

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2021, 7.00 - 9.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Mitchell (Chair), Erdal Dogan (Vice-Chair), Kaushika Amin, Mark Blake, Mahir Demir, Joseph Ejiofor, Emine Ibrahim, and Preston Tabois.

The following councillors joined the meeting virtually: Councillors Dawn Barnes, Noah Tucker, and Matt White.

This meeting took place in two parts and these minutes should be read in conjunction with the minutes of the Corporate Committee on 16 November 2021.

The Chair noted that this was a reconvened meeting of the Corporate Committee that had commenced on 16 November 2021.

1. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was explained that apologies for the reconvened meeting had been received from Councillor Dawn Barnes, Councillor Patrick Berryman, and Councillor Alessandra Rossetti. *Councillor Dawn Barnes joined the meeting virtually but could not be considered to be present for the purposes of the attendance record.*

3. URGENT BUSINESS

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

5. DEPUTATIONS / PETITIONS / PRESENTATIONS / QUESTIONS

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

6. MINUTES

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

7. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND DESIGNATION OF POLLING SCHEME

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

8. EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

9. AUDIT & RISK SERVICE UPDATE - QUARTER 2 (JULY - SEPTEMBER 2021)

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

10. TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE MID-YEAR REPORT 2021/22

This item was considered at the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

11. BUILDING, PLACE AND STREET NAME REVIEW

This item was resumed from the first part of the meeting on 16 November 2021.

The Chair highlighted that a late paper had been circulated on the day of the meeting and asked whether members required some time to consider the paper. At 7.05pm, the Committee agreed to a short adjournment. The meeting resumed at 7.10pm.

The Assistant Director for Commissioning introduced the report which provided a response and further information in relation to the motion moved by Cllr Ejiofor at the Committee meeting on 16 November 2021. It was explained that the report proposed to take forward the process for the renaming of Black Boy Lane based on the Committee decision made on 17 March 2021 whereby there would be a further period of consultation to provide further assurances to the residents of Black Boy Lane and to elicit their support for the change of street name. It was highlighted that residents and other groups were informed about the Committee's decision in March and would have a legitimate expectation that further consultation would be undertaken. It was proposed that the consultation would run from 1 December 2021 to 19 January 2022 and that a further paper would be reported to the Committee on 1 February 2022.

In response to a question about the decision in March 2021 to undertake further consultation, it was explained that there had been delays due to the pre-election period where council business was restricted, that there had been a new Cabinet, and that the council was still responding to the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cllr Ejiofor noted that the paper referred to the requirement for an executive decision to fund the package of support for residents in the event that the renaming of Black Boy Lane was agreed. He added that the previous decision of the Committee had noted that funding for the street renaming had been identified and enquired whether this could be used. The Assistant Director for Commissioning explained that there could be some changes based on the results of further consultation with residents in the immediate vicinity and the proposal for an executive decision would allow for any alterations in case the existing funding was insufficient.

Cllr Ejiofor enquired about the time period between a decision in February 2022 and any implementation, noting that the pre-election period for the council elections would start in 2022. The Deputy Monitoring Officer stated that he was not aware of a minimum time period for the implementation of street renaming but that it might be necessary to check the requirements for this process.

Cllr Amin enquired about the timescales for consultation and enquired whether the figures could be benchmarked against similar work that had been undertaken by other authorities. The Assistant Director for Commissioning explained that the proposed consultation period would run from 1 December 2021 to 19 January 2022; this would end before the Committee meeting in February and would provide a good time period for consultation, acknowledging the bank holidays at the end of 2021. It was noted that the proposed support package was based around the costs associated with street renaming and it was considered to be an appropriate amount. It was added that data from other authorities could be considered.

Cllr Dogan commented that, at the time of the previous street renaming consultation, it had been difficult to reach out to residents in the normal ways due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was requested that the further consultation used in person and virtual methods to engage as much as possible. It was highlighted that it would be important to communicate the existence of the financial package of support for those affected by the renaming. The Assistant Director for Commissioning stated that there would now be more opportunities to conduct more in person work and that a variety of methods for engagement could be used. It was added that the financial support package would need to be fair and equitable for all residents affected.

In response to a question about the ordinary procedure for street naming, the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that there was no statutory requirement to provide compensation for residents.

With the consent of the Chair, Cllr Tucker spoke as ward councillor. He stated that a deputation from Stand Up To Racism had been rejected for technical reasons for a second time but that he had seen the statement and noted that it raised a number of important points. He felt that the street renaming had been subject to delays which were political and were being used to prevent necessary change and he asked the Committee not to allow any further delays. He queried whether specific consultation for the residents of Black Boy Lane was required and asked why this consultation, that was agreed by the Committee in March 2021, had not been carried out. Cllr Tucker stated that, if a decision was not made at this meeting, the necessary street naming would be prevented and that this would be a shame.

The Chair noted that the Committee had discussed the issue of further consultation in detail and that the current proposal was to undertake the further consultation imminently so that a report could be presented to the Committee in February 2022.

Cllr Mark Blake suggested that the Committee could extend an invite to Stand Up To Racism to attend the Committee meeting in February 2022. The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager stated that they could provide a deputation as long as this was submitted three clear working days before the meeting. It was noted that the previous deputation request had not been made in time.

Some members enquired whether the street renaming decision could be considered now, without the need for further consultation as the majority of respondents had been in support of the renaming. The Assistant Director for Commissioning explained that the decision made by the Committee in March 2021 had given residents a legitimate expectation that further consultation would be carried out. The Deputy Monitoring Officer added that a number of messages had been given to residents following the Committee's decision in March which included letters to residents, a press statement, and information on the council's website. It was highlighted that, if the Committee made a final decision on the street renaming now, there would be significant risk of challenge. In response to a comment about implementation, the Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that a report would be presented to the Committee in February and that this should have more information relating to the implementation in the event that the Committee decided to agree the street renaming. It was added that recommendation 2.1.2. committed to providing a report to the Committee at the February meeting, including the agreement of an implementation timetable.

Cllr Ibrahim noted that some residents had a legitimate expectation that further consultation would be carried out but that other residents and organisations would have a legitimate expectation that this consultation would have taken place earlier and further decisions would have been made. She asked for it to be noted that it was disappointing that the decision of the Committee on 17 March 2021 had not been implemented expediently.

Cllr Amin stated that she wanted to discuss how some people had behaved at the Committee's meeting on 16 November 2021. Cllr Ibrahim added that technology could create some issues but that each person should be allowed to speak without interruption. The Chair noted that member conduct was an issue for the Standards Committee or could be raised through the Whips but highlighted that everyone should be treated with respect and should remember that meetings were conducted in public.

RESOLVED

To agree:

1. That officers would take forward the decision of the Committee made on 17 March 2021 to undertake a further period of consultation with Black Boy Lane residents, to commence on 1 December 2021 and to close on 19 January 2022.

2. That a report on the outcome of the consultation be brought back to the Committee on 1 February 2022 for a final decision on the making of an Order to rename Black Boy Lane. Further, for a decision on the implementation timetable such that it does not affect the preparation for and conduct of the May 2022 local elections, in particular, with regard to voter registrations.
3. In view of recommendations 1 and 2 above, it is proposed that the Committee amends its resolution to agree in principle the proposal made by Cllr Ejiofor so as to permit further consultation with residents and a report back to the Committee before a final decision is made to rename Black Boy Lane and as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
4. To note that, after the close of further consultation, an Executive Decision will be sought to fund the proposed package of support to be offered to residents in the event of an Order of the Committee.
5. To note that the Council is developing a Strategic Framework for Reimagining Haringey's Public Realm, and that a report will be made to Cabinet on this in due course including funding to be made available for any future street renaming.

12. DECISION MAKING FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ALEXANDRA HOUSE

Under s100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair of the meeting was of the opinion that the item should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances. These circumstances were that there had been a need for additional consultation with Legal and Property services to enable the finalisation of these reports.

The Chair highlighted that some of the information relating to this item was exempt and should not be discussed during the public section of the meeting. It was noted that all questions would be directed through the Chair, would be based on the information set out in the report, and would be directed to officers. It was added that questions should relate to the remit of the Corporate Committee and not the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Audit and Risk Management introduced the report and noted that the Committee had received a summary of the internal audit findings in relation to the decision not to purchase Alexandra House at its meeting in March 2021. The Committee had considered the findings and had requested a follow up report on the decision making relating to the purchase of Alexandra House and whether council policy and procedure had been followed. It was highlighted that the role of the Committee was to consider the governance, internal control environment, and management of risk.

It was noted that the full Mazars report was now presented to the Committee. It was explained that Mazars had reviewed the process for the decision and noted that the former Interim Assistant Director of Property and Economic Development was open to the suggestion to purchase Alexandra House as it could have helped to deliver Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings and it could have supported the

accommodation strategy. It was considered that the governance arrangements to manage an acquisition of such significance were weak, that there were a number of informal and ad hoc processes, and that there was a lack of documentary evidence regarding the people involved and the decisions made. There was also no evidence of a thorough business case which would have given decision makers an opportunity to consider all issues in full.

In response to the issues raised by the investigation, officers had undertaken to improve the arrangements for dealing with property acquisition, including an Acquisition and Disposals Policy that had been approved by Cabinet, a management review of governance, changes to the senior reporting arrangements covering acquisition, improved formalised communications with the Cabinet Member, formal minutes for Strategic Property Board meetings, a formal tracker in Strategic Property so that all acquisitions were noted in one location, and further reviews of the arrangements in the future.

Cllr Ejiofor noted that Cabinet Members at the time of the decision had been proactive and had made a number of requests, such as the confirmation of a formal acquisitions and disposals policy. It was enquired whether there was any evidence that the Chief Executive or Leader at the time had been informed about the opportunity to purchase Alexandra House. The Head of Audit and Risk Management explained that internal audit held officers accountable for internal governance. It was noted that Mazars had found that the procedures in place at the time were not adequate and that, although the benefits of purchasing Alexandra House were referenced incidentally in some documents, no options or advice had been presented in a formal document. The Head of Audit and Risk Management stated that, in his view, a specific, formal document would have been necessary to allow any decision maker to make an informed judgement.

Cllr Amin asked how the Committee and local residents could be assured that there was transparency in relation to future decisions. The Head of Audit and Risk Management noted that the role of the Committee was to seek assurances. It was explained that these issues had been identified and management should put adequate controls in place to ensure that future decisions were properly considered. It was added that there should also be regular reviews by internal audit to ensure that the processes were sufficient and were operating correctly.

Some members stated that the report was not clear in relation to which individuals undertook certain actions and who was responsible at each stage and asked for further clarity. The Head of Audit and Risk Management explained that the report highlighted that the procedures in place were insufficient to provide this level of clarity and it was therefore difficult to say what should have happened. It was noted that ensuring that there were adequate processes was the responsibility of management. It was added that, from an audit point of view, the focus was on the processes undertaken and not on the decision itself.

The Chair noted that the Mazars report referenced the fact that key stakeholders had been interviewed. There was a later reference to reliance on the interview with the Assistant Director for Capital Projects and Property (Interim) and it was enquired how many people had been interviewed or whether there had only been one interview. The

Head of Audit and Risk Management believed that Mazars had predominantly relied on information from the interview with the Assistant Director but most likely would have spoken to others in the relevant service and it was noted that this might require confirmation with Mazars.

The Chair stated that Mazars had seen two separate papers that had been presented to the Strategic Property Board in December 2018. It was noted that, according to its terms of reference, the Strategic Property Board met quarterly and it was enquired why Mazars or the Committee had not been given sight of papers from November 2018 to May 2019. The Head of Audit and Risk noted that the two reports in December 2018 were the only formal records of any decision and that there had only been incidental references to the purchase of Alexandra House at other times. This highlighted the importance of having clear processes with written reports and formal minutes.

Cllr Tabois noted that this would not have been the first time that the council had bought a building or something similar. He believed that there had been a failure to follow procedures in this case and that someone needed to be held accountable. The Head of Audit and Risk Management explained that the matter had been reviewed by Mazars who were independent and they had raised concerns that the governance arrangements in place were weak which had resulted in a largely informal process. It was noted that this had been discussed with the Committee and that measures had been put in place to ensure that there were internal controls that were strong enough to correctly consider decisions.

Cllr Ibrahim noted that local authorities were sometimes criticised for being bureaucratic but that processes were required to avoid situations such as this case. She accepted that the process for deciding not to do something may have been less clear but that this could still be detrimental to services. She stated that the council should learn from this that executive members should be able to ask questions to ensure that things had been done correctly. She stated that it was important not to assign blame to individuals but that all parties should take responsibility and ensure that the right questions were asked when decisions were made.

Following consideration of the exempt information, it was

RESOLVED

1. To note the report and attached documents.
2. To note the improved internal control governance arrangements for dealing with property acquisition detailed in the Mazars report.

13. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To note the dates of future meetings:

1 February 2022

10 March 2022

15. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of items 16-17 as they contained exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1985); paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 5; namely information relating to an individual, information which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), and information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

At 8.55pm, the Committee agreed a short adjournment. The meeting resumed at 9.05pm.

16. DECISION MAKING FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ALEXANDRA HOUSE - EXEMPT

The Committee considered the exempt information.

17. NEW ITEMS OF EXEMPT URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of exempt urgent business.

CHAIR: Councillor Peter Mitchell

Signed by Chair

Date