



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

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

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

Also present: Councillor Mashari (for Agenda Item 7, as Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Task Group)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

None.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

It was noted that Peter Gadsdon, Strategic Director Customer & Digital Services and Gail Tolley, Strategic Director Children & Young People both had personal (non-pecuniary) interests in relation to Items 9 and 10 as Council appointed representatives on the i4B Holdings Ltd and First Wave Housing Ltd Boards.

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. **Budget and Council Tax 2021/22**

Prior to consideration of the main report Councillor M Butt, Leader of the Council, invited Councillor Mashari as Chair of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Task Group to introduce the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report, which had been included as an appendix to the Budget and Council Tax 2021/22 report. Councillor Mashari began by advising that whilst supportive of

the overall budget proposals the Budget Scrutiny Task Group had, as part of their review of the proposals, identified a number of key findings and recommendations. These included what the Task Group had considered to be a need:

- to more clearly demonstrate within the budget how funding followed the democratically agreed strategic priorities for the borough;
- to outline how the £1m funding allocated for implementation of the Borough Plan objectives would be spent;
- to ensure a cumulative equality impact assessment of the final decisions made within the budget was undertaken reflecting the severe impact of the covid pandemic;
- for an in-depth analysis and modelling to be undertaken in order to identify the impact of the UK leaving the EU on residents, funding streams and the local economy; and
- to undertake a full and independent economic analysis of the borough ahead of future budget setting processes in order to better inform decisions.

In summing up, Councillor Mashari thanked the members and officers who had been engaged in the review process. In response, Councillor M Butt expressed his own gratitude for the hard work of members and officers in producing the report and highlighted its importance to the overall budget setting process.

Councillor M Butt then welcomed Paul Lorber to the meeting who he advised had requested to speak on the Budget and Council Tax 2021/22 report. In addressing Cabinet, Paul Lorber recognised the various elements that contributed to the budget and in particular the different elements of Council Tax. He felt it important to ensure there was no duplication in the way certain proposals within the budget were funded in order to mitigate the impact of any Council Tax increase on residents. As specific examples, he referred to the proposals for an additional payment to staff, to pursue the London Living Wage (LLW) as standard within Council contracts and to provide £1 million as an additional growth pressure identified as an allowance for uncertainty. In reference to the overall level of reserves being held, he urged the Council to consider funding these proposals from reserves rather than as an additional charge against the base budget.

Councillor McLennan, as Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources then introduced the report which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2021/22 and 2022/33. The report also set out the results of the budget consultation, scrutiny and equality processes and the overall financial position facing the Council for the medium-term.

Councillor McLennan also took the opportunity to thank all officers and members who had been involved in the budget setting process, including those members involved in the Budget Scrutiny Task Group. She highlighted the impact that the pandemic had had on the Council's income and expenditure, which had required additional savings to be identified over the next two financial years. Despite central government promising to cover the costs of the pandemic, much of the funding received had fallen short of covering the resultant expenditure and loss of income. Looking to the future, Councillor McLennan drew members' attention to what the Council aimed to achieve over the next year, as set out in the draft Borough Plan. She also commented on the proposed 4.99% increase in Council Tax, which included the full 3% precept permitted for Adult Social Care, which had been

identified as required to continue providing support for residents as the borough moved forward in response to the pandemic. Members were assured that the Council would continue to push for a fairer Council Tax system in the future, with the Council continuing to fund and provide support through its Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme.

In response to the comments raised at the start of the item regarding the proposed increase to the Council Tax, Councillor M Butt advised that he fully supported the proposals for an additional payment to staff who had worked so tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support local residents and who had had their wages frozen by central government for 2021/22. In regard to the LLW, he felt it would be hard not to support proposals to pursue it as standard within Council contracts considering the levels of poverty within the borough. Councillor M Butt once again thanked members and officers for their hard work in ensuring the best possible level of service was provided to residents over the forthcoming years.

In supporting the budget proposals, Councillor Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning thanked officers for their tireless work in producing the budget for 2021/22, and more widely those officers who had been working under difficult circumstances throughout the pandemic. She brought members' attention to the continued underfunding of local services by central government and despite recognising the need to consider the proposals within this context, commended the proposals for delivering another balanced budget that would allow the Council to continue fulfilling their strategic aims. As specific examples, she referred to the Council's continued support for education settings, affordable housing initiatives, tree planting, health centres and town centres and local businesses as well as the New Council Home Programme (NCHP), Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Programme and new adult education centre in Stonebridge. Councillor Tatler also echoed Councillor M Butt's comments regarding the LLW and gave her support to proposals to pursue it as standard within Council contracts.

Councillor Knight, Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement gave her support to the budget proposals and thanked officers for their hard work in bringing the proposals forward. She felt that the proposals mitigated against any perceived risks in terms of the work being undertaken by the Community Protection and Enforcement Teams. She was also pleased, in light of the work that the Regulatory Support and Anti-Social Behaviour Teams had undertaken during the pandemic to keep residents safe, that no reductions had been proposed in this area.

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment expressed her gratitude for the hard work of the Environment Team over the past year despite the challenging circumstances brought about by the pandemic. A number of initiatives were highlighted, including the work to provide emergency mortuary capacity, ongoing levels of enforcement activity and continued delivery of the footway programme.

In commending the budget proposals, Councillor Mili Patel recognised the difficulties that officers faced when looking to ensure children in the borough remained protected, whilst looking at ways in which expenditure across the service could be managed. She assured members that the budget proposals would ensure efficiency across the service in terms integration with health partners, and was also keen to highlight the provision made for plans to implement proposals for use of the

Gordon Brown Centre. Councillor Mili Patel thanked all officers across the service for their hard work in preparing the budget proposals and over the past year more generally, and felt encouraged by the high level of public engagement in the budget process.

Councillor Stephens, Lead Member for Schools, Employment and Skills praised the budget proposals and felt that they showed the Council was committed to supporting its residents. He highlighted the range of employment support proposed, especially in the context of the pandemic recovery and made particular reference to Brent Work, the impact which the creation of a new state of the art education centre would have on the support available from Brent Starts as well as the continued investment that the Council continued to provide to support local schools and Special Educational Needs provision.

Councillor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, thanked all officers for the hard work during the pandemic especially those on the frontline. She felt that the Council had responded well to the pandemic, and that the budget proposals set out a clear vision for recovery. With regard to the proposed increase in Council Tax, she reminded members that central government had encouraged this increase as part of their Annual Spending Review and that, in spite of this, the Council would continue to resource its CTS scheme so that the most vulnerable residents were protected. Councillor Southwood also assured members of the sustainable support the Council were looking to provide through the Resident Support Fund, which had provided hardship support to residents throughout the pandemic.

Councillor Nerva, Lead Member for Public Health, Culture and Leisure also endorsed the budget proposals and thanked all officers, particularly those working within public health, for their response to the pandemic. He was pleased that, despite the budget pressures the Council had secured funding for the provision of Health Champions who would work directly with communities to alleviate health inequalities and had put over £1 million into the boroughs cultural legacy resulting from the Borough of Culture programme including support for Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) across the borough.

In summing up, Councillor M Butt highlighted the challenging nature of the budget setting process given the ongoing impact of the pandemic and central government's continued underfunding of local authorities. He felt it was important to recognise that members and officers had looked at every aspect of their services to ensure budgets could be managed whilst delivering key strategic priorities and protecting the most vulnerable residents in the borough. He highlighted the use of the CTS scheme to mitigate against the impact of the proposed Council Tax increase; the Resident Support Fund to support those residents in hardship during the pandemic; the NCHP; the Climate Emergency Strategy; proposals to ensure digital inclusion across the borough and the range of regeneration and environmental infrastructure projects underway. Councillor M Butt also commended the transparency and accessibility of the budget setting process, ensuring residents were engaged and the Council were accountable for their actions.

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

- (1)** To recommend to full Council an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2021/22, with 3% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 1.99% general increase.
- (2)** To recommend to full Council the General Fund revenue budget for 2021/22, as summarised in Appendix A of the report.
- (3)** To recommend to full Council the cost pressures and technical adjustments detailed in Appendix B of the report.
- (4)** To recommend to full Council the budget savings proposals detailed in Appendix C of the report.
- (5)** To note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Panel, as set out in Appendix D of the report.
- (6)** To recommend to full Council the HRA budget for 2021/22, as set out in Section 7 of the report.
- (7)** To agree the HRA rents for council dwellings, tenant service charges and garages, as set out in Section 7 of the report.
- (8)** To agree the rents set under the Housing General Fund for Brent Housing PFI and traveller's site pitches and to note the rents for Hillside dwellings as set out in Section 7 of the report.
- (9)** To note the Dedicated Schools Grant as set out in Section 8 of the report.
- (10)** To agree to refinance the loan for First Wave Housing, as set out in Section 10 of the report.
- (11)** To agree to recommend to full Council the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix E of the report.
- (12)** To agree to recommend to full Council the Capital Strategy, the Investment Strategy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendices G, H, I and J of the report.
- (13)** To agree to recommend to full Council the schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendix K of the report.
- (14)** To agree, and where relevant agree to recommend to full Council, the schedule of fees and charges set out at in Appendix L of the report.
- (15)** To note the results of the budget consultation as set out in Section 6 and detailed in Appendix M of the report.
- (16)** To note the advice of the Director of Legal, HR, Audit and Investigations as set out in Appendix N of the report.
- (17)** To note and approve the specific recommendations identified for consideration by Full Council as detailed in section 2.17 – 2.36 of the report.

8. **Borough Plan 2021-2022**

Councillor McLennan, as Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced a report setting out the vision, strategic priorities and action within a refresh of the Borough Plan for 2021/22.

Members noted that the refresh of the Borough Plan 2021/22 set out how the Council would take forward the delivery of the five key strategic priority areas over the final year of the current Administration. It included refocussed actions against each priority reflecting work since the adoption of the previous version of the Plan and drawing on the experience of the pandemic. As specific examples, Councillor McLennan referred to proposed actions to tackle homelessness, reduce health inequalities, provide youth opportunities, tackle the climate emergency and deliver employment and training support as well as the Black Community Action Plan. It was also noted that the draft Plan reflected the Council's Equality Strategy 2019-23, ensuring equitable access to public functions, employment and work, goods and services, premises, associations, transport and education.

Having considered the draft Borough Plan 2021/22, it was **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- (1) Agree the draft Borough Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and draft Equality Strategy Action Plan, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, and refer them to Full Council for adoption on 22 February 2021.
- (2) Agree to continue monitoring implementation of the Borough Plan.

9. **i4B Business Plan 2021-22**

Councillor McLennan, as Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced a report on the draft i4B Holdings Ltd (i4B) Business Plan 2021/22.

Members noted that i4B had been set up to own and manage private rented sector properties, in order to support the Council in tackling homelessness and provide safe and secure housing. Members were also reminded that the company was set up strictly for the borough's housing needs and that the Council was its sole shareholder. As sole shareholder, the Council provided significant scrutiny of the company.

Councillor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform thanked those involved in the running of i4B, which formed an important element of the Council's response to tackling the homelessness agenda by providing safe and secure housing which was closely aligned with the needs of residents.

Councillor M Butt, Leader of the Council drew specific attention to the purchase of the block of 153 units in Wembley Park which would be let to key workers. He felt that this demonstrated the Council's commitment to increasing the amount of affordable housing and supporting other public sector organisations to recruit and train employees in the borough.

Members fully supported the recommendations contained in the report and noted that i4B was expected to generate its first surplus earlier than expected in the forthcoming year, acknowledging the hard work of all those involved in the running of the company.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- (1) Approve the proposals within the 2021/22 Business Plan.
- (2) Approve the content and proposed strategic priorities of i4B's 2021/22 Business Plan.
- (3) Approve the updated financial model contained within the 2021/22 Business Plan.

10. **FWH Business Plan 2021-22**

Councillor McLennan, as Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced a report on the draft First Wave Housing Ltd (FWH) Business Plan 2021/22.

Members attention was drawn to the company's void performance, which it was noted had not been in line with business plan targets. As a result FWH were reviewing options with the Council's Housing Management team to improve performance. It was also recognised that capital investment works in relation to eight of the company's blocks in South Kilburn, which were taken over from Brent Housing Partnership, had taken longer than expected. Members were assured that the company's main priority for the forthcoming year was to identify a safe, viable and affordable way of improving the condition of these blocks.

Councillor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform recognised, as previously highlighted, the improvements that needed to be made in the service provided to FWH over the forthcoming year. It was noted that significant capital investment was required in its stock, and that the scale of the investment remained to be quantified. Members were assured that actions had been identified to address these issues on which further updates would be provided as the final position was clarified.

Having considered the update provided, it was **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- (1) Approve the proposals within the 2021/22 Business Plan.
- (2) Approve the content and proposed strategic priorities of FWH's 2021/22 Business Plan.

11. **Meanwhile Use Strategy & Action Plan**

Councillor Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning introduced a report on the Meanwhile Use Strategy and Action Plan, which was part of a wider agenda to support local businesses and high streets.

Councillor M Butt, Leader of the Council highlighted the positive feedback that he and other Lead Members had received regarding the strategy, which it was felt would provide a strong way forward over the long-term.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the Meanwhile Use Strategy & Action Plan.

12. **Recommissioning of Housing Related Support (HRS) Services**

Councillor Farah, Lead Member for Adult Social Care introduced a report on the re-procurement of Housing Related Support (HRS). Members noted the changes identified to the level of HRS services being procured, which it was reported had been due to reduced demand rather than the need for budget reductions.

In supporting the recommendations, Councillor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform acknowledged the clarity provided regarding the changes to the level of HRS services, and highlighted the importance of ensuring that services responded to the needs of residents.

Councillor Knight, Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement thanked the Lead Member and officers for the increased level of support for Domestic Abuse Services and the Single Women with Complex Support Needs Service, especially in light of the increase in levels of domestic violence identified during the pandemic.

In summing up, Councillor M Butt, Leader of the Council praised the level of support available to residents through HRS services, in particular homelessness and ex-offender provision, as well as the proposal to ensure all contracts were tendered at London Living Wage levels.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- (1)** Approve inviting tenders for Housing Related Support (HRS) for Homelessness services (including ex-offenders); Mental Health services; Young Persons Services; Domestic Abuse Refuges and Complex Women's service; Generic Floating Support service, Older Persons Floating Support service and Handy Person service to be procured as seven separate contracts on the basis of the pre - tender considerations set out in paragraph 3.19 of the report for initial contract term of three years with two plus 1 year options to extend (5 years in total). The anticipated commencement date would be 1st November 2021 and a total contract value of £15,189,940.
- (2)** Approve Officers evaluating the tenders referred to in (1) on the basis of the evaluation criteria set out in paragraph 3.19 of the report.
- (3)** Agree that contracts are tendered at London Living Wage (LLW) levels under the new proposed HRS service contracts as set out in Section 4 of the report.

- (4) Delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Community and Wellbeing in consultation with the Lead Member for Adult Social Care to award the contract for HRS services as detailed in the report.

13. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

14. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting ended at 11.05 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair