



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 15 July 2024 at 10.00 am

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Environment & Enforcement) and Alice Lester (Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Regeneration). The Leader of the Council advised that Gerry Ansell (Director Inclusive Regeneration & Employment) was attending to represent Alice Lester.

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 17 June 2024, be approved as a correct record.

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

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

No petitions were 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. **Financial Year End Outturn 2023-24**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) introduced a report presenting the outturn for income and expenditure for 2023-24 and other key financial data. In introducing the report, Cabinet was advised that the Council's General Fund and Dedicated Schools Grant outturn had achieved break even with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reporting an underspend of £2m. The Council's Capital Programme spend had been £213m in 2023-24, equating to 95% of the approved budget.

Whilst the General Fund have achieved a break-even position, Cabinet noted the service overspends identified in relation to Resident Services, primarily driven by high demand for homelessness services, as well as the Community Health and Wellbeing department and the Children and Young People department with the use of earmarked reserves set aside to manage unexpected pressures having resulted in the overall break even General Fund position.

In considering the outturn position, Members acknowledged the significant level of financial challenge faced by the Council with the report highlighting the scale and depth of the pressures identified. These included pressures resulting from the increased demand in relation to homelessness, which was recognised as a national and regional issue, with demand for housing continuing to increase against a reducing supply across the whole housing market and increasing pressure on the supply of temporary accommodation leading to a greater reliance on the private rented sector which was often less affordable for those residents on low income or Housing Benefit.

In highlighting the potential changes that a newly elected government may implement, Cabinet felt that the prospect of a multi-year Local Government financial settlement would assist in providing greater stability with members recognising the need for continued lobbying to ensure the necessary levels of funding required to support residents across the borough was provided. Support was also expressed for the anticipated change in planning laws and reintroduction of mandatory housing targets proposed by the new Government as a means of encouraging growth, with members also keen to see tighter regulation on the housing rental sector and reform of the funding regime for local government, including Council Tax. Considering the new government's approach, Cabinet felt it was clear there was a commitment to long-term infrastructure investment and the exploration of devolution but, in highlighting section 3.16 of the report which detailed the Council's limited powers in relation to funding, made clear the Council's commitment to lobby for secure and adequate funding and the autonomy to grow the local economy and eradicate homelessness in the borough.

In recognising the efforts made to continue managing and mitigating against the final challenges identified, members welcomed the approach outlined by the incoming Government in relation encouraging the growth in house building, infrastructure and regeneration in support of the wider benefits identified, which it was highlighted the Council also remained committed to pursue Cabinet thanked all those involved for their efforts and as a result **RESOLVED** to note the overall financial outturn position for 2023-24, as detailed in the report.

8. **Medium Term Financial Outlook**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) introduced a report which set out the overall financial position facing the Council and highlighted the significant risks, issues and uncertainties with regard to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The report also set out the proposed budget setting strategy for 2025-26, which included the proposed consultation with residents, businesses and other key stakeholders.

In presenting the report, Councillor Mili Patel highlighted the challenging financial environment in which the Council was operating. Members noted that there was the potential for significant spending pressures from demand-led services, particularly social care and homelessness, and new burdens impacting on the budget as a result of the cost-of living crisis. It was added that, whilst growth had been built into the MTFS to alleviate the pressures identified, these continued to present a significant budget risk meaning the Council was likely to require further significant savings moving forward to deliver a balanced budget.

Having explained the context of the report, Councillor Mili Patel again raised the issue of housing, which continued to be a significant area of risk for the Council with demand for housing services increasing and the number of homelessness applications rising. The economic climate was also impacting rent collection rates, resulting in increases in rent arrears, leading to increased reliance on the private rented sector for supply to address demand. With more people placed in temporary accommodation, higher costs and less supply, it was expected that housing would continue to cause financial pressure on the Council's budget.

Concluding the presentation of the report, Councillor Mili Patel felt it was important to recognise the £210m worth of cuts already delivered in relation to the Council's budget since 2010 and further savings already agreed amounting to £12.5m spread across 2024-25 and 2025-26 to alleviate pressures. She highlighted that the lack of clarity around the future level of local government funding and uncertainty in the economic environment made it hard to be precise about future financial targets, with the Council having therefore continued to adopt a prudent approach over the 2025-2028 MTFS in order to deliver a sustainable medium-term position. Longer term, the anticipated funding allocations and current forecast assumptions estimated a budget gap of £16m in 2025-26, rising to a cumulative £30m by 2027-28, with the Council looking to identify and deliver savings of £16m to enable it to set a balanced budget for 2025-26. The financial impact and budget beyond 2026-27 would be subject to further review once the Local Government Financial Settlement was known but in the meantime it was pointed out that the Council would need to continue taking difficult decisions about which services to prioritise and protect in order to continue delivering an affordable and sustainable budget and package of support for local communities across the borough.

Concern was expressed at the substantial nature of the ongoing financial challenges outlined during presentation of the report given the impact on the Council's budget and potential need to deliver additional savings. In highlighting the need to continue focussing on the way in which support (including that available through the Council Tax and Resident Support Schemes) was being provided for residents moving forward, members were also aware of the need to ensure this continued to be targeted effectively on those most in need, supported by a range of other wider holistic measures designed to provide residents with the opportunities to succeed.

Officers were thanked for their work in preparing the report and it was **RESOLVED** that Cabinet:

- (1) Note the contents of the report and the potential financial impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, as set out within the report.

- (2) Agree the budget setting process for 2025-26, as set out in section nine of the report.
- (3) Endorse the response to the Minister for Local Government on Brent's productivity plans, as set out in Appendix A of the report.
- (4) Note and agree the proposed 2023-24 capital budget carry forwards and capital virements for 2024-25 as set out in section ten of the report.
- (5) Note the financial position with regards to the Housing Revenue Account, as set out in section eleven of the report.
- (6) Note the financial position with regards to Schools and the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section twelve of the report.

9. **Quarter 1 Financial Forecast 2024/25**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) introduced a report which set out the financial forecast for the General Fund revenue budget, the Housing Revenue Account, the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Capital Programme as at Quarter 1 2024-25.

In introducing the report, Councillor Mili Patel highlighted that despite the considerable efforts to maintain financial control, the operating environment and wider economic context continued to be volatile with small changes in demand disproportionately materialising in large financial pressures. These remained particularly acute in relation to Children's and Adult social care packages, and costs associated with the provision of temporary accommodation, with the Council also continuing to deal with the impact of rising costs due to the high level of provider inflationary pressures and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, which had also affected important income streams for the Council.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the challenges identified in seeking to manage demand and address the pressures identified, with members committed to continue the positive work with relevant Corporate Directors to ensure the monitoring and management of budgets in each service area.

Having noted the information provided and also the comments raised during consideration of the previous financial update reports (included as Items 7 & 8 on the agenda) Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the new grant funding received in year, the overall financial position and the actions being taken to manage the issues arising as detailed within the report.
- (2) To note the savings delivery tracker as detailed in Appendix A of the report.
- (3) To note the Prudential Indicators for Treasury Management, as set out in Appendix B of the report.

10. **Brent Post-16 Skills Strategy**

Councillor Rubin (Cabinet Member for Employment, Innovation & Climate Action) introduced a report outlining the main elements, vision and outcomes within the draft Brent Post-16 Skills Strategy.

In introducing the report, members noted that the Strategy had been developed (contributing towards the Council's anti-poverty strategy) working with businesses, educational providers and other stakeholders in order to equip residents with the skills necessary to secure high-quality employment opportunities that would also contribute towards the local economy. With unemployment rates across the Borough remaining high, the Strategy also aimed to provide the type of skills needed by both employers and employees in order to reflect the evolving needs of the local economy.

Members were advised that the strategy had also been designed to represent an investment programme in economic recovery that would contribute to a thriving economy and bridge the gap between skills supply and skills demand with one of the key outcomes being the establishment of a Skills Board bringing together key stakeholders, through which skills training and provision would be directed. Reference was also made to the specific focus within the Strategy aimed at increasing female participation in the workforce as well as the measures designed to support the participation and provision of employment opportunities for young people with Special Educational Needs as well as through the Black Community Action Plan. Members also noted the focus on high quality in-work training enabling employees to continue upskilling themselves with Cabinet asked to note the accompanying research prior to endorsing the strategy for progression to publication.

In considering the report, members welcomed and commended the progress made in terms of the Strategy seeking to tackle unemployment, enhance opportunities for career progression as well as in seeking to address poverty and social exclusion. Members also highlighted their support for the focus on community wealth building within the borough, which it was felt demonstrated a multi-faceted approach to post-16 skills.

In relation to children and young people, members highlighted the challenge in delivering secure employment for care leavers and were pleased to see potential opportunities in this area included in the report. Cabinet also felt it important to recognise and endorse the work of the Youth Justice Service in seeking to prevent reoffending through the provision of training and employment programmes. Members were also keen to commend the emphasis within the Strategy on creative and digital industries as growth areas and welcomed the introduction of a Skills Board that would include a wide range of external stakeholders, highlighting the importance of alignment with the new Culture Strategy that was being developed.

in concluding the discussion, Cabinet thanked the Employment and Skills Team and Cabinet Member for Employment, Innovation & Climate Action for the work undertaken in relation to development of the post-16 skills strategy with the opportunity also taken to remind members of the upcoming Brent Jobs Fair being hosted at Wembley Stadium.

Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note the progress of the work on the Post-16 Skills Strategy and the accompanying research commission.
- (2) To endorse the Post 16 Skills Strategy for progression to publication.

11. **Authority to award contracts for the provision of Parking and Traffic CCTV Enforcement Services**

In Councillor Krupa Sheth's (Cabinet Member for Environment & Enforcement) absence, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing) introduced a report which sought approval for the award of contracts for the provision of Parking CCTV camera equipment and software services and the supply of new cameras and associated software. In introducing the report, members noted the scope of contract in relation to continued enforcement of parking and moving traffic contraventions alongside the proposed improvements to parking and on road CCTV infrastructure to support delivery of the Council's Long Term Transport Strategy and traffic management across the borough.

In welcoming the report, Cabinet emphasised the positive impact that the use of CCTV was having in relation to Safer School Streets with members also commending the wider engagement with residents on the approach being taken towards the changes in parking and traffic enforcement activity.

In concluding the discussion, Cabinet were also keen to highlight and support the positive impact the contract would have in relation to the social value benefits identified and in addressing climate action across Brent through encouraging more active modes of travel.

Having considered and noted the exempt information contained within the appendix of the report, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the benefits of using CCTV cameras for the effective enforcement of parking and traffic contraventions and in terms of meeting the Council's strategic objectives.
- (2) To approve the award of a four-year contract with the option for 2 one-year extensions for the goods and services detailed within the report to DSSL Group Limited to a value of up to £9,746,610 following the conclusion of a tender process via an ESPO framework, to commence on 1 November 2024.

12. **Community Grants Fund (NCIL) 2023-24 - Projects over £100,000**

Councillor Farah (Cabinet Member for Public Safety and Partnerships) introduced a report seeking approval for projects recommended to receive a Community Grants Fund (NCIL) award over £100,000 in value.

In presenting the report, members noted the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to fund the Community Grants (Neighbourhood CIL) programme. In highlighting the significant community benefits provided as a result, particular attention was drawn to the opportunity available to support local communities and the voluntary sector in seeking to create better economic opportunities and stronger, more connected communities with it noted that the community grants had

been awarded on the basis of priorities agreed for local facilities in consultation with the local community and the evaluation of each application having been subject to a five-stage assessment process, as detailed within Appendix A of the report. This had resulted in a total of 35 projects being recommended for funding with two applications, Step Up Hub and Forest United Youth Football Club involving funding above £100k for which, members were advised, final approval would be required by Cabinet.

In outlining the projects for which funding approval was being sought, Cabinet were advised that both supported outcomes within the Borough Plan, specifically relating to Strategic Priority 3 – Thriving Communities.

In support of the community grants (NCIL) programme, Cabinet were keen to recognise the positive impact being created through the use of CIL as part of the wider programme of regeneration activity and its associated benefits for local communities across the borough, with thanks expressed for the work being undertaken to deliver the ongoing programme of growth and regeneration across the borough, including the generation and collection of CIL, given the wider associated benefits identified for both current and future residents.

In recognising the positive contribution of both projects within the local community for which funding approval was being sought Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve and confirm the final award of Community Grant (NCIL) funding to the following schemes:

- (1) Step Up Hub - £114,000.
- (2) Forest United (1973) Youth Football Club Ltd - £146,976, subject to additional funding being secured for the total amount of the project cost of £1.2m.

13. **Uncollectable Debt Write-Offs**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Residents Support and Culture) introduced a report informing Cabinet of the debts written off between 1 October 2023 and 31 March 2024 that exceeded £20,000 in relation to council tax, sundry debts, adult social care client contributions, and housing benefits overpayments.

In considering the report Cabinet noted the recovery action taken as a means of seeking to protect the Council's financial position prior to any debt being considered for write-off which also complied with the Council's Ethical Debt Recovery Policy and Write Off procedure.

Having reviewed the exempt information contained within Appendix 1 of the report relating to individual debt write-off and commended the transparent approach towards the process of debt recovery and write-off, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the debt written off as listed in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) To note a total write-off of £606,101.94 of debt for the period October 2023 to March 2024.

14. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

15. **Any other urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 10.30 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair