



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held as an online virtual meeting on Monday 8 March 2021 at 10.00 am

PRESENT (in remote attendance): Councillor M Butt (Chair), Councillor McLennan (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Farah, Knight, Nerva, M Patel, Krupa Sheth, Stephens, Southwood and Tatler

1. **Apologies for Absence**

None.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 January 2021 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

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

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

None.

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

None.

7. **Resident Support Fund**

Councillor Southwood, as Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform introduced a report on the proposal to bring the current Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWA) to an end, and revise the Resident Support Fund to include those parts of LWA that were not currently offered within it.

Cabinet noted that the LWA had been designed to support residents experiencing short-term emergency financial hardship or unexpected expenditure. This had been supplemented in August 2020 by the Resident Support Fund, with funding from this source originally designed to support residents specifically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

The proposal to discontinue the LWA and include those elements not already covered within the revised operation of the Resident Support Fund formed part of the development of a more integrated and streamlined approach towards financial inclusion. This include support for those residents experiencing financial hardship as the focus moved forward from the pandemic.

Members noted the outline of support mechanisms that the revised Fund had been designed to provide, as detailed within section 5 of the report. This included a focus not only on welfare support but also for those experiencing difficulties in relation to rent and mortgage arrears.

In summing up, Councillor M Butt, Leader of the Council drew members' attention to the current financial context in which the proposals were being brought forward, as detailed within section 4 of the report, which reflected the significant increase in the amount of households experiencing financial hardship across the borough during the pandemic.

Having considered the proposals, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To agree to discontinue the current Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) scheme.
- (2) To approve the revision of the Resident Support Fund (RSF) to begin 1 April 2021 as set out in section 5 of the report.
- (3) To delegate to the Strategic Director for Customer and Digital Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, authority to agree eligibility criteria for the new Resident Support Fund from 1 April 2021 to administer and award grants and loans.
- (4) To approve the continuation of an interest free loan arrangement as set out in section 7 of the report.
- (5) To approve payment to the Credit Union of such sums remaining in the Council Tax – Covid – 19 Hardship Fund 2020 – 21 and at such frequency as the Director of Finance considers appropriate from which Covid-19 Support Fund Loans will be made and delegate to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Director of Legal, HR, Audit and Investigations authority to finalise the terms of the investment.
- (6) To agree to transfer all remaining funds from the existing Local Welfare Scheme to the Resident Support Fund scheme.

8. **Special Needs Transport Managed Service - Contract Renewal**

Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Lead Member for Environment introduced a report detailing the outcome and cost options relating to the re-procurement of the managed personnel contract that provided drivers and assistants for the shared Special Needs Transport (SNT) service, and the proposal to pay the London Living Wage (LLW) to staff employed through the contract.

Members noted that the recommissioning exercise had been a process led by the London Borough of Harrow, on behalf of Brent. Confirmation was provided that the

associated costs would be funded through corporate reserves in 2021/22 and then built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2022/23 onwards.

Councillor M Butt, Leader of the Council reaffirmed the Council's commitment to ensuring that the LLW was pursued as standard across Council contracts, in view of the wider benefits provided.

RESOLVED that Cabinet to approve an uplift in payment in line with LLW which draws from the Council's reserves in 2021/22, but which would be included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2022/23 onwards.

9. **Purchase of 83 Wembley Park Drive for rough sleepers accommodation**

Councillor Southwood, as Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform introduced a report detailing the freehold purchase of 83 Wembley Park Drive through the Housing General Fund, in order to increase the supply of supported housing for people sleeping rough and to help reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation.

As part of a joint introduction, Councillor Tatler, as Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning also took the opportunity to thank the Property and Housing teams for their hard work in securing the purchase of the freehold.

Members noted that the proposal would generate a significant reduction in the reliance and costs relating to provision of temporary accommodation as well as providing more stable and higher quality accommodation for those in need and some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough.

In considering the recommendations, Cabinet noted the information provided within the exempt appendix accompanying the report.

Having noted the comments provided, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the purchase of the freehold of 83 Wembley Park Drive, London HA9 8HE with vacant possession to meet the needs of people who have been sleeping rough and rehoused through the Government's rough sleeping move-on initiatives.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Strategic Director of Community Well Being, to agree the terms of the purchase and acquire the property subject to financial and legal due diligence, vacant possession and to contract.
- (3) To note that completion of the property needs to take place by March 2021 in order to secure the funding arrangements and an extension was not guaranteed.

10. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting ended at 10.15 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair