



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – CALL IN

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the meeting of the OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY NOVEMBER 7 2006 at 7.30 P.M. at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Fiona Colley (Chair)
Councillors Bob Skelly (Vice-Chair), James Barber (reserve), Paul Baichoo, John Friary, Barrie Hargrove, Jonathan Mitchell (reserve), Lewis Robinson and Dominic Thorncroft

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mr Alie Kallon

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Danny McCarthy – Chair, Borough & Bankside community council (item 1)
Councillor Caroline Pidgeon – executive member for children's services and education (item 1)
Lionel Wright – coopted member of housing scrutiny (item 2)

OFFICER SUPPORT: Chris Bull - strategic director of health and community services
Shelley Burke – head of overview and scrutiny
Julian Bassham – community councils team manager
Gill Davies – strategic director of environment and leisure
Stephanie Fleck – principal lawyer, contracts
Carina Kane – scrutiny project manager
David Lister – head of governor development
Terry Reynolds - deputy director achievement, access and inclusion
Annie Shepperd – chief executive

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tim McNally, Ms Ann Marie Eastwood and Mrs Josie Spanswick.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMED URGENT

The Chair accepted an item about the departmental restructuring as urgent business.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none. [Councillor Hargrove sought legal advice about whether knowing and working with a school governor candidate in item 1 but not socialising with them constituted an interest and was advised that it was not an interest.]

1. **CALL-IN: APPOINTMENT OF AN LEA PRIMARY SCHOOL GOVERNOR TO CATHEDRALS SCHOOL (BOROUGH & BANKSIDE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OCTOBER 17 2006** (see pages 1 - 28)

At 7:10pm it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of the item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information that falls within categories 1 and 2 as defined in paragraph 10.4 of the council's access to information procedure rules.

- 1.1 The Chair explained that the purpose of the call-in was to consider the decision taken by the Borough and Bankside community council (B&BCC) on October 17 2006 in appointing a school governor to Cathedral school in light of concerns about the process undertaken by the community council.
- 1.2 Members heard evidence from the Chair of the B&BCC as well as from education officers and the community councils team manager. This included the process followed by the school governor team in putting candidates forward for consideration by community councils as well as detailed discussion about the process and information sought by the B&BCC.
- 1.3 After taking evidence, it was clear that there were still a number of concerns with the school governor appointment process. These included, for example, that the initial decision had been deferred while legal advice was sought yet the decision was taken without this advice, the seeking of ethnicity information and the presence of officers at meetings.
- 1.4 There was agreement amongst committee members that little would be achieved by asking the B&BCC to reconsider its decision. However the committee felt it was important to look into inconsistencies and concerns raised with the process during their considerations, including:
 - officer presence when community councils considered school governor appointments and the practicalities and budget considerations around this
 - the advice provided by the education department around a candidate's suitability
 - putting in place a system for monitoring the performance of governors, and the criteria that should be applied when reappointing a governor
 - consistency between community councils in terms of the information provided and the approach taken to encouraging diversity
 - whether or not school governor decisions should continue to be taken by community council, and if so, whether the candidate information could be made anonymous so the decision could be taken in public.
- 1.5 The committee therefore decided that the children's services and education scrutiny sub-committee should do a scrutiny review into this, picking up the concerns outlined in paragraph 1.4 above.

- RESOLVED:** 1 That no further action is taken with regard to the Borough & Bankside community council decision on October 17 2006 to appoint a school governor to Cathedral school. However, in light of concerns about the LEA school governor appointment process, the overview and scrutiny committee refers the broader issue of the appointments process to the children's service and education scrutiny sub-committee for further review.

At 9:20pm the meeting returned to open session.

2 DEPARTMENTAL RESTRUCTURING

- 2.1 At the request of the Chair, the chief executive briefed the committee about how the recent changes to the housing department came about.
- 2.2 The chief executive first explained that she had been made aware of all-party concerns about the delivery of housing services - particularly around housing management and the council's role as a landlord – during the selection process for her role. The need to address this problem was also included in her job description. Similarly, a key message that had come out of her discussions with tenants and representative associations on her ward walks was that consistency was needed across services and residents often felt they were dealing with different organisations when wanting different council services.
- 2.3 The chief executive reported that she had then looked at what could be done to provide a consistent service. In the process of these discussions some senior members of staff decided that they would be leaving the authority. She therefore made interim arrangements to ensure services continued to be effectively provided, under her delegated authority of the chief executive as service manager.
- 2.4 In terms of the interim housing arrangements, the chief executive told the committee that the changes were:
- housing management and leaseholder services to be managed by the strategic director of environment and leisure
 - supporting people and non-housing revenue account (HRA) would be managed by the strategic director of health and community services
 - housing performance and quality would remain, except that the housing benefits aspect would be managed by the strategic director of customer and corporate services
 - HRA would be managed by the director of finance.
- 2.5 The chief executive also informed the committee that she was putting recommendations to executive in December 2006 about interim management arrangements.
- 2.6 The chief executive said she was working with directors about other council areas about how they could be redesigned to promote a more corporate approach rather than 'turf wars' between departments.
- 2.7 Members were then were invited to ask questions of the chief executive.

- 2.8 Members first sought further clarification about content of the December executive report. The chief executive explained that the report would outline the structure she was recommending to put in place, particularly for the housing department, but also for the corporate and regeneration departments. She was consulting key staff first before talking to elected members and union representatives.
- 2.9 A member asked whether the report would go to housing forums for consultation. The chief executive replied that she was happy to meet with tenant council and added that other changes in the report would not be directly about housing.
- 2.10 Committee members questioned the extent that the chief executive felt compelled to make the decision to restructure. The chief executive was not prepared to discuss confidential information but told members that feedback from tenants and most elected members was of concerns about the housing services. She had to implement changes quickly because of the decision of senior members of staff to leave. She believed that what was proposed was best for the services.
- 2.11 A member said it was an important first step to convince tenants that they would know who to speak to at the council. The chief executive agreed, saying that it was important that they could speak to someone who knew what they were talking about and delivered and followed up on any action necessary. It was important to have a holistic approach and there was no reason why services could not be delivered satisfactorily without the levels of bureaucracy. She could not say at this stage that would be a named contact person because further analysis was needed; for example around the effectiveness of the call centre and the triangular relationship between tenants, the call centre and the repair contractors.
- 2.12 The chief executive informed the committee that she still needed to make a decision about the interim arrangements for housing regeneration. She was talking to executive that week about regeneration in general, including the division that was sitting in the housing department. It was important to concentrate on delivering services rather than territory fighting.
- 2.13 Members also questioned what had happened to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report on the housing improvement programme. The strategic director of environment and leisure explained the report put together a series of options for improvements, and was still in draft form while she looked over it and talked to staff. The final report would be available to members before Christmas.
- 2.14 The chief executive outlined how she reached her conclusion to put in the interim arrangements. She said that a structural change by itself was not the answer, it was important to improve the culture and attitude within the council. She wanted to instil a customer focus; and felt the council needed to be passionate about providing a decent service. All residents should be treated the same regardless of the nature of their relationship with the council (e.g. the council as a landlord). She was aiming to make step changes rather than focus on departmental lines. A sense of urgency was needed, and the changes were about services to residents, not about jobs. The staff affected by the changes could be counted on two hands.
- 2.15 In terms of how she would go about changing the culture, the chief executive explained that leadership, values and performance all needed to be looked at. Complaints had to be taken seriously, and it was not acceptable for staff or residents to be rude to each other.

- 2.16 In response to a question about whether councillors needed to take responsibility for promoting culture change, the chief executive said her observations were that all councillors had positive relationship with the community.
- 2.17 Some members were concerned that all major changes in the council - such as the housing restructure and face-to-face services - were characterised by being carried out very quickly and without discussion and buy-in from all parties. The chief executive responded that there were varying views and some people were of the opinion that the housing management restructure had taken too long. Members stressed the importance of communicating changes.
- 2.18 The Chair concluded the meeting by informing the committee that the Chair of housing scrutiny was interested in monitoring the implementation as it progressed and that OSC itself may wish to look at how it all went. The chief executive suggested that Spring may be the best time for housing scrutiny to become involved.
- 2.19 The Chair thanked officers for their attendance.

The meeting concluded at 10:20 p.m.

CHAIR:

DATED: