

## **PRESENT**

Members of the Committee

Councillor Professor Sir Anthony Coates, Bt, BSc, MD, FRCPath, FRCP  
(Chairman)

Councillor Barbara Campbell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Robert Atkinson

Councillor Judith Blakeman

Councillor Victoria Borwick

Councillor Andrew Dalton

Councillor Gerard Hargreaves

Councillor Tim Jones

Councillor Emma Will

## **Co-opted Voting Members**

Dr Samer Al-Zaher (parent governor)

Mr John O'Donnell (Roman Catholic Diocesan Board of Education)

Mr Paul Quinn (Parent Governor)

The Revd Dr William Taylor (London Diocesan Board for Schools)

## **Co-opted Non-Voting Members**

Mrs Kathleen Williams (Headteacher)

## **Others in Attendance**

Councillor Elizabeth Campbell (Cabinet Member for Education and  
Libraries)

Councillor Baroness Ritchie (Cabinet Member for Family and Children's  
Services)

## **Officers**

Mr Derek Myers, Town Clerk and Chief Executive

Mrs Libby Blake, Executive Director for Family and Children's Services

Ms Rebecca Matthews, Director for Schools, Quality and Standards

Ms Karen Tyerman, Director for Community Learning

Mr John Page, Interim Director for Family Services

Ms Joanne Hay, Interim Director of Policy and Performance

Ms Clair Bantin, Scrutiny Manager

Mr Ivor Quinn, Principal Governance Administrator

## **A1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Elizabeth Rutherford, Mr Kieran Parsons and Mr Paul Quinn, and for lateness from Councillor Emma Will.

## **A2 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Vice-Chairman and Councillor Jones declared personal interests as trustees of the Colville Nursery Centre. It was noted that a number of members were school governors.

## **A3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising thereon - list of acronyms

The committee noted that members had not received the list and asked for it to be sent as soon as possible.

## **A4 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2011/12**

### **A5 REVENUE BUDGET 2011/12**

### **A6 CAPITAL BUDGET 2011/12 - 2013/14**

The committee considered Reports A4, A5 and A6 together.

The Chairman introduced the report by saying that the total reduction in the FCS budget for 2011/12 was £6.78m, made up of a £4.706m reduction in response to changes in specific grants and £2.081m reduction in core RBKC funding.

Mrs Blake said that identifying reductions had been a difficult exercise. She said that Report A5 showed the proposed revenue savings and A6 showed the FCS Capital Budget.

The committee considered in particular annex B of A4 (details of savings) and page 11 of A5 (summary of changes).

Members made the following points:

- Councillor Dalton referred to the government's intention to give greater responsibility for spending to schools and he thought the committee should have a report on the pressures this would place on schools. Mr Jarvis commented that funding for schools through the Dedicated Schools Grant was not being reduced and previously separate grants were being transferred into the DSG. Ms Matthews said that schools would be able to buy services direct rather than through the Council. She said that it would be difficult to give a general answer to the question because the effect on schools would be different, school by school, as there would be a mixed economy of provision in future, with each school making its own choices. Councillor Dalton suggested that there should be a few illustrations. Councillor Atkinson said he would like to have details school by school.
- Councillor Borwick asked if the Council would be encouraging schools to buy from it or to go elsewhere. Ms Matthews

replied that the Council would need to be able to compete in the market, but it would not be able to provide everything it provided in the past. She added that schools could not assume that the service would be there at existing levels to buy back. Some Council services would not be viable if schools withdrew from them, although it was proposed that some education services would be commissioned on a three borough basis to make the services more viable.

- Councillor Jones asked about the additional income of £162,000 from Children's Centres. Mrs Blake explained that there had been over-provision of places and there was an opportunity to sell places. The charge of £205 per week would not increase in 2011/12. In response to a question from Councillor Blakeman, Ms Matthews said that children in need, referred by Family Services, were unaffected by the proposal because their places were protected and would be found in one of the eight children's centres. In reply to a question from Councillor Hargreaves, Mrs Blake said that she was confident that there would be demand for places.
- Councillor Blakeman referred to the closures of Latymer Children's Centre and Golborne Education Centre. Ms Matthews commented that these were changes to the service because alternative childcare provision was available. She added that the Golborne Centre had always been a satellite of the Latymer. The Council's Director of Property Services would be considering the Council's property needs in this area and FCS needs would be taken into account as part of that.
- The Chairman asked if the committee wanted reports on the topics raised so far. Mr O'Donnell thought this would be a good idea and suggested a report about the Pupil Referral Unit as well. He said that two headteachers he had spoken to were concerned about the speed of return of excluded pupils to mainstream schools because they considered that a six week exclusion period was insufficient.
- The Vice-Chairman questioned whether asking for these reports was the best use of officer time during a very busy period. Councillor Baroness Ritchie suggested that specific questions would be better. The Vice-Chairman agreed and suggested that members should submit questions in advance before each meeting. The Chairman commented that Westminster City Council's scrutiny committee operated a question and answer system, in which there were deadlines for questions and answers to be submitted. Councillor Blakeman said that she would like to be able to submit questions on the budget in the week before the Council budget meeting on 2 March. She would also like to see an equality

impact assessment on services and users before the Council meeting on 2 March. Mrs Blake said that Miss Hay had been working on the assessments and would be able to give a broad response.

- Councillor Dalton commented that, in reality, the budget for 2011/12 was broadly set and the critical years to begin to consider were 2012/13 and 2013/14. He said that he would be interested in a paper on the Pupil Referral Unit in the longer term up to 2014. Ms Matthews said that the national policy in respect of PRUs was changing. Councillor Elizabeth Campbell said she had been discussing the matter with Mrs Blake.
- Councillor Will said that there were rapid changes in the FCS area and the Council needed to be flexible as not all the answers would be known now.
- The Vice-Chairman referred to the proposed savings on the reduced use of contract staff and consultants, and said she was surprised at how much had been spent on consultants in the past. Mrs Blake said that there was a Council-wide policy to reduce the use of consultants. In the past, FCS had used agency staff to cover for vacancies, e.g. in social work teams. Mr O'Donnell commented that many of the savings would have an impact on staffing - if staffing levels were reduced beyond a critical point then the Council would start to respond more slowly and might fail to meet its statutory obligations. Mrs Blake said that she was confident that the Council would continue to meet its statutory obligations. Councillor Baroness Ritchie said that with reduced staff things would need to be done in a different way. Mrs Blake gave an example of this. The teams of business support officers had been centralised with central management. Savings had been made by dispensing with the central management and putting the teams under social work management.
- Councillor Atkinson referred to ContactPoint. Mrs Blake said that a database in itself would not protect children; the quality of partnership work was more important and the Council did a lot of cross-checking work with the police.
- Councillor Dalton said the principle of stopping bureaucracy getting between the service user and the provider should be supported.
- Councillor Atkinson referred to the reduction in Looked After Children management costs. Mrs Blake said there had been a reduction in the number of looked after children, but she accepted that there would be more of a challenge for managers.

- Councillor Blakeman referred to the social work team at Westway. Mrs Blake said that this was part of a longer term strategy. The Council would keep a presence in the north of the borough and would continue with the six locality teams, with social workers with a mixed caseload.
- Councillor Blakeman referred to the additional pressure the savings would place on staff when at the same time the Council was trying to reduce sickness levels and increase effectiveness. Mrs Blake agreed that this would be a challenge, but staff would be supported so that resilience was increased.
- Councillor Blakeman referred to the savings in respect of youth support, especially the effect on teenagers and questioned whether this would be cost-effective, given other policies such as the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance. Ms Tyerman replied by referring to the savings made in respect of the Connexions Service and said that the Council's statutory responsibility was changing. The early intervention strategy was being rethought to achieve more effective spending. Councillor Blakeman said that she thought the proposals would just lead to costs being shunted elsewhere.

The Chairman thanked members for their contributions and said he was sure that the committee would join him in welcoming the Council's contribution to a number of significant capital projects. Councillor Dalton added that the committee should express its gratitude to the FCS senior officer team which had had to produce these tough decisions. Councillor Atkinson said that the Labour Group reserved its position on the savings proposals.

## **A7 TRI-BOROUGH WORKING**

Mr Myers, Town Clerk and Chief Executive, spoke about the progress of discussions in respect of tri-borough working. The Council's revenue budget was £415m and the intention was to try to reduce that by £50m over four years. It had been decided that these savings might be made in a more cost-effective way, and protecting front line services, by joining with Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster. In respect of children's services it was thought that £7.5m might be saved whilst protecting the front line. Preliminary proposals would be presented to the Cabinet on 17 February and if they were thought worth pursuing then they would go out to public consultation and for consideration by scrutiny committees and then back to the Cabinet in April. If it was decided to proceed after that then an action plan would be produced to turn proposals into plans.

The Chairman reported that he and Councillor Hargreaves had met the chairmen of the scrutiny committees of Hammersmith and

Fulham and Westminster. It had been a friendly, cooperative and informal meeting. A scrutiny officer from each borough had also attended. The meeting was intended as a scrutiny networking opportunity and a chance to share best practice. The Chairman added that the meeting had been helpful and that a further informal meeting had been proposed for late February/early March.

The main points made by members were:

- Councillor Jones questioned whether some borough services might improve and some might decline in quality and he asked what pitfalls might be envisaged. Mr Myers replied that all change represented a challenge - there would be an opportunity to compare and contrast how things were done in the three boroughs, and there would be risks, such as a loss of continuity of staff, which would need to be mitigated.
- Councillor Dalton said that his impression of the Council over the years had always been of one of high achievement at relatively low cost. He noted that each year in recent times the Council had made efficiency savings of about 3%, seemingly without effort. Now that there was a focus on unit costs there still seemed a great deal more to do to increase efficiency. Mr Myers commented that the Council continued to seek to provide high quality services, at the same time as setting the fourth lowest Council Tax in England. In the current financial climate officers would give Councillors options for future spending and Council Tax levels.
- Councillor Atkinson asked about the future quality of FCS services. Mr Myers replied, first, that the Council would continue to assess what assistance it could give to families and children and that basic task would continue at borough level; secondly, that specialist services, e.g. youth offending teams, might more effectively be grouped together on a three borough level; and thirdly, that supervision and management of those services might be reduced by merging management across the boroughs. He added that for schools services it had already been decided to operate across the three boroughs and trading would start in September.
- Councillor Borwick said that the most intimate services to do with families and children could not be treated in the same way as services such as highways maintenance and the Council should not let the quality of its services, or the relationships it established with families, slip. The Cabinet Members said that this was an important and helpful point which needed to be borne in mind.
- The Vice-Chairman asked if working with the two other boroughs would assist or impede any consideration of a return

to the committee system of governance as provided for in the Localism Bill. Mr Myers said that the current proposals involved no change to governance arrangements and provisions in the Localism Bill would need to be considered when the bill was enacted.

- Mr O'Donnell referred to the very different cultures of the three boroughs and the view of the diocesan authorities and of headteachers he knew that Kensington and Chelsea was more helpful than the other two boroughs. Mr Myers replied that cultural differences would need to be considered.
- Revd Taylor referred to the abolition of the western extension of the congestion charging zone and the effect of that on children's health. Councillor Baroness Ritchie said that the Council and the committee would have an increased role in public health in future.
- Councillor Dalton referred to the fact that the schools estate of the three boroughs would still be relatively small and he asked how far, if at all, three borough working would impede the borough in spending its capital in the way that it wished, through the creation of a joint education committee. Mr Myers replied that this would not happen as there would not be a joint committee or pooled budgets.
- Councillor Will asked where the greatest savings might lie. Mr Myers said that it was hoped to save at least £10m per borough through reduced and shared back room services.

The Chairman thanked members for their comments and thanked Mr Myers for attending.

## **A8 LIBRARIES**

The Vice-Chairman, who chaired the libraries mini-group, introduced this item. A brief report outlining the main points discussed by the group was tabled in order to assist the Vice-Chairman in her oral report. She said that her intention and expectation had been that the group would take a narrow look at libraries, focusing on what was needed to maintain the libraries service in the current financial climate. The current position was set out in paragraph 3 of the report and further information could be provided for each library. In the event the group looked at the vision for the future of libraries as well.

The main points made by members were:

- Councillor Borwick said that equality impact assessments should be included in future for any savings proposals. She also said that costs and service provision had to be balanced. In response to a specific point, Ms Tyerman said that all

libraries would buy a book if requested provided it was appropriate.

- In reply to a question from Councillor Will Ms Tyerman said that the 45,000 members could be broken down by library.
- In response to a question about how costs had been reduced from £5.50 to 65p, as mentioned in paragraph 3.4, Ms Tyerman replied that new technology, fewer staff and external stock suppliers getting books ready to go straight onto the shelves, had made this reduction possible.

The report was noted.

## **A9 DEEP LEVEL SCRUTINY - MINI-GROUPS**

The Chairman introduced the report and reminded members that mini-groups were intended to be an informal process for dealing with pressing matters quickly.

Members' comments were:

- Revd Taylor said that if mini-groups considered savings proposals then they should also consider equality impact assessments. He compared the libraries report in A8 above to the obesity report that had been submitted in 2010 and said that there should be a sharper mechanism for reports to be cleared before coming to committee. The Chairman responded by saying that the obesity report arose from a traditional working group of the Health Scrutiny Committee, which had met over many months, whereas the libraries report was intended to assist the chairman of the group in reporting orally on the outcome of one informal meeting.
- Councillor Dalton said that the budget discussion could be used as a basis for preparation for the financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14. He suggested that the budget for Family Services for those two years could be discussed in the months up to the summer recess so that the committee had considered the matter before the Imperatives and Opportunities process for 2012/13 started in the autumn.
- Councillor Atkinson said that reports ought to be in writing and ought to be written by the officers and not by members to avoid the problems caused by the obesity report.

The Chairman thanked members for their comments. It was agreed that the future work of mini-groups be considered after the committee had considered the Cabinet report on three borough working at the next meeting.

## **A10 FORWARD PLAN**

The report was noted.

**A11 ANY OTHER ORAL OR WRITTEN PUBLIC ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERED URGENT**

Councillor Borwick said that she understood that the Council was cutting grants to organisations supporting work with young people, such as the cadets, and she asked that this be reconsidered. The officers said that they were unaware of this and would check and let the committee know the position.

**Action: Director of Policy and Performance**

Revd Taylor said that he would have to submit his apologies for the next meeting as it fell on Ash Wednesday. He asked the Council to try to avoid having meetings on the days of major religious festivals.

The meeting ended at 6.20pm.

Chairman