

London Borough of Hackney
Budget Scrutiny Task Group - Public Realm
Municipal Year 2015/16
Date of Meeting Wednesday, 21st October, 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 Jon Burke and Cllr Nick Sharman

Apologies: Cllr Rick Muir

Co-optees

Officers In Attendance Dr Penny Bevan (Director of Public Health), Mark Griffin (Head of Environment and Waste Strategy), Ian Holland (Head of Leisure and Green Spaces), Tom McCourt (Assistant Director - Public Realm), John Wheatley (Head of Waste Operations) and Kim Wright (Corporate Director Health and Community Services)

Other People in Attendance Councillor Kam Adams, Councillor Feryal Demirci (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods), Councillor Jonathan McShane (Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Culture), Councillor Anna-Joy Rickard and Councillor Peter Snell

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 Apologies were received from Cllr Muir.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

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

3 Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4 Submissions from the Public Realm Division

- 4.1 The Chair introduced this item by saying that this meeting was designed to hear further information around savings proposals for 2016/17 for the services falling within the Public Realm Division, and for the Leisure and Green Spaces Service, following the meeting on the 16th September.
- 4.2 She advised the Group that, as per emails sent to them, an additional meeting had been arranged for the 19th November, in which Members would hear further information around the Public Realm cross-cutting review, and any movement towards the integration of the waste and cleansing services currently operated separately by the Council and Hackney Homes.
- 4.3 She asked that Tom McCourt, Assistant Director Public Realm, gave a very brief overview of the three papers from his area, which were available within the agenda packs.
- 4.4 The Assistant Director Public Realm advised Members that the first paper explored the potential of changing the Bulky Waste Service from a free to a chargeable service, with different models for consideration. Introducing charging would bring the Council into line with the majority of other London Boroughs.
- 4.5 A further paper within the agenda packs explored the likely impact of implementing reductions in street cleansing activity and in the number of crews within the graffiti and fly posting removal team.
- 4.6 The third item was a paper exploring the scope for greater income generation from greater advertising activity within the public realm.
- 4.7 The Chair at this point invited questions from Members on the proposals around the Bulky Waste function.

Discussion on Bulky Waste

- 4.8 A Member noted that the paper stated that there were ICT requirements for a charging model to be introduced. She asked what the cost of the new system would be, and whether there would be a risk of costs escalating from those estimated.
- 4.9 Mark Griffin, Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that ICT were aware of a potential change in the service model and of the likely new requirements for the current system. While there was not a dedicated resource in place to deliver the changes at this stage, it was envisaged that there could be for the start of 2016/17. The analyst responsible for these changes would be made responsible for the delivery of other ICT requirements within the Division also; experience had shown that ICT changes had been delivered most successfully where the time of the resource was focused within one single area of the Council.
- 4.10 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy thought that it was reasonable to not foresee an escalation in ICT costs and the time for implementation as becoming an issue; there was not a need for a full new system to be developed, and the requirements had been successfully installed in a number of other systems used by the Council. The new facility would be linked with the new Hackney One Account, where residents would be able to request and pay for bulky waste collections online in addition to interacting with other services.

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- 4.11 There was a discussion among Members as to whether it was reasonable to introduce charging for items of bulky waste, on the proviso that residents on low incomes were offered some continued free provision.
- 4.11 A Member felt that a move to a charging model for bulky waste collections was reasonable, as long as the charges made were fair. Introducing a charging service sent a message that there were costs involved with waste collection.
- 4.12 Another Member said that with the scale of savings which were likely to be required, that it was fair for the Council to give consideration towards which services it could and should continue to deliver for free.
- 6.13 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that the moving to a charging model would put the Council in line with the majority of other boroughs.
- 4.14 A Member said that his experience when working to install a charging service elsewhere, was that there was a resulting increase in flytipping. He said that this would need to be carefully managed.
- 4.15 At this point, Feryal Demirci, the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods said that she did feel that there needed to be a review of the approach to Bulky Waste, and that the paper submitted included a number of models for Members to consider. However, with the Council currently carrying out a large review of Enforcement functions across the organisation, it was important that the approach to this was partly informed by any predicted need for greater enforcement activity post the ending of a free Bulky Waste service.
- 4.16 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that the service had established a good record of enforcing effectively against flytipping. It would need to ensure that it was ready to tackle any escalation. However, evidence available suggested that the impact on flytipping volumes of moving to a charging service would not be significant.
- 4.17 The great majority of residents acted lawfully around their waste disposal (especially around the disposal of larger items) and evidence very much suggested that changes to the Bulky Waste Service would not effect this. When the Council had removed communal skips residents had not chosen to continue dumping in the location illegally. In Enfield, the closure of a household recycling centre had not resulted in a higher escalation of flytipping. These examples had helped form the view that a move to a charging service would not result in the Council still needing to collect large volumes of bulky waste for free, but via flytipping clear ups.
- 4.18 In addition, he was only aware of one case where a borough had moved to a charging model only to return back to universally free one. This had recently occurred at Tower Hamlets although he understood that this change was due to a political decision rather than one based on the results of the charging model.
- 4.19 In response to a Member asking what the rationale was around proposals for bulky waste collections to allow for five items per time, the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy advised that this allowed for some consistency with the previous arrangement.
- 4.20 John Wheatley, Head of Environmental Operations elaborated on this, saying that the collection of a number of items in one visit was more efficient than collecting 1 or two items on a number of visits. He felt that the introduction of a charging service would result in less multiple visits where the service collected one item, towards a pattern of residents rationing their collection orders so that

they made the full use of the five item limit in most cases. This, aside from any benefit from income generation, would help make the service more cost effective and efficient.

- 4.21 The Head of Environmental Operations also said that he felt that residents, while very much expecting streets to be clean and refuse to be collected in return for the Council Tax that they paid, would generally expect to pay for larger items of rubbish to be collected. He pointed out that suppliers of new white goods or furniture in most cases charged customers to collect and dispose of their old goods. In addition, the proposed charges - £15 per booking with an allowance of up to five items on each one – were below those which the private sector would offer. He therefore agreed with the view of the Head of Environment and Waste Strategy that there would not be a large impact on levels of flytipping.
- 4.22 A Member asked how a recommended charge of £15 per booking had been reached. Also, whilst not necessarily wishing to replicate their approach, he noted that Barnet had been found to have charged far higher amounts.
- 4.23 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that a charge of £15 had been suggested based on what neighbouring boroughs were charging. He felt that models where significantly higher amounts that this were charged could sometimes be a reflection of an aim to drive out the service from the Council to other providers.
- 4.24 A Member said that he agreed with the view that residents in general saw the collection of general waste as a key function which their Council Tax paid for, but that bulky waste collection was seen a separate entity and one which it might be reasonable to charge for. In principle, and in a setting where the Council needed to make significant savings, he felt that a move to a charging service was fair.
- 4.25 He also said that it had been a big achievement for the Council to have delivered and maintained high standards of cleanliness across all areas of the borough. Some other local authorities had focused their resources on particular areas. He said that if moving to a charging model on the Bulky Waste service helped to preserve these high standards then he would be supportive.
- 4.26 This said, he did feel that a move to a charging model should be made only if any resulting increase in flytipping did not largely cancel out the financial benefits of the new scheme.
- 4.27 He said that he would be interested to see factual data from similar boroughs – Tower Hamlets in particular – on the income and expenditure from a charging model compared to a non-charging one. This would factor in the costs of flytipping clear ups under the two different arrangements.

<p>ACTION (Head of Environment and Waste Strategy): To provide available data for similar boroughs on the income and expenditure from a charging model compared to a non-charging one, factoring in the costs of flytipping clear ups under the two different arrangements.</p>
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- 4.28 There was a conversation around the great importance of street cleansing standards to residents. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods said that this formed a key part of the way that residents and businesses perceived the Council.
- 4.29 A Member said that in his view it was absolutely crucial that there was a single standard of cleansing and waste service for all residents across the borough. He said that the transition of services currently delivered by Hackney Homes into the

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Council and the integration of these separate functions with one another, would help to achieve this. He reiterated the view he expressed in the last meeting that this needed to be delivered quickly. He hoped that bringing the services together would help to achieve the efficiencies required while also achieving and maintaining a very good cleansing and waste service across the borough, including on estates.

- 4.30 He looked forward to the meeting in November in which he hoped detailed proposals and options were given to Members to consider around integration of cleansing and waste services in the Council and Hackney Homes.
- 4.31 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods said that she was a strong advocate for the fast joining up of services currently delivered separately by the Council and Hackney Homes. She said that estate properties made up 52% of the overall housing stock in the borough and yet there were separate policies being followed around parking, recycling and other areas.
- 4.32 Bringing a close to this item, the Chair said that she took from the discussions a view that there was an openness towards moving to a charging model for bulky waste collection. Option B appeared to be the most feasible, and included measures to offer those on lower incomes access to some free collections.
- 4.33 She said that there was a political sensitivity in moving to a charging model; the introduction of a free service some years previously had sent a strong message about the turnaround of the Council. This said, she agreed with other Members that introducing a reasonable set of charges for bulky waste was a fair approach, and in line with many other boroughs.

Discussion on proposals around street cleansing and Graffiti/Flyposting Removal services

- 4.34 Discussions on the paper on street cleaning and graffiti and flyposting removal, were held in tandem with those on the one around media activities.
- 4.35 They have been separated here for clarity.
- 4.36 There was concern around the level of impact that taking savings in this area was predicted to have. One Member said that the priority at this time should be integrating the cleansing and waste services of the Council and Hackney Homes. Potential savings should be explored as part of this work, and from an integrated set of services thereafter.
- 4.37 A Member said that the night time economy generated significant amounts of cleansing requirements.
- 4.38 There was broad agreement by all Members that clean streets was one of the absolute basic commitments that the Council needed to deliver on. One said that this would remain the case during a period in which vast savings needed to be found.
- 4.39 Another Member noted that Westminster delivered a model where street cleaning was put at the centre of its policies. While not wishing to replicate this authority in all areas, he saw room for the Council to follow a similar policy. He said that clean streets was a factor of public service which was universally important for all. He again celebrated the approach of Hackney in achieving a high grade across the borough.
- 4.40 Another Member sounded a note of caution; while he shared the view that clean streets were vital, he also suggested that this should not mean that expenditure

within the Public Realm Division was not considered as part of an exploration on room for savings. For example, he would welcome an option for consideration around reducing expenditure on pavements to pay to sustain some other services.

Discussion on media activities on the public realm

- 4.41 The Chair noted that the emerging options around advertising were at an early stage. They were not due to deliver savings for 2016/17, which was the period that this meeting was set to be focused on. However, she invited questions from Members on the paper and for them to give a view on the exploration of further opportunities from advertising.
- 4.42 A Member said that he felt any move towards greater levels of advertising needed be made very cautiously, and delivered on a step by step basis. Badly handled or delivered to excess, new schemes could result in areas losing their aesthetic appeal. He said that a key consideration would be around the areas (if any) to limit advertising to. This might be within Town Centres and other commercial locations.
- 4.43 Another two Members said that they would be sceptical and had misgivings around proposals to increase advertising activity. One said that from his viewpoint as a Ward Councillor, that he would be very challenging towards any proposal for greater advertising in this area, and that it would be up to Officers to prove that its benefits warranted it. Residents would expect nothing less.
- 4.44 The Assistant Director, Public Realm said that the work underway was around identifying if there were any changes which could be made which would not interfere with keeping the distinctive character of the borough. The Head of Planning was closely involved and was advising on what might and might not be possible and or suitable.
- 4.45 The Head of Environment and Waste Strategy said that the challenge was to design in room for advertising without a great impact on the character of the borough, and to ensure that it was also used to deliver information and advice to residents.
- 4.46 The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods said that she appreciated the concerns of Members that the unique character of the borough was preserved. She fully supported this. She noted that the Council had always been very cautious about the extent to which it allowed advertising; including through the resistance of any advertising on moving assets (cleansing and waste vehicles for example). She said that there would always be a very cautious approach.
- 4.47 A Member noted that the paper acknowledged that consideration needed to be given as to how the Council could ensure that expertise was in place to ensure that it gained the best possible deal in advertising contracts. He said that he would support a view that an expert be recruited to ensure that residents benefitted to the maximum possible amount from advertising activities. He suggested that the current contracts in place which were mentioned in the paper, appeared to be very questionable as to the value that they delivered. One provider had 60 sites for a sum of £21,000, and the net gain by the Council after it used the sites itself was only around £6,000.
- 4.48 Another Member agreed with this point. Elaborating further, he said that he would suggest for consideration to be given to any risk that increasing available advertising space could have a downward impact on the income that was generated from each site.

- 4.49 Bringing the item to a close, the Chair said that the discussions had been useful to give Members an insight into the information gathering work underway. The Officers from the Public Realm Division were thanked and excused.

5 Submission from the Leisure and Green Spaces Service

- 5.1 Ian Holland, Head of Leisure and Green Spaces, gave a brief overview of a paper which was available within the agenda packs.
- 5.2 He said that all savings for 2016/17 were set to be achieved from a renegotiation of the Council's Leisure Contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL).
- 5.3 The paper also explored other potential avenues for savings and greater income generation which would need consideration if, as was expected, the service was required to work within further reduced budgets for 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- 5.4 Options around income generation included greater sponsorship activities, increased catering and ice cream concessions in parks, offering spaces for corporate events and the delivery of more major events.
- 5.5 Options for delivering savings were around a review of the Council's offer in supporting and enabling the scale of community events, lesser grass cutting and gardening activity, more locations being kept unlocked overnight, and restructures of the service to reduce staff costs (and service capacity).
- 5.6 Thanking the Head of Leisure and Green Spaces for the presentation and the paper, she said that Parks were a function of the Council which served all residents. She was thankful for the quality of green spaces (reflected in the number of Green Flags awarded to the authority), which was often commented upon by people living in Hackney or visiting the borough.
- 5.7 After the Chair invited questions on the paper, a Member asked that Kim Wright, Corporate Director Health and Community Services gave an update on the amount of savings that the Council expected to achieve, and its progress in identifying where these savings would be produced from. He noted that the papers seen during this meeting looked at options to save relatively low amounts in the context of Councillors having been previously advised that savings of many millions were likely to be needed.
- 5.8 The Corporate Director Health and Community Services said that the Council was still working on a basis of needing to achieve £60 million spending reductions during the three years to 2018/19. £16 million had been identified at this time. However, it could not be guaranteed that savings in excess of £60 million would not be required until full details were known of the Comprehensive Spending and other relevant proposed changes to finance arrangements (business rates and others).
- 5.9 On the papers giving options for savings of relatively low amounts of money, the Corporate Director said that the scale of reductions which were likely to be required meant that the Council needed to give consideration to how all of its services could contribute. Without doing this, there would be an increased risk of not being able to meet the financial challenge. Also, where services had small budgets relative to those of some other areas (Leisure and Parks compared to Adult Social Care for example), the savings that they proposed could be smaller in value while also being significantly larger as a proportion of their overall budget.

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- 5.10 A Member asked about the scope that there was for more large scale, commercial events in parks to help answer the savings challenge. She asked what downsides there were, and whether there were barriers.
- 5.11 The Head of Leisure and Green Spaces said that a key barrier was the availability of suitable sites on which to cater for large scale events. Only Hackney Marshes was big enough to deliver major events. This site was common land and to be able to hold events to cater for 40,000 to 50,000 people, permission would be required from the Planning Inspectorate. A move to hold events on the site (there were currently none) would be likely to face some opposition.
- 5.12 One downside of holding events on the Marshes was that there would be an impact on football pitches, which covered the full ground. While the Service would design contracts and charges in which event organisers would pay for the renewal of pitches and any other remedial action required following the event, there would be an impact on the volume of good quality pitches available immediately after an event.
- 5.13 One Member said he felt that if events were carefully managed and delivered outside of the football season wherever possible, that their negative impact could be reduced.
- 5.14 The Head of Leisure and Green Spaces agreed that the impact on the quality of space from large scale events could be minimised (although not eradicated) through effective management. The 2012 Radio 1 weekend on the Marshes, while well managed and delivered, had given points of learning to the service which would help reduce the impact on the area that any future events would have.
- 5.15 Another Member said that he would support the Council establishing a professional event management function for Parks which could ensure that the events allowed to be held were carefully chosen, and that they were managed well. He felt that a service should be in place which balanced an offer of commercial events with community events.
- 5.16 The Head of Leisure and Parks said that the service had an Events Manager with significant experience of enabling the delivery of large and small events. The challenge for him as Head of Service, and subject to the agreement of Members, was to ensure that her workload was rebalanced to allow her to dedicate more time to building up contact with and attracting, providers of big events to the borough.
- 5.17 A Member sounded a note of caution around a move to hold more large events. She said that there was already a perception among many residents that there were a lot of large scale events in the borough (sometimes due to Victoria Park often being considered to fall in Hackney) and she felt that many would not be amenable to more.
- 5.18 A hostility towards commercial events was coupled with a (rightful) demand for the high levels of cleanliness and maintenance of parks to be maintained. Residents really valued parks and green spaces as key facilities for the borough.
- 5.19 With the Council needing to find significant amounts of savings, she accepted that there might be little choice but to be more open to commercial events, which could help fund the maintaining of standards in the borough's open spaces. However, she felt that the Council would need to manage communications on this very effectively.

- 5.20 Invited to feed in at this point, Cllr McShane, the Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Culture, said that he fully agreed that any extension of commercial events would need to be managed carefully. He said that communications on the benefits that they delivered would be vital. He felt that there were lessons to learn from how Islington had worked to clearly demonstrate to residents how various improvements in Finsbury Park had been made possible by the delivery of events which might not always have been popular. The Council would need to maintain its dialogue with Park User Groups.
- 5.21 He also felt that the Council had made a misjudgement in the way that it had consulted on holding five events per year on Hackney Marshes, further to the delivery of the Radio 1 weekend in 2012. He felt that the consultation should have been a lot clearer on the positive impact that this would have in terms of the maintaining and improving of public services. He felt that results could have been more amenable to higher numbers of events if the message had been clearer.
- 5.22 A Member said that Park User Groups were hugely important and played a key role in ensuring a community voice in park management. However, the scale of the budget reductions which were needed were vast. For Members to effectively deliver their mandate, and to work to restrict the impact of budget reductions on an overall level, all avenues needed to be considered.
- 5.23 A Member said that it was clear that communications would be vital if there was to be a move to more commercial events. She asked if, in addition to the Finsbury Park example, if there were others that the Council might learn from.
- 5.24 In response, the Head of Leisure and Green Spaces said that his service delivered one large annual event, in Haggerston Park. Found was targeted at 20-25 year olds, and attracted numbers of 7,500. The Events Manager had worked hard to engage residents and the Park User Group who were initially opposed to the event. Through her being willing and keen to meet residents and users, and by working to ensure that the site was returned to normal use quickly after the event had closed, the event had now become a generally accepted item in the calendar which delivered a revenue stream.
- 5.25 The Chair noted that the paper showed the service to charge low fees for community events, including large scale ones. She said that the commitment of community groups to hold events was a key strength of the area. However, she asked if charges could be revised or if events could be delivered in tandem with one another to reduce costs.
- 5.26 The Head of Leisure and Green Spaces said that there was significant demand from community groups for their events to be clearly individual. He said that he would welcome a review of the way that the Council catered for community events. While they were clearly important, these event types accounted for the majority of the Event Team's time, with officers needing to help ensure that they were run properly and were safe for the park and for those attending. The paper gave proposals around a new charging regime for community events, informed by scale.
- 5.27 A Member shared the view that community events were important. However, she felt that there was scope to review the range of community events being delivered to ascertain whether some might reasonably be classified as commercial events. She felt that some events organisers expected significant levels of support from services for little cost, while also profiting from their delivery. She said that she thought there was room to look at the charges made in these cases.

- 5.28 Another Member said that while he was happy for new models to be considered, that he felt it important that the Council continued maintain a community event support offer.
- 5.29 A Member agreed with this point, but thought that the approach could perhaps be better balanced through profit making events being asked to contribute more towards the cost that the Council incurred by supporting them.
- 5.30 The Chair at this point brought the discussions on commercial and community events to an end. She suggested that the next set of Budget Scrutiny sessions (to look at potential savings for 2017/18 and 2018/19) should consider this in more detail. In addition, she was keen that future meetings looked more in depth at any scope for increased volunteering involvement.
- 5.31 However, she asked that the remainder of the item be spent on Members asking any questions around the renegotiation of the GLL Leisure Contract. This meeting was focused on savings for 2016/17, and the paper showed that the renegotiation was where all savings for this period were expected to be achieved from.
- 5.32 The Chair asked whether the renegotiation would have any impact on the service received by customers. She also asked if the work would involve a contract extension.
- 5.33 The Head of Leisure and Green Spaces said that the negotiations were underway and were expected to be concluded during November. There would be some changes to service provision but the impact was not predicted to be significant. The Hackney Marshes Centre would be closed for access during the week, except for when it had been booked for events. Data had shown that the main centre had attracted little weekday usage. The Centre toilets and café would remain open all week. There would be some changes at Queensbridge Sports Hall to enable a health and fitness offer. Further details could be shared outside of the meeting, as they were currently subject of commercial confidentiality.
- 5.34 There would potentially be an extension of contract. The service continued to work towards achieving its aim of having a leisure contract in place with zero cost to the Council.
- 5.35 The Chair asked Members if any had concerns around the proposals on the Leisure contract. None were expressed.
- 5.36 The Chair then asked the Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Culture if he could give a view on what he would take away from this discussion.
- 5.37 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.

6 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

6.1 The Chair noted that the Minutes of the previous meeting did not record some Members and an Officer who were in attendance, as present. These were:

- Cllr Kam Adams
- Cllr Feryal Demirci
- Cllr Philip Glanville
- Ian Holland
- Cllr Anna-Joy Rickard
- Cllr Caroline Selman
- Cllr Peter Snell

6.2 The Minutes of the meeting of the 16th September 2015 were agreed as an accurate record.

7 Any Other Business

7.1 There was no other business.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.00 pm