

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting held at 5.00 pm on 18 May 2020

Present:

Councillor Pauline Tunnicliffe (Chairman)
Councillor Stephen Wells (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Vanessa Allen, Mary Cooke, Robert Evans,
Kira Gabbert, Josh King, Christopher Marlow,
Russell Mellor, Tony Owen, Neil Reddin FCCA,
Melanie Stevens and Michael Turner

76 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gareth Allatt and Harry Stranger.

The Vice-Chairman took the chair for a period at the start of the meeting while the Chairman resolved some technical issues with her equipment.

77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Kira Gabbert declared an interest regarding minute 80 – Appointments to Outside Bodies – as her appointment to one of the positions was recommended to continue. It was accepted that this might apply to other members of the Committee.

78 QUESTIONS

No questions had been received.

79 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11TH FEBRUARY 2020

The Council's new Head of Corporate Finance and Accounting, David Dobbs, attended the meeting, and gave an update on the current position with regard to the 2018/19 accounts (Minute 54).

He began by confirming that the Council had supplied further information to its previous external auditor KPMG in relation to an objection to the 2016/17 accounts, and was waiting to hear back from them. This objection had an impact on the accounts for successive years. There were also objections to the 2017/18 and 2018/19 accounts which needed to be resolved, as well as the issue of the asset valuations for the 2018/19 accounts. Re-stated accounts had been submitted to EY for 2018/19 and it was performing

additional audit procedures particularly in relation to valuation procedures. He hoped to be able to finalise the 2018/19 statement of accounts and bring them back to the Committee soon.

Finance staff were currently working to close the draft 2019/20 accounts, and these would be published for public inspection. Local electors would then be able to raise objections, as had happened with previous years – one person had raised objections for three consecutive years which the external auditors had not yet dealt with, leading to the current backlog. Part of Mr Dobbs' role was to address these previous years' accounts and ensure that the issues were resolved by the external auditors as quickly as possible. Mr Dobbs emphasised that it was not unusual for accounts to be outstanding, and some Councils faced more significant backlogs than Bromley.

Responding to questions, Mr Dobbs commented on the possible motivation behind the objections to the accounts, which he confirmed were detailed and extensive. A Member suggested that Mr Dobbs had an opportunity as a new officer to make a personal approach to the objector to try to resolve some of the issues. It was not open to the Council to dismiss the objections as vexatious – this was a matter for the external auditor, and auditors were open to legal challenge from objectors if they rejected objections without good reason. Mr Dobbs confirmed that considerable additional fees would be charged by the external auditors which the Council had little control over. Part of his remit was to press the external auditor to resolve these objections. A new Code of Audit Practice had taken effect in April 2020 which set out a timeline of six months for auditors to deal with objections (from the point of accepting the objection). This was not retrospective, but it did indicate that the problem had been recognised at a national level and the Code should be helpful in future. Mr Dobbs explained that the current delay with the 2018/19 accounts appeared to be that a senior partner at EY had not had time to look at the work done by more junior staff following the revaluations. Mr Dobbs' team were pressing EY on this.

The Chairman confirmed that she and the Vice-Chairman had held regular meetings with the officers concerned to monitor the situation.

With regard to minute 55, the Director of Corporate Services stated that he understood that a response had been provided on the issue of postal votes for the Lewisham West and Penge constituency in the 2019 General Election, but he would check this. (Note: It was subsequently confirmed that details had been sent to Cllr Allen on 14th February 2020.)

With regard to minute 60, the chairman commented that she had hoped that the programme of meetings would be adhered to, but the response to the pandemic had necessitated changes, as agreed by the Urgency Committee. A Member commented that an amended programme should have been circulated to Members.

Councillor Kira Gabbert requested that the minutes be corrected to record that she was present at the meeting on 11th February 2020.

RESOLVED that, with the addition of Councillor Gabbert's name, the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2020, excluding exempt information, be confirmed.

80 APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES 2020/21
Report CSD20067

The Committee received a report setting out the nominations for appointments to outside bodies for 2020/21 received from the party groups. The Chairman drew attention to two changes – the Duke of Edinburgh Award Support Committee was no longer required as the responsibility had been passed on to the schools, and the vacancy on the Bromley Arts Council did not need to be filled as the body was in the process of changing its constitution.

RESOLVED that the nominations to outside bodies set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

81 AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26TH FEBRUARY 2020, EXCLUDING EXEMPT INFORMATION

The draft minutes from the meeting of the Audit Sub-Committee held on 26th February 2020 (excluding exempt information) were received.

82 PENSIONS INVESTMENT SUB-COMMITTEE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30TH JANUARY 2020

The draft minutes from the meeting of the Pensions Investment Sub-Committee held on 30th January 2020 were received.

83 LOCAL PENSION BOARD: MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22ND JANUARY 2020

The draft minutes from the meeting of the Local Pension Board held on 22nd January 2020 were received.

84 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION) ORDER 2006 AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

RESOLVED that the Press and public be excluded during consideration of the items of business referred to below as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the Press and public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

**The following summaries
refer to matters involving exempt information**

**85 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11TH
FEBRUARY 2020**

RESOLVED that the exempt minutes from the meeting held on 11th February 2020 be confirmed.

**86 AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE: EXEMPT MINUTES - 26TH
FEBRUARY 2020**

The draft exempt minutes from the meeting of the Audit Sub-Committee held on 26th February 2020 were received.

The Meeting ended at 5.50 pm

Chairman