

CALL-IN SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

5 AUGUST 2013

Chairman: * Councillor Jerry Miles

Councillors: * Mano Dharmarajah * Graham Henson (2)
* Tony Ferrari * Chris Mote (2)

In attendance: David Gawn Minute 52
(Councillors) Thaya Idaikkadar

* Denotes Member present
(2) Denotes category of Reserve Members

45. Appointment of Chairman

RESOLVED: That Councillor Jerry Miles be appointed Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

46. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly constituted Reserve Members:

Ordinary Member

Councillor Paul Osborn
Councillor Sue Anderson

Reserve Member

Councillor Chris Mote
Councillor Graham Henson

47. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 7 – Call-In of Cabinet decision (18 July 2013): Concessionary Travel – Changes to the Taxicard Scheme

Councillor Chris Mote declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his brother was a blue badge holder. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Thaya Idaikkaddar declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his mother was disabled. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor David Gawn declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a blue badge holder.

RESOLVED ITEMS

48. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Jerry Miles as Vice-Chairman of the Call-In Sub-Committee for the 2013/2014 Municipal Year.

49. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2013 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment: page 2, paragraph 1, 'Kingsbury School' should read 'Kingsley High School'.

50. Protocol for the Operation of the Call-In Sub-Committee

The Chairman outlined the procedure to be followed at the meeting and advised the Sub-Committee on the requirement to cite the grounds for call-in, and the options open to the Sub-Committee following consideration of the call-in.

RESOLVED: That the Call-In on the Cabinet decision on 'Concessionary Travel - Changes to the Taxicard Scheme' would be determined on the basis of the following ground:

d) the action is not proportionate to the desired outcome.

51. Call-In of Cabinet Decision (18 July 2013) - Transformation of Day Opportunities in Harrow

The Chairman informed the Sub-Committee that a call-in notice had been received, signed by over 150 members of the public, in respect of the Cabinet decision taken on 18 July 2013, on 'Transformation of Day Opportunities'. However, official notice had since been received from the lead signatory that the call-in notice should be withdrawn, and there was, therefore, no business to consider under this item.

RESOLVED: That the withdrawal of the call-in notice on the Cabinet decision on 'Transformation of Day Opportunities' be noted.

52. Call-in of Cabinet Decision (18 July 2013) - Concessionary Travel - Changes to the Taxicard Scheme

The Sub-Committee received papers in respect of a call-in notice submitted by over 150 members of the public.

The Chairman invited the representative of the signatories, Ms Angela Dias, to present the reasons for the call-in of the decision to the Sub-Committee.

Ms Dias explained that the action was disproportionate in that it would have an enormous impact on some lives, and particularly for those with complex needs who were unable to use public transport, regardless of discounts and passes available to them. For people without family and friends to assist and support them it would mean the difference between being totally housebound and isolated, and being able to socialise and partake in 'normal' activities enjoyed by people without disabilities. She also believed there was a potential human rights challenge, in that the right to participate in community life would be compromised.

She added that disabled people were already suffering cuts in services and benefits, and that this action compounded the hardship and distress being experienced by a vulnerable sector of the community. Changes to the scheme would achieve minimal savings but at great cost to the quality of life of disabled people.

Avril Coombs and Maureen McGrath made additional points:

- disabled people, often on low incomes, have higher expenses in carrying out normal activities;
- 40 trips amounts to 20 trips in total as each outing will require a return journey;
- disabled people are already seriously disadvantaged in their lives and support should not be reduced.

Councillor Idaikkadar stated that while he was deeply sympathetic to the needs of service users, it was imperative to balance the Council's budget. He added that he had experience of disability in his own family and understood the impact the decision would have, but savings in this area were preferable to cuts in other services. In reviewing the service, Cabinet had looked at practice in other boroughs and had decided to remove the subsidy, rather than lose the service altogether. They had also analysed the available data, which demonstrated that 15% of scheme users would be adversely impacted, as not all users exceeded the proposed allowance. He acknowledged that the service could be improved, and had asked officers to meet with London Councils to discuss this. He was happy to liaise with Harrow Association of Disabled People (HAD) to look at issues raised.

He noted that disabled residents had recourse to other support, such as personal budgets, in managing their needs. He commented that Cabinet had

included transitional arrangements in their decision, and while they had taken no comfort in deciding on these changes, it was the right decision at this time.

Members discussed the points raised, and requested clarification on the following points:

- were there alternative income streams (e.g. interest on the underspend) which could fund the shortfall?;
- if alternative methods of transport were available for scheme members, how were these publicised and promoted?.

Members noted that interest accruing from an underspend would be available only in the short term and was not a viable long term proposition.

In response to a query about what training on disability and equalities was provided for officers and Members, it was confirmed that officers received training relevant and appropriate to their area of work, and all Members received mandatory training on equalities.

An officer informed the Sub-Committee that consultation results showed a high level of taxicard use was for attendance at doctor and hospital appointments.

Members noted that housebound residents could insist on home visits, and that volunteer schemes were in place to assist patients with transport for medical reasons. Members were of the view that if alternative transport arrangements were available, it was imperative to ensure that scheme users were aware of these and of their rights in accessing alternative provision.

(The Sub-Committee then adjourned from 7.35 pm – 8.05 pm to receive legal advice).

The Chairman announced the decision of the Sub-Committee and it was

RESOLVED: (unanimously) That

- (1) the call-in on ground (d) - the action is not proportionate to the outcome – not be upheld;
- (2) the following statement, by the Chairman on behalf of the Sub-Committee, be noted by Cabinet:

“The Sub-Committee notes the transitional arrangements put in place for high end users; the Sub-Committee further notes that the changes to the scheme are due to be implemented on 1 October 2013, and requests that the changes are not implemented until the scheme users are made aware of alternative arrangements with other transport providers, particularly in respect of transport for doctor and hospital appointments.”

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 8.10 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JERRY MILES
Chairman