



## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 19 July 2010 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Lisa Rajan (Chair)  
Councillor Andy Simmons (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Toby Eckersley  
Councillor Gavin Edwards  
Councillor Dan Garfield (Reserve)  
Councillor Mark Glover  
Councillor David Hubber  
Councillor Tim McNally  
Councillor Helen Morrissey  
Councillor Paul Noblet  
Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole

**EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES:** Colin Elliott, Parent Governor

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny  
Doreen Forrester-Brown, Legal Services  
Adrian Green, Regional Manager, Electoral Commission  
Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Project Manager

### 1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Neil Coyle.

### 2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were no urgent items of business.

### 3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

#### **4. MINUTES**

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2010 be agreed as a correct and accurate record.

#### **5. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES**

- 5.1 The chairs of the scrutiny sub-committees outlined the work programmes proposed at their initial meetings.
- 5.2 In response to questions, Councillor Gavin Edwards, chair of the housing & community safety scrutiny sub-committee, confirmed that the sub-committee was aware of the previous scrutiny review of housing repairs. The intention of the sub-committee was to focus on the specific issue of performance management and would take the previous review into account as background information.
- 5.3 Members highlighted imminent changes in housing benefits and asked whether the sub-committee had considered reviewing the impact on Southwark. Councillor Edwards explained that the sub-committee had not considered this but could review their work programme at a later date if there proved to be a major impact on Southwark. Councillor Tim McNally reported that he had already raised this as an issue and would be happy to circulate the results of his enquiry.
- 5.4 A member asked whether overview & scrutiny committee or the housing & community safety scrutiny sub-committee might review the result of bringing revenues and benefits fully back in-house. Councillor McNally suggested that it would not be appropriate for overview & scrutiny committee to take the lead on this as three members were former members of the executive who had been involved in the decision to bring the service back in-house.
- 5.3 Councillor Mark Glover, chair of the regeneration & leisure scrutiny sub-committee, indicated that the review of funding generated by Section 106 would cover all community council areas to assess what income streams were supporting regeneration borough-wide.
- 5.4 The chair asked that, in reviewing service changes to drug and alcohol treatment at Marina House, the health & adult care scrutiny sub-committee join this up with the work of officers in children's services.
- 5.5 The chair also reported that the housing & community safety scrutiny sub-committee was proposing to co-opt representatives from the tenants and home owners councils. In response to members' comments, the chair of the sub-committee agreed to extend the proposed co-option to include a representative and reserve from each body.
- 5.6 The committee considered the proposed cabinet member interviews. The chair explained that the intention was to invite members of the housing & community

safety and leisure & regeneration scrutiny sub-committees to attend overview & scrutiny committee when the cabinet members for housing management and regeneration & corporate strategy were being interviewed. The sub-committee members would also be invited to submit questions in advance of the meeting. Councillor Edwards confirmed that this would not preclude the sub-committees inviting either member to attend a meeting to give evidence on specific reviews.

- 5.7 The committee discussed whether or not it would request written answers to questions in advance of meetings. Members considered that the deadline for questions should be set sufficiently in advance of meetings to allow cabinet members to provide written answers. The chair indicated that she and the vice-chair would raise the issue with the Democracy Commission.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the work programmes of the scrutiny sub-committees be agreed.
2. That the proposed cabinet member interviews be agreed and the committee invite the attendance of cabinet members on the following dates:  
  
September: Councillor Ian Wingfield, Deputy Leader & Housing Management  
  
November: Councillor Richard Livingstone, Finance & Resources  
  
January: Councillor Peter John, Leader  
  
February: Councillor Fiona Colley, Regeneration & Corporate Strategy

**6. ELECTION REVIEW - SCOPING**

- 6.1 Adrian Green, Regional Manager from the Electoral Commission, addressed the committee and outlined the role and responsibilities of the commission and of returning officers.
- 6.2 Members commented on the initial response of Southwark's returning officer to the proposed scrutiny review and asked whether there were any examples of returning officers being appointed from other local authorities in order to avoid conflict. Members also asked whether the electoral commission considered self assessment to be an adequate way of measuring performance. Adrian Green responded that returning officers had appeared in front of scrutiny committees and that the commission's upcoming report would make reference to the valuable role of scrutiny. Bristol had recently engaged an independent consultant to undertake a review and report to an overview and scrutiny committee. He was of the view that self assessment was probably not adequate but that introducing anything more, in order to achieve a more independent and rigorous process, would require additional resources.
- 6.3 In response to further questions, Adrian Green expressed the view that as returning officers delivered elections on behalf of the council it was appropriate for

them to be accountable to the council. Members emphasised that the counting of votes in both the elections had been lengthy and wondered if the electoral commission had any role in improving procedures. Adrian Green stated that a lot of problems could be traced back to the availability of resources and to planning and managing procedures. Possibly the council had more of a role in respect of local elections as it had a duty to provide resources. It was a matter of choice for returning officers as to whether or not to change procedures and not something on which the electoral commission could give direction.

- 6.4 Members noted that the council's head of electoral services was conducting a review of the combined general and local elections on 6 May 2010 and asked the electoral commission's representative if the commission would be interested in seeing the results of this review. Adrian Green replied that the commission would welcome sight of the report and that the committee could receive the performance standards report in relation to Southwark and a copy of Southwark's self-evaluation.
- 6.5 Members asked whether the commission set out any standards as to the number of staff per voting station and the number of counters. Adrian Green indicated that guidance was published as to polling stations in respect of a single parliamentary election but not in respect of combined elections. No guidance was issued in respect of the numbers of counters and there was a variation across local authorities.
- 6.6 The chair indicated that for the next meeting of the committee she would ask the returning officer to present the results of the local review. Members agreed that it would be a positive move to re-invite the returning officer to participate in the scrutiny review and to consider the local review together with the self-evaluation and the electoral commission's monitoring report. Any comments from the electoral commission on the local review could be considered at the same meeting.
- 6.7 Members noted the reference in the returning officer's email of 24 June 2010 to a session explaining the UK electoral system to Kosovo officials and asked whether it would be possible for a copy of any presentation to be circulated. Members also noted the list of declaration times for the general election and asked whether it would be possible to contact Wandsworth (for Putney, Battersea and Tooting) and Hackney (Hackney North and Stoke Newington and Hackney South and Shoreditch) asking how much each borough spent on the election process, how many counters were employed and the number of staff at each polling station. As a comparison, Southwark's returning officer could be asked whether she considered the resources allocated to her were sufficient or if she needed additional resources.
- 6.8 Members also suggested that the returning officer be asked about how practical changes could be made to allow people standing in queues at closing time to cast their votes and whether any alternative premises could be found for the count.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm