



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 15 January 2024 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor M Butt (Chair) and Councillors Donnelly-Jackson, Farah, Grahl, Knight and Nerva.

Also present: Councillors Hirani and Maurice.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tatler (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Growth) and Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action).

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made during the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Cabinet **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 11 December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

4. **Matters Arising (if any)**

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

5.1 **Implementation and Operation of Blue Bag Recycling Scheme**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) welcomed Sheila Darr to the meeting, who had been invited to speak in support of a petition containing 3,422 signatures highlighting a number of practical and operational concerns regarding the recently introduced blue bag recycling scheme across the borough. In addressing Cabinet, Sheila Darr began by calling for the scheme to be replaced as it was felt to represent an unworkable extension of the existing blue bin scheme. In seeking to highlight the views of those who had signed the petition, Cabinet was advised of the concerns raised relating to the design and quality of the blue recycling bags, which were felt to be inefficient and as a result discourage residents from recycling. Additionally, Cabinet was advised that many elderly residents had expressed concern regarding the potential consequences of putting non-recyclable material in the blue bags and them not being collected as a result.

In discussing potential GDPR and data protection implications of paper and cardboard containing details such as names and addresses being misplaced due to the unsecure nature of the bags, Sheila Darr also raised concern regarding the protection of residents' personal information and queried how documents containing sensitive information could be suitably disposed of. Furthermore, in emphasising the need for resident support to improve recycling rates, a request was made for the planned review of the scheme to be brought forward and undertaken immediately in order for resident feedback to be taken into account, recognising the level of concern expressed and enabling further research on schemes that had been successful in securing support from local residents across other boroughs. As an example, the suggested use of split recycling bins with removable dividers or retention of the blue recycling bins for paper and card with the provision of smaller recycling bins for tin, plastic and glass were identified as possible alternative solutions.

To conclude, Sheila Darr felt it would be helpful to share examples of the type of comments being raised by other residents across the borough which had been posted on the Nextdoor App in relation to the blue bag scheme. These included concerns regarding stolen bags, the space available in the bags, difficulties for disabled residents and recycling bags not being collected or emptied properly and a lack of assisted support for those residents with specific needs who required assistance.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (responding as Leader of the Council on behalf of Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action) firstly thanked Sheila Darr for attending Cabinet and all those residents who had signed the petition for taking the time to ensure their views were represented. In reiterating the Council's commitment to tackling the climate emergency and work towards the achievement of net zero by 2030, Councillor Butt explained that the changes introduced as part of the blue bag scheme had been designed to increase recycling rates to bring the borough closer to its environmental and climate related goals.

Regarding the specific issues raised as part of the presentation and petition, the Leader reassured residents that the concerns relating to the design and quality of the recycling bags were being addressed with the supplier and confirmed that replacement bags were also available for those reported as damaged along with additional bags for residents requiring increased capacity. In terms of contamination, the Leader advised that the concerns raised relating to the impact of adverse weather conditions on the paper and card being placed in the blue bags when left out for collection was also being monitored with the Council's contractor so that any issues identified could be addressed.

To demonstrate the positive impact that the blue bag scheme was having on recycling rates, Councillor Butt advised that since introduction of the scheme in October 2023 there had been a 264% increase in the recycling rate of paper and cardboard across the borough, with this enabling the Council to also explore opportunities to generate additional income through recycling to mitigate against recent budget cuts and the continued financial pressures being faced by the Council. Regarding the planned review of the scheme, the Leader advised that this had been scheduled to provide an opportunity to fully consider its impact utilising all available evidence in order to consider any changes that may be required as part of

the transition process with it pointed out, in terms of research, that a number of other councils had or were also considering the introduction of similar types of recycling schemes in an attempt to increase their recycling rates.

In concluding Councillor Butt, once again highlighting the Council's climate and environmental commitments, emphasised the importance of waste and recycling as a priority and whilst welcoming the increased levels of recycling being achieved as a result of the scheme advised he would be willing to continue discussions with local residents in relation to any ongoing concerns.

6. Reference of item considered by Scrutiny Committees (if any)

There were no references from the Community & Wellbeing or Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committees submitted for consideration at the meeting.

7. Quarter 3 Financial Report 2023/24

In Councillor Tatler's absence (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance, Resources & Reform), Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) introduced the report setting out the financial forecast for the General Fund revenue budget, the Housing Revenue Account, the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Capital Programme as at Quarter 3 2023/24.

In highlighting the forecast overspend of £13m against the revised General Fund revenue budget at Quarter 3, which was broadly similar to the position reported at Quarter 2, Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined the significant and serious nature of the financial challenges faced by the Council as a result of the current economic environment, government austerity and ongoing pressures in relation to homelessness and the increased demand on temporary accommodation. These pressures had also been compounded by the recent Local Government financial settlement with Brent having received the second lowest settlement in London for 2024-25 and, despite the significant challenges faced, not having been allocated any additional support towards the pressures identified in relation to homelessness. In recognising the seriousness of the position outlined and scale of the financial challenges faced members noted the progress being made in relation to the implementation and identification of further savings proposals alongside the additional measures which had been introduced to control expenditure and maintain financial control.

Members welcomed what were felt to be not only the prudent but also responsible nature of the measures identified in order to ensure the Council remained focussed on maintaining a balanced budget whilst also seeking to safeguard key services and protect residents, given the wider impact of the cost-of-living crisis and economic challenges highlighted, with specific reference made to the ongoing pressures being created as a result of the increase in homelessness and demand on housing supply. In addition, members attention was drawn to the additional pressure on the Housing Revenue Account as a result of current economic conditions, rent limitations imposed during 2023-24 and increased demand on disrepairs, responsive repairs and void works along with the mitigating actions identified in response.

Concerns were also highlighted regarding the lack of clarity provided by the Government regarding the provision of future funding for the Household Support Fund given the importance of support being provided for local residents. Despite this uncertainty, Cabinet welcomed and praised the support continuing to be provided by Council through its Resident Support Fund (RSF) in relation to households struggling with household bills, food, fuel rent, mortgage or council tax arrears. During 2023-24 it was noted that the RSF had supported 2,773 applications awarding a total of £2m to residents with the total Fund consisting of a £3m investment by the Council and £2m allocation from the HSF reactive support fund. Whilst it was recognised that demand would increase over the winter months an assurance was provided that the Council would continue to do everything possible to carry on supporting residents in need and through the cost-of-living crisis. The opportunity was also taken to highlight the ongoing pressures in relation to adult social care, despite the breakeven figure outlined within the report, as a result of issues relating to recruitment, the wider impact of the current complexities in terms of the social care and hospital discharge system and economic conditions affecting providers across the care system. As a result, the ongoing work of all involved in maintaining and delivering such vital services was also commended.

In support of the approach outlined, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the overall financial position as detailed within the report and actions being taken to manage the issues arising.
- (2) To note the savings delivery tracker in Appendix A of the report.
- (3) To note the Prudential Indicators set out in Appendix B of the report.
- (4) To approve the virements set out in section 3.9.11 of the report.

8. **Treasury Management mid-year report 2023/24**

In Councillor Tatler's absence (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance, Resources & Reform), Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) presented a report updating Members on Treasury Management activity for the first half of the financial year 2023-24 which included the Council's investment and borrowing activities and strategy.

Members welcomed the report and prudent approach being delivered in terms of the Council's Treasury Management activity to support delivery of the Council's wider ambitions and priorities given the challenging economic context under which the Treasury Management Strategy was having to be delivered. Having noted the assurance provided that the Council had fully complied with the Treasury Management Indicators set as part of the annual strategy for 2023 - 24, as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report Cabinet **RESOLVED** to note the 2023-24 Mid-Year Treasury report and approve it being referred on to Council, in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management (the Code).

9. **Acquisition of a property in Wembley for the Brent Childrens Care Home Project**

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) introduced the report, which set out the Council's plans to acquire a property as part of the Children's Residential Home Project.

In considering the report Cabinet noted the way in which the proposed acquisition aligned with the objectives within the Brent Children's Residential Home Business Case approved by Cabinet in May 2023. This included not only supporting the Council in seeking to address the increasing cost of child residential placements for looked after children, with the scheme projected to save the Council approx. £290,000 on an annual basis once operational, but also in delivering the benefits associated with the additional capacity to reduce the need for out of borough placements and enabling more children and young people to receive care closer to home with access to local services and support.

Members welcomed the way in which the insourcing of this scheme would enhance service delivery and in recognising the benefits that the proposal would bring to both young people and the Council, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the acquisition of the property (address detailed in the exempt appendix of the report) in Wembley HA9 with vacant possession to meet the needs of young people as outlined in the Brent Residential Home Business Case approved by Cabinet in May 2023.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Corporate Director of Children and Young People, to agree the terms of the purchase and acquire the property subject to financial and legal due diligence, vacant possession and contract.
- (3) To note that the completion of the property needs to take place by the end of January 2024 in order to allow sufficient time to renovate the property within the timescales permitted in the grant agreement with the Department for Education (DfE).

10. **Northwick Park Public Mortuary Expansion Business Case**

In Councillor Krupa Sheth's absence (as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action), Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) introduced the report setting out the Business Case supporting an expansion of Brent Mortuary by 80 storage spaces.

In considering the report, Members noted that Brent, operating under an Inter Authority Agreement with the London Boroughs of Harrow and Barnet, provided a licensed shared mortuary and post-mortem facility covering three of the five boroughs within the HM Coroners Jurisdiction across North London. The site was located on the site of Northwick Park Hospital with the Council and partners having a responsibility to ensure that the premises and facilities met required standards within the Human Tissue Act. Given increasing pressure on capacity, the proposed expansion was designed to ensure the mortuary was able to continue meeting these requirements in support of local residents, the Coroners Service and Metropolitan Police. Members noted that the expansion was being undertaken in collaboration with the London Borough of Barnet and London Borough of Harrow, with Brent's contribution being £900,621 towards the overall cost of £2.63m.

In recognising the importance and Council's ongoing commitment towards ensuring security and dignity in terms of care for the deceased and addressing, in a cost-effective manner, the additional need identified to maintain support for local residents given the sensitive nature of the service, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the need for additional mortuary capacity to meet the standards laid out in the Human Tissue Act 2004.
- (2) To support the proposals contained in Option 2 of the options appraisal at paragraph 3.4 of the report as the means of best meeting the requirement for additional mortuary capacity.
- (3) Subject to Barnet Council's and Harrow Council's capital contribution confirmation, approve the business case to carry out capital works to expand the public mortuary capacity for a cost of £2.63m.
- (4) Subject to Barnet Council's and Harrow Council's capital contribution confirmation, note Brent Council's contribution towards the total project budget is £900,621.
- (5) Subject to Barnet Council's and Harrow Council's capital contribution confirmation, approve the use of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy to fund Brent Council's contribution as detailed in (4) above.
- (6) To approve the delegation of authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services, in consultation with the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources to amend the project business case should either Barnet Council and/or Harrow Council not receive their respective approvals to contribute towards the cost of the project as set out in this report.
- (7) To approve the delegation of authority to enter into the new lease with the NHS to the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Corporate Director, Resident Services and Lead Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action should the new lease exceed the Corporate Director's current approval levels as set out in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, paragraph 11.

11. Exclusion of Press and Public

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press or public.

12. Any other urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 10.26 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair