

RENEWAL AND RECREATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.30 pm on 24 January 2011

Present:

Councillor Sarah Phillips (Chairman)
Councillors Councillor Michael Tickner (Vice-Chairman),
Councillor Brian Humphrys, Councillor Ian F. Payne,
Councillor Russell Jackson, Councillor Pauline Tunnicliffe,
Councillor Tom Papworth and Councillor Peter Fookes

Also Present:

Councillor Charles Joel, Councillor Alexa Michael,
Councillor Julian Benington and Councillor Gordon Norrie

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF ALTERNATE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillors John Ince and John Getgood with Councillor Peter Fookes attending in place of Councillor Getgood.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Tom Papworth and Alexa Michael each declared a Personal Interest as members of the Bromley Arts Council. The Chairman also declared a Personal Interest as a Governor of the Bromley Adult Education College.

45 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

There were no questions.

46 MINUTES OF THE RENEWAL AND RECREATION PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7TH DECEMBER 2010

Members agreed the minutes and in so doing the Vice Chairman referred to Minute 34 explaining that he had yet to be consulted on the preparation of a report on Beckenham and West Wickham scheduled for the Committee's meeting on 15th February 2011. The Director explained that this was in mind and an officer would be in touch shortly.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2010 be agreed.

47 RENEWAL AND RECREATION PORTFOLIO - PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Decisions of the Portfolio Holder taken since the Committee's previous meeting on 7th December 2010 were noted.

48 DRAFT 2011/12 BUDGET

Report DRR11/001

Members considered a draft 2011/12 Budget for the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio incorporating cost pressures and additional saving options as reported to the Executive on 12th January 2011.

The Executive requested that each PDS Committee consider the proposals arising from the report to its 12th January meeting entitled "*The Local Government Finance Settlement 2011/12 to 2012/13 and Related Budget Issues*".

For the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio, commentary was provided in report DRR11/001 on the position for five areas namely the Cotmandene and Mottingham shops, the Field Studies Centre, the Adult Education Centre, income from Planning Applications and income from Building Control. Savings options across the Portfolio were also detailed for the consideration of Members.

Introducing the report, the Director outlined key issues from Bromley's Local Government Finance Settlement and pressures for the Portfolio budget. For the Cotmandene and Mottingham shops reference was made to the importance of keeping the shops open and the taking of management measures to enable this.

(i) Proposed budget options for recreation

In considering the draft Budget further, the Assistant Director commented on proposed savings for recreation based on activities outlined at Appendix 1 to report DRR11/001. Referring to a proposed removal of subsidy to the Bromley Arts Council (BAC), Councillor Michael outlined the BAC Chairman's views that it would be kinder to the Arts Council to have a 25% reduction in subsidy next year with a 25% reduction for each of the subsequent three years. With a complete withdrawal of subsidy there was a risk that the Ripley Arts Centre might have to be disposed of and Councillor Michael enquired of the BAC activities that would be covered in an amalgamation with the Churchill Theatre contract noting that this would mean transferring to a trading company rather than retaining the BAC as a registered trust. The Assistant Director

acknowledged the merits of giving further thought to a structured subsidy reduction to the BAC and referred to the Ambassador Theatre Group taking on some of the activities currently undertaken by the Ripley Arts Centre. Councillor Papworth also recognised the merits of a structured subsidy reduction. Councillor Humphrys suggested that to compensate for any reduced or withdrawn subsidy the BAC might wish to increase revenue from functions such as wedding receptions held at their premises. Councillor Michael commented that the BAC had made efforts to raise funds over the past ten years and had made good progress in so doing. However the Arts Council had been hindered on property maintenance with a number of new regulations. Councillor Payne asked if the Business Support Group could offer advice to the BAC on measures to improve income and Members were advised that officers worked closely with the BAC. Overall it was felt that the £35k saving for 2012/13 should be made over three years to support the BAC and enable them to maintain their property for functions such as wedding receptions etc.

Councillor Humphrys also commented that there appeared to be a number of Portfolio areas not covered in the budget options. The Assistant Director highlighted a need to focus on the next two years and in the latter years there would be further opportunities for savings; the cuts proposed represented 25% of the net controllable budget for the Portfolio and some aspects were factored in for later savings. The Director added that savings were being considered over a four year period although the current focus was on the 2011/12 budget. Over a four year period it was intended to halve contributions to the Churchill Theatre and with MyTime it was intended to look at a negotiated agreement to zero Council funding. Councillor Payne felt that further explanation was necessary for years three and four in order to understand proposed savings for the first two years as these appeared to be limited. The Assistant Director explained that the lion's share of his budget sat with the Library service and the Libraries Working Group would be reporting its recommendations to the Committee's next meeting on 15th February.

Councillor Fookes enquired about the possibilities for income generation and increasing charges. The Assistant Director referred to a significant income from the Library service and it was hoped to be able to set more aggressive fees and charges. Referring to a proposal to amalgamate Penge and Anerley libraries, Councillor Papworth explained that it was a popular service at both locations and referred to some residents having to travel a longer distance to access a new Library. He also enquired whether it would be possible to save some 2% elsewhere from the libraries budget and so save the Penge and Anerley libraries. Members were advised that outcomes from the Libraries Working Group yet to be finalised although amalgamation of the Penge and Anerley libraries had been a previous Member decision under Building a Better Bromley.

Councillor Tickner felt that the proposed savings were tame and suggested that areas not identified in the report be looked at including salary reduction. The Director explained that salary considerations were related to terms and condition of service and a corporate matter. The focus was on savings for

next year where there was an ability to act and act quickly. For the following years there were a lot of unknowns and the current forecast did not deal with the extent of savings needed in future years. For Town Centre costs, Members were advised that the Town Centre and business support teams had merged and there was now a limited staff resource on business support; the emphasis was on the town centre team whose support had been retained.

A further question was asked about the number of staff in the renewal and recreation department and the Director offered to circulate a breakdown of staffing figures comparing figures with last year and the previous year. This would also identify staff funded by external grant and show a trend of retrenchment in staff numbers.

(ii) Proposed savings for the Planning Service

The Chief Planner explained that previous savings had been made and referred to a Fundamental Review of the Planning Service in 2008. National performance Indicators on planning determination standards were a consideration for budget options as was a need to develop a Local Plan which would need to be prepared promptly. The Planning division was also in the vanguard of Building a Better Bromley. Significant Planning successes in the previous year would also need to be taken into account. The Chief Planner briefly commented on specific budget options proposed for the Planning Service,

Councillor Papworth expressed concern at any option to reduce enforcement explaining that it was necessary to save residents from unpleasant developments, suggesting that problems would be stored up for the future. He also enquired about charging for planning applications and was advised of a government proposal for such fees to be set locally in a similar way to building control fees. The fees would be on a cost recovery basis and should this be taken forward, arrangements would be implemented by regulation from 1st October 2011.

Councillor Jackson also expressed concern for any reduced priority on enforcement. On charges for pre-application discussions on non major applications he enquired whether any comparison had been made with the costs of consultants. The Chief Planner explained that a search for cost comparisons was not limited and costs had been compared with those of similar authorities to Bromley.

Councillor Michael was also concerned about any priority to reduce enforcement suggesting that it would convey the wrong message. She explained that the role of an enforcement officer required a certain set of skills and it would be wrong to negate work carried out over the previous two years. Councillor Payne indicated that more enforcement could be undertaken by not losing a post and enquired whether savings from contributing to the Open House initiative could be made against enforcement. The Chief Planner acknowledged that effective enforcement saved money in the longer term and was prepared to look again to see what further savings could be made from

the Open House initiative. The Portfolio Holder commented that the Open House initiative was attractive to Bromley residents with some 12 to 14 properties opened up in the borough during the weekend – there was a value in the initiative and it was valued by residents.

Councillor Fookes suggested that the option for reducing enforcement priority be deleted. He also suggested that the Council recover its costs where an appellant is unsuccessful in a planning appeal and provide a refund where the appellant is successful. Members were advised that there was no provision for such measures in forthcoming legislation.

Councillor Tickner suggested that the public had a poor perception of enforcement activity and to increase its impact he suggested contracting out enforcement activity to the independent sector e.g. a freelance surveyor where payment could be made by results. Councillor Tickner also felt that a £200 fee for pre-application discussions on non major applications was not unreasonable and in regard to advertisements, he suggested posting advertisements on the Council website rather than advertising in local newspapers. The Chief Planner explained that for pre-application discussions, the intention was to propose fees that were high in comparison with other London boroughs but not the highest. Reference was also made to inflation proof fees and a differing fee scale according to application. Concerning outsourcing of enforcement activity, the Chief Planner felt that this would not necessarily generate a cost saving and that publicity and direct action would convey the enforcement message. Concerning website advertising the Chief Planner explained that the Department for Communities and Local Government had undertaken a consultation on the matter; following this, such an approach could not be endorsed and there was a particular difficulty for those not having access to the internet.

Councillor Joel observed that where the Planning Department had been successful on appeals the Council did not seem to get much money back. He also supported retention of the current enforcement complement and suggested there could be enforcement difficulties with two enforcement officers should one be absent through sickness.

Councillor Jackson suggested cutting the annual Residents Association Seminar rather than enforcement activity. Councillor Michael felt that the Annual Residents Association Seminar was worthwhile but suggested that savings be made to it so that it was more of a frugal event e.g. with refreshments but without catering. Councillor Joel agreed. Councillor Payne noted that the 2010/11 budget for the Open House Initiative, Seminar and general running costs was £395k and advocated using some of this budget to retain a third enforcement officer.

The Director suggested further consultation with Members on how the £31k to retain the enforcement complement could be met - possibly through eating into the budget for the Open House Initiative, annual Residents Association Seminar and general running costs. Proposals would then be fed to the Executive.

(iii) Bromley Adult Education College (BAEC)

The Director briefly outlined the budget position for the BAEC.

RESOLVED that the Executive be recommended to:

(1) support the Bromley Arts Council by staggering the £35k saving over three years to enable them to maintain their property in order to maximise income from functions such as wedding receptions; and

(2) consider ways in which the existing planning enforcement posts could be maintained possibly through greater reductions to the budget allocated to the Open House Initiative, the annual Residents Association Seminar and general running costs.

The Meeting ended at 9.45 pm

Chairman