



DEMOCRACY COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Democracy Commission held on Thursday 22 September 2011 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)
Councillor Michael Mitchell
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor Cleo Soanes

OFFICER SUPPORT: Ian Millichap, Constitutional Manager
Alexa Coates, Principal Constitutional Officer
Simon Godfrey, Residential Involvement Senior
Ebony Riddell Bamber, Community Participation Manager
Darryl Telles, Neighbourhoods Manager
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 Stephen Douglass.

3. ITEMS OF BUSINESS THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 August 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting, and signed by the chair.

In response to a query from Councillor Mitchell, Ian Millichap stated that the email to Councillor Mitchell regarding the budget contained the confirmed savings figure of £344,000.

Councillor Mitchell said he would arrange a meeting with Stephen Douglass in early October, to clarify the budget figures that were discussed at the August Democracy Commission meeting.

Councillor Soanes said she would discuss the matter of filming Council Assembly with Ian Millichap. It would be considered at a future Democracy Commission meeting.

5. AREA HOUSING FORUMS AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Simon Godfrey introduced the report.

He said that many of the residents who attend area housing forums also go to their local community council meetings. In his view the meetings should continue as separate to avoid overloading them with items. He added that the funding for Tenants and Residents Associations in Southwark came from a levy on the rent which was unusual.

Members noted the report.

6. SPONSORSHIP OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Darryl Telles introduced the report.

He highlighted that any sponsorship must not be seen as an inducement. The example of community council planning meetings was discussed and how a neutral observer may perceive sponsorship by a local business being given so as to further their business ends. Perception was important and anything negative could undermine the committees. There was a possibility of exploring volunteering at meetings and perhaps specific match funding to enhance the community council fund.

Members noted the report and asked for the local giving model to be looked at and included as a recommendation in the draft report as an issue requiring exploration.

7. CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS ON REVIEW OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Ebony Riddell Bamber introduced the report. A short presentation was tabled.

Ebony explained that there had been a disappointing response to the questionnaires with only 21 received. It had been taken again to the September round of community council meetings and any additional questionnaires received would be reported to the next meeting.

The feedback and common themes were summarised in the report. The report was noted.

8. AREA COMMITTEES IN OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Ebony Riddell Bamber introduced the report which looked at the area forum models of some inner London and outer London boroughs as well as those in other parts of the UK.

There was no comparable structure in inner London to the Southwark model. The tendency was towards some devolved budget. The broader picture was away from formal decision making and towards engagement meetings between councillors and local people.

Councillor Mitchell said that Southwark was leading the country and others should be encouraged to move in Southwark's direction.

Members noted the report and thanked Ebony for the very informative report.

9. ANALYSIS OF RESIDENTS THAT ATTEND COMMUNITY COUNCILS IN DIFFERENT AREAS

Ebony Riddell Bamber introduced the item and said that few residents attended more than one community council. The exception was Bermondsey and Rotherhithe areas where there were about 20 residents who go to both. There were smaller overlaps of 4 residents between Borough & Bankside and Walworth meetings, and 3 residents between Peckham and Nunhead & Peckham Rye community councils.

Members noted the report.

10. FEEDBACK ON DEMOCRACY COMMISSION ITEM AT SEPTEMBER ROUND OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Ebony Riddell Bamber explained that the item had gone to most community councils. Bermondsey had opted not to consider the item, whilst Nunhead and Peckham Rye would discuss it in November.

Residents said that savings should be made on PA equipment, venue costs, reduced publicity and fewer planning meetings.

Members said that discussing meetings was a dry topic for many and that may explain the low number of responses. Engagement and keeping meetings interesting was very important. A Saturday meeting in Walworth was highlighted, where young people were given a free role and had transformed the dynamic of the meeting to positive effect.

Members thanked the officers for the work undertaken in taking this item to community councils.

11. SHAPING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Ian Millichap introduced this item. In the workplan the next meeting would discuss draft recommendations and the purpose of this item was to seek an initial steer in order to draft a report. A range of topics had been covered during the Democracy Commission meetings

and several areas for savings discussed. Among those were: changes to the planning committees, staffing, fewer meetings, fewer areas, PA, venues, food, school governors, CPZs and publicity.

In some of these areas the commission had come to some consensus. Referring to item 8 on Area Committees in other Local Authorities, Ian Millichap suggested one issue the commission may wish to consider is the balance between community engagement and decision making aspects of community councils. Item 8 demonstrates the various approaches adopted in other authorities.

The chair asked for a summary of the various potential areas for savings and the relevant figures that may be achieved by changing each. The Democracy Commission could then view the bigger picture and decide on recommendations. It may be that members consider the functions needed and then the resources could be allocated for those.

Officers undertook to produce a summary report with various permutations for consideration by members. Stephen Douglass would need to be involved with the report on his return from leave.

Ian Millichap explained that the scheduled October and November meetings would need to be brought forward so that recommendations had the appropriate time to go forward to cabinet. New dates would be circulated.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no members of the public present.

13. PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM OPTIONS

This report was considered in closed session, (see separate notes).

The meeting ended at 9.10pm

CHAIR:

DATED: