



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 5 February 2024 at 10.00 am

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

Also present: Councillors Conneely, Georgiou and Molloy.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Alice Lester (Interim Corporate Director Regeneration & Communities) with Gerry Ansell (Interim Director Regeneration, Growth and Employment) attending as a substitute.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made during the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Cabinet **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 15 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

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

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

No petitions had been submitted 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. **Budget & Council Tax 2024-25**

Prior to consideration of the main report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) advised that he had agreed various requests to speak in relation to the budget report and proposals, with the comments received as follows.

As an initial contribution, Councillor Conneely was invited, as Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Task Group, to introduce the main findings and recommendations within the Budget Scrutiny

Task Group report, which had been included as an appendix to the Budget and Council Tax report 2024-25. In introducing the report, Councillor Conneely began by thanking all members of the Task Group and everyone else who had participated in the scrutiny process. In emphasising that the upcoming financial year would be one of the most challenging for local authorities across the country, Councillor Conneely highlighted what she felt to be the need for extensive reform of the current way in which local authorities were funded, given the inadequacy of the existing funding regime.

Due to the cumulative impact of funding cuts on local government and other public services as a result of austerity over the previous decade Councillor Conneely, in presenting the Task Group report, highlighted the importance placed on collaboration between neighbouring local authorities, partners and the voluntary and community sector to not only deliver vital services for residents, but also to counter the competitive environment imposed by discretionary grant funding which positioned councils against each other. This emphasis on collaboration had been reflected in the Task Group recommendations, which included the establishment of a shared outcomes framework with the voluntary and community sector to co-design and co-deliver budget proposals. Furthermore, the Task Group had recommended implementing additional shared service agreements with other local authorities with Councillor Conneely also advising that they had welcomed the decision to retain use of the New Millenium Day Centre, operating under a new shared service arrangement.

Highlighting other key recommendations made as part of the review, Councillor Conneely also referred to the Task Groups support in seeking a better alignment of NHS resources to better reflect the local population and need and for increased delegation of budgets and decision making to the Brent Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), in order to enable more clinically led collaboration at local level. As part of the wider approach towards addressing the budget challenges identified, the Task Group had also been keen to support and recommend the development of a longer-term strategic and more holistic approach towards income generation including yearly action plans and a robust monitoring process with dedicated cross departmental resource.

In concluding, Councillor Conneely once again thanked all those involved for their participation in the review process and commended the recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to Cabinet for consideration as part of the budget setting process.

In welcoming the contribution from Scrutiny Budget Task Group, Councillor Tatler as Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform supported the view that the 2024-25 budget setting process was likely to be one of the most challenging faced by the Council reflecting the ongoing impact of austerity and importance, highlighted as an outcome of the review of the need for enhanced collaboration between all stakeholders in seeking to address the pressures faced. In commending the thorough nature of the approach and work undertaken by the Task Group, Councillor Tatler thanked all those involved for their contribution as a key part of the budget consultation.

In support of the comments made, Councillor Fleur Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Culture) welcomed the recommendation

to establish a shared outcomes framework with the voluntary and community sector, highlighting the benefits of closer collaboration with key partners integral to the delivery of services including Brent Hubs.

As a further contribution the Leader then welcomed and invited Councillor Georgiou to speak, who began by echoing the concerns expressed at the challenging nature of the financial pressures faced by local authorities, created by a combination of factors such as the significant underfunding of local authorities, Brexit, and the economic mismanagement of the current Conservative Government. Compounding these factors, Councillor Georgiou felt that the current position had also been adversely impacted by spending decision taken by the current Council Administration, such as those related to Civic Centre improvements and the pursuit of what he regarded as unviable development schemes.

Whilst recognising the need for difficult decisions in order to provide a balanced and sustainable budget, Councillor Georgiou advised he was keen to ensure that residents priorities were at the forefront of the proposals being considered, with the Liberal Democrats Group therefore intending to propose a number of amendments at the upcoming Council meeting seeking to address areas of ongoing concern identified by residents including street cleanliness, youth provision and the climate emergency.

Given the proposed increase in Council Tax, Councillor Georgiou felt there was a need for the Council to ensure that funding collected locally was refocussed and prioritised on local areas of concern, including:

- Street Cleansing – with concerns highlighted in relation to the new intelligence-led approach to street cleaning;
- Waste collection and recycling – with ongoing concerns highlighted regarding the operation of the blue bag recycling scheme and the option of wheelie bins therefore being sought as an alternative; and
- Focus in addressing the supply and cost pressures relating to temporary accommodation through the provision of more genuinely affordable housing developments and introduction of more stringent planning policies in relation to the Council's affordable housing targets.

To conclude, Councillor Georgiou felt there was a need for a clear commitment from any potential incoming government to ensure that the necessary reforms required to local government funding were introduced in order to address the serious financial challenges being faced by local authorities, including Brent, and in order to provide necessary reassurance concerning the future of local government services.

In response to the comments made, Councillor Butt expressed disappointment at the lack of engagement by the Liberal Democrats Group in the Scrutiny Budget Task Group process and felt it important to recognise the detrimental impact of the governments approach towards local government and wider public sector funding which had required the Council to make difficult decisions in seeking to set a balanced budget whilst also maintaining investment in key local services in order to continuing providing the necessary support to residents. He also expressed his thanks for the hard work and challenge provided by all members and officers in

producing the Task Group report, welcoming the approach adopted and highlighting its importance to the overall budget setting process.

Councillor Tatler, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform, then introduced the report which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2024-25. 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.

In presenting the report, Councillor Tatler began by outlining the extensive nature of the consultation undertaken with all key stakeholders to develop the budget proposals, before highlighting the seriousness of the Council's financial position, which had required an additional £8m of savings to be identified for 2024-25 and 2025-26 on top of the £210m of funding cuts delivered since 2010. In expressing concern at the impact of Government's ongoing short-term funding settlements and delay in wider local government funding reforms, members noted the 78% decrease in core funding received from government since the start of austerity and associated shift this had created in the placing the funding burden onto Council Tax & Business Rates Payers as well as on fees and charges all directly impacting on local residents. On a national scale, members were advised that the position was equally challenging with it noted that 1 in 5 councils were anticipating they may have to issue s114 notices. In outlining the key drivers of the additional pressures being experienced in relation to the increase in demand for key services and wider social and demographic changes along with the specific pressures on the homelessness budget given increased pressure on housing supply and demand, Councillor Tatler felt that budget proposals continued to demonstrate the Council's commitment, despite the severe funding constraints imposed by the government, in seeking to build more social housing, address the climate emergency and tackle the wider inequalities highlighted as a result of the pandemic. Comparing this to the stance taken by both Opposition Groups on the Council in seeking to oppose key developments and wider impact of the governments approach in relation to the current state of the public sector, Councillor Tatler felt that the approach taken by the current Administration demonstrated the Council's commitment to the renewal of public services based on sustainable long-term financial planning that would ensure no resident was left behind.

As further context in terms of the financial pressures faced, members were advised that the Government's provisional financial settlement for local government had failed to provide sufficient funding to meet the severe cost and demand pressures faced by many councils, including a £400m shortfall identified for local authorities across London. The recent announcement of a further £600m was also not expected to materially change the overall position in relation to the Council's budget, with this funding having been ringfenced by the government for Adult and Children social care and not sufficient to address the growing housing crisis. Given the additional financial pressures on the Council, currently forecast at £13m, the efforts made to produce a balanced budget whilst seeking to preserve essential services had been the most challenging to date with Brent's provisional settlement the lowest across all London boroughs (excluding the City of London) and less than the September CPI rate of inflation.

In noting the pressure the provisional settlement and reduction in long term core funding had placed on decisions relating to Council Tax, Councillor Tatler advised

the Council remained aware of the additional burden this placed on households particularly during the ongoing period of economic uncertainty with neither this or the use of reserves and sale of assets regarded as a solution to the long term funding pressures faced. Concerns were also expressed in relation to the ongoing impact of the cost -of-living crisis and uncertainty around future government funding to support the Household & Resident Support Fund and Holiday Activities and Food Programme, which it was pointed out had also required the Council to consider new models of support to continue providing the assistance required. Reminding members that this had been the sixth one-year settlement in a row for the Council, Councillor Tatler felt it important to highlight the impact this was continuing to have on the financial planning process with the Council therefore continuing to lobby for a longer-term approach.

In concluding her introduction, Councillor Tatler once again highlighted how challenging and difficult development of the budget proposals had been and thanked all those who had engaged in the consultation process along with all Cabinet Members and officers (including the Finance team) 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. In terms of specific pressures and priorities identified these had included:

- The significant increase in homelessness, with housing demand increasing rapidly and less supply available along with ongoing pressures on the Housing Revenue Account taking account of the Government's rent policy. Whilst a national issue, members commended the work being undertaken in seeking to mitigate against the pressures identified and in maintaining the Council's commitment to increase the supply of genuinely affordable and accessible housing in as viable a way as possible.
- The ongoing programme of work and investment in key highway and environmental infrastructure across the borough including waste and refuse collection, tackling fly-tipping, parks and open spaces and towards addressing the climate emergency working in partnership with the Brent Environmental Network (including initiatives such as the new Green Area Neighbourhood pilots) in order to ensure the borough remained as clean and green as possible.
- The continued support for children and young people despite the ongoing reductions in core government funding and increase in child poverty, with specific reference to the innovative approach adopted in relation to the establishment of various initiatives such as the scheme to support local provision of childcare residential placements, enhancement of SEND provision through capital investment in a new school and establishment of the Family Hubs.
- 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 with the key priority to continue working in collaboration with local providers (given the significant ongoing pressure on

health services and social care funding and impact of the annual rather than longer term funding settlements) in order to address wider health inequalities. In recognising concerns which had been highlighted relating to the future of the New Millennium Day Centre, members noted that these proposals would involve transfer of the Centre into a new Community & Wellbeing Hub supported by the wider aim in seeking to maximise the independence of young adults transitioning from care. Whilst also recognising ongoing pressures in relation to adult residential care, Cabinet were pleased to note to approach adopted by the Council in seeking to ensure care staff were paid at the London Living Wage (LLW).

- Ongoing support for Brent Hubs, warm spaces and the Resident & Household Support models alongside the investment in the boroughs libraries and work being undertaken to maximise income generation opportunities and support the Voluntary & Community Sector in order to maintain support for residents across the borough.
- Maintaining the ongoing commitment to enhance regeneration, renewal and economic growth across the borough and create employment opportunities whilst also seeking to maintain key infrastructure and continue working with partners to ensure the borough remained safe and secure.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to once again highlight the challenging nature of the budget setting process given the ongoing impact of austerity, the cost-of-living crisis, wider economic challenges and continued uncertainty in relation to central government's funding of local authorities. As a result, he welcomed the approach taken by all Cabinet Members and officers in seeking to review all aspect of their services to ensure budgets could be managed whilst delivering core strategic priorities and protecting the most vulnerable residents in the borough. Despite recognising the significance of the financial challenges identified and the level of funding cuts already delivered by the Council, he commended the approach adopted and measures outlined within the report which had been designed to ensure the Council was able to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way. Whilst development of the proposals had required difficult choices to be made, Councillor Butt ended by highlighting the aim to ensure the process remained as open and transparent as possible and was focussed on enabling the Council to deliver a balanced budget whilst also seeking to maintain the provision of key services and essential support for residents across the borough.

Having noted the comments provided, and welcomed and supported the approach outlined within the report along with the recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To recommend to Full Council an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2024/25, with 2% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 2.99% general increase.
- (2) To recommend to Full Council the General Fund revenue budget for 2024/25, as summarised in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) To recommend to Full Council the savings proposals for 2024/25 and 2025/26, as set out in Appendices C (i) and C (ii) of the report.

- (4) To note the Equalities Impact Assessments on the budget proposals, as set out in Appendices C (iii) and C (iv) of the report.
- (5) To note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in Appendix D of the report.
- (6) To recommend to Full Council the HRA budget and business plan for 2024/25, as set out in section eight and appendix Q of the report.
- (7) To agree the HRA rents for council dwellings, tenant service charges and garages as set out in section eight 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 eight of the report.
- (9) To note the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section nine of the report.
- (10) To recommend to Full Council the changes to the existing Capital Programme in relation to additions of new schemes and reprofiling, as set out in section 11 and Appendix E of the report and note the Capital Pipeline Schemes in Appendix F of the report.
- (11) 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.
- (12) To agree for a new loan and equity facility of up to £40m to be made available to i4B Holdings Ltd for the provision of PRS accommodation in line with the Temporary Reform Accommodation plan as set out in section 11.38 of the report.
- (13) To recommend to Full Council the Reserves Strategy and schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendices K (i) and K (ii) in the report.
- (14) To agree the action plan to implement CIPFA's Financial Management Code and conduct a Financial Resilience Assessment, as set out in Appendix L of the report.
- (15) To agree, and where relevant recommend to Full Council, the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix M of the report.
- (16) To note the results of the budget consultation, as set out in section seven and detailed in Appendices N (i) and N (ii) of the report.
- (17) To note the legal advice from the Corporate Director of Governance, as set out in Appendix O of the report.
- (18) To note the decision of the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources to continue as part of the Eight Authority Business Rates pool in 2024/25 as set out in section six of the report.

(19) To note and approve the specific recommendations identified for consideration by Full Council as detailed in section 2.19 – 2.38 of the report.

8. **Future of the RSF and new model of support**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture) presented a report detailing proposals for the introduction of a new model of support for Brent residents from April 2024, which had been developed through the piloting of Cost-of-Living Outcome Based Review (OBR) projects guided by a series of approved design principles.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the outline of the design principles used to guide development of the proposed new model which had included the need to support residents in becoming more resilient and independent; the support available being targeted and easily accessible to those most in need; the model seeking to incentivise skills and employment and address physical and mental health challenges as well as being aligned with and supporting connectivity between related support offers on an intelligence-led and sustainable basis. Members also noted the engagement of a range of local organisations and stakeholders in the pilot projects used to support development of the model which had included (as detailed in section 4.8 and Appendix 2 of the report) a Community and Wellbeing Project working with Sufra NW London, the establishment of a Crisis Response Fund, Provision of Debt and Immigration Advice as well as a project aimed at upskilling frontline staff to provide specialist advice.

As a result of the designed work undertaken, the recommended option was to establish a single, joined-up model including development of a Community Wellbeing Programme aligned with a refreshed Resident Support Fund (RSF), designed to support residents to be more resilient in the longer term and align more closely with strategic priorities including the Health & Wellbeing and Brent Food Strategies.

Given ongoing uncertainty in relation to the level of government funding for the Household Support Fund that would be available to local authorities from 2024-25 onwards members welcomed, despite the significant financial challenges faced by the Council, the £1m investment included within the current budget proposals towards support of the new and more sustainable version of the Resident Support model proposed within the report. Cabinet also commended the vision supporting the model in seeking to focus on more sustainable outcomes through a behaviour-centred approach which included the ability to support residents in a more holistic way by enhancing their opportunities in the longer-term, promoting independence and reducing dependency on other services in order to maximise use of the funding support available.

Whilst recognising importance and legacy of the support provided through the current arrangements, members also supported the need identified, given the challenging nature of the funding position, for the proposed change in approach and in thanked all those involved in development of the new support model Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To agree the proposed model for resident support, including a Community Wellbeing Programme and refreshed Resident Support Fund and Crisis Response Fund (CRF) as detailed from section 4.21 in the report.
- (2) To agree that:
 - (a) the access criteria for the Community Wellbeing Service (detailed from section 4.24 of the report) be delegated to the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Director of Public Health; and
 - (b) authority to amend the award criteria for RSF and CRF funds be delegated to the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Culture.

9. **Highways Footway Maintenance 2023-2026 Report**

Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action) introduced the report setting out recommendations for Brent's 2023-26 prioritised footway maintenance and reconstruction programme.

In introducing the report Cabinet were reminded that the Highways Infrastructure remained one of the most visible, well used and valuable physical assets within ownership of the Council. As with any physical asset, however, this type of infrastructure was subject to deterioration over time requiring continual investment to support its maintenance with the Council, as a result, having provided an additional £15m worth of investment to support the programme of works to improve the quality and safety of roads and pavements across the borough. In recognising the priority expressed by residents, from both a safety and accessibility perspective, in relation to ongoing investment in the borough's highways and footways, members also recognised the balance needing to be maintained in relation to the Council's overall financial position given the core reduction in funding provided by central government and cumulative impact of the £210m cut from the Council's budget over the last decade.

In support of the asset management approach identified towards prioritising this investment, based on the use of condition surveys and other data to produce annual road and footway maintenance programmes, members also noted and welcomed the increased utilisation of asphalt to support delivery of the footway maintenance programme. This had not only enabled the Council to maximise use of available funding but also to deliver a wider programme whilst also improving health and safety and reducing emissions associated with reconstruction works with the condition of a majority of the footways reconstructed using asphalt since the programme had commenced still rated as good or excellent.

In considering the report Cabinet also welcomed the opportunity provided for input from ward councillors in developing the programme who had been able to nominate footway(s) in their areas for inclusion as part of the prioritisation process, with members commending the associated benefits from both a locality and ward based perspective.

Having thanked ward councillors for their support and officers for their efforts in developing the programme and keeping the borough safe and on the move,

members once again felt it important to recognise the challenges in seeking to maintain the condition of infrastructure across the borough as a result of the government's reduction in core government funding for not only the Council but also Transport for London (TfL). In welcoming TfL's ongoing commitment to the programme of Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funding along with the additional programme of investment provided by the Council to maintain and improve the highway infrastructure across the borough, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the 2023 - 26 Planned Footway Maintenance Programme as set out in Appendix A of the report.

10. **Council Tax - Empty and Second Homes Premium**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Culture) introduced a report seeking approval to proposed changes affecting both Council Tax and Business Rates from 1 April 2024.

As further context to the proposed changes on which approval was being sought, Cabinet noted that in terms of business rates guidance relating to the provision of discretionary local retail, hospitality and leisure relief discount schemes had now been extended for 2024-25. Having already been approved by Cabinet (March 2023) it was therefore noted that the Council's existing business relief scheme for small and medium properties would be continued for 2024-25 and 2025-26 enabling relief to carry on being provided for eligible and occupied retail, hospitality, and leisure properties in order to maintain levels of support available for local business. In terms of Council Tax, members were also advised of the powers now being made available through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 to tackle ongoing issues around vacant properties and second home in the borough through the provision of additional discretion for local authorities to increase Council Tax on properties left as vacant. Members were advised that since April 2019, the Council had charged a Council Tax premium of 100% on a property which had been empty for two years which had risen to 200% for five years and 300% if empty for more than ten years with the aim, given the current number (1,859) of empty domestic properties within the borough, of encouraging owners to bring their properties back into use.

Given the current demand for housing, rising number of tenants in temporary accommodation and shortage in supply, members were keen to consider all available options which included encouraging those who owned empty properties and second homes to maximise their availability and use, with the powers available being utilised to allow the existing long-term premium on empty homes to commence once a property had been empty for a year, rather than the current two year period. Alongside this change it was also proposed to charge a premium on second homes given they also tended to be underutilised and unoccupied, which had again been designed with the aim of encouraging the property to be brought back into use and would apply (allowing for the required period of notice) from the 1 April 2025.

In noting that details of the proposed changes would be widely publicised as part of a wider communications strategy focussed on available options to bring empty properties back into use as a means of supporting the work to address the current housing shortage Cabinet, in support of the approach outlined, **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the Council's National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) Discretionary Scheme in relation to 2024 - 25 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and pursuant to the Council's powers under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 as amended.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services in consultation with the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources to implement the discretionary schemes as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (3) That from 1 April 2024 in accordance with the provisions of The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 the Council:
 - i. introduces the council tax premium of an additional 100% for those domestic properties empty for longer than 1 year.
 - ii. maintains the council tax premium of 200% in respect of domestic properties that have been empty for longer than 5 years.
 - iii. maintains the council tax premium of 300% in respect of domestic properties that have been empty for longer than 10 years.
 - iv. from 1 April 2025, introduces a premium of 100% to domestic properties determined to be applicable Second Homes.
- (4) To note the communication campaign (as detailed within section 3.3.16 of the report) to highlight to owners of empty property how the council may be able to help them make better use of their property.

11. Admission Arrangements for Community Schools 2025/26

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools) introduced a report detailing the outcome of consultation on proposed amendments to the Admission Arrangements for Brent Community Schools in 2025-26 and seeking approval to determine the proposed arrangements, as set out within Appendix 1 of the report.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted that approval had been granted in November 2023 to undertaken public consultation on a number of proposed amendments to admission arrangements for the academic year 2025-26. Members were reminded the proposed amendments had been designed to reflect the fall in demand for pupil places within the primary sector across areas of the borough and London as a whole whilst also seeking to protect school budgets and ensure the longer-term sustainability of educational provision across the borough.

In noting the outcome of the consultation, which had been focussed around amendments to the existing admission arrangements in relation to the proposed reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Fryent Primary School and Mitchell Brook Primary School, Cabinet advised they were minded to endorse the proposed amendments recognising the excess surplus in capacity identified and broader aim to protect the long term sustainability of schools in the planning areas identified.

In support of the approach outlined and seeking to ensure the admission arrangements remained as fair and transparent as possible Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note the outcome of the consultation.
- (2) To agree the proposed reductions of the Published Admission Numbers at Fryent Primary School and Mitchell Brook Primary School.
- (3) To determine the admission arrangements, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

12. **Outcome of informal consultation on school organisation proposals for Leopold Primary School in Primary Planning Area 4**

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) introduced a report providing Cabinet with a summary of the informal consultation undertaken between November 2023 and December 2023 on the proposal to implement a phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School and seeking approval to move to formal consultation, through publication of a statutory notice, on a phased closure of the site and a variation to the Published Admission Number of Leopold Primary School from 120 to 60 to take effect from the 2025-26 academic year.

In considering the report Cabinet once again noted the forecast fall in demand for pupil places within the primary sector with the highest capacity and percentage of spare places falling within Primary Planning Area 4 and schools in that area having to manage this impact for a number of years with the support of the Local Authority. Members recognised it was within this context that the proposals outlined within the report had been developed and, whilst recognising and sympathising with the disappointment and concerns identified by governors, parents and the leadership team at the school along with the impact on pupils and their families, felt that the approach outlined in terms of reducing capacity at Leopold Primary School was the last available option for consideration in terms of being able to safeguard the longer-term sustainability of other schools in the area.

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 as factors which 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. Recognising the efforts being made to safeguard future school provision and doing everything possible to reduce the likelihood of school closures, Cabinet welcomed the assurance regarding the future retention of any school buildings released as a result of the proposal for education purposes as well as the ongoing support being provided to the school in managing any transition process.

Having noted the outcome of the consultation process Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED** in recognising the limited and difficult nature of options available to approve a period of formal consultation, through publication of a statutory notice, on proposals to:

- (a) seek a variation to reduce Leopold Primary School's Published Admission Number (PAN) from 120 to 60 from September 2025; and
- (b) implement a phased closure of provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School between September 2025 and the end of July 2027.

13. **Adult Social Care Charging Policy Consultation Findings**

Councillor Neil Nerva (Cabinet Member for Public Health and Adult Social Care) introduced the report, detailing the outcome of the Adult Social Care Charging Policy consultation, which ran from November to December 2023, and the changes recommended for consideration following the completion of that consultation process.

In considering the report Cabinet noted that proposals had been developed as a result of the requirement on the Council to regularly review and update the charging policy to ensure that the service remained sustainable and fit for purpose and was therefore being considered separately to the Council's main budget setting process. Whilst aware that the proposed changes would require some clients to pay more for their care services, members were assured that the arrangements for those who were not currently required to pay would continue with the Council also seeking to mitigate, as far as possible the impact of the charges on those clients paying to receive care services. Members were advised this would include a new financial assessment to determine any new level of charge, recognising that not everyone would be directly impacted, and the Council also seeking to assist clients in maximising their income and taking account of disability related expenditure whilst also disregarding legitimate expenditure where a person had little or no choice other than to incur the expenditure in order to maintain independence or quality of life. Members were also advised of the need to recognise that the changes were being considered at a time when the council was seeking to invest in reablement and other important preventative services to ensure people could remain as independent as possible for as long as possible without requiring adult social care services.

Whilst recognising the challenges and cost pressures identified, given what was felt to be the government's failure to adequately address and fund adult social care, Cabinet were supportive of the approach outlined in terms of the adoption and implementation of the revised adult social care charging policy. On the basis these changes were felt to provide greater consistency and fairness and would be linked to the wider aims for adult social care in Brent, whilst also seeking to ensure delivery of the service remained sustainable and focussed on supporting people to remain as independent as possible, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the changes to the Adult Social Care charging policy following completion of the public consultation, as follows:

- (1) To apply a 10% discretionary enhancement to the minimum income guarantee for those receiving non-residential or nursing care.
- (2) To increase the hourly rate charged for homecare for self-funders from £12.97 per hour to the cost of commissioning care. This is currently £20.50 per hour for contracted services, or £17.50 an hour for spot packages.

- (3) To agree that an annual uplift is applied to the hourly rate charged for homecare in line with the increase given to providers, so that the charge continues to reflect the amount paid to providers on an hourly basis.
- (4) To increase the amount charged to service users if they cannot have a light touch financial assessment, to a new average contribution (£32.52 per week).
- (5) To charge people the full cost of their care if their financial assessment cannot be completed within four weeks. Safeguards will remain in place where this is due to a physical or cognitive impairment.
- (6) To charge homecare service users their client contribution for up to seven days during a hospital admission.
- (7) To charge service users their client contribution for 28 days after being admitted to hospital from a residential or nursing home.
- (8) To agree the changes to the charging policy will be implemented from April 2024 onwards with a two-month minimum transition period to implement the new arrangements.
- (9) To agree that final arrangements for implementation of the policy be delegated to the Corporate Director Care Health & Wellbeing.

14. **Safer Brent Community Safety Strategy 2024 - 26**

Councillor Farah (Cabinet Member Safer Communities & Public Protection) introduced a report seeking approval to the Safer Brent Community Safety Strategy and accompanying Action Plan for 2024 – 2026.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted that the Strategy had been developed in collaboration with the Safer Brent Partnership and wider community following an extensive programme of engagement with a range of key stakeholders to reflect key priority areas with an Action Plan also developed in response to address the issues identified. The Strategy, it was pointed out, had also been designed to reflect and incorporate the Council's key priority in seeking to ensure everyone had the best start in life within a safe and secure borough. In recognising the need to act earlier, smarter and more proactively in order to tackle crime and disorder and protect the most vulnerable, members also noted the move within the new Strategy towards a public health based preventative approach based on a process of earlier and more proactive intervention and identification of wider support needs designed to prevent future escalation which would include programmes of mentoring, counselling, promotion of substance misuse services and employment opportunities delivered collaboratively with partners across the borough.

Cabinet were advised that development of the Strategy had also been subject to review by the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee who, as a result, had recommended that the priority around tackling violent crime should include specific emphasis on knife crime. Due to publication deadlines, members were advised that it had not been possible to incorporate this change in time for the Cabinet meeting with Councillor Farah confirming that it would, however, be included within the final version of the strategy.

In thanking all, officers stakeholders and partners on the Safer Brent Partnership for their engagement in developing the Strategy and in contributing towards ensuring that Brent remained a safe place for all residents, members welcomed the holistic approach outlined within the Strategy which it was noted would continue to be kept under review and had been designed to reflect the key issues and priorities identified across local communities within the borough alongside the wider financial pressures faced by the Council.

As a result, Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the Safer Brent - Community Safety Strategy and accompanying Action Plan 2024 – 2026.

15. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

16. **Any other urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 11.10 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair