



DEMOCRACY COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Democracy Commission held on Wednesday 3 August 2011 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)
Councillor Mark Glover
Councillor Michael Mitchell
Councillor Cleo Soanes

OTHER MEMBERS

PRESENT: Councillor Barrie Hargrove

OFFICER

SUPPORT: Michael Cleere, Community Cohesion Co-ordinator
Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement
Ian Millichap, Constitutional Manager
Barbara Selby, Head of Transport Planning
Darryl Telles, Neighbourhoods Manager
Des Waters, Head of Public Realm
Tim Murtagh, Constitutional Officer

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Councillor Abdul Mohamed welcomed councillors, officers and residents to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Columba Blango, Helen Morrissey and Paul Noblet.

3. ITEMS OF BUSINESS THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

1. That the open minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting, and signed by the chair subject to the following additions:

Under Item 8,

“Members looked at the sub-committee models and discussed the North-South and East-West possibilities. There was a discussion on other models.”

Under Item 9, Council Assembly 6 July – add at end:

“Councillor Cleo Soanes had asked for the filming of council assemblies to be considered at future meetings.”

“In response to Councillor Soanes request, Stephen Douglass said that the filming of council assembly would be considered during the 22 September meeting of the Democracy Commission.”

2. That the closed notes of the meeting held on 8 July 2011 circulated to members only.”

5. ROLE AND PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Stephen Douglass introduced the report and said that Des Waters and Barbara Selby would explore this as part of item 6.

6. ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT ISSUES AT COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Des Waters introduced the environmental and cleaner, greener, safer roles of community councils making reference to page 6, item 5 of the main agenda.

Des Waters explained that action teams used to do a range of street auditing and report back results to community councils. The action teams had been stood down and there were no regular attending officers at meetings from the Environment and leisure department. Occasional briefings would take place on things such as waste management.

On the cleaner, greener, safer (CGS) programme, Des said that there was an error in the report and in 2009/10 there was an allocation. Funding of £1.8 million had been confirmed for 2012/13 and future years. Delivery of projects had improved year on year and the next programme would be rolled out in the final quarter of 2011. Officers were considering how to reformulate it to cover other objectives around local decision making.

Des Waters informed the commission that officers were currently briefing cabinet members on the way forward. The 2012/12 programme would be rolled out in the final quarter of 2011 to allow project delivery to be undertaken in quarters 2-4 of 2012/13. It was noted that the Democracy Commission’s timescale for reporting in December 2011 would potentially delay implementation of the 2012/13 programme.

Des Waters advised that officers were considering options for more devolved forms of local decision making as part of the localism agenda. The options included:

1. Providing grants – involving small sums of money with decision by either cabinet member, community council or ward member.
2. Capacity building – working with communities and local groups
3. Engagement – e.g. public vote.

It was reported that some of these options would have resource implications.

Larger projects would be contracted out whilst some smaller schemes would be delivered through grants to local community groups. One challenge was to make the process more inclusive as CGS tended to get many of the same bidders each year.

Members considered the options of devolved decision making to individual Members at ward level. Some felt that the current system worked well at the moment and could not see a case to change the system unless sufficient reductions in costs could be made. Officers clarified that any such savings would not impact on the savings the Democracy Commission was seeking.

The CGS team used to have twelve project management officers delivering projects and it now had six. Des explained that the staff cost of about £300,000 would have to be met out of the £1.8 million. The challenge was to deliver more projects locally and reduce costs, however officers bring accountability and control of the programme. In summary Des Waters said a number of models were being looked at and the cabinet member would be sent a paper on this. The 2012/13 CGS model would be the same as in previous years but changes could be made for 2013/14.

Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Cabinet member for transport, environment and recycling, welcomed any ideas members of the commission may wish to contribute on how community councils could administer CGS in the future. The officer presentation report contained many ideas but he wanted to hear more.

Barbara Selby introduced the transport management roles of community councils making reference to page 6, item 5 of the main agenda. The role of the transport team at community councils included: consulting on the Transport Plan (this was last year only), consulting on the TfL funding plans (known as the Local Implementation Plan), making themselves available for discussions on transport issues.

Increasingly officers are attending transport planning community council sub-groups if there are transport issues. In future years transport officers only expected to attend one meeting of each community council a year when TfL funding plans were discussed. Otherwise attendance would be as requested and varies between community councils.

Barbara Selby explained that her aim was to make sure that no issue of importance was left out of the Transport Plan (Local Implementation Plan). The decision ultimately would be taken by Cabinet but any scheme that receives strong local support at community council was more likely to make it into the first programme. Officers were always available to attend community councils and in the past had given support to transport sub-groups.

In response to a question from the chair, Barbara said that her team receive £20,000 from the community council budget. This funds half an officer post.

Councillor Glover said that transport items at his community council had been among the most engaging and had given rise to visible changes following the consultation.

Officers requested that the commission review some of the transport decision making functions. An example given was local disabled parking bays which although approval of bays is reserved to community councils the allocation of places is actually based on a borough wide criteria.

Another area of decision making which would merit review was community councils involvement in controlled parking zone decisions in light of the recent changes to the constitution to make strategic transport and CPZ issues decision making a matter for the relevant cabinet member. Currently the same CPZ proposal could be considered at different stages by a community council on no less than three occasions: (1) to agree in principle the consultation plan on a CPZ, (2) report back on consultation and (3) finally a report on final design of the scheme. Officers suggested that this could be reduced by officers producing a consultation plan and reverting back to members at the final design stage. In response to a question officers advised that consultation plans are rarely changed.

A similar approach on consultation policy on could also be applied to traffic management orders.

The commission welcomed any proposals to rationalise decision making in the way proposed by officers.

Members noted that less officer time should reduce the cost either to community councils or to the council.

Des Waters reported that regarding the Highways and Lighting Capital scheme, that the cabinet had allocated £175,000 to each area in the last two years. However, in view of the need to allocate funding strategically he would not be recommending to the cabinet member such an allocation this year. That view was due to the state of the road network and the reduced resources available.

Councillor Barrie Hargrove said that the Council was trying to make the most of limited resources. To get up to standard £50 million was needed plus £6 million per year, at the moment they had £4 million to work with.

Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Barbara Selby and Des Waters left the meeting at this point.

Councillor Mitchell said he would welcome the ability of community councils to allocate some monies locally as local councillors understood their areas; based on this approach he could see an argument to allocate more funds. In response officers advised that it was proposed to recommend that the limited funds available be allocated to planned preventative programmes.

7. ENGAGEMENT FUNCTION OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Darryl Telles explained that community councils were encouraged to be more than a meeting. The workshops, themed meetings and films had developed interest and explored a broad range of topics. Darryl highlighted the case studies and attendance data.

Members felt that attendance at meetings varied according to the items for discussion along with choice of venue. Concerns were raised over why there were such variations in attendance.

Action: The reasons why some residents stop attending would be considered at the 22 September 2011 meeting of the Democracy Commission.

8. CONSULTATION WITH MEMBERS AND STAFF ON COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Michael Cleere summarised the findings of the consultation. Consultation with the public would continue and be borough wide throughout August. The questionnaire was available on the website and in local libraries.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION ON COMMUNITY COUNCIL BUDGETS

Stephen Douglass introduced the three short papers that were a response to questions raised at the previous meeting of the Democracy Commission.

9.1 CLARIFICATION ON BUDGET

The report looked at pension adjustments, team budget underspends and service level agreements.

Action: Councillor Michael Mitchell to clarify with the Finance Director the potential impact of the pension adjustments on the savings.

9.2 EXAMPLES OF COSTS PER ATTENDEE

Ian Millichap explained that there were fixed and variable costs per meeting. Among those were van hire, public address, venues, publicity and sign language. The total costs range was approximately £1,300 to £2,000 per meeting.

9.3 ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM REDUCED MEETINGS

Members explored the impact of fewer meetings on matters including the cleaner, greener, safer programme and reviewing some decisions such as disabled parking bays from a timetabling perspective.

It was reported that reducing community council areas from 8 to 5 would save around £100,000. Reducing the amount of main meetings per year from 6 to 4 would save around

£69,000.

10. PLAN FOR DEMOCRACY COMMISSION ITEM AT SEPTEMBER ROUND OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Stephen Douglass explained the plan for engaging residents in the community council review. There would be slots at each community council meeting in September at which Democracy Commission members would introduce the session. Both options, plenary and workshop, sought feedback from residents on what worked at community councils and what did not, as well as seeking ideas for suggested savings.

Members asked for the categories list to be looked at again. In particular, the wording of the reducing activities at meetings category could be more general.

Action: Ebony to circulate an amended category list for consideration.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS

A resident asked if there was something available that informed what the Democracy Commission covered. Stephen Douglass explained there were terms of reference and a work programme. Those could be emailed and were available on the website.

Another resident valued the work undertaken by the CGS team and said that a range of approaches was needed to deliver projects. She supported the idea of increased involvement of residents. It was useful when officers attended so they could fully understand what local people wanted e.g. their traffic schemes. She added that people referred to as “usual suspects”, who attended meetings should be viewed as gateways to the community.

CHAIR:

DATED: