

Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive

Tuesday 8th September 2020 09:30 am

Cllr Peter John OBE was in the chair

Present

Member	Position
Cllr Peter John OBE	Chair
Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE	
Cllr Claire Holland	
Cllr Darren Rodwell	
Cllr Georgia Gould	
Cllr Ray Puddifoot MBE	
Cllr Muhammed Butt	
Cllr Gareth Roberts	Substitute
Cllr Clare Coghill	
Cllr Danny Thorpe	
Cllr Elizabeth Campbell	
Catherine McGuinness	

Cllr Julian Bell and Kim Smith, Chief Executive of the the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham were in attendance.

London Councils officers were in attendance.

The Chair congratulated Cllr Sir Ray Puddifoot MBE on his recent knighthood. The Chair confirmed that it was to be his last meeting of the Executive, although he would be attending the Leaders' Committee AGM in October.

Cllr Puddifoot announced that this would be his last Executive meeting. The Chair also confirmed that John O'Brien, London Councils Chief Executive, had announced his intention to step down from his role in April 2021.

The Chair also welcomed Cllr Gareth Roberts, who was substituting for Cllr Ruth Dombey, and also Kim Smith, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, present for item 4 on the agenda.

1. Apologies for absence and announcement of deputies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ruth Dombey.

2. Declaration of interest

Cllr Bell declared an interest in that he was a member of the Transport for London (TfL) Board.

3. Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 16th June 2020

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 16th June 2020 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting

4. Supporting Councils to improve services and practice by addressing Racial Inequality

The Chief Executive introduced the report, informing members that the business plan adopted in July 2020 had included references relating to the importance of fairness and inclusivity in the Capital, and that these ambitions were to be seen in the context of the disproportionate impact on BAME communities by Covid-19, and also the response to the death of George Floyd. Work in these areas had progressed with professional networks and, in particular, a CELC working group, chaired by Kim Smith, Chief Executive of Hammersmith and Fulham Council, as well as Heads of HR and also Cllr Butt, Portfolio Holder for Welfare, Social Inclusion and Empowerment.

The work with boroughs emphasised the importance of avoiding duplication in work, and also of finding ways in which boroughs could better be supported to

fulfill their own objectives. Progress was being shared in order to get for members' feedback, with a view to taking a draft statement to Leaders' Committee for endorsement.

Kim Smith, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, commented that the paper set out a business case for addressing inequality issues, a number of which had been further revealed by the Pandemic, within three overall themes: Demonstrating Leadership; Building Inclusive Workplaces; and Challenging and Improving Practice across Services.

Ms Smith pointed out that London boroughs had a good reputation for being inclusive employers and in demonstrating positive behaviours, and there were opportunities for looking at further improvements, for example maximising apprenticeship levy budgets, and looking at the issue of recruitment of BAME staff. Ms Smith recognised the large amount of good practice within boroughs, as well the need to accelerate actions in this sphere and for greater visibility in the work being undertaken.

Ms Smith also referenced a number of thematic reviews on health, crime, housing and employment, which now had regard to the disproportionate impact on BAME communities and which were addressing whether work programmes needed to be amended as a result.

Cllr Butt recognised the opportunity for boroughs to have a collective voice and to demonstrate further commitment with a view to increasing confidence. He recognised the importance of boroughs, as large employers, creating mentoring and support systems, and demonstrating that boroughs were taking the issue of inequality seriously.

In terms of the draft statement on race equality, the Chair explored the relationship with MOPAC/MPS work in this area.

Members made the following points in response to the paper:

- it was important that boroughs should look at their own workforce diversity, and how they were developing recruitment, sponsorship and mentoring to promote more diverse organisations;
- it was also important to understand what boroughs already knew about disproportionality in terms of planning for a potential second wave of the Pandemic, and what more could be done to mitigate the risks for communities;
- data held by boroughs should be utilised to help benchmarking activity, examine key issues such as ethnicity pay gaps and to help focus on action to improve outcomes.
- the work should eventually be expanded to cover all areas of diversity.

Executive noted the progress made in co-designing a programme of activity, commented on the emerging model for the programme of work set out in the report, and commended the draft statement set out in Appendix B to Leaders' Committee for its consideration.

5. Local Government Finance – Update

The Director of Local Government Performance and Finance introduced the report, commenting that:

- the paper set out the aggregate financial position for London boroughs as a result of Covid 19 impacts to the end of July based upon individual borough returns. Since the production of the report, boroughs had completed the August survey, the results of which were being analysed.
- Collectively, the financial impact of Covid-19 on boroughs was estimated to be losses of £2 billion

- the paper had been written in the context of the forthcoming Spending Review and further Government consultation on the reform of Business Rates
- In terms of the Business Rates review, there was an initial call for evidence by 18 September and a full response required by the end of October. The draft London Councils response called for the review to take place alongside a wider review of the Local Government finance system
- the paper also set out an approach to Spending Review lobbying.

Members made the following points in response to the report:

- the key financial priority was to make good the financial effects of the Pandemic and address the issues of social care underfunding. Broader ambitions would fall in to the medium term as the immediate priority was seeking greater financial stability;
- that greater clarity on the next phase of Government financial support was clearly needed;
- London had historically been a source of support to other parts of the country, but the lack of available finance would limit the ability of London to assist in that way in the next period;
- the work on the treatment of SEND deficits in relation to DSG had yielded positive results;
- lobbying should not focus too much on the submission of letters to ministers;
- the previously agreed 1/2 page list of 'asks' for London remained a good product and should also include the investment case for London.

Executive noted the information provided on the financial impact of Covid-19 and agreed the broad principle of the joint London Government response to the Fundamental Review of Business Rates.

6. Covid 19 – Recovery and Renewal

The Chief Executive introduced the report, referencing the previously expressed view of the Executive that work should build on the work being carried out by the boroughs on recovery and renewal as well as supporting the Recovery Board. Accordingly, the results of a survey of Leaders and Chief Executives had been included in the report, which covered the work that boroughs have been participating in with communities, cross borough collaborative projects, and how boroughs were addressing the financial challenges caused by the Pandemic.

Members were informed that the themes in the report would be developed further with Portfolio holders, and it was hoped to integrate the work into material in connection with influencing the Spending Review and in responding to the Devolution White Paper. The competing pressures on time and resources, for members, for boroughs and London Councils in supporting various strands of recovery activity would need to be identified and managed.

- Members emphasised the connection to work on Resilience and London local government response to the pandemic.

Cllr Gould drew members' attention to the shared agenda being developed with the GLA in encouraging green jobs, digital access and reinvigorating high streets.

The Executive noted the findings of the borough Leaders and Chief Executive surveys and supported progressing the findings contained in the Recovery and Renewal overview report.

7. Month 3 Revenue Forecast 2020/21

The Director of Corporate Resources reported:

- That the figures reflected the impact of the Pandemic on the Transport and Environment and Joint Committee funding streams;
- while TEC had a small surplus, there has been a reduction in income relating to enforcement activities and Freedom Pass renewal income;
- there had been savings in the running costs of London Councils buildings and utilities, but the income target for meeting room rental had not been met because of the present position;
- in terms of reserves, London Councils were in a broadly comparable position compared with the same time last year;
- the implications of the Pandemic were expected to be clearer at the half year stage.

Cllr Puddifoot felt that the financial position was relatively strong and as good as could be expected in the present circumstances. He congratulated the Finance Team at London Councils for all their work, which the Chair also endorsed.

The Executive noted the overall forecast surplus as at 30 June 2020 (Month 3) of £109,000 and noted the position on reserves.

8. Debtors Update report

The Director of Corporate Resources presented the report, which detailed the level of outstanding debt owed to London Councils from all sources as at 31 July 2020. This report also detailed the reduction in the level of outstanding debt due from boroughs, TfL and the GLA in the period to 31 December 2019.

Executive noted that all borough, TfL and GLA debts raised up to 31 December 2019 and reported to the Executive at its meeting on 3 March 2020 have been paid; the level of outstanding debt of £1.83 million in respect of borough, TfL and GLA invoices raised in the period 1 January to 31 July 2020; the level of outstanding debt of £229,000 in relation to other debtors invoices raised up until 31 July 2020; and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the finances.

In closing, Executive Members paid tribute to Cllr Peter John for his work as Chair of London Councils, recognising his strong leadership, persuasive advocacy on behalf of London local government and his willingness to offer advice and support to fellow Leaders across London throughout his tenure as Chair. Members also paid tribute to the contribution of Cllr Sir Ray Puddifoot to the Executive and thanked him for all of his work.

The meeting closed at 10.45.