

# DECISIONS OF THE BUDGET & PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 November 2011

Present:

\*Councillor Dean Cohen (Chairman)  
\*Councillor Joan Scannell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

Brian Gordon	* Hugh Rayner
* John Marshall	* Brian Schama
* Alison Moore	* Alan Schneiderman
* Ross Houston	* Andrew Strongolou

(substituting for Alex Brodkin)

\*denotes Member present

Also in attendance:

Councillor Richard Cornelius – Leader of the Council

Councillor Daniel Thomas – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance

Councillor Brian Coleman – Cabinet Member for Environment

Councillor Andrew Harper – Cabinet Member for Education, Children's and Families

Councillor Sachin Rajput – Cabinet Member for Adults

Councillor David Longstaff – Cabinet Member for Safety and Resident Engagement

Councillor Robert Rams – Cabinet Member for Access and Partnerships

Councillor Joanna Tambourides – Cabinet Member for Planning

Councillor Anne Hutton – Labour Group Lead, Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Barry Rawlings – Labour Group Lead, Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Jack Cohen – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

## 1. MINUTES (Agenda Item 1):

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2011 be approved.

## 2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS (Agenda Item 2):

Apologies absence had been received from:

- Councillor Alex Brodkin (who was substituted for by Councillor Ross Houston);
- Councillor Alison Cornelius, Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who was absent on council business; and
- Councillor Helena Hart, the Cabinet Member for Public Health, who was absent on council business.

Apologies for late arrival had been received from:

- Councillor Brian Coleman, the Cabinet Member for Environment; and
- Councillor Sachin Rajput, the Cabinet Member for Adults.

**3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS (Agenda Item 3):**

<b>Member:</b>	<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Interest Declared:</b>
Councillor Anne Hutton	Agenda Item 6 (Business Planning 2012/13 – 2014/15)	Personal but non-prejudicial interest as a Member of the Board of directors of Barnet Law Service
Councillor Barry Rawlings	Agenda Item 6 (Business Planning 2012/13 – 2014/15)	Personal but non-prejudicial interest as he was a specialist safeguarding advisor for CommUNITY Barnet
Councillor Ross Houston	Agenda Item 6 (Business Planning 2012/13 – 2014/15)	Personal but non-prejudicial interest as he was a Member of the Board of Directors of Barnet Homes
Councillor Brian Schama	Agenda Item 6 (Business Planning 2012/13 – 2014/15)	Personal but non-prejudicial interest as he was a Member of the Board of Directors of Barnet Homes

**4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (Agenda Item 4):**

None.

**5. MEMBERS' ITEMS (Agenda Item 5):**

None.

**6. BUSINESS PLANNING 2012/13 – 2014/15 (Agenda Item 6)**

The Committee considered the proposals set out in the Cabinet's Business Planning 2012/13 – 2014/15 report of 3 November 2011. In presenting the item, the Chairman advised the Committee that the Chairmen and Opposition Group Leads of the council's other Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Business Management, Safeguarding and Health) had been invited to the meeting to present comments, questions and recommendations raised by their committee members on aspects of the budget proposals which related to their terms of reference. In addition, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group had been invited to put forward the views his Group on the budget proposals.

Cabinet members and directors had provided written responses to pre-submitted questions relating to the budget proposals, as well as answering further supplementary questions from the Committee and other invited members. Discussions and questioning of the budget proposals were categorised by service area. The order of business was as follows:

**1) Deputy Chief Executive's Service and Commercial Services:**

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance answered general questions relating to budget proposals and outlined the public consultation process. He also answered questions relating to the service areas within his portfolio, the Deputy Chief Executive's Service and Commercial Services. In relation to the budget, the Committee noted that large scale public meetings would not be taking place as there had been limited interest in 2010/11. However, feedback from the public would be used to inform the decision making process.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Cabinet Member outlined grant funding arrangements, including an overview of possible implications for the council from forthcoming changes to the management and distribution of business rates. The Cabinet Member answered questions in relation to the Council Tax freeze for 2011/12 and the implications for future years.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the possible impact of reforms to housing benefit allowances, the Assistant Director Strategic Finance informed Members that allowances had been made in the 2012/13 budget for changes to levels of housing benefits and that the situation would continue to be monitored.

**RESOLVED that –**

- 1. Where written responses to the questions submitted by members had not been received in advance of the meeting that any additional responses received should be circulated to Committee Members in advance of the next meeting of the meeting on 6 December 2011.**
- 2. Cabinet be requested to lobby the Central Government regarding the equitable distribution of grant funding to local authorities.**
- 3. The Committee request that updated Housing Revenue Account figures be presented to the January 2012 meeting to highlight the impact of the recent change in the council's Housing Allocations Policy.**

**2) Children's Service:**

The Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Families presented the Children's Service budget proposals for the period. In response to Members' questions, the Cabinet Member highlighted that in the current economic environment, the council could no longer realistically be expected to provide universal services. Instead, resources would be concentrated on the most vulnerable children and families through initiatives such as Early Intervention and Prevention.

The Cabinet Member answered questions relating to schools expansions, identifying that there would be funded through a combination of Section 106 developer contributions and prudential borrowing. The Committee were informed that in the future, the Children's Service would be seeking to support the voluntary sector to provide youth services, rather than youth services being directly provided by the local authority.

The Committee highlighted that there was an uneven geographical distribution of voluntary sector youth services within the borough and requested that this be taken into account when determining the level support that would be provided to voluntary sector

youth services.

**RESOLVED that –**

- 1. The Children’s Service, when working with the voluntary sector in relation to the future provision of youth services, be requested to take into account the geographic location, type of service(s) provided and the needs of local communities when determining the level support that would be provided to voluntary sector youth services.**

**3) Chief Executive’s Service:**

The Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships responded to questions from the committee relating to the Chief Executive’s Services, particularly libraries and the New Support and Customer Services Organisation One Barnet project.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that there would continue to be qualified staff at all libraries in the borough.

**RESOLVED that –**

- 1. the Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships be requested to provide a breakdown of costs relating to the One Barnet Programme by year and individual project.**
- 2. Cabinet note that the Committee welcomes the extension of RFID (Radio Frequency Identifier) technology in libraries**

**4) Corporate Governance:**

The Leader of the Council responded to questions from the Committee in relation to the Corporate Governance Directorate.

The Committee noted that of the council were exploring options to deliver Legal Services via a shared services arrangement with a neighbouring borough. Members requested the current level of legal support for committees be maintained, should such a model be adopted.

In response to questions relating to a planned reduction in the courier service to Members, the Committee were informed by the Director of Corporate Governance that the service was seeking to reduce costs in the provision of committee papers through the greater use of electronic resources.

**5) Adults:**

The Cabinet Member for Adults responded to questions relating to the Adult Social Care and Health budget, particularly the provision of adult care services, the development of a “New Social Work Model” and savings relating to the reduction of the strategic commissioning function as a result of service users directly commission services using direct payments. The Cabinet Member also outlined details of savings that would be achieved from the implementation of a retail model for small pieces of equipment and adaptations service which was expected to reduce delivery and collection costs while giving people more choice.

## **6) Environment, Planning and Regeneration:**

The Cabinet Member for Environment responded to questions relating to Environment services, particularly regarding parks, parking provision and street lighting.

The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that the council were considering plans to hire out park facilities for the provision of private functions. The Committee were advised that the council were able to do this under existing legislation and that public consultation would take place on the proposals. In relation to further spending on play facilities in parks, the Committee was advised that over recent years that had been significant investment in parks and play equipment and it was unlikely that this would continue in the immediate future due to the current economic environment.

In relation to parking fees and charges, the Cabinet Member stated that the increase this year of five per cent was likely be followed by further increases in subsequent years. The Committee were informed that this would be necessary to ensure that the Special Parking Account was effectively managed. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that improved monitoring capabilities and technological advances available to the council would allow the public to benefit from an intelligent parking service in the future, assisting with the transition to a cashless parking service.

In relation to re-profiling the new column installation programme for street lighting and investing the saving in new technology to include energy measures which reduce energy consumption, the Committee was assured that this would not mean switching off street lights.

Responding to concerns raised by the Committee with regard to the savings identified in relation to alternative parking delivery, the Cabinet Member provided assurance that these had been subject to a financial appraisal and would be achieved.

## **7. CABINET FORWARD PLAN (Agenda Item 7)**

**RESOLVED that –**

- 1. The Cabinet Forward Plan for the period November 2011 to February 2012 be noted**
- 2. The Scrutiny Office send a copy of the latest version of the Cabinet Forward Plan to Committee Members and invite comments for suggested items for inclusion of the Forward Work Programme.**

## **8. BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)**

**RESOLVED that –**

- 1. The Budget and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be noted.**

## **9. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT (Agenda Item 9)**

None.

The meeting finished at 9.56pm