Chair's wording to reflect this more clearly.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the following response be submitted to the Standards Board for England on question 5 of the consultation document *A code for the Future*:

"In principle an explicit public interest defence should be available. However on the basis that it would be expected that Members would take sufficient steps to ascertain the reasons for which confidentiality was claimed, the public interest defence should not be available to a Member who recklessly disclosed material relating to personal information of an individual or to commercial information of private companies. In all cases it would be necessary for

any investigation to seek to establish that the Member held a reasonable and genuine belief that the disclosure was in the public interest.”

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME 2005/06 [Pages 15-23]**

Before leaving the meeting, the Strategic Director of Regeneration made the point that the work programme was clear in terms of the sequence for developments of Elephant & Castle, and also commented that the rethinking about Aylesbury Estate timing needed careful consideration. The Chair suggested it could be useful to have a joint session on this with Housing, and said that he wanted to add something to the work programme about the selection of the preferred developer for the Elephant and Castle regeneration.

The work programme for 2005/06 would also include the following:

- Report back from the Strategic Director of Regeneration on the requested information for Elephant & Castle, as agreed at the sub-committee meeting of March 2005
- Framework for monitoring internal and external audit reports
- The Statement of Community Involvement
- Progress report on the emerging Unitary Development Plan
- 6-month expenditure monitors for the Regeneration and Strategic Services Departments
- Statement of Accounts
- Update on the end of Best Value and what Gershon means for the council
- Consideration of the value for money requirements set out in the new CPA

Councillors Pearce, Friary and Kayada were in favour of looking at the development of the Peckham and Camberwell areas. The Chair was not keen to take this up on this as a specific scrutiny, but said that it could be considered when the sub-committee received an update on the community strategy.

The Chair said that the Executive interview with the Executive Member for Resources and the Deputy Leader (on the Elephant and Castle regeneration) would be scheduled for later in the municipal year. The Executive Member for Regeneration & Economic Development would be a lower priority.

The meeting closed at 9:45pm.

**CHAIR:**

**DATE:**