

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 13th December 2005 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor John (Chair), Councillor Coughlin (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gladbaum (alternate for D Long), Harrod (alternate for Kagan), Lyon and H B Patel.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Kagan, D Long and R S Patel.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 27th October 2005

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th October 2005 be approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

None.

4. Deputations

None.

5. Statement of Accounts 2004/2005

Duncan McLeod (Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) introduced the report and advised the Committee that the Council's external auditors, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), had reported their Opinion on the 2004/2005 Statement of Accounts. There were no qualifications. The report now before the Committee asked Members to note the revised accounts including the amendments to those accounts originally submitted to the General Purposes Committee on 12th July 2005.

Members heard that whilst the Statement of Accounts had been concluded, the final audit had not yet been formally concluded due to a review by PwC of a potential objection by a member of the public. The Committee was informed that PwC had collected information on this matter and would conclude in the near future. Some members enquired into the financial impact of these objections and Mr McLeod advised that overall audit costs for the average number of objections per year, estimated at three or four objections, was up to £20 000.

Some members of the Committee referred to the earmarked reserves, p61, and requested further information regarding whether these funds were available to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). In response, Mr McLeod explained that the general fund reserves were not available to the HRA.

Several members commented on the positive nature of the timescale within which the Statement of Accounts had been finalised. Councillor Coughlin (Lead Member for Finance and Corporate Resources) reiterated this and commended officers for their efforts, which had ensured the Statement of Accounts was completed in advance of the deadline.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Schedule of Significant Amendments at appendix 1 to the report be noted;
- (ii) that the audited 2004/2005 Statement of Accounts at appendix 2 to the report be noted.

6. Calculation of Council Tax Base 2006/07

The Committee received a report which set out the Council Tax base calculations to be used for the 2006/07 Budget. The level of Council Tax base set was used in the calculation of the Council Tax for 2006/07. The Regulations required that the Council Tax base be set by 31st January 2006 prior to the start of the financial year.

The Committee heard that the target for collection rates in previous years had been extremely challenging but that all were optimistic about the progress being made in meeting these targets. Duncan McLeod (Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) advised members that in comparison to other London boroughs' collection rates, Brent had been in the top ten of the most improved boroughs for both 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Members discussed the need to enforce stricter penalties for non-payment of Council Tax, and Mr McLeod confirmed that strategies were planned to ensure that those residents who avoided payment faced the legal consequences. Some members commented on the need to ensure that those who had genuine difficulty with Council Tax payments were made aware of Council Tax benefit and the Committee agreed on the importance of ensuring the availability of Council Tax benefit to those in need.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the collection rate for the Council Tax for 2006/07 be set at 97.5%;
- (ii) that in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax (Base) Regulations, 1992, the amount calculated by the Council as its Council Tax Base for 2006/07 be set at 94,047.

7. Sub-Committee Membership Changes

None.

8. Appointments to Outside Bodies

None.

9. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

A JOHN
Chair

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