

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 21 November 2012

Present:

Councillor Tony Owen (Chairman)
Councillor Russell Mellor (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Nicholas Bennett J.P., John Canvin,
Roger Charsley, Roxhannah Fawthrop, John Getgood,
Julian Grainger, Will Harmer, Gordon Norrie,
Charles Rideout, Diane Smith, Tim Stevens and
Pauline Tunnicliffe

Also Present:

Councillor Graham Arthur, Councillor Douglas Auld,
Councillor Ruth Bennett, Councillor Eric Bosshard,
Councillor Stephen Carr, Councillor Judi Ellis, Councillor
Ellie Harmer, Councillor Brian Humphrys, Councillor
William Huntington-Thresher, Councillor Nick Milner,
Councillor Ernest Noad, Councillor Tom Papworth,
Councillor Sarah Phillips, Councillor Richard Scoates and
Councillor Colin Smith

53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Payne.

54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tim Stevens declared that as a member of the Executive he would not take any part in the debate or voting on Parking Shared Services.

There were no other declarations.

55 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

No questions had been received.

56 PARKING SHARED SERVICE Report ES12110

This item was considered in a joint session with the Executive and Resources PDS Committee. The following documents were circulated in addition to the report – a summary of the consultation responses received from staff, a letter

dated 20th November 2012 from the Directors of Environment & Wellbeing and Finance & Resources at LB Bexley, and the draft minutes from the meeting of the Environment PDS Committee on 20th November 2012. The Environment PDS Committee had supported the proposed shared parking service with Bexley, but added an additional request that an assessment of externalisation opportunities be brought forward once the shared service had been successfully established with a report on options in 12 months' time.

Members considered that the savings on offer of £100,000 were modest compared to the scale of the service. The proposed staffing structure appeared to contain too many managerial posts, and could be further trimmed to achieve more savings – particularly the Strategy and Service Development Team. Officers explained that the manager posts at this level, while including supervisory responsibilities, were not at management grade, and this team played an important role in developing the statutory Parking strategies for both boroughs, assessing and responding to customer needs, and dealing with issues such as complaints and freedom of information enquiries.

Members sought clarification on whether new staff would be recruited only on Bromley terms and conditions. It was confirmed that costs would be split according to the collaboration agreement, whether staff were appointed by Bromley or Bexley. The proposal was based on secondment of staff as there would be pension liabilities for Bromley.

Members were concerned at references to a joint parking strategy in the response given to staff, given that the two authorities might have different priorities and different problems to address. The aim would be to align strategies as far as possible, but the report correctly confirmed that the respective boroughs would retain their own formal Parking Strategies which would continue to be agreed by Members. Some Members suggested that as Bromley appeared to be a better performing service the advantage in the shared service would be greater for Bexley. It had been suggested at the Environment PDS Committee meeting that if Bromley was bearing a risk if performance was poor, consideration should be given to providing a financial incentive if the opportunity to improve performance was realised. Members were also reluctant to agree that the power to approve the formal Shared Service Collaboration Agreement should be delegated to an officer, and felt that this should be confirmed by the Executive.

Officers confirmed that the Parking Service was already largely outsourced, with contracts for enforcement & car parks management, and ICT. Efficiency savings had already been made, and there was little scope for “salami slicing” further savings. A larger service would reduce duplication and be better able to cope with peaks of work.

Officers were already working with Liberata to investigate the potential benefits of an outsourced debt collection service. There were differences between bailiff services for Council Tax and parking, but Liberata had invested in effective IT systems that could look at all a debtor's debts together. Further evidence was needed to show that they would be effective

at collecting parking debt. The Environment PDS Committee had suggested that outsourcing should be investigated once the shared service had been established, but other Members suggested that if the boroughs' views diverged this could mean increased costs to disentangle the new arrangements and that all options should be considered.

The Chairman of the Executive and Resources PDS Committee stated that he was not in favour of joint management and decision-making as this would lead to increased costs, delay and lack of clarity over responsibility. He was concerned that the savings were too small, and too many staff were being retained. He suggested that this was a good opportunity for an employee buy-out and that this and other options should be examined further before a decision was made.

RESOLVED that the Committee agrees (subject to the comments made by the Environment and Executive and Resources PDS Committees, and to agreement from the Executive) in accordance with Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's scheme of delegation, to place such of the Council's employees as may fall within the remit of the scoping of the shared parking service at the disposal of the London Borough of Bexley. Any such officer shall be treated for the purpose of any enactment relating to the discharge of local authorities' functions as an officer of that other local authority.

The Meeting ended at 7.55 pm

Chairman