



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Wednesday 15 January 2025 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor M Butt (Chair), Councillor M Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Fleur, Farah, Grahl, Nerva, Rubin and Krupa Sheth.

Also present: Councillors Ahmed, Dixon and Molloy.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received at the meeting.

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 9 December 2024 be approved as a correct record.

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

None identified.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

No petitions were presented at the meeting.

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

There were no items referred from either the Community Wellbeing or Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committees.

7. **Neasden Civic Partnership Programme**

Prior to considering the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) welcomed Councillors Ahmed and Dixon to the meeting who, he advised, had asked to speak (as local Dollis Hill ward councillors) in support of the Neasden Civic Partnership Programme. Highlighting the diversity, history and vibrant nature of Neasden, Councillor Ahmed in opening his comments, also felt it important to recognise the challenges faced in the area, particularly in relation to social and economic inequalities. The proposals and funding (which it was noted included £3.1m in capital grant funding from the Mayor of London and up to £7.4m from

Brent's Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy) outlined within the report were therefore welcomed as a means of focussing delivery on a programme of transformative regeneration and sustainable development within Neasden Town Centre that would also, it was felt, enhance quality of life across the wider surrounding area.

In further support of the programme, particular reference was made by both Councillors Ahmed and Dixon to the public realm and highways improvements as well as potential to secure wider environmental sustainability, which had been identified as part of the programme, along with the engagement and collaboration undertaken with local residents, businesses and other key stakeholders in the co-design and development of the Neasden Town Centre Action Plan. It was noted this would form a key element in delivery of the programme designed to make Neasden a safer, greener and more prosperous area for all.

Having thanked Councillors Ahmed and Dixon for their comments, Councillor Muhammed Butt then introduced Rumi Bose (Rumi Bose Consultancy) who, he advised, had been invited to attend the meeting in order to provide (as supporting background information) an outline of the key elements of the programme and summary of the engagement undertaken to develop the Neasden Town Action Plan. The key issues covered within the presentation were as follows:

- The background and outline of the programme and development of the Neasden Town Centre Action Plan as the basis for submission of a bid under the Mayor of London Civic Partnership Programme (CPP), which had resulted in Brent being selected as one of 12 boroughs to join Stage 1 of the programme. As a result of work to develop the Action Plan, funded through the Stage 1 programme, a subsequent bid had been submitted for Mayor of London CPP Exemplar (implementation) funding with Brent having been one of five boroughs securing a share (£3.1m) of the stage two funding available.
- The key strategic principles around which development of the proposals and Neasden Action Plan had been based, which included the aim to enhance public realm; tackle climate change and ecology and enhance community programming and leadership.
- The detailed mapping process undertaken in relation to the socio, economic and infrastructure issues identified across Neasden as a basis to support development of the Action Plan.
- The detailed and extensive nature of the community engagement process undertaken to inform co-design of the Neasden Town Centre Action Plan, which had involved a range of methods including an online survey, collaboration with United Borders and the College of North West London aimed at reaching out to a younger demographic, engagement with local businesses and media outlets, a local hackathon, vox pops and walkabouts with key partners including the Metropolitan Police.
- The key proposals which had been included within the programme, focussed on the following core areas:
 - Public Realm –wayfinding for Neasden Town Centre including a route to Neasden Underground Station and Neasden Stations Growth Area, with new signage, lighting, landscaping, public art; Green infrastructure for Neasden Town Centre: sustainable urban drainage system, pocket forest trees and low-level planting.

- Cultural & Civic Programming – including the provision of a Meanwhile Lighthouse structure with access stairs and tower signage, internal first floor fit out for workspace and community uses and support for local market provision
- Eastern Gyratory – reconfiguration, new access road, pavement, crossings, lighting and street furniture, to define and open up the gateway to Neasden Town Centre, improve access to The Grange, improve the route to Neasden Underground Station and Neasden Stations Growth Area.
- The design & planning along with construction timescales for delivery of each phase of the programme.

Having thanked Rumi Bose for the presentation, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning & Growth) then moved on to introduce the accompanying report providing an update on the Neasden Civic Partnership Programme and seeking approval to the allocation of up to £7.4m Strategic Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) capital funding to deliver the associated public realm and highway infrastructure improvements for Neasden Town Centre.

In presenting the report, Cabinet noted the ambitious nature of the vision within the programme which had been developed working in partnership with local stakeholders, business, residents and the Mayor for London in order to address the long standing social, economic and physical challenges identified in relation to Neasden as a town centre and its surrounding communities. In seeking to build on the positive outcomes achieved through the engagement process, members were advised that the proposals had been designed to deliver a programme of regeneration activity that would not only improve the public realm and foster better connectivity but also strengthen social cohesion and safety across the area in order to ensure Neasden was able to benefit from being a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable part of the borough.

In expressing support for the proposals outlined within the report, members welcomed what they regarded as the transformational nature of change outlined within the vision and as a result of the additional investment being sought to unlock the area's potential, particularly in relation to the public realm and wider connectivity improvements with members also keen to ensure opportunities associated with wider infrastructure improvements such as West London Orbital were also maximised. Members were also keen to support the proposals as a means of encouraging more active modes of travel and supporting existing as well as attracting new types of business to Neasden Town Centre, alongside the wider environmental and green infrastructure enhancements designed to facilitate Neasden becoming more sustainable as part of the Council's commitment towards tackling current inequalities identified and delivering a cleaner and greener future (with the proposed inclusion of the existing Grange building and facilities also welcomed).

The opportunities available to enhance critical infrastructure and support the delivery of wider regeneration and economic growth were also highlighted alongside the way in which the proposals had also been designed to assist in addressing community safety and tackling gang activity and antisocial behaviour

through the creation of safe, welcoming spaces for people to learn, connect, and grow.

In terms of other comments, support was also expressed for the way in which the proposals had been designed to build on the process of community engagement and civic partnership in seeking to deliver a place-led programme of improvement including new community and workspace areas that would also support the development of a wider package of employment, training, skills and enterprise support as part of an approach towards addressing the circular economy and also wider cultural provision across the area.

In recognising the impact of the legacy created as a result of the historical highway infrastructure interventions on Neasden as a Town Centre and also the impact arising from the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis across the area more widely, members were also keen to recognise the efforts being made through the programme to reestablish the socioeconomic and environmental links between the Town Centre and surrounding communities in a way that would also enhance community cohesion as a means of tackling wider public health inequalities and also provide initiatives to support young people in seeking to engage and better connect with the opportunities available, working in conjunction with local schools and the Young Brent Foundation.

In thanking all those involved for their efforts in developing the programme and once again commending the ambitious nature of the vision and proposals as a means of delivering meaningful change that would enable Neasden to be a safer and more inclusive place as part of the Council's commitment towards regeneration across the borough, Cabinet **RESOLVED**, having noted the exempt information contained within the appendices of the report and also support expressed by other stakeholders including the Mayor for London, Neasden Business Collective & Transport for London:

- (1) To approve up to £7.4m Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy capital funding to deliver public realm and highways infrastructure improvements in and around Neasden Town Centre.
- (2) To note that a range of contracts for consultants and contractors would be required to design, plan and develop the proposed public realm, community programming and highways improvements for the Neasden Civic Partnership Programme.
- (3) To note and endorses the proposed installation of a temporary building for community use on top of the council-owned car park next to 237 Neasden Lane, subject to obtaining any planning permission and other statutory consents.

8. **Quarter 3 Financial Report 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 3 2024-25.

In introducing the report, Councillor Mili Patel highlighted that the current forecast would be the final update on the Council's financial position in advance of the 2025-26 budget proposals being presented for consideration in February, highlighting that once again, despite the considerable efforts to maintain financial control, the operating environment and wider economic context faced by the Council remained challenging. In seeking to prioritise key statutory services the ongoing impact of austerity was again highlighted and whilst welcoming the new Government's promise of future multi-year funding settlements the need for this to be accompanied by urgent wide ranging reform of Local Government Funding arrangements was also highlighted.

In outlining the challenging financial conditions faced by the Council and recognising the efforts made to innovate, identify efficiencies and generate income members were advised these measures alone would no longer be sufficient over the longer term with the latest forecast predicting an overspend of £17.4m in the General Fund budget. Whilst officers, in seeking to address the pressures identified, had identified in-year savings of £8m members were advised that the potential need to draw down from unallocated reserves therefore remained a concern especially given the ongoing levels of demand and revenue pressures in relation to Housing Needs.

In focussing on these pressures, members noted that the Housing Needs Service in Brent had experienced a 12% increase in the number of homelessness presentations, with Council's across London now spending £4m a day in seeking to address the crisis, and solutions to tackle the scale of the housing emergency becoming increasingly limited. As a result, the government was being urged to increase the funding available to local authorities to cope with the loss in Housing Benefit subsidy to ensure the Local Housing Allowance was truly reflective of the cost of living in London.

Whilst recognising the financial pressures and surge in demand faced by the Council, members also noted the positive outcomes which had been achieved including the delivery of a £1.7m underspend within Neighbourhoods and Regeneration and the contribution through the i4B initiative in generating (on a self-financing basis) annual savings exceeding £4m in terms of cost avoidance relating to Temporary Accommodation costs, with additional proactive efforts in homelessness prevention and relief having also yielded positive results.

Recognising the extent of the significant challenges identified in seeking to manage demand and address the pressures identified, the transparent assessment of the Council's current position was welcomed, with the need for continued financial discipline and careful stewardship highlighted in order to sustain and ensure the Council's financial sustainability.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the specific updates provided by members in relation to the following areas:

- Children and Young People (CYP) with members advised that the current forecast overspend of £1.3m reflected a shift from the £0.5m underspend reported in Q2, mainly driven by increasing pressure and the unpredictable nature of demand on the placements budget. In terms of other pressures, members noted the £0.9m overspend being reported within Forward Planning,

Performance, and Partnership which reflected the current higher-than-expected level of demand for residential and secure placements and support expressed for the efforts being made to seek better regulation across the sector and address pricing between boroughs with the need for more of these services to be brought within the control of local authorities. Additional overspends of £0.1m were also identified in relation to Business Support (due to staffing pressures) and £0.5m on legal costs and out-of-borough contact services, which it was noted reflected the ongoing costs of legal disbursements related to age assessments for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

Whilst the delivery of underspends in Independent Foster Agency placements had been welcomed (driven by lower client numbers and unit cost reductions) efforts to expand in-house foster care provision and promote independence for care-experienced young people, including access to relevant benefits and sustainable tenancies (being led through the recently established CYP Placement Commissioning Board) were also highlighted as part of the approach in seeking to address pressures identified and improve outcomes for young people. Whilst highlighting ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers support was also expressed for the efforts being made to manage and reduce the use of agency workers as well as the proactive efforts being made to address the inflationary pressures from external providers in terms of the provision of fostering and residential accommodation, including delivery of the new children's home designed to increase local placement capacity and reduce reliance on external providers. In recognising the ongoing nature of the demand led risks identified (including the increased level of demand in relation to SEND provision) members welcomed the proactive range of measures identified to monitor and manage these pressures and efforts being made to continue prioritising the delivery of high-quality, wraparound support for children and families across Brent in a fiscally responsible way.

- Partnerships, Housing, and Resident Services with a focus on the financial pressures being experienced as a result of the ongoing demand for housing and housing emergency, with the current forecast projecting an overspend of £12.9m for 2024-25 contributing towards the overall pressure of £15.2m identified within the Housing Needs and Support service. Whilst outlining the proactive measures (including £2.3m of in-year savings achieved through vacancy holds, additional income generation, and the reprioritisation of expenditure) which had been taken in seeking to mitigate against the pressures identified, members recognised the significant extent of the challenges being experienced given the ongoing scale of demand including the increase in homelessness presentations as well as Temporary Accommodation (8%) and emergency placements for families (36%) many of which involved more expensive out of borough arrangements due to the scarcity of local options compounded by the strain on the private rented sector and increase in rent levels.

In seeking to respond strategically to the pressures identified, members noted and welcomed the contribution being made through the i4B initiative towards increasing the available supply of affordable and secure homes aimed at reducing reliance on costly temporary accommodation. In terms of other

initiatives being led through the Directorate, reference was made to the positive impact being delivered through the new Community Wellbeing Programme and refreshed Resident Support Fund designed to provide sustainable and impactful support for local residents alongside the Household Support Fund as a means of assisting residents in financial hardship, which it was hoped the new government would continue supporting given the value this provided as an emergency safety net. In outlining the range of proactive measures being taken to manage the immediate pressures identified, members also recognised the significant nature of ongoing risks including ongoing viability concerns relating to the delivery of housing projects as a result of cost inflation, rising interest rates, and stringent new fire safety regulations and pressures on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) relating to demand for repairs. Despite the challenges identified, however, members remained keen to highlight the Council's ongoing commitment to ensuring every resident had access to a safe, secure and suitable home and in tackling the housing emergency.

- Community, Health & Wellbeing with the focus once again on the financial pressures being experienced as a result of the growing demand for key services with the current forecast across the Directorate involving a £0.4m pressure, reflecting a change from the £2.1m underspend reported at Q2. This reflected the strain of rising demand, inflationary pressures, and the complexities of delivering care across a sector facing significant workforce and financial challenges and wider need for urgent reform of the social care system. In terms of key challenges, members were advised of the current £1m pressure on Strategic Commissioning and Capacity Building budgets, primarily being driven by a 7% increase in homecare service users since Q2, which had been compounded by a delay in the delivery of savings from the Technology Enabled Care programme, currently in the scoping phase. Whilst noting that Adult Social Care, was still forecast to deliver a £0.9m underspend, this had reduced from the £2.6m previously forecast due to rising costs for residential and dementia placements.

The pressures being experienced in relation to Leisure Services were also highlighted particularly in relation to provision at Bridge Park and Vale Farm, where it was noted fluctuating demand and rising operational costs had contributed to a £0.3m forecast pressure and reflected the current vulnerability of income-dependent services. In recognising the pressures identified, members also acknowledged the significant level of in-year savings due to be delivered (£1.7m) across the Directorate, including those brought forward from 2025-26 and through changes to the charging policy which it was felt reflected the proactive approach being taken in seeking to manage the overall financial position whilst continuing to provide essential services and in recognising the significant nature of risks identified. These were noted to include not only demographic changes in terms of the level and range of complex needs requiring support but also seasonal winter pressures and workforce challenges being experienced across the health and social care sector as a whole. Whilst conscious of the ongoing challenges identified the positive approach being taken towards prevention and targeted intervention was also highlighted alongside the impact of various Public Health funded initiatives including the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant and the Rough Sleepers Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant as a means

of ensuring the highest standards of care continued to be delivered for Brent residents.

- Public Realm & Enforcement with the Council's ongoing commitment to keeping the borough, clean green and safe outlined despite the financial challenges already identified. As part of this approach, reference was made to the introduction and monitoring of new contractual arrangements for key services including parking and waste management, with members advised of the specific pressures identified in relation to the new waste management contract as a result of the fluctuation in material prices. Whilst efforts remained ongoing to mitigate these impacts, members were advised the pressures identified had been anticipated with earmarked reserves created to manage such challenges and longer-term performance improvements being introduced to maintain sustainability and ensure the service remained in budget during the current year. This approach had also been supported more widely through initiatives such as the 'Don't Mess with Brent' enforcement scheme with members also welcoming the recent commitment announced by the government of an additional £1.6b for local authorities (including an allocation of £759k for Brent) to address potholes and maintain roads.

As further updates, the ongoing challenges and risks identified in relation to delivery of the Capital Programme were also highlighted due to the complex nature of schemes included and impact of the increase in build costs affecting viability on a number of projects.

In thanking officers and members for the update provided, Cabinet noted the challenges in seeking to manage demand and address the pressures identified, with members noting the work being undertaken through the Budget Assurance Panel in this respect and outlining their continued commitment to working with their relevant Corporate Directors to ensure ongoing oversight and management of budgets in each service area.

As a result of the update provided, 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 Q3 Financial Forecast.
- (2) To note progress on the savings delivery tracker, as detailed in Appendix A of the report.
- (3) To note the prudential indicators for treasury management, as detailed in in Appendix B of the report.
- (4) To approve the virements set out in section 4.7.13 of the report.

9. **Brent Council's School Admission Arrangements and Schemes of Co-ordination 2026-2027**

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools) introduced a report outlining the proposed admission arrangements for Brent

Community schools and Schemes of Coordination for 2026-27 (as set out within Appendices 1 & 2 of the report) which required determination and approval by the Admission Authority, in accordance with statutory requirements and timescales.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the key aim within the proposed admission arrangements and schemes of co-ordination for all maintained schools and academies to ensure that every child in Brent had the opportunity to access high-quality education as a means of establishing the foundation for their future success and wellbeing. In recognising the financial challenges being experienced by many schools in relation to falling pupil numbers and increased demand for SEND provision the establishment of effective admission arrangements was therefore recognised as more than an administrative requirement, with the need for a clear and transparent process regarded as key in ensuring places continued to be allocated in a fair way enabling the needs of young people and their families to be prioritised and addressed.

Officers and schools were thanked for their support to ensure that the approach established enabled children from all backgrounds across the borough to have access to local schools, supporting community cohesion and providing a stable environment for families, with the Scheme of Coordination outlined in the report also highlighted as an essential part of the admissions process in terms of providing clarity and structure and in maintaining work being undertaken across maintained schools and academies to ensure that children could transition smoothly and equitably into educational provision.

In noting the importance in terms of the forward planning for provision of school places across the borough, given the need to balance demand for school places with the availability of high-quality provision, across the family of schools in Brent, members also recognised the way in which the proposed arrangements would also support provisions within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill relating to school places in a way that would also provide certainty for schools, assisting them to plan ahead and continue delivering the best possible education for young people across the borough.

In welcoming the transparent nature of the arrangements, given the importance and impact of the school admission process on families and young people, members commended what they felt to be the thorough and fair nature of the proposals outlined in relation to maintained schools and academies across the borough.

In support of the transparent nature of the approach outlined, Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To agree ("determine") the proposed admission arrangements for Brent community schools and schemes of co-ordination for all maintained schools and academies in Brent for the 2026/2027 academic year, as detailed within Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.
- (2) To note the scheme of co-ordination which would be in place for the 2026-2027 offer year for co-ordinated applications to start school in years Reception, 3, 7 and 10.

10. Exclusion of Press and Public

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

11. **Any other urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 11.07 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair