



## **DEMOCRACY COMMISSION**

MINUTES of the Democracy Commission held on Wednesday 7 December 2011 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)  
Councillor Mark Glover  
Councillor Helen Morrissey  
Councillor Cleo Soanes

### **OTHER MEMBERS**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Martin Seaton

### **OFFICER**

**SUPPORT:** Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement  
Ian Millichap, Constitutional Manager  
Ebony Riddell Bamber, Community Engagement  
Alexa Coates, Principal Constitutional Officer  
Darryl Telles, Community Engagemet  
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 from Councillor Michael Mitchell. There were apologies for lateness from Councillors Mark Glover and Cleo Soanes.

The chair explained that Councillors Paul Noblet and Columba Blango would not be attending as they had withdrawn from the Democracy Commission. He added that no recommendations had been submitted on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group.

### **3. ITEMS OF BUSINESS THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

There were none.

#### 4. MINUTES

##### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting, and signed by the chair subject to the following amendment:

That the last paragraph of item 6, should state that members were to put forward options on behalf of their political groups.

#### 5. SHAPING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Stephen Douglass introduced the report and the various options set out.

The chair asked if there would be any constitutional hindrance to the recommendations. Ian Millichap said there would be none.

Stephen Douglass introduced the submission on the future of community councils that Councillor Michael Mitchell had emailed. The submission recommended a reduction to seven community council areas, each holding four main meetings per year. More than half of the required savings would come from the community engagement budget.

Members noted Councillor Michael Mitchell's submission but disagreed with the retention of the Governor appointments function and said that the planning function should be changed. It was highlighted that 76% of planning applications between June 2010 – 2011 were heard after the expiry date, which meant that appeals could be launched for non-determination before the applications were considered by the community councils.

Members thanked Councillor Michael Mitchell for his contribution to the overall process and for putting forward options for the commission to consider.

Councillor Helen Morrissey introduced the Labour Group's submission which proposed a saving of £344,170 to the community council budget by:

- removing school governor appointments from community councils making a saving of £10,895
- making general savings of £70,632 as previously identified by the commission
- introducing a planning sub-committee model with two sub-committees making a saving of £92,238
- changing community council boundaries to create 5 community council areas and reducing main meeting to 5 per year making a saving of £86,405
- and reducing the neighbourhoods support making a saving of £85,000

Cllr Morrissey also highlighted the recent budget commitment of £10,000 Cleaner Greener Safer revenue funding to be allocated to each community council area. Cllr Morrissey explained some of the key thoughts behind the proposal. In terms of introducing a planning sub-committee model she highlighted some of the difficulties for councillors in terms of deciding whether to take part in decisions at community council level or represent the interests of local residents and that decisions at this level can sometimes prevent councillors from getting involved in local campaigns on planning applications. It was

expected that a sub-committee model would be introduced to consider minor planning applications which would retain some planning decisions at member level. Cllr Morrissey highlighted previous discussion of the commission which recognised the need to adjust the threshold of decisions taken by councillors so that the £92,238 saving could be achieved. Cllr Morrissey also indicated that the proportionality of planning sub-committees be explored so that all political groups are represented in some way. Officers advised that these issues would be picked up in a report to the constitutional steering panel.

Cllr Morrissey explained that the Labour Group proposed that the community council areas be reduced from 8 to 5 with the following boundaries:

- Merge Bermondsey and Rotherhithe
- Merge Peckham and Nunhead and Peckham Rye
- Retain Dulwich
- Retain Camberwell and
- Merge Borough and Bankside and Walworth

It was proposed that the community councils meet 5 times a year. It was acknowledged that the community councils are a valued means of engaging with local residents but that in the context of significant reductions in the council's budget savings had to be made to the budget for community councils which was currently over £1million.

It was also proposed that the Neighbourhoods budget be reduced by a further £85,000 to reflect the reduction in boundaries and meetings.

The chair said that the options presented by the Labour group were based on the discussions at the previous Democracy Commission meetings and the evidence presented by officers.

Councillor Mark Glover said that funding arrangements for the five areas should be proportionate. Under the Cleaner Greener Safer programme and the Community Council Fund, the amounts awarded to each community council area should be based on population size and their need (as indicated by the deprivation indices), as had been the case in the past.

Members said that the larger community councils with eighteen councillors would need to ensure that residents had an opportunity to have their say or participants could become frustrated.

It was suggested that the quarterly meeting of community council chairs' and vice chairs' continue as an established forum for sharing best practice amongst the community councils.

Residents in attendance expressed concerns over the merging of existing community council areas. Councillor Martin Seaton said that merged areas would be better suited to discuss larger matters such as Supplementary Planning Documents.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposals, submitted by the Labour Group, as set out in Appendix B of the closed report be agreed and that the draft report (Appendix C) be amended to reflect the proposals.

Members noted that proposals would be taken forward in the budget process 2012/13.

Members noted that recommendations relating to constitutional amendments would be considered by the constitutional steering panel.

Members noted that recommendations relating to engagement and consultation with residents would be considered by community councils chairs' and vice chairs' meeting on a no-cost or low cost basis.

## **6. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**