



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 14 November 2022
at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor M. Butt (Chair), Councillor M. Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Donnelly-Jackson, Farah, Grahl, Knight, Nerva, Krupa Sheth, Southwood and Tatler.

Also present: Councillors Georgiou and Molloy.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

None received.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Peter Gadsdon (Corporate Director Resident Services) and Phil Porter (Corporate Director Adult Social Care) declared personal interests in relation to Agenda Item 8 (Update on New Affordable Housing Supply) as Council appointed Directors on the Boards of i4B & FWH Ltd.

Councillor Muhammed Butt declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item 8 (Update on New Affordable Housing Supply) in view of his brother (Councillor Saqib Butt) also serving as a Council appointed Director on the Boards of i4B & FWH Ltd.

There were no other declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 17 October 2022 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

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

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

There were no petitions submitted for consideration at the meeting.

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

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

7. **Draft Budget 2023/24**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance Resources & Reform) introduced a report which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2023/24. The report also provided a general update on the Council's overall financial position, including not only the Council's General Fund revenue budget but also Housing Revenue Account, Dedicated Schools Grant and Capital Programme as well as an overview of the current economic outlook.

In considering the report, members noted the ongoing risks and uncertainties outlined in relation to inflationary pressures, the economic challenges resulting from the war in Ukraine, Government's short term funding settlements and delay in wider local government funding reforms along with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and Brexit. Members also noted this followed a twelve year period of significant reductions in Government funding which had required the Council to make £197m worth of savings, despite an increase in demand for key services. In noting the challenges these issues had presented in relation to the Council's overall Medium Term Financial Strategy, members were advised that the proposals detailed within the report had been designed to address the significant financial impacts arising from the demographic and inflationary pressures identified whilst also seeking to ensure that the Council continued to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way.

As a result of the issues identified, members were advised that the budget gap now being forecast between 2023-24 and 2024-25 had (as originally reported to Cabinet in July 2022) now been estimated (based on current assumptions) as £28m profiled at £18m for 2023-24 and £10m the year after. Given the high level of uncertainty over the current economic environment and Government's longer term funding settlement for local government, members noted that the approach identified to address this position had required restricting the budget proposals to a single year, rather than outlining a two-year programme as had previously been standard practice.

In terms of the savings identified, a series of additional proposals totalling £18m had been outlined within the report which, subject to approval following consultation and scrutiny, would need to be implemented in 2023-24. These new savings proposals had been detailed in Appendices A & B of the report, which taken alongside the updated budget assumptions and proposal to seek (at this stage) a Council Tax increase of 2.99% (based on a 1.99% general increase plus 1% for the Adult Social Care precept) would enable the Council to set a balanced budget for 2023-24.

Whilst noting that the proposals had been designed to limit, as far as possible, service reductions and the impact on front line services, members recognised the challenging nature of their delivery. Concern was also expressed at the impact of the significant uncertainty which remained over the Government's local government funding proposals for the medium term in the absence of a longer-term Spending Review and the outcome of other reforms including the Fair Funding review and to the business rates regime.

Having recognised the adverse impact of the measures included in the Governments mini budget delivered in September and subsequent adjustments which had needed to be made by the Government in October, members also noted

the uncertainty in terms of further announcements anticipated in the Chancellors Fiscal Statement due to be delivered on 17 November 2022, which had the potential to require further review and adjustment of the Council's budget proposals for 2023-24 prior to them being finalised.

In concluding her introduction, Councillor Mili Patel once again highlighted how challenging and difficult development of the budget proposals had been and thanked Cabinet Members and officers for their support and efforts in the process.

In supporting the budget proposals, contained within the report, Cabinet Members recognised the ongoing nature of the challenges and financial pressures identified and also took the opportunity to thank the finance team for their work in developing the budget proposals whilst also seeking to safeguard, as far as possible, key services and support for local residents and businesses focussed around the Council's core strategic priorities. It was noted these priorities included maintaining the ongoing commitment to increase the supply of genuinely affordable and accessible housing alongside the regeneration of the borough and creation of employment opportunities whilst also seeking to keep the borough as clean and green as possible in tackling the climate emergency and provide for maintenance of key infrastructure. Members also welcomed the aim to continue prioritising the most vulnerable in society whilst also seeking to protect essential services particularly in relation to health and adult social care (given the significant pressure on health service funding), culture, children and young people in order to maintain support for residents across the borough and ensure the best possible outcomes for all.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt highlighted how the proposals, despite the significant challenges and frustrations identified in relation to wider funding constraints by the Government, had been designed to ensure the Council was able to deliver a balanced budget and ensure that the Council would continue to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way whilst seeking to support and protect local residents as far as was possible during such challenging times in line with the Council's core strategic priorities.

Having noted the current financial context in which the budget proposals had been developed Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the overall financial position, as set out within the report.
- (2) To approve consultation on the new budget proposals, as set out in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) To agree to consult on a Council Tax increase of 2.99% (consisting of a 1.99% general increase plus 1% for the Adult Social Care Precept) in 2023/24.
- (4) To endorse the approach to the statutory process of consultation, scrutiny and equalities between November 2022 and February 2023, as set out in Section 8 of the report.
- (5) To endorse the changes to the technical budget assumptions underpinning the budget, as set out in Section 4 of the report.

- (6) To note the position with regard to the funding for Schools and the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in Section 9 of the report.
- (7) To note the rent increase for 2023/24 would be subject to the outcome of the government consultation on the proposed rent cap, as set out in Section 10 of this report.
- (8) To note the position with regard to the Capital programme, as set out in Section 11 of the report.

8. **Update on New Affordable Housing Supply**

Prior to consideration of the item, Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) advised that he had accepted a request to speak on the report from Councillor Georgiou. In addressing Cabinet, Councillor Georgiou whilst recognising the increasing demand for affordable social housing and welcoming the update provided within the report sought clarification in relation to the number of new Council homes which had been developed and let to date under the New Council Homes Programme along with a breakdown on rent levels and tenure, including any provided under a shared ownership model. In expressing concern at the definition and inclusion of shared ownership as an affordable housing product, Councillor Georgiou supported the need for a more detailed review around the demand for shared ownership within Brent prior to any new Brent Shared Ownership offer being considered. Pending this, he urged Cabinet to consider rejecting the approach outlined within the report towards the conversion of schemes offering units at London Affordable Rent to Shared Ownership and also to consider preventing developers using shared ownership as an alternative to offering what he felt were more genuinely affordable housing products.

In responding to the comments raised, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to recognise the pressure on the Council to address increasing demand for the provision of affordable social housing across the borough along with the difficult nature of choices needing to be made around available options, given the significant challenges in meeting the level of need identified. In view of the clarification being sought, Councillor Butt advised he would arrange for a detailed response to be provided on the issues raised by Councillor Georgiou outside of the meeting.

Councillor Knight (Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security) was then invited to introduce the report which provided an update on the New Council Homes Programme (NCHP) along with an outline of the current pressures on the delivery of those schemes, both within contract and also in the pipeline, including details on the viability gaps identified and options to address them. In addition, the report also provided an overview on progress against three major projects being led by the Council in relation to South Kilburn, Wembley Housing Zone and St Raphael's Estate.

In considering the report and commending the progress made to date in delivery of the NCHP, Cabinet also recognised the social and economic factors now placing pressure on the viability of schemes already on site as well as those within the pipeline. Alongside the impact of rising inflation and construction costs, the

shortage of labour and materials members noted the impact of wider changes within the housing market that were reducing both the supply of social homes for rent and affordable rented homes within the private rented sector. This in turn had increased pressure on the Housing Need service to meet levels of demand, whilst fulfilling their statutory duties.

In terms of addressing the issues identified, members noted the options outlined for addressing the viability gaps outlined for each scheme on the basis of the further assessment undertaken (as detailed within Appendix 2 of the report). This had included the need to consider cross subsidising elements of the social housing provision with other forms of tenure for a number of schemes within the pipeline.

In noting the challenges identified, Cabinet highlighted their ongoing commitment to delivery of the current target for the development of new council homes by 2024 alongside the Council's ambition to continue playing a leading role in tackling the increasing demand for affordable social housing across the borough and in shaping developments to meet the needs of Brent's residents. As such members were supportive of the efforts being made to progress delivery of the programme, despite the significant challenges identified, with the Cabinet member and all officers involved thanked for their efforts in seeking to establish a viable way forward.

Having considered the report, including the exempt information included within Appendices 1 – 4, Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the content of the report and approve (as a result of further clarification provided) the following officers, namely Corporate Director Residents Services and Corporate Director Communities & Regeneration being authorised in respect of projects which are the responsibility of their departments (in consultation with Cabinet Members for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security & Regeneration and Planning respectively):
 - To convert schemes to include alternative tenures, either shared ownership or open market sale, with a view to making schemes viable and prioritise delivery of larger homes;
 - To utilise conversion in larger schemes to address financial pressures on schemes currently in contract;
 - To utilise conversion in larger schemes in order to address viability gaps for schemes not yet in contract but would provide much needed larger family sized accommodation.
- (2) To note the update provided for the Wembley Housing Zone.
- (3) To note the update provided for St Raphael's estate.
- (4) To approve that all new planning permission applications submitted as part of the New Council Homes Programme (NCHP) going forward commit to 50% affordable housing with a view to delivering above this wherever possible.

- (5) To approve a capital budget allocation of £44m (including 10% contingency) for the development at Edgware Road.
- (6) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services, in consultation with the Corporate Director for Finance & Resources and Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renter Security, to agree pre-tender considerations, invite tenders, evaluate tenders and thereafter to award development/construction contracts with developers/contractors for Edgware Road to the value of £40m + 10%.
- (7) To approve the use of Modern Methods of Construction for a minimum of 25% of all homes built under the second Homes for Londoners Programme as required by the GLA.
- (8) To commission a report into shared ownership demand in Brent and examples of best practice in order to influence a new 'Brent shared ownership offer'.
- (9) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services, to make an application to seek Secretary of State's consent under section 19 of the Housing Act 1985 to appropriate any part of St Raphael's Estate necessary to progress the development for planning purposes so that part of the Estate is no longer held for the purpose of Part II of the Housing Act 1985 as set out in Appendix 5 of the report.
- (10) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services in Consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security to consider the impact of the Public Sector Equalities Duty implications and to ensure compliance with that duty and to consult with those affected by the appropriation of areas within St Raphael's Estate and to consider the responses of the consultation and thereafter and where appropriate to appropriate the relevant parts of the St Raphael's Estate for planning purposes in order to facilitate the development pursuant to section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 as set out in Appendix 5 of the report.
- (11) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services in consultation with the Lead Member Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security to appropriate part of the open space at St Raphael's Estate s necessary to progress the development pursuant section 122 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 and prior to doing so to advertise for two consecutive weeks in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the land is situated and consider any objections to the proposed appropriation which may be made to them.
- (12) To approve the reduction of the affordable homes to be built at Neville and Winterleys on behalf of the Council from 101 units to 95 units in line with the proposal set out in section 6.5 to 6.7 of the report. To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services, any further changes up to a 5% tolerance.

9. **Future St Raphael's Estate**

Councillor Knight (Cabinet member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security) introduced a report outlining proposals for the transformation of St Raphael's Estate through the investment of £30million in relation to a programme of estate improvements.

In considering the programme, Cabinet noted the detailed outlined of the investment proposals, as set out in Appendix A of the report, which members were reminded had been solely focussed, at this stage, on delivery of the estate improvements developed as part of wider plans for the estate in consultation with local community representatives.

Whilst recognising the significant financial pressures on the Council, members welcomed the commitment outlined within the report towards delivery of the investment proposals, which it was noted included a focus on the following key areas – connectivity, green spaces and play, infrastructure improvements and the provision of a new community hub. The investment proposals identified were also felt to highlight the positive contribution that could be made through the application and utilisation of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) funding being generated within the borough.

Members thanked all those involved for their efforts in developing the proposals, which it was pointed out also reflected the Council's ambition and priority to deliver investment required to match local aspirations for the estate. On this basis, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note and approve the £30m budget and spending proposal, as detailed within the report.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Resident Services in consultation with the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources and Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, to approve any procurement of services and spend to successfully deliver all improvements outlined in Appendix A of the report, in accordance with the budgets set out in the proposal.

10. **Refurbishment of Granville New Homes**

Councillor Knight (Cabinet member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security) introduced a report providing an update on the progress in remediation of the housing stock known as Granville New Homes.

In considering the report, Cabinet welcomed the progress being made in delivery of the remediation works identified as required in order to ensure the continued provision of much needed accommodation for 110 Council tenants.

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

- (1) To agree the criteria for the works as set out in Section 4 of the report.
- (2) To approve the inviting of tenders and awarding the contract to a suitably experienced Technical Consultancy that will manage the design,

procurement and delivery of the refurbishment works to the properties based on the pre - tender considerations set out in paragraph 8.4 of the report.

- (3) To delegate of the award of the contract for Technical Consultancy to the Corporate Director, Residents Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Renters Security.
- (4) To delegate approval of the procurement, pre tender consideration, evaluation and contract award to a suitably experienced Contractor that will undertake the refurbishment works to the properties, to the Corporate Director, Residents Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Renters Security.
- (5) To approve the allocation of £26.4m inclusive of VAT from capital to fund the Works and Technical Consultancy services in accordance with the detail set out in the report.

11. **Cost of Living Crisis: Supporting Residents with a Warm Place in Brent this Winter**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities & Culture) introduced a report updating Cabinet on the actions being taken by the Council to help mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on residents across the borough, particularly in relation to the issue of rising energy bills over winter.

In considering the report, Cabinet recognised the ongoing impact and challenges being experienced by local residents as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and additional concerns identified in terms of the impact of increased energy bills over the upcoming winter months. As a result, members were advised that the report detailed the work being undertaken by the Council on a joined up basis alongside the voluntary, faith and community sectors to provide a range of respite and support for local residents, including those struggling with fuel poverty this winter as part of the national “Warm Welcome Campaign”.

Members welcomed the approach outlined within the report, which included the use of libraries to offer warm spaces and provision of advice, guidance and support through the Brent Hubs, Resident Support Fund, Fuel Poverty Toolkit, Financial Support leaflet (already provided for all households) and through the Council’s Digital Inclusion Strategy, with efforts also focussed on mapping the range of resources available working with the Council’s partners and other external organisations to ensure these were available online.

Given the current refurbishment works at Harlesden Library, Cabinet was assured of the work being undertaken to identify an alternative warm space location in that area.

In commending all those involved for their work to develop the overall package of support available for local residents in response to the cost-of-living crisis, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note that the Council network of “Warm Welcome Spaces” had

commenced with the Council's libraries registered on the warm welcome national website.

- (2) To note that work was under way to develop a cohesive joint offer for residents to access support, advice, warmth and temporary refuge or respite through the network of "Warm Welcome Spaces".
- (3) To note that the Council will work with partners across Brent to maximise impact and map where offers of support meet the needs and demands of Brent residents.
- (4) To note that a Council Project Group had been established reporting to the Council's Cost of Living Crisis Working Group, to monitor the take up and impact of the Warm Welcome Spaces approach. Representatives include Customer Access, Public Health, Strategy and Partnerships, Children & Young People: Early Help, Adult Social Care, and the Communications Team.
- (5) To note that meetings of the Group in (4) above would take place as the autumn and winter season progressed; in order that the impact of actions could be (re)worked, (re)considered and monitored.
- (6) To note that Facilities Management would prioritise maintenance of heating systems across the Council's estate to maintain the Council's public offer.
- (7) To note the proposal to progress the action plan tasks to the proposed timetable.
- (8) To note that pursuant to, and within the exercise of the delegated authority of the Corporate Director of Resident Services, limited financial support will be made available in the form of "Warm Welcome Spaces Grants" to community, faith and voluntary groups who make space available throughout the winter season and meet the criteria to offer a Warm Welcome spaces that is inclusive, non-judgmental, and where everyone can expect a warm welcome from staff and volunteers.
- (9) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Culture to set the eligibility criteria in respect of the funds available within the Council's current budget for a "Warm Welcome Spaces Grant".

12. School Place Planning Strategy 2019-23 Refresh

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools) introduced a report providing Cabinet with the outcome of the annual refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023.

In considering the report, members noted that the annual refresh of the Strategy provided an updated assessment of school place demand across the borough based on the latest pupil projections from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and therefore took into account changes in key factors such as the impact of birth rate, new housing or migration patterns along with the impact of Brexit and the pandemic on the local population and resulting effect on forecast demand for school places.

In noting the trends forecast in relation to primary, secondary, early years and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities school place provision, Cabinet recognised the work being undertaken to develop strategies working with schools to manage changing patterns of demand and to ensure the sustainability of provision, along with the potentially challenging nature of decisions that may be required over the longer term in this respect, for which planning was already underway.

Members were supportive of the overall approach adopted as part of the refresh of the strategy alongside the work being undertaken with Brent schools to address the longer-term challenges identified as a result of the forecast population trends in relation to school place planning.

Having considered the update provided, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) To note that Planning Areas had been reviewed to align with the new ward boundaries and that Planning Area 5 had been divided into two Planning Areas to support analysis of school places in the south of the borough.
- (3) To note current forecasts for primary and secondary places indicated a fall in demand in the short term, with larger impacts on some planning areas than others.
- (4) To note there remained significant and increasing demand for places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25, and the planned strategies for addressing this need (including the SEN Capital Programme of £44.19m approved by Cabinet in January 2022).
- (5) To note the reported impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Early Years provision and the strategies to support recovery in the sector.

13. **Consultation on Admissions Arrangements for Community Schools for 2024-2025**

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools) introduced a report seeking approval to consult on a number of changes to the Admission Arrangements for Brent Community Primary Schools for 2024-25.

In noting the rationale provided for the changes proposed in relation to the Admission Arrangements and consultation requirements Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve consultation on the following changes to the Admission Arrangements for Brent Community Schools for 2024/25:
 - (a) the removal of all admission criteria determined by catchment area, and their replacement with criteria for all siblings and all other children;
 - (b) a change to lift the priority of the children of staff criterion to before siblings;

- (c) expansion of the Medical and Social Needs criterion to include consideration of the medical or social needs of family members with caring or parental responsibility for an applicant.

14. **Annual Procurement Strategy Report - FY 2021-22**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) introduced a report detailing the Procurement Strategy Annual Report 2021-22.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the progress (as detailed within section 3 of the report) being made against each of the five pillars within the 2020-23 Procurement Strategy and way in which these had also been aligned to meet the key objectives within the Borough Plan 2019-23. These included the alignment with the Council's Social Value and Ethical Policy and proposal to undertake a further review of the main pillars within the Strategy in order to reflect the updated priorities within the Borough Plan during 2023.

In recognising the progress being made and associated benefits being achieved, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to note and approve the Annual Procurement Strategy report 2021-2022 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

15. **Complaints Annual Report 2021-22**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) introduced a report setting out complaints performance by Brent Council for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. The report included details on complaints performance relating to Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care which it was noted were governed by separate statutory complaint procedures.

In considering the report Cabinet noted the key headlines relating to complaints performance in 2021-22 which included a decrease in Stage 1 complaints by 13% but increase in number of Stage 2 complaints by 21% (43 cases) with 22 cases being upheld by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman against Brent in 2021-22 compared to 12 cases in the previous monitoring period. In recognising the ongoing impact on the volume and complexity of complaints as a result of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, members also welcomed the work being undertaken with those services identified as receiving the highest number of complaints, including housing repairs, housing customer experience and Council Tax. to review the complaints handling process and address the root causes of the complaints being received.

In thanking officers for their efforts in monitoring and managing complaints performance, members felt the issues and areas highlighted as key concerns reflected the nature of current challenges being experienced by many local residents requiring support and also the Council in being able to manage the increased level of demand for key services. As such the report was welcomed as a means of continuing to focus on the nature of complaints received and approach towards service improvement for residents.

Having considered the report Cabinet **RESOLVED** to note Brent's performance in managing and resolving complaints, as detailed within the Complaints Annual Report for 2021-22.

16. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

17. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting ended at 10.45 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair