

London Borough of Hackney
Budget Scrutiny Task Group - Public Realm
Municipal Year 2015/16
Date of Meeting Thursday, 19th November, 2015

Minutes of the proceedings of the
Budget Scrutiny Task Group -
Public Realm held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street,
London E8 1EA

Chair

Councillor Margaret Gordon

**Councillors in
Attendance**

**Cllr Kam Adams, Cllr Jon Burke, Cllr Sophie Cameron,
Cllr Rick Muir, Cllr Nick Sharman and Cllr Peter Snell**

Apologies:

Co-optees

Officers In Attendance



**Mark Griffin (Head of Environment and Waste Strategy),
Tom McCourt (Assistant Director - Public Realm), Jim
Paterson (Head of Building Maintenance and Estate
Environment) and John Wheatley (Head of Waste
Operations)**

**Other People in
Attendance**

Members of the Public

PublicInAttendance

Officer Contact:

Tom Thorn
 0208 356 8186
 thomas.thorn@hackney.gov.uk

Councillor Margaret Gordon in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 There were no urgent items and the order of business was as laid out.

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 Cllr Adams advised that he was a leaseholder.

4 Future approaches to waste and cleansing services

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- 4.1 The Chair thanked the Officers in attendance for having provided the paper which had been sent to Members some days previously.
- 4.2 She said that the background to the item was that Members of the Task Group had been keen to explore and receive information on, any movement towards the bringing together of waste and cleansing functions currently delivered separately by the Council and Hackney Homes.
- 4.3 Invited to begin a presentation on the paper, Tom McCourt, Assistant Director, Public Realm advised Members that it was split into three main sections.
- 4.4 Part A gave an overview of the standards and principles that integrated public realm services would seek to achieve and operate within. Part B looked at how an integrated approach would look in practice and pros and cons around it. The final section gave a proposed timeline for further design work and implementation.
- 4.5 Further to the Chair inviting questions and a Member asking who was leading on the work, the Assistant Director, Public Realm said that it would be vital that the correct governance was in place. It was therefore proposed that the governance of the programme was overseen by the Public Realm Cross Cutting Review Programme Board which was already in place, and on which senior Officers and Members were represented. Dedicated project management resources would be allocated to the work from the relevant service area of the Chief Executive's Directorate.
- 4.6 A Member said that he fully agreed that adequate oversight and Governance needed to be in place. He was keen that a wide range of Members were given opportunity to hear updates on progress and to feed in their ideas, throughout the process.
- 4.7 The Cabinet Member for Housing said that the Cross Cutting Review of Public Realm (within which the plans for integration would be made and delivered) would have the same Governance Structures as the other Cross Cutting Reviews which were being delivered, and that all had project boards with a Member voice.
- 4.8 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Sustainability confirmed that other cross cutting programmes which the Public Realm work would follow the principles of, had effective Governance arrangements in place which ensured Member input. In particular, the Enforcement Programme was well progressed. This said, she would welcome any opportunity to attend the relevant Scrutiny Commission (Living in Hackney) to give a single update, or to be asked to give stage by stage progress reports.
- 4.9 The Chair noted that there was significant interest amongst many Members in there being progress towards the joining up of cleansing and waste services, and that many wanted to be kept updated throughout the process. As an action arising from the meeting, she suggested that she write to the Chair of Living in Hackney to suggest that his Commission considered requesting regular progress updates on the integration of Public Realm services.

Action (Chair)

To liaise with Chair of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission to ask about any plans to hear regular updates on progress within the Public Realm Cross Cutting Review.

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- 4.10 A Member said that he felt it hugely positive that a report had now been provided with a timetable for integration and an actual initial figure for the savings expected from this. He was thankful for the efforts of Officers on this. He said that the approach taken to delivering savings by joining up services was one which he felt could be rolled out to another areas also. As such, he felt that continued pressure needed to be applied to ensure that this work could be completed so that it could then be used to inform other projects.
- 4.11 Another Member also celebrated the level of thought and detail that the paper offered to Members. However, while he said that Hackney Homes tenants and leaseholders would be pleased upon any efficiencies being achieved which reduced their service charges, he also wished to sound a note of caution. He said that there would be politically difficult decisions for Members to make if there was to be a more standardised service offer across both streets and estates. He said that an example was with parking charges and making these more equal; at present residents living on estates benefitted from cheaper parking permits than residents of street based properties. Changes which would increase charges for some residents would be more difficult to implement.
- 4.12 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Sustainability thanked the Member for his point, and agreed that political decisions would be needed which all Members would contribute towards. In terms of parking charges, it was the case that permit prices differed according to whether a resident lived in a street property or an estate. The structures of charges (in terms of any differential rates informed by emission levels and or engine size) also differed between spaces managed by Hackney Homes and those managed by the Council.
- 4.13 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Sustainability said that decisions would be needed at a later point around whether a consistent charging scheme on both streets and estates should be delivered. However, at this stage, the focus on was on reaching a point where a single system had the ability to process permit applications and parking tickets for vehicles both on estates and on the street. At present distinct systems did this.
- 4.14 The Cabinet Member for Housing said that while any move to increase charges for estate parking permits estates would not be popular, that improvements to processes could perhaps mitigate hostility. Data showed that 15,000 visits to Neighbourhood Offices each year involved parking permit issues. This was an inefficient use of residents' time. Improvements to processes would be well received.
- 4.15 In response to a Member asking what the next steps were, the Assistant Director, Public Realm said that it would be a case of translating the final section of the report looking at plans and timescales, into a formal project plan. This would detail who was doing what and identify resources to help support the work.
- 4.16 Jim Paterson, Head of Building Maintenance and Estate Environment, Hackney Homes, said that himself and the Head of Environmental Operations for the Council were working together to reach an understanding of the services that they ran separately. This involved working through the different functions and identifying where they lent themselves to immediate integration, and where matters would be more complex.
- 4.17 John Wheatley, Head of Environmental Operations for the Council, said that programmes of training would be required as some members of staff would be asked to carry out tasks which were new to them. In addition, there would be industrial relations challenges as there would be staff reductions. This would include through restructures of management.

- 4.18 However, he felt that Officers were well placed to deliver the changes. They had delivered a similar project successfully when recycling collections were brought back into the Council from an external provider.
- 4.19 The Head of Environmental Operations said that, while bringing the recycling collection function into the Council, they had secured a wide range of efficiencies and improvements through the more effective use of vehicles and better use of equipment. A project to bring together the waste and cleansing functions of Hackney Homes and the Council would secure improvements in a similar fashion. Also, and in addition to delivering efficiencies, the integration would bring improvements to the customer experience, with better weekend provision on estates where it was shown to be needed.
- 4.20 A Member asked whether, where there was clear symmetry between functions delivered by Hackney Homes and the Council, these could be brought together before April 2016.
- 4.21 In response to this the Assistant Director, Public Realm said that while he would like to work towards integration as soon as possible, that he felt that it might not be possible to achieve this before April 2016. He said that he felt that integration would be best implemented within a single phase; the industrial relations aspect of the work could be managed most effectively within this arrangement.
- 4.22 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Sustainability said that there were a number of steps involved with the integration work which would be politically sensitive. In particular, this would be around the extent to which industrial relations were successfully managed and around the extent to which the Council was able to engage tenants and leaseholders in consultation and dialogue. The Programme would be managed and monitored closely, and both she and the Cabinet Member for Housing would keep Risk Registers and other relevant project documentation closely under review.
- 4.23 Cllr Glanville agreed that there would be challenges involved, with Members needing to make and communicate the basis for, difficult decisions. However, he felt that the Council stood in good stead to do this well with the experience that it had of delivering change. Difficult steps had been taken including the closing of some chutes on estates, and by managing communications on these well, residents had generally been persuaded of the merits of these.
- 4.24 A Member said that residents and businesses in his ward would be very concerned if any reorganisation removed high performing street sweepers, who they had built good relationships with and saw as a vital part of the Council. He asked that any changes were fully communicated with Ward Councillors and justification be given so that they could effectively communicate with constituents.
- 4.25 The Head of Environmental Operations said that he fully appreciated that residents of the borough built relationships with cleansing staff in their area. He had been a street sweeper in Kensington and Chelsea for a ten year period and had seen first hand the extent to which residents built affinities with good members of staff.
- 4.26 The Head of Building Maintenance and Estate Environment, Hackney Homes, reassured Members that the competitive interview process would very much aim to ensure that the strongest Members of staff across the organisation were retained.

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- 4.27 Asked for their final thoughts the Cabinet Members for Housing and Neighbourhoods and Sustainability both thanked the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for their involvement which had been very helpful.
- 4.28 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Sustainability said that service areas relevant to Public Realm had clear links with the agenda of Hackney a Place for Everyone. By joining up and achieving universally high standards of service around waste, recycling, green travel and others the Council could help ensure that residents across the borough received the same standards.
- 4.29 Bringing the discussion to a close, the Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and Officers for their insight. In particular, she thanked Officers for having worked hard to provide written information for this meeting and the two previous ones falling within this phase of the Task Group's work.

5 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 5.1 Members of the Task Group agreed with a point that another Member made around point 5.37 of the Minutes, which had been recorded as per below:

“In response, the Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Culture said that he had found the discussion useful. He had heard a clear commitment from Members that parks remained at a high standard, and continued to be a key Council offer to residents and visitors. There appeared to be a willingness to explore the capacity for and value of catering for large events. Finally, there was a view that community events and the charges attributed to them might be reviewed. This should help ensure that while there was still a community event offer, that the charges applied to them were more reflective of their size and the costs in officer time which were associated with them.”

- 5.2 The Member said that he felt that the Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Culture had confirmed that the view of the Task Group had been more equivocal around events than the passage suggested, and also that he had given his support towards this stance. The Member felt that the Task Group and the Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Culture had agreed that the approach towards events needed to be revisited. This was both towards the levels of support given to community events and also the extent to which the Council would work to enable large events to be hosted. The Member said that it had been agreed that if it was found that a revised approach to events would secure the maintaining of a high quality offer across parks which would not be secured otherwise, that the Council should pursue a revised approach.
- 5.3 Aside from this point, the Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.
- 5.4 The Chair noted that at the last meeting, Members had requested information around other borough's experiences of moving from a free bulky waste collection service to a charging one, in terms of any impact on levels of flytipping. She advised that a paper had been appended to the Minutes in response to this.
- 5.5 After the Chair asked him to provide a brief summary of the report, Mark Griffin, Head of Environment and Waste Strategy for the Council, said that the paper brought together the best evidence which was available at this time.
- 5.6 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy advised that available data from other local authority areas suggested that:
- There was no direct relationship between a move to a bulky waste service and a significant increase in flytipping activity.

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- That a move to a charging model would have an impact on the number of bulky waste collections as some residents rationed their use of the service or chose alternatives.
- 5.7 A Member said that he would be keen to explore where the waste previously collected via a free bulky waste collection would be redirected to, if the impact of introducing a bulky waste collection charge was a reduction in use of the service. In particular, he asked whether there would be an impact on the volumes of waste collected through kerbside refuse collections due to residents breaking up bulky items and adding this waste to their general rubbish.
- 5.8 In response, the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that the evidence available suggested that residents who were dissuaded from continuing with a bulky waste service after charging had been introduced, in general used the alternative legal option which was the most convenient to them. In many cases this was through the use of Household Waste and Recycling Centres (Hackney residents were eligible to access services at the Hornsey Road centre).
- 5.9 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that the level of data available would not enable the service to reach a fully evidenced position on any impact on residual waste collection tonnage that moving to a charging bulky waste service would bring.
- 5.10 However, the service was able to reach a reasonably informed view by considering the approaches and experiences of other local authorities, and to track whether or not after introducing a charging service they had returned to a free service model. This would help indicate whether or not the disbenefits of the policy change had been found to outweigh the benefits. The data available suggested that local authorities had not generally returned to a free model after introducing a charging one (an exception was Tower Hamlets, but this was understood to be a politically-based decision rather than one driven by officers).
- 5.10 In response to whether or not there could be a risk of residents breaking up items to add to their general refuse in response to an ending of free bulky waste collections, the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that he had not seen evidence to suggest that this was likely. However, operatives did notice and flag with their supervisors where unsuitable materials were being added to general household waste. Any rise in these cases post the introduction of a bulky waste service would be identified, and the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy would be happy to feedback to Members on this and to discuss responses to this is applicable.
- 5.11 The Chair of the Commission noted that this discussion followed on from Members requesting further information around the experiences of other boroughs introducing chargeable bulky waste collections, in terms of any impact on levels of flytipping. She felt that the key section of the paper (for the purposes of this meeting) was the passage that explained that the data for a number of London boroughs suggested that there was no significant impact of a charging bulky waste service, either on flytipping or on street cleansing waste streams.
- 5.12 More than one Member said that they felt a move to chargeable bulky waste collection service was fair in principle. One said that it would help communicate the message that there was a cost associated with waste collection.
- 5.13 A Member asked a question around any enforcement activity that the service was doing to tackle any flytipping among people working within the private rented

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sector. He asked whether this activity could strengthen the case for the Council introducing licensing within the sector.

- 5.14 In response, the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that data on flytipping had been shared with the area of the Council exploring the scope for licensing the private rented sector. However, he understood that the data available had not been sufficient to enable licensing on the grounds of anti-social behaviour within the sector.
- 5.15 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that in relation to the Bulky Waste Service, work was done to try to tackle abuse of it by private sector landlords, who were ineligible for it and were expected to pay for collections via the Commercial Waste service.
- 5.16 The Chair thanked the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy for the paper he had provided and for answering questions. These had included queries on topics outside of the discussion item, and she appreciated this.

6 Public Realm Budget Scrutiny for 2015/16 - closing thoughts

- 6.1 The Chair reminded Members that they were now coming to the end of the first phase of the Budget Scrutiny work process.
- 6.2 The aim of this phase had been for Task Groups to review proposals for savings for 2016/17 within specific areas of Council operations, and to reach a view on whether as a group they endorsed these or not.
- 6.3 The Chair noted that the proposals put to the group around achieving savings for 2016/17 were:
- For Leisure and Green Spaces, the renegotiation of the leisure contract
 - For Bulky Waste, the introduction of a charging model
 - Reductions to Council graffiti and street cleansing services.
- 6.4 The Chair felt that the Group had reached a position of agreement on the first two of the three proposals above.
- 6.5 She suggested that on the third proposal (around reductions to graffiti and street cleansing services), Members had felt unable to endorse these. This was due to a view amongst the Group that further exploration was needed around the capacity to achieve required savings through the integration of Hackney Homes and Council cleansing and waste services, rather than through a reconfiguration of Council functions in isolation.
- 6.6 She noted that in addition to reviewing the immediate proposals for 2016/17, the Group had heard information and made suggestions for, areas for potential savings for after 2016/17. She said that these had included:
- Exploring how events in parks might be used more effectively as an income generator.
 - Exploring roles of volunteers / community groups in parks
 - Exploring the room for media activities on the public highway

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- 6.7 The Chair advised that further phases of the Budget Scrutiny process would explore these and other options in more detail.
- 6.8 At this point the Chair asked for Members to give their views on the process, and around the responses which the Group should make to help inform the budget decision process.
- 6.9 A Member said that he had found the meetings beneficial and useful. He felt that in addition to the group giving a view on whether proposals were endorsed or not, their response should also set out a range of principles which they felt that explorations for savings should be made within. He felt that these principles should include:
- The Council working to achieve a common level of service and standards across the borough
 - Charging for more services to be accepted if this was done fairly and ensured strong public services
- 6.10 Another Member agreed that there needed to be a set of principles around the Council's approach to delivering the savings required. These could aid discussions between Members and residents around changes (events in parks for example) which would be contentious. He named the following as principles which he felt to be appropriate:
- Common service standards for all residents
 - A commitment to integration
 - Maintaining good levels of service and exploring options on how this could be funded.
- 6.11 A Member said that while some of the proposals for 2016/17 involved discussions of savings and changes which could be seen as quite modest, he felt that the Task Group had been very progressive. He said that Members had explored difficult areas and weighed up their appetite for making decisions which would be contentious, against the benefits that they would deliver. Developing an approach which would enable the maintaining of good public services through difficult measures (such as greater allowance of large events in parks) was harder than an approach of simply scaling back service quality across the board.
- 6.12 Another Member said that he felt that a record should be made of the effect that a group of back bench Members had had. He felt that their interest in the capacity for integration of services in the Council and Hackney Homes had helped to escalate and drive forward a process for which Members had wanted progress on for a long time.
- 6.13 A Member said that he was concerned to see that the Budget Scrutiny Task Groups were time limited. He felt that the process had worked very well, partly as a result of this form of scrutiny sitting outside of a more rigid 5 Scrutiny Commission arrangement. He felt that an ongoing arrangement where groups of interested Members could be brought together to scrutinise any one issue, could be an appealing option for the future of Scrutiny in Hackney.
- 6.14 Another Member agreed with this point. He felt that the Scrutiny Commissions delivered excellent and strong pieces of work which informed policy. However, he saw perhaps more value in an approach of programming a range of investigations, and bringing together time limited bespoke Commissions to complete each of these. He felt that particularly during the lifespan of the

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Comprehensive Spending Review to be announced shortly, that there should be capacity for this function.

6.15 The Chair thanked Members for their points. She agreed that the work had been useful, and that it also had helped identify areas for later further discussion around savings considerations for beyond 2016/17.

6.16 However, the Chair also noted that Scrutiny Officers had been asked to support the Budget Scrutiny Groups in addition to their main roles of supporting Scrutiny Commissions. In addition, this group had met for an additional meeting in this phase. She suggested that, if the Task Groups were going to be made more of a permanent arrangement, consideration would need to be given on how they could be supported. She thanked the Scrutiny Officer for his work. She also thanked Officers for all of their input, and for making such a rich level of information available for each meeting. Finally, she thanked Members for their interest and effective lines of questioning.

6.17 Another Member wished to place on record his thanks to Public Realm Officers who had worked to provide an excellent and insightful intelligence base. This had helped a group of backbench Members to give effective challenge, which was very positive.

7 Any Other Business

7.1 There was no other business.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 8.30 pm