



Brent

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 6 December 2021
at 10.00 am

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

Also present: Councillor Kennelly for agenda item 7

1. **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mili Patel.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 8 November 2021 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

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

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) welcomed a member of the public, Nicola O'Brien, to the meeting as an online participant who had been invited to address the meeting in order to present a petition with 236 signatures requesting the reinstallation of a water standpipe in Roundwood Park.

Referring to a reply received on the petition, Nicola O'Brien began by highlighting what was felt to be the disproportionate response to the recent vandalism of the standpipe involving its entire removal. Whilst recognising the concern around water wastage as a result of the damage caused, it was pointed out that the standpipe had been suffering from a slow leak which was unrelated and had remained unfixed prior to the vandalism. Although advised that the standpipe had not been designated for public use, Nicola O'Brien pointed out it had been relied upon and used by park users without any previous objection or issue prior to the current vandalism. She also queried its use purely as a source of water for the surrounding flower beds, pointing out that the design of the standpipe included an auto shut-off press tap which faced away from the flower beds and towards the public footpath. As such it was felt the design encouraged use by park users looking for a supply or refill of water.

In terms of the alternative option suggested regarding use of the café to purchase or supply water, those who had signed the petition did not feel this was appropriate given the busy nature of the café, costs and fact this would involve the supply of plastic bottles which would also be wasteful and more damaging to the environment than use of the standpipe as a public water supply. Whilst noting the proposal currently being investigated to restore the original public water fountain by the main entrance to the park, concerns had been expressed that no timescale had been provided on this. It was noted that similar water supplies appeared to be available in other parks and green spaces, with the petitioners feeling the removal of the standpipe to be unjustified given the impact on park users. As a result, Nicola O'Brien advised that the petitioners were asking the Council to reconsider its original decision and to reinstall the standpipe and tap.

In responding, Councillor Krupa Sheth (Lead Member for Environment), thanked Nicola O'Brien for presenting the petition and advised that the original decision to remove the standpipe had been taken following a number of acts of vandalism which had taken place in quick succession of a number of repairs having been undertaken. This had included damage to the auto shut-off tap, which it was acknowledged had been a feature of the standpipe. Given the constraints on the Parks Service budget, the combination of the repeated vandalism and associated cost of repairs along with the resulting loss of water, the decision had reluctantly been made to remove the pipe and ensure there was a connection only for use by the contractor in watering the surrounding flower beds. Confirmation was provided that, although used by the public, the standpipe was not designed for that purpose with its intended use only to provide water for the flower beds. The level of local concern regarding its removal had, however, been recognised with an assurance provided that the Council was continuing to investigate the cost and work required to restore the original water fountain at the main entrance to the park. This would include options available to seek external funding with Nicola O'Brien advised she would be kept updated on progress, as lead petitioner.

Having noted the response provided, Councillor M Butt (Leader of the Council) ended by welcoming the contribution made at the meeting and reaffirming the Council's commitment to continue working with all stakeholders and Friends of the Park Groups in order to ensure access was maintained for everyone to parks and their facilities across the borough. Recognising the level of local concern amongst park users, an assurance was provided that the Council would consider the specific issues raised in relation to the standpipe in Roundwood Park and any alternative solutions available, although it was pointed out this would need to be within the context of the significant financial pressures needing to be managed across the Authority.

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

There were no references from Scrutiny submitted for consideration at the meeting.

7. Draft Budget 2022/23

Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) welcomed Councillor Kennelly to the meeting who he advised had requested to speak in relation to the draft budget proposals. In addressing Cabinet,

Councillor Kennelly, whilst recognising the challenging nature of the budget position faced by the Council, was keen to highlight the importance in maintaining a focus on key infrastructure requirements, including maintenance of footways. Highlighting the support expressed locally for the repairs and maintenance undertaken on footways in Preston ward he also outlined the wider importance of this in terms of supporting the Council's objectives towards encouraging more active forms of travel and in tackling the Climate Emergency. As a result he asked Cabinet to ensure that consideration was given, as part of the budget proposals, to securing and maintaining the necessary levels of resources required to support the need for ongoing and future infrastructure investment, especially in relation to footways.

In responding to the comments raised, Councillor Butt (Leader of the Council) highlighted the challenges needing to be addressed in securing the necessary resources to be able to support the key priorities identified by the Council, given the constraints on available funding. The issue raised in relation to securing long term investment to support infrastructure including footways had, however, been recognised with funding discussions also being pursued with key stakeholders, including TfL.

Having noted the response provided, Councillor McLennan was then invited to introduce the report, which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2022/23. The report also provided a general update on the Council's overall financial position, including an assessment of the Chancellors Autumn budget statement.

In considering the report Cabinet noted that, given the final year of the current Administration, no new budget proposals were being recommended with the position for 2022/23 broadly in line with that estimated at the time of the last budget in February 2021 and subsequent monitoring updates. The proposals within the report would enable the Council to set a balanced budget in 2022/23 with the key features being:

- A proposed Council Tax increase of 3% for the Brent element with the GLA precept currently to be advised;
- Ongoing delivery of the budget saving proposals (all of which had been considered by Council in February 2021) with an aggregate value of £2.7m as detailed within Appendix A of the report;

It was noted that whilst the Government's Spending Review had announced an increase in core spending power this had been based on the assumption that Councils would increase their Council Tax by the 3% maximum allowable without triggering a local referendum, with a majority of the additional funding linked to social care reforms. Members also noted this followed a ten year period of significant reductions in Government funding which had required the Council to make £185m worth of savings despite an increase in demand for key services.

In addition, the report detailed the proposals for the Council to participate in a sub London mini Business Rates Pool with Members also noting the updates provided in relation to the current position on the Dedicated Schools Grant and ongoing pressures on the High Needs Block, along with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). In terms of the HRA, this included details on a proposed increase of 4.1% in average rent (based on CPI + 1%) which members noted had been required to take account of inflation led growth and continued investment in the Council's Housing Stock.

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

In supporting the proposals contained within the report, Cabinet also noted the overview provided on the planned spending and financing of the Council's Capital Programme from 2022/23 – 2026/2. The ongoing challenges in relation to the Medium Term Financial Strategy were also noted given continued uncertainty around wider funding reforms, the continuing impacts of Brexit and Covid-19 on local residents and businesses across the borough.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt highlighted how the proposals, subject to their agreement following consultation, would deliver a balanced budget and ensure that the Council would continue to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way in seeking to limit as far as possible the impact on front line services whilst also providing for growth in essential areas based on the core strategic priorities identified.

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

- (1) Note the Council's overall financial position.
- (2) Endorse the budget proposals for 2022/23 that were previously agreed at the Council meeting of 22 February 2021, as set out in Appendix A of the report.
- (3) Agree to consult on a Council Tax increase of 3% in 2022/23.
- (4) Agree to participate in a sub London Business Rates Pool in 2022/23 and delegate authority to the Director of Finance to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the participating authorities as may be necessary to implement and/or regulate the pool.
- (5) Delegate authority to the Director of Finance to agree to participate in such pools in subsequent years (in consultation with the Lead Member) and to enter into Memorandum of Understandings in respect of any such subsequent pools.
- (6) Note the position with regard to the funding for Schools and the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in Section 7 of the report.
- (7) Agree to consult on a rent increase of 4.1% (CPI + 1%) for the 2022/23 Housing Revenue Account budget, as set out in Section 8 and Appendix B of the report.
- (8) Note the position with regard to the Capital programme, as set out in Section 9 of the report.

8. **Brent Infrastructure Funding Statement 2020/21**

Councillor Tatler (Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning) introduced the report, which detailed the Council's second Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) prepared in accordance with the requirements within the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) (Amendment) Regulations 2019.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the outline provided relating to the purpose of CIL as a funding mechanism to assist in the delivery of infrastructure to support development of an area and annual requirement within the IFS to detail how CIL funding has been spent in line with the regulations. In addition, the IFS was designed to set out, where possible, future spending priorities on infrastructure in line with growth identified within the Local Plan, Borough Plan and Capital Pipeline, with confirmation provided that CIL could not be used to fund pre-existing budget deficits or deficiencies.

Whilst recognising the impact of the pandemic on the programme of development across the borough, members noted the continued strong performance of the Council in terms of the collection of CIL receipts, as detailed within section 3 of the report. The wide ranging and diverse nature of infrastructure projects being supported through the CIL process was also highlighted and commended by members (with specific reference to the Morland Gardens Scheme and Youth Provision) along with the allocation of funding aligned to support corporate strategies, including the Black Community Action Plan, Poverty Commission Action Plan, Inclusive Growth Strategy, Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Draft Long Term Transport Strategy. Clarification was also provided in relation to the use of Neighbourhood CIL in an area with a Neighbourhood Forum, with confirmation provided that up to 25% of CIL funds collected from liable developments within a Forum boundary could be spent on priorities identified by the Neighbourhood Forum covering that area provided they were operating with an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. Of the three Neighbourhood Forums operating in Brent, members were advised that two (Sudbury Town Residents Association and Harlesden) were operating with an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

Having thanked officers for their efforts in relation to performance on the collection of CIL receipts during such a challenging period and noted the associated benefits being achieved through the wider regeneration programme across the borough
Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the content of the report and Brent Infrastructure Funding Statement 2020/21, as detailed within Appendix 1.
- (2) To approve the Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication.

9. **Digital Strategy and Business Case 2022-2026**

Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader & Lead Member for Resources) introduced the report presenting the Draft Digital Strategy 2022-26 and Outline Business Case for an extension of the Digital Programme to 2026 along with the capital investment required to deliver the Strategy.

In considering the report Cabinet noted that the 2022-26 Strategy had been designed to build on the outcomes, savings and efficiencies delivered through the previous 2019-23 Strategy. In noting the key achievements delivered through the

2019-23 Strategy to date, as set out within section 3.4 of the report, the crucial role that digital technology had played as part of the response to the Covid 19 pandemic was also highlighted alongside the ongoing support digital transformation was providing in relation to delivery of the Council's core strategic objectives. Whilst recognising the positive impact of digital transformation, members were also aware of the impact the pandemic had had in serving to expose wider inequalities, including those related to digital exclusion, which the 2022-26 Strategy had also been designed to address

Members also noted the details provided within the Outline Business Case (attached as Appendix 2 to the report) on the level of investment required to support delivery of the Strategy along with the potential savings arising from the programme and details of priority projects and technology investments, with the key themes and supporting benefits detailed within section 3.11 of the report. The core capital investment required to deliver the Strategy had been identified as £9.3m with total cumulative savings of £14.8m being forecast after Year 4 along with an estimated recurring annual saving of £3.9m after 3 years based on new enabling and efficiency savings. In addition, members were advised of £4.2m being sought in relation to the Business Support Fund and provision of up to 8,000 devices identified to support connectivity for digitally excluded households. The Outline Business Case also included a cost benefit analysis in terms of the identified programme, which included support for a range of social investment and potential future savings being included as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy covering 2023-26.

In supporting and welcoming the Strategy, members were keen to recognise the wide ranging benefits associated with the programme. These not only included the efforts being made to address digital exclusion but also to improve the way in which data was provided and shared to support the planning, development and delivery of service improvements and to provide the necessary digital infrastructure and skills to support the local economy and business, whilst also supporting a healthier, safer and cleaner borough. As part of the approach outlined, members also highlighted the need to engage closely with key strategic partners, such as health providers, to ensure a joined up approach towards the digital experience provided for all service users.

Having thanked officers for their work to develop the Strategy and noted the significant economic and social benefits which would accompany its delivery alongside the Council's core strategic priorities, Cabinet **RESOLVED** having noted the information provided within the exempt appendix of the report:

- (1) To agree the Digital Strategy 2022-26 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) To agree the Outline Business Case as set out in Appendix 2 of the report with the funding identified to deliver the programme.
- (3) To approve the establishment of a Business Support Fund as set out in Appendix 2 and Section 3.19 of the report.
- (4) To delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Resources to agree eligibility criteria for the Business Support Fund.

(5) To delegate to the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services authority to administer and award assistance from the Business Support Fund.

10. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting ended at 10:42am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair