

DEMOCRACY COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Democracy Commission held on Monday 14 November 2011 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)
Councillor Columba Blango
Councillor Michael Mitchell
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor Paul Noblet

OFFICER SUPPORT: Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement
Ian Millichap, Constitutional Manager
Alexa Coates, Principal Constitutional Officer
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 Councillors Mark Glover and Cleo Soanes.

3. ITEMS OF BUSINESS THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting, and signed by the chair subject to the following amendment:

That apologies for absence from Councillors Columba Blango and Paul Noblet be recorded.

5. UPDATE OF CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS ON REVIEW OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Stephen Douglass introduced the report and said it was an update to the report that had gone to the 22 September 2011 meeting of the Democracy Commission. Since the initial report there had been a further round of community council meetings and one more focus group. A further 83 questionnaire responses had been received which were summarised in the report. Stephen said that was a small sample by comparison with the questionnaires on the future of Southwark libraries and following the August civil unrest both of which had about 1,000 responses and therefore no significant conclusions could be drawn from the results.

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

6. SHAPING THE RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY OF OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Members said that although the Democracy Commission had to find savings, one of its other objectives was to find ways of effectively engaging with the community.

Members explored the savings options for planning meetings. Alexa Coates explained that Model B which deleted planning from community councils would save £186,435 whilst Models C and D would save less depending on which sub committee model was established. Members said local people did not want officers to take all the planning decisions and residents should maintain their involvement in planning meetings.

Members discussed the membership of the planning sub-committee models and whether it would be proportional. They said it was important for all locally elected parties to be represented and that membership should allow all parties to be represented. Officers undertook to prepare a briefing paper on proportionality implications for planning sub-committee models.

Stephen Douglass introduced the revised Appendix A containing 15 savings options, set out in the closed supplemental agenda. The options covered the various matters covered during meetings of the Democracy Commission. He said that in between now and the meeting on 7 December, officers would prepare a draft a report based on member input. That would subsequently go to the Cabinet budget meeting in February and then Council Assembly in May.

Members asked if there was some degree of tolerance in the £344,000 of savings that were required. Stephen said that within £5,000 would be acceptable.

Councillor Michael Mitchell said that having consulted Dulwich councillors, members in the area supported retaining the decision making for school governor appointments at community councils, which was an area of potential saving. He believed the local

knowledge councillors brought was important in taking the decisions.

Ian Millichap summarised the fifteen options contained in the closed agenda along with the surplus or deficit that would result from each option against the overall savings figure required.

Councillor Paul Noblet asked if there was for example, a shortfall of £6,000 in the budget, if that could be made up by slicing £750 of each area's community council fund budget in future years and whether some other grant reduction arrangements may be possible to find the savings. Stephen said it was possible but a reduction in the Neighbourhoods Team support may impact on the ability to operate the Fund.

Councillor Mitchell asked about the £70,000 that had been discussed previously at the July meeting. Stephen said that this was as a result of pension's adjustment which had an effect on the original figures provided to the commission. However this did not alter the fact that savings of £344,000 had to be found.

Members said they had different views on how the savings would be made. Stephen said that officers would be available to provide further information for members in considering the various options in the report.

Members with regard to the consideration of the draft report and recommendations at the 7 December meeting 2011 undertook to provide their submissions and suggested options by 25 November 2011 so that officers would have time to draft and publish papers ahead of the meeting.

7. SHOWING FILMS AT COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

Members suggested postponing the item as Councillor Soanes was absent. Councillor Helen Morrissey said there was some discussions due to take place between the three party whips about council assembly, which would come back to the Democracy Commission at a future meeting. It was suggested that this item be considered at that time.

RESOLVED:

That the item be deferred.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm

CHAIR:

DATED: