

Minutes of an Informal Meeting of the Executive

Wednesday 14th September 2022 15:00

Present

Member	Position
Cllr Ruth Dombey OBE	Vice Chair
Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE	Vice Chair
Cllr Georgia Gould	Chair
Cllr Elizabeth Campbell	
Cllr Nesil Caliskan	
Cllr Darren Rodwell	Deputy Chair
Cllr Ian Edwards	
Cllr Jas Athwal	
Cllr Claire Holland	
Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz OBE	
Christopher Hayward	Vice Chair

London Councils officers were in attendance.

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. She marked the sad loss of Queen Elizabeth II and sent sincere condolences and noted the efforts being made across London to ensure that the occasion was properly marked.

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Apologies for absence and announcement of deputies

Apologies for absence were received from Mayor Philip Glanville (LB Hackney)

3. Minutes of the informal Executive Meeting held on held on 21st June 2022 – to note

The minutes of the informal Executive meeting held on 21st June 2022 were noted.

4. Local Government Finance update

The Strategic Director: Local Government, Finance & Improvement introduced the report. Members were informed that:

- The report comprised two elements; correspondence with Paul Scully; and the second part the submission to the emergency budget
- In terms of correspondence sent to Paul Scully in his capacities as Minister of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and more recently as Minister for London, a response had been received. In the response it was hoped to provide certainty as soon as possible via the Local Government Finance settlement and a funding reform timetable. It was also confirmed that no quantum had yet been agreed in terms of the Homelessness Prevention legislation
- The intention of the 2 page response was to lobby in terms of the forthcoming emergency fiscal event, the forthcoming party conferences and the full budget in the autumn. Members had already made a number of helpful comments on the paper at the EO meeting on 12 September

Members made the following points concerning the response:

- There should be a delay to proposed social care funding reforms given their complexity
- boroughs should not have to meet the costs of the pay rises which were higher than budgets forecast
- costs of energy should be reflected in other services like school transport and waste disposal
- There needed to be a longer-term solution to the DSG statutory override
- Energy cost support for businesses needed to extend beyond six months
- it was important to emphasise that, as part of fiscal devolution, that boroughs be encouraged to creatively approach the issues of finances
- There were good examples of how boroughs had used the Public Works Loan Board which could be used to demonstrate innovative funding.

- Cost of Living – the paper should include specific asks around data sharing with utility companies in terms of highlighting vulnerable households for the Universal Credit subsidy and other packages

The Chair thanked London Councils for the work done regarding the submission. Members noted the report.

5. Narrative Discussion

The Chair welcomed Nick Kilby from Cratus Communications, who had been developing a shared narrative under the London's Voice aspect of the Shared Ambitions programme, to update members on the work. Members were informed that:

- The narrative would inform all future London Councils communication both formal and informal, and was compiled following meetings with members and senior managers at London Councils
- The wording aimed to find a fresh language which reflected the changed views of how London Councils could collaborate going forward and the shared values of the organisation
- London Councils was now seen more as a collective local government organisation than a membership one with the opportunity of using its constitution in a more dynamic and shared way
- In terms of collaboration, the new narrative recognised the potential for new relationships with the Mayor, the NHS and the business community
- London Councils had a wide number of external customers/service users and there was an opportunity to be of more use to their needs
- In terms of the London media, London Councils should be the provider of facts that drive information
- The strapline 'leading with solutions' encapsulated the views expressed

Members supported the work and made the following points:

- There was some concern expressed at the use of the word 'collective'
- Mentions of 'the leafy outer boroughs' should be removed
- The collaborative approach among equal partners should be emphasised

- The reference to 'health inequalities before 2010' should be changed
- Deprivation and inequality should both feature in the narrative; the draft should be reviewed to consider this
- The audience for the narrative should be further defined to address the way in which it was to be delivered to Londoners
- It was felt that Opportunity London could be more strongly highlighted as an example of collaboration
- The present Shared Ambitions should be defined more clearly, accepting that the Ambitions were subject to change

Members noted the report.

7. Asylum Dispersal arrangements

At this point of the meeting, representatives from all London boroughs except xxxx joined the meeting.

The Strategic Lead for Health and Adult Social Care presented a set of slides to members, who were informed that:

- The discussions were taking place around a national move to regional dispersal models, where all regions were asked to agree a favoured dispersal model, or accept the Government backstop when implemented
- Each region has been given an allocation; in London this meant 6,344 additional bedspaces. Positive progress had been made with the Home Office with a view to an overall reduction in asylum seekers to around 12,700
- Leaders had discussed the issue in July and looked at three options, including the multi factor model which had generated the most feedback. There was a general view of wanting to avoid the Government backstop option. Detailed modelling on the multi factor option had been shared with boroughs in August and comments had been received

- A threshold of 1 in 200 (0.5%) above which no borough would be expected to take any new allocations was also suggested as part of the option; this had not been opposed by boroughs
- A draft commentary with general principles was also circulated which would be submitted with any preferred option
- Around two thirds of boroughs had fed back with general, but not universal support for the multi factor model; boroughs also favoured a back up plan in the event of disagreement, using a population based approach
- Consideration had been given to housing feedback, including reliance on the private rented sector, the lack of supply of affordable accommodation, and also the Clearsprings approach to procurement and the issues of out of borough placements;
- Following feedback, it was noted that the multi factor model would be updated to include Afghan resettlement data within overall refugee data; 100% weighting in favour of the receiving borough for out of borough placements; and the use of ONS data instead of Census data

Members broadly supported the multi factor model but made the following points:

- It should be emphasised, accompanying the London Councils response, that sufficient funding must be given to support refugees and that there should be a partnership between Government and boroughs with clear communication
- The partnership should be underlined by principles of fairness, recognising the complexity and challenges of the task
- There was concern that data supplied to boroughs may, in some cases, be incorrect and should be investigated
- Consideration should be given to boroughs establishing their own backstop to assist if any one borough were facing an accommodation emergency
- Any option should include a weighting, as a per capita payment per asylum seeker would result in affordability issues depending on their location in London

It was agreed that while in principle the multi factor model was generally favoured some more work should be done to look at issues regarding the borough based statistics, where concerns had been raised, and also to incorporate the priorities expressed by members in terms of housing and overall Government commitments.

The meeting ended at 17:00.