



**MINUTES OF THE BUDGET AND FINANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Tuesday 4 February 2014 at 7.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Hopkins (Chair), Councillor Harrison (Vice-Chair) and Councillors S Choudhary, HB Patel, Ketan Sheth and Long

Also present: Councillors Butt, R Moher and Ogunro

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors RS Patel and Van Kalwala

**1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

None declared.

**1. Deputations**

None.

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 January 2014 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

**3. Matters arising**

None.

**4. The draft budget 2014/15**

Councillor R Moher, Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the draft budget 2014/15. She opened the presentation by outlining the approach to the 2014/15 budget which was underpinned by the One Council programme which focussed on back office efficiencies, procurement savings, protection of frontline services and recognition of the challenging years ahead. The Deputy Leader of the Council reminded members of the budget process that had been undertaken, which included a widespread consultation exercise of a budget simulator and focus groups as well as meetings held with lead members and directors to publish the budget proposals earlier than previous years. She outlined the current position regarding Council Tax in light of the latest Government Statement with changes to rules on referendum criteria and changes to the treatment of Council Tax freeze grant. It was explained that the proposed Council Tax freeze meant that Brent would have not increased council tax since 2009. Councillor R Moher continued by addressing the key budget issues in 2014/15 namely the pressures on in adult

social care and average savings of 6.8% across all service areas whilst ensuring school places remained a key priority of the capital programme. Councillor R Moher continued her presentation by highlighting the budgets for each service area for 2014/15 and highlighted cost pressures and savings to be made for each. Councillor R Moher explained the risks of the budget for 2014/15 which included the impact of the welfare reforms, pressures from social care and the requirement to deliver savings of £18m.

Following queries from members it was clarified that the presentation was a summary of the budget position following the in depth presentations over the course of the year. Members queried whether there was scope to increase funding for children in secure accommodation. Councillor R Moher informed the committee that work was being undertaken with the West London Alliance to set up a contract to secure accommodation for all boroughs at a set level but also to undertake proactive work to avoid young persons going into secure accommodation. Queries regarding the funding for schools places were raised and it was clarified that all currently identified expansion projects had suitable funding. It was also noted that in some cases temporary accommodation would be more suitable to enable long term planning for school places to be undertaken. In response to queries regarding the impact of the recent economy growth, Cllr R Moher informed the committee that further cuts were expected for 2015/16 and it was unclear what funding streams would be available following the general elections although it was anticipated that it was not likely to improve. During discussions it was felt that residents were not always aware of what the Council did in terms of supporting vulnerable persons and were unaware of how their Council Tax was spent. Councillor R Moher felt that communication and engagement with residents needed to be improved including the area forums to ensure residents were well informed of the services that the Council provided and were able to be consulted on decisions. She continued to explain that it was hoped that vulnerable people would be able to remain in their homes for longer with support which would ensure a better quality of life for the person and also a more cost effective method of care. Members expressed concern that residents may be living in unsuitable or large accommodation. Councillor R Moher explained that it was not possible to ask people to leave their homes although recognised suggestions of symbiotic schemes where support or company was exchanged for accommodation. It was recognised that individuals managing their own care allowances could result in less than desirable accommodation although it was noted that all supported accommodation had communal areas which were popular amongst most residents. In response to queries it was felt the public may not be fully aware of the council's responsibility for public health and the impact of schemes encouraging healthy living resulting in delivering savings long term. Members discussed the Council's One Council Programme and noted that there were currently six projects outstanding and work was being undertaken to implement phase two and identify further projects and imaginative ways of working. It was recognised that the voluntary sector and Council Tax communications could be optimised to engage with residents with the use of real life stories to ensure effective communication. Councillor Butt, Leader of the Council, informed the committee that there were numerous challenges ahead with the risks increasing as the budget got tighter.

The Chair noted the committee's interim report had been circulated prior to the meeting and requested that members submitted any further comments or concerns to the Senior Policy Officer within two days. During discussion it was noted that

previous years had included a recommendation that there should be a ratio of six staff per manager and it was agreed that this recommendation would be included in this year's report. In response to queries the Operational Director of Finance explained that recommendations were monitored and updated throughout the course of the year's work of the Budget and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee. During discussions it was agreed that recommendation five would be amended to reflect 'interims and consultants', recommendation 15 would include references to maximising revenue from the disposal of Council assets and recommendation 12 be amended to change the word 'aggressive' to 'robust'. During discussions it was noted that Councillor HB Patel did not agree with recommendation three and felt that building control fees for building improvements so as replacing roofs should be maximised. Following discussion it was agreed that Councillor Sheth as Chair of the Planning Committee would agree a form of wording with the Senior Policy Officer to include the collection of building control fees and other fees within recommendation 17. In response to queries, Mick Bowden explained that in comparison to similar local authorities, Brent had a relatively low level of reserves which could be seen as the council being at greater risk to fluctuations in service demand and changes in funding.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the presentation be noted;
  
- (ii) that the interim report be amended to reflect the discussion.

**5. Vote of thanks**

The Chair thanked the Vice Chairs and officers for their contribution and support during the past two years whilst chairing the committee.

**6. Any other urgent business**

None.

**7. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Budget and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be confirmed at the meeting of Annual Council in June 2014.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

A HOPKINS  
Chair