



DEMOCRACY COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Democracy Commission held on Friday 8 October 2010 at 5.00 pm at
160 Tooley Street

PRESENT: Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)
Councillor Anood Al-Samerai
Councillor Mark Glover
Councillor Michael Mitchell
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor Cleo Soanes

**OTHER MEMBERS
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Stephen Douglass - Head of community engagement
Julie Timbrell - Project manager
Ian Millichap - Constitutional Manager
Norman Coombe - Principal Lawyer
Ian Marks - Senior Lawyer , Governance Team
John Bibby – Leaders Office

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

2. APOLOGIES

1.1 Cllr Columba Blango gave apologies.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

3.1 The minutes were agreed. Cllr Glover noted that on page 4 his point was that we need to find a balance between involving residents in assembly meetings and allowing elected members sufficient time to debate issues.

4. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 4.1 The paper circulated on other Local Authorities reviews of Council Assembly was presented. The experiences of Nottingham City Council, Birmingham City Council and Bath & North East Somerset were considered.

5. REVIEWING AND AGREEING THE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members agreed to consider the table of recommendations circulated under this item. This detailed areas of agreement and proposed amendments by the respective political groups represented on the commission.
- 5.2 Members agreed points 1 -3 of the table, where there was consensus.
- 5.3 On point 4 Cllr Anood Al-Samerai said that her understanding from the consultation undertaken by the commission was that more decision making powers would attract more people to meetings. There was a discussion around the scope for more plans to go to Assembly for decision. Officers advised that there is potential for some additional plans to be included in the policy framework agreed yearly by the Council Assembly, however officers cautioned members that the Assembly cannot decide something that is an 'executive function'. The Constitutional Steering Panel would be best place to consider if additional plans could be included in the policy framework. Generally high level plans can be decided by the Assembly. If a plan is not presently in the policy framework it is usually decided by Cabinet.
- 5.4 Cllr Mohamed noted that the cabinet had referred extra plans to Assembly, and made reference to the Accommodation Strategy.
- 5.5 It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could refer particular plans for debate, but not decision, unless the plan was already in the policy framework.
- 5.6 Members also noted that many of the current plans may no longer be a requirement of the new government; some of the plans are also 3 year plans so may not be due to for consideration and furthermore, many of these plans may not be very engaging.
- 5.7 It was noted that the Council Assembly Business Panel could look forward and recommend plans and strategies that the Assembly would be well placed to debate. These would then need to be agreed in advance.
- 5.8 There was a discussion about the Council Assembly Business Panel and agreement that it would consist of a representative from all the political groups and advise the Mayor. It would meet twice a year.
- 5.9 Changes were agreed to point 5.1 and it was decided that the Constitutional Steering Panel should advise on an appropriate number of signatures needed to trigger a debate on a petition in Council Assembly. This would then come to Council Assembly for a final decision. The

Commission recommended 1,000 be this trigger.

- 5.10 It was decided that Community Councils will be able to raise issues via questions rather than motions. Point 5.5 will be deleted and 6.2 amended, as detailed in the attached and amended Southwark Democracy Commission Recommendations.
- 5.11 There was a discussion about public questions and whether the commission would endorse the recommendation for approximately 15 minutes pre-submitted questions by the public on the themed section of the meeting. There was a debate on whether the existing opportunity for public questions at the beginning of the meeting should remain. It was agreed that both opportunities for public questions should be endorsed by the commission.
- 5.12 There was a debate about themes; with suggestions that backbenchers should be able to able to present; however the majority view was that this should be undertaken by Cabinet. There was concern that the debating of themes does not restrict the ability of backbench members to bring issues of concern to Assembly. It was generally felt that those opportunities will still remain. The new formats success will depend on the agenda being sensibly managed by political groups, the Mayor and the Council Business Planning Panel, however the changes will be monitored for effectiveness and reviewed in 12 months time.
- 5.13 Cllr Anood Al-Samerai spoke in favour of the themed meeting slot being set used to debate an important plan or strategy, and for flexibility in approach. It was agreed that this slot may be used for a fuller Assembly debate on a plan or strategy.
- 5.14 Cllr Anood Al-Sameria suggested that the Democracy Commission recommendations included a section endorsing the new planed Decentralisation and Localism Bill and the recommendation that the Democracy Commission investigate how these new powers could be used to strengthen the Council Assembly. Other members indicated that this was inappropriate at this stage.
- 5.15 The recommendations were agreed by the committee. Cllr Al-Samerai indicted that she would put a motion to Assembly calling for an amendment on the Decentralisation and Localism Bill.

RESOLVED

It was agreed that the revised recommendations would be circulated to the committee for final agreement. Comments were requested by officers as possible so the document can be finalised by Wednesday 13 October to allow time to dispatch to with Cabinet and Council Assembly papers. (The revised and finalised recommendations are appended to the minutes.)

6. NEXT STAGE

- 6.1 The finalised recommendations will be put to the 19th October 2010 Cabinet meeting for endorsement.
- 6.2 The agreed recommendations will go to the 20th October 2010 Council Assembly meeting for debate and agreement. Following this they will be implemented by the Constitutional Steering Panel, Cabinet and the Chair; Cabinet lead Cllr Mohamed. Any constitutional changes arising from implementation of the recommendations will then need to be agreed by a subsequent Council Assembly.

CHAIR:

DATED: