



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Thursday 16 November 2023 at 10.00 am

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

None received.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

The following personal interests were declared in respect of Agenda Item 7 – Draft Budget 2024/25 and 2025/26 (budget saving proposals):

- Councillor Nerva – as one of the Council's appointed representatives on the North West London Integrated Care Partnership and Integrated Care Board.
- Councillor Donnelly-Jackson – as Chair of the Brent Disability Forum.

No other interests were declared at the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Cabinet **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 16 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

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

None

5. **Petitions (if any)**

There were no petitions presented for consideration at the meeting.

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. **Draft Budget 2024/25 and 2025/26**

Prior to consideration of the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) invited Rajas Falker, a local resident who had requested to speak on the item, to address the meeting. Having introduced herself, Mrs Falker advised she

was attending the meeting in order to express concerns about the budget saving proposal identified for 2025-26 relating to the potential closure of the New Millennium Day Centre, given the impact it was felt this would have on service users and carers using the Centre. In outlining the detrimental impact she felt the proposal would have on the health and wellbeing of existing service users and their carers the opportunity was also taken to advise members of the much valued level of care and social interaction being provided for vulnerable adults using the Centre, which she advised had enabled those individuals to thrive and flourish in a safe and supportive environment. Referring to the closure of other surrounding day care provision, Mrs Falker felt it was also important to recognise the importance locally of the service being provided by the New Millennium Day Centre. Whilst aware of the financial pressures faced by the Council, Mrs Falker ended by urging members to reconsider the saving proposal and to keep the New Millennium Day Centre open to ensure those vulnerable adults and their carers who relied on the service being provided were not adversely impacted and could continue to benefit from the support available through the Centre.

In response Councillor Nerva (as Cabinet Member for Public Health & Adult Social Care) whilst recognising the concerns highlighted, felt it important to begin by outlining the challenging context in which the budget proposals presented for consideration had needed to be developed. This had included the impact arising from austerity and the cumulative funding cuts which had been imposed on local authorities by the current Conservative Government along with their failure to deliver reform of the social care system. These challenges had been compounded, particularly in relation to adult social care providers across all sectors, by the wider economic and inflationary cost pressures currently being experienced alongside an increase in demand for services. Faced with the pressures identified the Council had needed to consider ways in which Adult Social Care services could continue to be delivered as effectively and sustainably as possible working in partnership across a range of sectors whilst also seeking to support and maximise, as part of a wider transformation process, the independence of service users.

In terms of the specific proposal identified, Mrs Falker was assured that the decision outlined for consideration at this stage was to commence a wider community and service user consultation and engagement process on the budget proposals identified. As part of the consultation process outlined, Councillor Nerva and Councillor Tatler (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform) confirmed this would include users of the New Millennium Day Centre and would involve a full assessment of options and alternative provision prior to any final decision being made on whether to proceed with the proposal. In concluding, Councillor Nerva again assured local residents and care users of the efforts that would be made to genuinely engage and seek views on the budget proposals without any form of predetermination but felt it important to stress the difficult nature of decisions needing to be considered and taken by the Council in seeking to balance the budget and ensure the sustainability of services which protected and supported the most vulnerable in the borough.

Having thanked Mrs Falker for highlighting the issues raised, the Leader then invited Councillor Tatler (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform) to introduce the report which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2024/25 and 2025/26. 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 serious and challenging nature of the Council's current financial position, which it was pointed out had arisen as a result of the unprecedented pressures created by continued economic uncertainty and inflationary pressures coupled with rapidly increasing demand for services and the reduction in government funding as a result of austerity since 2010. In noting that the pressures identified were being experienced across London, with it estimated that Council's across the region were facing an overall shortfall of £400million in funding during the current year, members noted that within Brent these additional pressures had led to a gap of £13million within the Council's budget. The additional pressures identified were related to increased demand in terms of Adult Social Care as well as the significant and again unprecedented increase currently being experienced in levels of homelessness and a reduction in supply and increase in costs for the provision of suitable Temporary Accommodation. Councillor Tatler advised that the position also reflected the level of cuts, totalling £210million, which the Council had been required to make since 2010 whilst core funding received from the government had decreased by 78%, increasing the funding burden on other sources such as Council Tax, Business Rates and Fees and Charges.

Having introduced a range of spending controls to assist in addressing the additional budget gap identified during 2024/25, members recognised the difficult nature of the decisions that would still be required to deliver a balanced budget and address the significant financial impacts arising from the demographic and inflationary pressures identified and ongoing uncertainty over future government funding for local government, whilst also seeking to ensure that the Council continued to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way. Given these uncertainties and the significant nature of the financial challenges identified the Council had therefore been required to bring forward a series of new savings proposals totalling £8million which, subject to approval following consultation and scrutiny, would need to be implemented in 2024/25 and 2025/26. 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 4.99% (based on a 2.99% general increase plus 2% for the Adult Social Care precept) would enable the Council to set a balanced budget. Whilst noting that these 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.

In concluding her introduction, Councillor Tatler once again highlighted how challenging and difficult development of the budget proposals had been and thanked Cabinet Members and officers for their support in the process with it noted that the priority remained to protect residents across the borough and ensure a safety net continued to be provided for the most vulnerable.

In supporting the budget proposals, contained within the report, Cabinet Members recognised the difficult 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. In noting the update provided in relation to the current pressures in relation to homelessness, concerns were expressed at the impact of the current funding arrangements in relation to the cap on level of housing benefit subsidy entitlement based on the applicable Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and also the governments delay in review of the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which had compounded the wider pressures identified. In terms of other priorities members highlighted the ongoing commitment towards maintaining the increase in supply of genuinely affordable and accessible housing alongside the regeneration of the borough whilst also seeking to keep the borough as clean and green as possible and tackle the climate emergency. 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 (including the support and care being provided for those with disabilities) and in addressing the pressures and challenges in relation to services for children and young people (including SEND provision and the demand and increasing cost of residential care) in order to maintain support for residents across the borough and ensure the best possible outcomes for all. As a result, members advised they were keen to encourage as many residents and other stakeholders as possible to engage in the budget consultation process, using all available means including opportunities such as the Disability Forum.

In summing up Councillor Muhammed Butt highlighted how the proposals, despite the significant financial pressures and challenges highlighted and concerns identified in relation to the impact of the wider funding reductions imposed by the Government since 2010 and subsequent reliance on use of Council Tax to address the financial burden created in areas such as adult social care, had been designed to ensure the Council was able to deliver a balanced budget and ensure that the Council could continue to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way whilst seeking to support and safeguard local residents as far as possible during such challenging times in line with the Council's core strategic priorities. In highlighting the importance of the Council's ongoing investment in the Council Tax Support Scheme and Brent Hubs as an example, he ended by outlining the commitment to ensure the consultation and decision-making process on the budget proposals was as transparent and open as possible and designed, as far as possible, to safeguard frontline services for the most vulnerable residents to ensure no one was left behind whilst seeking to deliver a balanced budget.

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

- (1) To note the overall financial position, as detailed within the report.
- (2) To agree to consult 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 4.99% (consisting of a 2.99% general increase plus 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept) in 2024/25.

- (4) To endorse the approach to the statutory process of consultation, scrutiny and equalities between November 2023 and February 2024, as set out in section eleven of the report.
- (5) To endorse the changes to the technical budget assumptions underpinning the budget, as set out in section seven 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 twelve of the report.
- (7) To note the lack of certainty over the level of the rent increase for the Housing Revenue Account in 2024/25 since the government had yet to publish the new regulations. In the absence of guidance, the draft budget had assumed an increase of CPI+1% (7.7%), as set out in section thirteen of the report.
- (8) To note the position with regard to the Capital programme, as set out in section fourteen of the report.

8. **Sudbury Town Residents' Association Application for Neighbourhood Forum Status**

Councillor Tatler (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Growth) introduced a report outlining the outcome of the consultation process undertaken on an application from the Sudbury Town Residents' Association (STRA) to be the Neighbourhood Forum for the Sudbury Town Neighbourhood Area and seeking a decision on the application.

In presenting the report, Councillor Tatler reminded members of the original background behind the introduction of neighbourhood planning which had been to provide residents and businesses in a specific area with the opportunity to engage in the identification of localised planning policies designed to assist in shaping development outcomes across the relevant area. Where local communities wanted to take up these opportunities there was a requirement to establish a Neighbourhood Forum as the relevant "qualifying body" with a requirement for Forum status to be renewed every five years. Members were advised that STRA had initially been designated as a Forum in December 2012 with the Sudbury Town Neighbourhood Plan having subsequently been adopted in September 2015. They had then successfully reapplied for Forum status in December 2017 with the current application to renew this status submitted in December 2022. As required, the current application had been subject to a statutory consultation process which had run from January – February 2023 with a summary of the responses detailed within Appendix F of the report. Of the 30 responses received members were advised that seven were in support of STRAs continued designation as a Forum, 16 had raised objections and the remaining seven had been submitted by statutory consultees. As part of the consultation responses, members also noted that a prospective counter application for Neighbourhood Forum status had been received from another organisation "Sudbury Matters". Given the issues raised in objection to STRAs application as part of the response to the consultation (as detailed within section 3.2.13 of the report) and as it was only possible for one Forum to be designated in any specific area, attempts had been made to engage and arbitrate with STRA utilising an independent organisation who specialised in providing support to local community organisations. Despite these efforts. Members were

advised it had not been possible to resolve the concerns identified and having applied the statutory criteria and tests (as set out within the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 and Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012) in assessing the application and considered the outcome of the consultation process and lack of progress it had been possible to make with STRA in addressing the issues identified, it had been recommended that STRA's application for Neighbourhood Forum status should be refused.

Members were supportive of the approach outlined, having considered the attempts made to engage with STRA and representations received following consultation on their application for Neighbourhood Forum status, which it was noted had included concerns relating to the transparency, accessibility and diversity of the organisation along with a lack of focus on neighbourhood planning activities or clarity on the distinction between the Forum and wider Resident Association business and perceived lack of political impartiality.

Officers were thanked for their work in engaging with STRA throughout the renewal process and it was **RESOLVED** to confirm that the Council refuse STRA's application to be the Neighbourhood Forum for the Sudbury Town Neighbourhood Area as set out in the refusal statement in Appendix G of the report.

9. **Statement of Gambling Principles 2024-2027**

Councillor Farah (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities & Public Protection) introduced a report setting out the Statement of Gambling Principles, which Cabinet noted it was a requirement for all local authorities designated as a Licensing Authority to have to keep under review and prepare and publish every three years, under the Gambling Act 2005.

In considering the report members were advised that as part of the Statement each Licensing Authority was expected to outline local issues, priorities and risks that would be used to inform their approach and policy for dealing with applications and regulating gambling premises, with the draft updated Statement for Brent having been detailed within Appendix 1 of the report. In preparing the Statement of Principles each authority would also be required to reflect current regulations and have regard to the Gambling Commission's guidance, with members noting the limitations these placed on Licensing Authorities in terms of relevant matters that could be taken into consideration when setting the policy and considering specific licensing applications.

Members were advised that the draft Statement of Principles had been subject to an extensive consultation process, with the responses and any amendments included as a result having been detailed within Appendix 2 of the report.

In recognising the work undertaken to prepare the revised draft Statement, Members specifically welcomed the focus included under Objective 3 in terms of the protection of children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling. Concerns were, however, expressed at the limits placed on Licensing Authorities under the current legislation in terms of relevant matters that could be taken into account when considering applications in relation to gambling premises, which excluded being able to consider issues such as public health, demand or moral objections.

In recognising the concerns highlighted and efforts made within the draft Statement of Principles to continue seeking to protect, as far as was possible within the limitations of current regulations, local communities and individuals from the harm and anti-social behaviour associated with gambling activity Cabinet **RESOLVED** to note and approve (without any amendment) the draft revised Statement of Gambling Principles (31 January 2022 – 31 January 2025) as set out within Appendix 1 of the report, for recommendation to Full Council on 20 November 2023 in order to confirm its formal adoption and fulfill the necessary legal requirements.

10. **Consultation on Brent Council's School Admission Arrangements for Community Primary Schools in 2025/26**

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) introduced a report which set out proposed amendments to the Admission arrangements for Brent Community Schools in 2025 – 26 along with proposals for formal consultation on a reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Mitchell Brook Primary School and Fryent Primary School.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the detail provided in support of the proposals, recognising the fall in demand for pupil places within the primary sector across areas of the borough. In commenting on the nature of the challenges identified, members felt it important to note the impact of the current cost-of-living crisis, increase in the cost of housing and changes introduced as a result of austerity to the welfare system which it was felt had all contributed to families struggling to afford to settle in the borough and across London, with the associated impact on varying demand for pupil places made more challenging (especially in relation to the primary sector) by the ongoing pressures on school funding as a result of the Government's education policy.

In commending the work being undertaken with schools to support them in managing the impact of falling demand and any resulting transition process, members also recognised the way in which the proposals had been designed to support and ensure the longer-term sustainability of educational provision across the borough given the importance of schools and education provision across Brent.

As a result, it was **RESOLVED** to approve consultation being undertaken on the following amendments to existing admission arrangements (having noted that the proposals were not inter-dependent and could be agreed individually):

- (1) The reduction of the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Mitchell Brook Primary School from 90 to 60.
- (2) The reduction of the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Fryent Primary School from 120 to 90.

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.

In closing the meeting Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of Council) took the opportunity to formally thank Zahur Khan for his support to the Cabinet and in the delivery of services to residents across the borough during his time at Brent. Noting this would be his final Cabinet meeting in advance of leaving the Council to return to a new role at Lewisham, Members took the opportunity to wish him well.

The meeting ended at 10.52 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair