



**MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Held as a Virtual Meeting on Tuesday 19 July 2022 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT (in remote attendance): Councillors Conneely (Chair), Long (Vice-Chair) Ahmadi Moghaddam, Akram, Bajwa, S. Butt, Fraser, Georgiou, Moeen and J. Patel.

Also Present: Councillors Mili Patel and Krupa Sheth.

**1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miller and Mitchell, with Councillors Fraser and Moeen attending as alternates.

**2. Declarations of interests**

None.

**3. Deputations (if any)**

None.

**4. Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meetings held on 9 March 2022 and 9 June 2022 be approved as an accurate record

**5. Matters arising (if any)**

The Committee were updated that prior to the meeting a deputation had been received from a resident, Mr Philip Grant. This was in regards to a presentation which was made to this committee in the previous municipal year, on the Poverty Commission Update at the 9 March 2022 meeting of the Committee. Further information had been received from the Brent Housing Department on this issue which the Committee would be considering in the future, and commenting on any further recommendations at the Committee's September meeting.

**6. Medium Term Financial Strategy – Summer Update**

This update was presented by Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) and Minesh Patel (Director of Finance, Brent Council). The report highlighted the uncertainties and risks with regard to budget setting, as part of the process of setting the Council's budget for the year 2023/24. There were no new proposals by way of this report, other than the estimate of a budget gap of around £28 million from the budget of 2023/24 to 2024/25. The report also outlined how the medium term financial framework of the Council would aim to provide

investment to longer-term priorities, such as those outlined in the Borough Plan, as well as the response to Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis.

It was acknowledged that the report reflected financial uncertainty in the national economy, owing to factors such as Covid-19, high levels of inflation and the global impact of the war in Ukraine. Together with local changes, this required the need for substantial savings within the Council's budget. Due to the lack of clarity around future levels of funding for local government, the Committee were updated that it was difficult to be precise around future financial targets. When the budget for 2022/23 was initially agreed by the Council in February 2022, it was assumed that a further savings of £12 million were required in the next few years. However, based on the new information since then, the Committee were updated that the current working assumption was that £28 million of savings would need to be made. These estimates would be a major factor in the construction of the Council's budget for 2023/24.

The Committee were then invited to raise questions, which are summarised below:

- Regarding the impact that the rate of inflation would have on contracts and levels of service, it was noted that inflation would be factored in when considering awarding new contracts. A number of contracts organised by the Council did also contain inflationary clauses within them.
- The Committee asked if analysis had been undertaken of the Council's major suppliers financial viability/resilience, especially those services for which the Council is supplier of last resort; it was noted that within the care sector, the Council were cognizant of the need for contractors to be able to continue delivering services. It was not guaranteed that all care providers could be protected in the borough, though within the budget there was a focus on areas and contracts that were experiencing financial difficulties.
- On the issue of Adult Social Care, it was asked whether the pressures to adult social care budgets were likely to lead to a change to any of the thresholds of social care funding; it was noted that eligibility criteria for funding was decided nationally. In relation to charging residents for services, it was explained that this was decided on a means testing basis.
- The Committee questioned what the Council was doing to reduce its reliance on the private rented sector for temporary accommodation and to reduce government funding being paid into the private sector; it was responded that Brent Council had built more affordable housing than any other London Borough in the last few years.
- Raising the issue of Council Tax, it was asked how the financial burden could be reduced for the most vulnerable residents; the Council Tax support scheme provided by the Council was cited as benefitting over 20,000 households in Brent. This was alongside the Residents' Support Fund, as well as other measures adopted by the Council to address the Cost of Living Crisis.
- The Committee asked what the impact of a reduction in Business Rates income would have on the Council, it was noted that Brent were exposed to this risk. With regards to Business Rates, there was a safety net whereby the Government could intervene if levels fell below the agreed rate.
- Regarding raising new forms of income for the Council, the Committee were updated that due to the failures of other local authorities in commercial ventures, this was now made more difficult by the Government to do.

- It was asked what the potential impacts of the Capital build programme would be for the Council; it was highlighted that the report referred to the fact that the Council had not spent as much money in this year as it was intended. The issue of inflation was identified as a major risk going forward, particularly if rent levels did not keep up with the costs of building. This would also potentially have an impact on the levels of affordable housing the Council was able to provide.
- In relation to the financial risks presented by the Council's subsidiary bodies, it was asked what risk these could present to the Council. It was noted that I4B and First Wave Housing were not fully commercial, rather operating against a specific business plan. There was consistent monitoring of these companies against performance indicators to mitigate risks.
- Regarding schools in Brent that ended up in a financial deficit, it was asked if there were any characteristics that these schools shared; it was noted that the consistent thread was in supporting children with SEND, in addition to inflation and associated cost pressures.
- Following on from this, the Committee were updated that EHCP plans were delivered to schools that required them, and the Council utilised DSG funds to provide this.
- Going forward, it was asked if schools would be able to fill the demand of pupils and full time staff with current funding; it was noted that the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 Refresh taken to Cabinet on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Nov 2021 indicated that there was currently sufficient capacity to meet the need in the Primary and Secondary phase.

The Chair thanked those present for their responses during the discussion, and invited the Committee to make information requests and recommendations.

The Committee made the following information requests:

- i) A fuller response from Housing/CWB on the issue of vulnerable residents of other boroughs being placed in housing within Brent was requested. Focus on the smaller number of vulnerable people (who may require support for their needs) who had taken up an accommodation option in Brent – is there a process and what is the process?
- ii) A breakdown of housing to be provided including data to show shift from private to council provided accommodation.

The following recommendations were made:

- i) Schools deficit area of the financial outlook is effectively scrutinised by the relevant community (CWB). RPR would endorse and support the CWB committee. Cllr Fraser and Cllr Moeen (CWB) attended on 19 July RPR meeting – RPR Chair requested that they make the link with Cllr Sheth and the rest of CWB.

## 7. Digital Inclusion Strategy

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) introduced the item, presenting the Committee with an update on the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy. Sadie East (Operational Director, Transformation) and Madeleine Leathley (Digital Workstream Lead).

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the information provided, which focussed on a number of key areas, as highlighted below:

- Regarding residents who were digitally excluded, it was asked what was being done to help them get online; it was answered that additional support had been offered to children and young people in schools, providing 500 devices to young people. In terms of general residents, there was focused targeting of residents to identify areas in the borough where residents required the most support.
- Further to this point, the Committee asked how residents who did not speak English as a first language were supported, as well as refugees and asylum seekers. The Committee were updated that devices had been provided to these groups, as well as digital skills training sessions, in conjunction with language interpreters.
- On the point of digital accessibility, it was asked how difficulties with residents navigating two-factor authentication applying for the residents support fund was being addressed. It was noted that there was support in place through Brent Hubs, as well as through 'digital champions' in the borough. Accessibility formed a significant part of Brent's wider digital strategy.
- It was asked what role the NHS were playing in adding to the digital strategy; it was updated that a new relationship with local NHS trusts had been forged, with information being shared from the NHS with Brent Hubs and digital champions. The NHS also had their own digital champions to advise people on their online activity. There was ongoing work offline with organisations such as Age UK in order to signpost these services to residents.
- It was also updated that funding and support was in place to further the creation of more Digital Champions going forward.

The Committee made the following information requests:

- i) Provide a list of VCS groups the council is working with so members can co-ordinate their own assistance.

The following recommendations were made:

- i) Undertake further consultation with the community and VCS to identify the gaps in the current strategy.
- ii) Involve councillors to identify gaps in the strategy and to assist with championing the strategy provisions (relates to the information request for the breakdown of VCS groups – above)
- iii) Digital champions network – recruit, train and resource champions from marginalised and disenfranchised communities in this area.

- iv) Re-launch the network as a programme/scheme to raise the profile of the network.

## 8. Wembley Events Review Paper

Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action) introduced the item. The Committee were updated on how the Council and its partners had worked to implement the recommendations of Baroness Casey following the events of the Euro 2020 men's football final.

Moving forward to speak to the report, Chris Whyte (Operational Director) updated the Committee that the summation of the Casey Review had been not to repeat the events which had occurred at Euro 2020, and the Council had been successful in achieving that aim in the last year.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the information provided, which focussed on a number of key areas, as highlighted below:

- In relation to the recommendations from Baroness Casey's report, it was asked if there were any plans to have e-ticketing at Wembley and if so, how would phone signal be updated around the stadium. It was updated that this was primarily a question for the stadium staff, though there were plans to increase the phone signal around the stadium area.
- Reflecting that different audiences such as boxing, football and concertgoers presented different challenges, it was asked if this had been addressed in event day planning going forward. The Committee were updated that resources were supplied in a different way, depending on the type of event. This was dependent on the likelihood of antisocial behaviour occurring at an event. Mostly, football events were now treated the same, irrespective of the size of the teams playing at the stadium. This risk was analysed in tandem with being fair to businesses, and allowing them to trade on event days.
- In terms of identifying risks posed by different football teams' fans on event days, it was updated that the Council were heavily reliant on the risk profiles supplied by the Police.
- The issue of dispersal after concerts was raised as an issue at recent concerts, and this was acknowledged of being due to transport and traffic issues.
- Residents in the Wembley area had expressed concern that security coverage had not been equal across the borough, as well as an issue of concert attendees not dispersing as quickly as football fans. It was noted that there were four key partners on event days: the Council, Quintain, the Football Association and the Metropolitan Police. The Council had been working to establish a broader network to address any security gaps which may have occurred.
- It was noted that information and timings around events and concerts should be made more readily available for residents in the area going forward.
- In terms of deterrent around parking, it was asked if fines were large enough to stop people parking illegally. It was noted that the level of parking fines were set by the statutes, which did mean that the Council were unable to alter them. The deployment of Council staff on the ground was funded by Wembley Stadium.

- It was raised that ward Councillors and residents had noticed traffic hotspots building up on event days, it was asked what was being done around signage to notify residents of changes to traffic. It was acknowledged that the competition of event day traffic versus commuter traffic led to high traffic areas in some cases. The Committee were updated that the Stadium were looking to increase digital signage around the area, and modernise the signage used.
- Further to this, it was noted that it would be helpful to receive information on event days from the Football Association regarding road closures and changes, so this could be passed on to residents.
- The Committee acknowledged the improvement in clean up after events, and it was asked what steps were being taken to ensure that this was maintained going forward. The Committee were updated that the Council had ensured after the Casey Review implementation that a well motivated and resourced team would be able to continue this work.
- It was asked if the new event management plan had taken into account the role of delivery drivers providing alcohol around the stadium, and it was noted that this was minimal, though where this did happen the Council did not have legal powers to prevent this from happening.
- In conclusion, it was asked what the future arrangements would be for events at Wembley Stadium. It was updated that reviews of safety and security arrangements would be ongoing with all partners, who would meet on a regular basis. The stadium also hosted a residents and businesses forum, to receive feedback from the local community.

As a result of the discussions, the following Recommendations and Information Requests were made by the Committee, noted below:

**Recommendations:**

- i) There should be a clear and robust relationship between the council and FA, SSE Arena and Wembley Stadium:
  - to share event information about events in advance to local partners including the council and police.
  - to engage with residents.
  - to look at signage to aid route planning/traffic management
  - to uphold enforcement agreements.
- ii) For the council and any other partners involved to consult with local councillors, residents and key partners to gather information on traffic management arrangements to review how effectively they are responding to congestion hotspots identified by councillors, residents and partners.
- iii) Look at North End Road (identified by a committee member as pinch point) to identify the effects events have in terms of traffic, dispersal of people and anti-social behaviour (please refer to recommendation 2) to amend traffic management arrangements to alleviate the impact in these hotspots.
- iv) All relevant partners (including landowners, housing associations etc) should be brought together to review current security provision in the

Wembley events area including identification of responsibilities and jurisdictions to rectify gaps.

- v) Review the abuse/use of parking permits on event days.

### **Information requests**

- i) Cllr Sheth agreed a procedure for councillors and officers on the ground to escalate anti-social behaviour concerns on event days. Confirm the procedures in place and circulate to the committee.
- ii) Request feedback from FA regarding their engagement with residents. To include data (numbers, frequency, spread/areas, who had been consulted) on engagement levels and headline findings and how feedback had been incorporated into practice and procedures going forward.
- iii) Request list of resident associations, which currently attend the liaison committee. Provide this information to all relevant councillors and include them in the committee's work

### **Improvement recommendations**

- i) For the FA, Wembley Stadium and Arena to promote public transport for events particularly concerts.

## **9. Committee Work Plan 2022/23**

The Committee agreed the work plan set out in the report.

## **10. Recommendations Tracker**

The Committee noted and agreed the contents of the Recommendations Tracker.

## **11. Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.24 pm

Councillor R. Conneely  
Chair