

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CHAIRS** held on **WEDNESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2015** at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Danny Beales, Jenny Headlam-Wells, Alison Kelly, Awale Olad and Don Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Sarah Hayward, Leader of the Council and Pat Callaghan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting.

MINUTES

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

It was moved, seconded and agreed that Councillor Danny Beales be elected Chair for the meeting.

RESOLVED -

THAT Councillor Danny Beales be elected Chair for the meeting

2. APOLOGIES

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF PECUNIARY, NON-PECUNIARY AND ANY OTHER INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were none.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

There were none.

6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There were none.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED –

THAT the following terms of reference be noted:

‘To discuss the Leader’s Annual Statement to the Council and other relevant cross-cutting matters arising from the business of the Cabinet’

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 7th October 2014 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

9. THE LEADER'S ANNUAL STATEMENT TO FULL COUNCIL

Consideration was given to the Annual Leader’s statement as considered by the full Council meeting on 16th September 2015, and set out in the agenda papers.

The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council gave the following key responses to Members questions:

Future Financial and other challenges for the Council

- The Council was continuing to have to face huge financial challenges due to continuing Government cuts. The scale of the challenge meant that traditional ‘salami slicing’ of budgets was no longer an option. In response to these cuts, the Council had pioneered an Outcome Based Budgeting approach to its proposed future funding programme. This approach had looked in detail at all spending to understand how to transform services, to provide maximum value for residents by focussing the Council’s investment on activities that would make most difference.

- The Government's Comprehensive Spending review, which was seeking Government departments to identify between 20 – 40% additional savings, were again likely to have a huge impact on local government. The Government would be making its announcement on the impact this would have on local government in the late autumn, and local authorities would then be expected to revise their budget plans at short notice to cater for any changes. At that point the Council would then have to consider what other options it had in relation to the raising of resources through other sources. This level of uncertainty made it very difficult to plan and make considered decisions regarding the provision of services.
- The possible cuts to local government funding meant that every Council service was vulnerable to facing a budget cut.
- The Government's proposals in relation to housing and welfare would have a huge impact on the social fabric of the borough. With the Council potentially being forced to sell off high value Council voids, to pay for the extension of the Right-to-Buy for Housing Association Tenants; the pay to stay proposals; the forced 1% annual reduction in social rents effectively ripping up the self-financing policy agreed a few years ago and reducing the resources available for major repairs by £69M by 2019/20; and the reduction in the benefits cap meaning more families would have to face having to move out of Camden.
- The Council had managed to obtain the support of other public sector bodies, along with sections of the private sector to help in meeting the Camden Plan objectives. Private Sector partners had been working with the Council to help boost the number of apprenticeship schemes available in the borough. The Health and Wellbeing Board allowed for good working relationships and the planning of health services in the borough. Again though, the delivery of the Camden Plan's objectives would have to be considered, should the Council face the drastic cuts to its resources as being identified in the press.

Voluntary Sector provision

- The Council recognised the important role that the voluntary sector played in Camden. The Council had sought to enhance and strengthen this role through the high level of funding it gave to the voluntary and community sector, through grants and the commissioning of services. Last year the Council used £37M, 16% of the Council's budget, on the voluntary and community sector through grants and the commissioning of services. The Council would continue to support the voluntary and community sector in the borough through these routes in the future.

Commissioning and Procurement

- The Council had set up a Strategic Commissioning and Procurement Board, which was a senior officer group that oversaw Camden's commissioning and procurement activity. As part of its role it sought to ensure that the procurement and commissioning processes met the Camden Plan's objectives; ensured value for money, and met the needs of service users. The

Council already had a long history of effective joint commissioning through its work with health service providers.

- The proposed housing contracts in relation to M&E works, sought to enable small and medium size firms to be able to bid for Council works contracts. This approach should enable greater efficiencies to be obtained from the contract process, and help achieve value for money for all tenants and residents.

Camden's Schools

- Camden had the best primary schools in the borough. This had been established through the Council working with the community of schools, to ensure that a shared version of what was expected from all providers was achieved. Camden's example showed what could be done with all the providers (Council, faith, voluntary aided, academy's and free schools) of education working together.
- The Government's drive to acadamise schools and take them away from local authority support, showed that they were more concerned about structures rather than providing the best quality of education for children.
- Should future Government cuts affect funding for schools then this would again impact on the delivery of this key service.
- Good schools came about through having good heads and teachers. The lack of affordable housing in London meant that it would become more and more difficult to keep and attract good quality teachers. The Council was looking to develop an intermediate housing strategy which would seek to help people to buy and rent homes. The impact of the lack of affordable homes in central London meant that the Council had to work with other authorities, and the Mayor of London to seek a pan-London solution to this problem.
- The Council had a strong reputation amongst the teaching profession as a place where teachers would receive high quality training, strong borough support, and where they could teach a culturally diverse community.
- The School Led Partnership were considering what initiatives could best work in helping with the recruitment and retention of teachers, and the Council would look at any scheme that they recommended.

Council Housing

- The Council was seeking to ensure that 6,000 homes were built in the borough by 2018. These homes would be built by the Council, the private sector and housing associations. The Council's Community Investment programme was seeking to turn unused Camden land into developments that would provide homes in the borough. Councillor Callaghan, Deputy Leader of the Council, agreed to provide the scrutiny chairs information on the number of homes that would be built in Camden by provider by 2018, along with how many would be Council homes.

ACTION BY: Councillor Pat Callaghan

- The Council through groups like London Council's, the Greater London Authority, and Central London Forward were all working to lobby the Government to try and influence the proposals that were to be included the Housing Bill. With a view to lessening its impact on Council housing provision.
- The proposals that could be contained within the Housing Bill had the potential of having a completely detrimental effect on social housing provision in Camden. This could lead to a scenario where Camden no longer had such a mixed vibrant community, but a place only affordable for the very rich or very poor.
- The Council was working with a number of private sector landlords to pilot a rent stabilisation scheme, which would enable people to have security of tenure and rent levels for a long period of time. This would enable people to plan better for the future and be less disruptive to those people with families.
- The Council's Private Rented Sector licensing scheme was going live in December 2015. The Council may look at running an expanded scheme that would allow the authority to gather more information on housing conditions in the borough. This additional scheme could allow the authority to cover the whole of the borough.
- The housing crisis was especially severe in Central London and it needed the Mayor of London to take on the issue with the Government. Unfortunately the Mayor of London did not have a plan for helping to solve this crisis.
- More homes needed to be built in London and the boroughs needed to have the HRA cap lifted, and be empowered to ensure other housing providers also built enough homes.

Joint Services

- The independent report on the operation of the Tri-Borough service sharing agreement had concluded, that the scheme had not generated savings over and above those that individual authorities had been able to achieve. The Council had a strong shared history with the London Borough of Islington and the proposed sharing of ITC services was another example of both authorities working together. The joint oversight arrangements provided both authorities with an effective way of monitoring the development of the new service.

Child Care

- The Child Care Bill was still to go through Parliament so the Council was still unclear what the final proposals would be, along with how much of the proposals the Government was prepared to fund. As a result of the Child Care Bill, one of the possible scenarios could lead to the Council facing a funding shortfall of £6M a year.

Policing in Camden

- The Police were doing a very difficult job under difficult circumstances. The Government was proposing further £600M cuts to the Metropolitan Police

Service's (MPS) budget. As part of the options being considered to meet this budget shortfall, the MPS was considering whether to axe all Police Community Support Officer posts in London. These possible cuts could see neighbourhood policing being reduced to just a single dedicated Police Officer for each ward in Camden. This was down from the six officer strong Safer Neighbourhood Teams in Camden.

- The Council and the Police had worked in partnership to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour around Kings Cross and Camden Town. Changing the Police support that was available could lead such issues arising again in Camden.

Library Service

- The responses arising from the existing consultation regarding Library Services was producing a number of interesting ideas for taking the service forward. Camden was lucky in having such a high number of community minded people who wished to get involved and support community facilities like the Library Service.

West End

- The Council was constrained in its ability to restrict the types of shops and businesses that took up residence in Soho and parts of the West End, as it had to work within the London Plan and the National Policy Framework for Central London. These parts of Camden should not become areas that only catered for the London's rich and must still provide for the local community.

Air Quality

- The Council had a strong national profile for the work it had been doing in trying to improve the air quality for the borough. Increasing the number and quality of cycle lanes in the borough, as well as putting in place traffic schemes that would reduce the speed and number of vehicles, were all helping to improve air quality. It should be noted though that the local authority did not have the power to regulate the efficiency of car or bus engines, this responsibility rested with the Government and the Mayor of London.

Councillor Danny Beales, then thanked the Leader and Deputy Leader for answering the scrutiny committee chair's questions.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

Joint Scrutiny Committee Chairs - Wednesday, 23rd September, 2015

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

CHAIR

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MINUTES END