



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 6 February 2023 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor M Butt (Chair), Councillor M Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Farah, Grahl, Knight, Nerva, Southwood and Tatler.

Also present: Councillors Afzal, Conneely and Georgiou.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Donnelly-Jackson and Krupa Sheth along with Carolyn Downs (Chief Executive) with Phil Porter (Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health) in attendance as her representative.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Nerva and Grahl both declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item 16 (New Repayment Framework for Major Works Billing for Leaseholders in Brent) as they were leaseholders in the borough.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 16 January 2023 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

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

None.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

There were no petitions submitted for consideration at the meeting.

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

There were no references from either the Community & Wellbeing or Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committees submitted for consideration at the meeting.

7. **Budget & Council Tax 2023-24**

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

As the first speaker, Councillor Afzal began by highlighting the need to recognise the challenging economic context in which the budget had been developed, with specific reference to the cumulative detrimental impacts arising from a decade of Government austerity affecting the poorest in society. As a result, he highlighted the importance in the engagement and consultation process which had been undertaken in seeking to finalise the budget proposals for consideration.

The Leader advised he had also received written representations from Councillor Kennelly, who in expressing support for the budget proposals, highlighted:

- The need to recognise their focus in seeking to protect the most vulnerable against the rising costs of living.
- The challenging nature of the decisions forced upon the Council as a result of the stance taken and financial measures introduced by central government. Whilst recognising these challenges he also felt it important to commend the positive initiatives and support which the budget proposals had been designed to continue protecting such as the Resident Support Fund and strategic goals such as reducing carbon emissions and tackling the climate emergency.
- The regressive nature of Council Tax as a means of ensuring (particularly as a result of rising costs and demand in relation to adult social care and children's services) the Council was able to continue supporting and protecting the most vulnerable in society.

Councillor Georgiou, was then invited to speak who, whilst outlining the regressive nature of Council Tax, also expressed concern at the fairness of the proposed increase in Council Tax recommended within the budget proposals given the impact on local residents, particularly those living within Alperton and the surrounding area. Whilst recognising the challenging economic context and impact of austerity, stemming from the 2008 financial crash on local government finances, compounded by Brexit and recent central government fiscal interventions, concerns were raised about the proposed increase in Council Tax when compared to reductions in services locally. Concerns were also highlighted in relation to the impact of the Mayor for London's precept and change in Government policy to move responsibility for funding Adult Social Care to local authorities, again through Council Tax. Given the concerns highlighted, Councillor Georgiou felt there was a need for the Council to ensure that funding collected locally was refocussed and prioritised on local areas of improvement, including:

- The state of roads and pavements – with a call for additional capital investment.
- Street Cleansing – with concerns highlighted in relation to the new intelligence-led approach to street cleaning.
- Investment in young people – with concerns highlighted regarding the reduction in funding over the last decade on youth services and impact on the most underprivileged young people, which it was required the development of a new Youth Offer that would dedicate funding to youth services in Brent.

As a final contribution, Councillor Conneely was then 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 2023/24. In introducing the report, Councillor Conneely highlighted that the Task Group in undertaking their review had recognised the challenging

financial environment in which the Council was operating given the long-term reduction in Government funding and level of savings already delivered as a result, current economic challenges and increasing complexity of demand for Council services along with similar pressures on other statutory and voluntary and community sector support. Taking these issues into account the Budget Scrutiny Task Group had been impressed with the Council's attempts to focus investment on the most vulnerable, particularly in relation to the Resident and Council Tax Support Fund and in seeking to address housing demand and reduce the use of temporary accommodation. Highlighting the recommendations made as a result of their review, the Task Group had:

- Been keen to ensure that the budget proposals were clearly presented with clarity provided regarding cuts and investment proposals.
- Emphasised the importance of ensuring a holistic approach to residents care including ensuring that an effective collaborative mechanism was established between the Council, NHS and other relevant stakeholders to agree patient discharge/step down plans and to leverage sufficient financial contributions from the NHS and other stakeholders to improve the Health and Social Care function in Brent in order to avoid the main cost burden falling on the Council.
- Supported the need to seek additional funding in order to support Brent Schools through the Dedicated Schools Grant
- Supported the need for additional investment in highways infrastructure and to further explore the development of income generation opportunities as a means of supporting strategic priorities.
- Recognised the importance of the ongoing financial support for the Council Tax Support Scheme, given the assistance being provided for those most vulnerable in society and lack of alternative viable options to raising Council Tax as a means of addressing the current financial pressures and challenges on the Council.

In concluding, Councillor Conneely advised that the Task Group had also been keen to ensure the budget clearly set out how the spending proposals were aligned with agreed strategic priorities for the borough and to support the need for continuing lobbying for Local Government funding reforms, again highlighting what was felt to be the regressive nature of Council Tax. On this basis the recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group were commended to Cabinet for consideration as part of the budget setting process.

In response to the comments made Councillor Butt 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 and in addressing the ongoing challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and wider economic pressures as a means of continuing to support residents. He also expressed his thanks for the hard work of members and officers in producing the Task Group report and highlighted its importance to the overall budget setting process, especially given the detailed analysis undertaken in respect of the wider budget and funding implications on services.

Having also thanked members for their contributions, Councillor Mili Patel, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform then introduced the report which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2023-24. 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 Mili Patel began by providing a strategic overview to the context in which the budget proposals had needed to be developed. This included the ongoing risks and uncertainties outlined in relation to inflationary pressures, the economic challenges resulting from the war in Ukraine, Government's short term funding settlements and delay in wider local government funding reforms along with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, recovery from the pandemic and Brexit. Members also noted this followed a twelve-year period of significant reductions in Government funding which had required the Council to make £196m worth of savings, despite an increase in demand for key services and wider social and demographic changes which had resulted in particular pressures on Adult's and Children's Social Care and the homelessness budgets. In noting the challenges these issues had presented in relation to the Council's overall medium-term Financial Strategy, members were advised that the proposals detailed within the report had been designed to address the significant financial impacts arising from the demographic and inflationary pressures identified whilst also seeking to ensure that the Council continued to support those most in need and operate in a prudent, financially sustainable and resilient way and meet its requirements in delivering a balanced budget.

In noting the outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 announced by the Government in December, members felt it important to recognise that whilst better than anticipated the increase had also assumed the maximum permitted increase in Council Tax of 4.99% (without triggering the need for a referendum). The maximum allowable therefore represented a 2% increase in the previous limit (based on a 1% uplift in Council Tax and 1% uplift in the Adult Social Care precept), although it was noted that even allowing for this, the additional funding available to support existing services was less than inflation and would still therefore amount to a real term cut alongside the increased demands on services.

In focussing on the detail proposals, Councillor Mili Patel highlighted that aside from the usual updating and adjustments to various technical assumptions the key features within the budget for 2023/24 therefore included:

- a proposed Council Tax rise of 4.99% for the Brent element, which included 2% ring fenced for Adult Social Care. The proposed increase had been designed to reflect the current financial pressures facing the Council and was felt to be the minimum required to ensure the Council was able to continue providing the level of services required given the ongoing nature of demand. It was noted that the final level would also need to include the precept agreed by the Greater London Authority (GLA);
- New budget savings proposals with an aggregate value of £18m, with £4.5m deferred to 2024/25 as detailed within Appendix C(i) of the report.

In concluding her introduction, Councillor Mili Patel once again highlighted how challenging and difficult development of the budget proposals had been and thanked Cabinet Members and officers 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. It was noted these priorities included:

- ongoing support for Brent Hubs, Resident & Household Support Fund and Council Tax Support Scheme, including transformative provision for establishment of a Family Food Fund and community shop and kitchen at Bridge Park Leisure Centre working with local partners in order to maintain support for residents across the borough;
- maintaining the ongoing commitment to increase the supply of genuinely affordable and accessible housing alongside the regeneration of the borough and creation of employment opportunities whilst also seeking to keep the borough as clean and green as possible and provide for maintenance of key infrastructure;
- 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 pressure on health service and social care funding) and work being undertaken to address wider health inequalities.
- continued support for local schools and Special Educational Needs provision, with specific reference to the enhancement of SEND provision through capital investment in a new school and to the establishment of a scheme to support local provision of childcare residential placements, alongside various initiatives to enhance youth provision across the borough including use of NCIL, given the significant cuts in this area as a result of the Government's programme of austerity.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt highlighted the challenging nature of the budget setting process given the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis, wider economic challenges and continued uncertainty in relation to central government's funding of local authorities. He felt it was important to recognise that members and officers had looked at every 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, cumulative impact of austerity and the Government's approach towards local government funding (including the regressive nature of Council Tax) along with the level of cuts already delivered by the Council and identified for 2023-24 and beyond, he advised that the measures outlined 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, including the proposed level of increase in Council Tax, he ended by highlighting the aim to ensure they were focussed on enabling the Council to deliver a balanced budget alongside key services and essential support and protection for residents across the borough during such challenging times and ensure the best possible outcomes for all.

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 agree to recommend to Full Council an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2023/24, with 2% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 2.99% general increase.
- (2) To agree to recommend to Full Council the General Fund revenue budget for 2023/24, as summarised in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) To agree to recommend to Full Council the savings proposals for 2023/24 and deferral of savings to 2024/25 as set out in Appendix C (i) of the report.
- (4) To note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in Appendix D of the report.
- (5) To agree to recommend to Full Council the HRA budget for 2023/24 and business plan, as set out in section seven and Appendix Q of the report.
- (6) To agree the HRA rents for council dwellings, tenant service charges and garages, as set out in section seven of the report.
- (7) 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 seven of the report.
- (8) To note the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section eight of the report.
- (9) To agree 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 10 of the report and Appendix E, and note the Capital Pipeline Schemes in Appendix F.
- (10) To agree 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.
- (11) To agree to recommend to Full Council the Reserves Strategy and schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendix K of the report.
- (12) 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.
- (13) To agree, and where relevant agree to recommend to Full Council, the schedule of fees and charges for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix M report.
- (14) To note the results of the budget consultation, as set out in section six and detailed in Appendix N of the report.
- (15) To note the advice of the Corporate Director of Governance, as set out in Appendix O of the report.

(16) To note the decision of the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources to continue as part of the Eight Authority Business Rates pool in 2023/24 as set out in Section five of the report.

(17) To also note and approve the specific recommendations identified for consideration by Full Council as detailed in section 2.17 – 2.36 of the report.

8. **Acquisition of 294 Homes at Fulton Road, Wembley**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) introduced a report seeking permission to the purchase of a long leasehold interest in 294 homes (flats) located on the former Euro Car Parks site, Fulton Road, Wembley.

In considering the report, Cabinet was advised that the development on the former Euro Car Parks site, Fulton Road (for which planning permission had been granted in March 2022) comprised a mixed-use delivering retail space, industrial floorspace and housing. As a result of the developer seeking a buyer for 294 of the homes, an in-principle agreement had been reached with the Council for their purchase based on the breakdown of affordable housing units as detailed within section 3.2 of the report.

Members noted that the purchase of the blocks identified would represent an increase in the original level of affordable housing and improvement in the tenure(s) available as part of the development proposals, which would assist in meeting current levels of housing demand across the breakdown of units identified. As part of the funding package to support the purchase the Council had also submitted an application to the GLA for £8.2m grant funding, which reflected the overall percentage of affordable housing being provided.

In supporting the proposed acquisitions, Members were keen to recognise the ongoing work being undertaken to support households who were either homeless, at risk of homelessness or in housing need and in terms of increasing the supply of safe, secure and appropriately sized affordable accommodation across the borough, working in partnership with the GLA and other key stakeholders.

As a result, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

(1) To approve a budget of £85.6m plus VAT (if any) to purchase the long leasehold interest in 294 homes from Crown Wembley LP, subject to contract and subject to a) clean and marketable title b) financial and legal due diligence and c) vacant possession, with a target completion date in March 2023.

(2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources in consultation with the Finance, Resources & Reform to negotiate and agree the terms and thereafter enter a development sale and purchase contract with the vendor for the purchase of these homes by way of a long lease of 999 years (less 3 days).

(3) To note the Corporate Director, Finance & Resources using powers delegated under the Constitution would tender and award relevant contracts for

professional services relating to the construction supervision of the 294 homes that would be transferred to Brent Council.

- (4) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Resident Services to enter into a grant agreement with the Greater London Authority (GLA) for purchase of the Section 106 block of apartments at Fulton Road in the sum of £8.2m.
- (5) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform to secure the necessary pre-requisite consents and thereafter agree the terms for entering a lease of the 118 units to a Council owned subsidiary.

9. **Airco Close Lease Assignment**

Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) introduced a report seeking approval to the transfer of a 999-year lease from the developer of 399 Edgware Road to the Council for a concrete podium above a basement car park, as part of a s106 Agreement for the development.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted that the original planning consent for the site had comprised a mixed-use development including the provision of a two-form entry primary and nursery school for which the Council had entered into a s.106 Agreement to secure the transfer of the land. Having approved initial proposals and a lease to provide and operate the proposed new school on the site, the project had subsequently been halted based on a review of pupil numbers and demand identified which had meant there was no longer any requirement to provide a Primary School in that part of the borough.

As a result, members noted that the site had remained vacant since completion, with the developer having undertaken protective measures and repairs to ensure that the site remained in a reasonable and appropriate site prior to any subsequent transfer. Given the Council had the right, within the terms of the lease to seek landlords consent for other uses and its location within a significant growth area, it was therefore proposed that the site be formally acquired in order for alternative options regarding its future use and development to be progressed.

In supporting and welcoming the development opportunities identified in relation to the potential future use of the site Cabinet **RESOLVED** having also noted the exempt information included within Appendix 2 of the report, to agree a transfer of a 999-year lease from the Developer of 399 Edgware Road to the Council for a concrete podium above a basement car park as part of a s106 agreement for the development.

10. **Borough Plan 2023-27**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) introduced a report presenting the outcome of the consultation and engagement undertaken on the draft Borough Plan and setting out the changes and updates proposed in terms of adoption of the final Borough Plan 2023-27 and accompanying documents to be recommended to Full Council for final adoption.

In considering the report Cabinet noted the work undertaken in developing the Borough Plan to capture the achievements made during the previous four-year period, whilst also providing the context and narrative in relation to the Administrations strategic priorities and ambitions over the next four-year period in order to best support the borough, its local residents and diverse communities in continuing to thrive.

Members noted and welcomed the comprehensive nature of the process undertaken to frame, shape and consolidate the ambitions and commitments as an overarching strategy within the Borough Plan along with the flexibility retained in order to adapt to any needs and challenges as they arose moving forward, recognising the difficult economic and financial context in which the Council was having to operate.

In noting the extent and outcome of the engagement and consultation process, as detailed within Appendix A to the report, alongside use of the evidence base, attached as Appendix C of the report, to support development of the key themes, strategic priorities and outcomes within the Plan, members were keen to ensure this work continued in order to share the ambitions identified and encourage further engagement with stakeholders, particularly young people and members of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities as part of the next steps in delivering the Plan.

Whilst recognising the ongoing financial challenges and increased level of demand on services, members welcomed the ambition within the Borough Plan to continue prioritising the most vulnerable whilst also seeking to protect essential services in order to support all residents across the borough and in noting the progress made were keen to endorse the five overarching strategic priorities identified within the final Plan along with the key changes that had been made, following feedback from the consultation and engagement process, as detailed in section 5.3 of the report. Members particularly welcomed the update of Strategic Priority (SP)1 to focus on “Prosperity and Stability” and include the objective in relation to “safe, secure and decent housing”, which members were also pleased to note had been expanded to include a focus around housing quality across Brent.

Officers were thanked for their efforts in developing the final version of the Plan, with work now ongoing to agree the key measures and milestones to be included within the new corporate performance matrix for delivery, which it was recognised would also require an ongoing joint focus between Cabinet Members and their relevant Corporate Directors.

Having considered the report, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to endorse the following to be progressed to Full Council for finalisation and adoption:

- a. Borough Plan Engagement and Consultation Findings 2023-27 (attached as Appendix A to the report)
- b. Brent Borough Plan 2023 – 27 (attached as Appendix B to the report)
- c. Borough Plan evidence base (attached as Appendix C to the report)
- d. Equality Impact Assessment (attached as Appendix D to the report)

11. **Draft Sustainable Environment and Development Supplementary Planning Document**

Councillor Tatler (Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Planning) introduced a report seeking approval to undertake consultation on a draft Sustainable Environment and Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and delegate authority in relation to its final adoption.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted and welcomed the aim in developing the SPD to provide clarity, given the extent of new development across the borough and Council's commitments in relation to tackling the climate emergency, on how developments within Brent would be required to address climate change factors, taking account of the Brent Local Plan and Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.

Members were advised of the extensive range of both internal and external engagement undertaken to inform the content of the SPD, which had included the Local Plan Member Working Group. As a result, it had been recognised that the SPD would be expected to clarify the guidance and requirements in relation to the creation and delivery of more sustainable developments at both major and minor level within the borough, including reference to relevant London Plan policies, Supplementary Planning Guidance, London Plan Guidance as well as Brent's Local Plan policies.

Having noted the outline of the proposed consultation process and recognised the way in which the SPD had been designed to support delivery of the Council's wider development and climate emergency commitments, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve progressing consultation on the Sustainable Environment and Development draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as set out in Appendix A of the report.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Communities and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning to consider consultation responses, along with any necessary changes, and the decision on whether to adopt the final SPD.

12. **Draft Residential Amenity Space & Place Quality Supplementary Planning Document**

Councillor Tatler (Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Planning) introduced a report seeking approval to undertake consultation on a draft Residential Amenity Space and Place Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

In considering the report, members were advised that the SPD had been developed to clarify and provide clear guidance in relation to the Council's expectations for well-designed places and existing requirements in terms of residential amenity and good urban design in Brent's Local Plan.

Cabinet endorsed the scope of the SPD, which it was noted would cover a wide range of amenity space types, sizes and scales of development designed to

improve residents' quality of life by seeking to ensure high quality environmental design aimed at improving health, wellbeing and social cohesion and address wider inequalities such as those exposed during the covid pandemic. As part of this approach, members noted how the scope of the SPD extended beyond the typical design guidance, through introduction of a new "Place Quality Framework" setting out a new system for the assessment of design quality framed around health, wellbeing, social sustainability and quality of life outcomes building on emerging guidance that would be a material consideration in determining future planning applications.

Members were advised of the extensive range of both internal and external engagement undertaken to inform the content of the SPD and having considered and welcomed the approach in seeking to improve quality of life through the design of places, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the Draft Residential Amenity Space and Place Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), as set out in Appendix A of the report, to be issued for statutory public consultation.

13. **Authority to Award a Contract for Services relating to the Supply, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Electric Vehicle Charging Points**

As a result of Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action) having submitted her apologies for the meeting Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) introduced a report outlining the procurement process undertaken for the supply of a Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Solution – Supplier Funded – End to End Service and seeking approval for final award of the contract.

In support of the provision of additional electric vehicle charging points, given increasing demand particularly within the Private Hire Vehicle sector, members were also keen to recognise the wider benefits identified through the contract and supply of local charging facilities as a means of addressing the Council's climate change and air quality objectives.

As a result, and having noted the exempt information contained within Appendix A of the report, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the award of the call off contract for the supply, installation, operation and maintenance of electric vehicle charge points for 10 years with an option to extend for a further 5 years (up to 15 years) to Zest Eco Ltd following completion of the further competition from the Crown Commercial Services' Dynamic Purchasing System and note that, depending on charge point models used, the value of the Contract was estimated to range between circa £952,000 and £1,936,000 plus a total revenue share projection over 10 years of £200,678.53.
- (2) To approve a maximum capital budget of £1.04m for supply and installation of the electric vehicle charging points.

14. **Improving the Customer Experience in Brent Civic Centre**

Councillor Southwood (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Economy & Citizens Experience) introduced a report outlining proposals for the redesign of face-to-face public

spaces in Brent Civic Centre aimed at delivering an improved service to residents and the Council's customers.

As context to the proposals, members noted the background to the Customer Access project and shift in customer behaviour following the covid pandemic impacting on the way customers were now accessing services and profile of those now presenting at the Civic Centre and Community Hub for support, often involving more complex needs. Members were advised that the redesign project had therefore been designed to improve public spaces in the Civic Centre, with a focus on the Hub, Library, Mezzanine floor and Customer Service Centre in order to support an expanded offer and ensure that all customer spaces within the Civic Centre were fully utilised, safe, comfortable and accessible for residents and staff and able to unlock efficiencies in how customer facing services and the Civic Centre were able to operate.

In noting the key changes proposed in terms of the building redesign, members were advised that these had been shaped following extensive engagement and feedback from residents as well as frontline staff and would enable the current challenges in terms of the existing layout to be addressed whilst providing a range of additional benefits (as outlined within section 4.31 of the report) also ensuring customer facing services would be able to operate in a more integrated and holistic way.

Having welcomed the review and recognised the benefits identified in terms of supporting the way customer-facing services were operating whilst also delivering a space that would be welcoming, comfortable, accessible and could support the delivery of an expanded offer and future efficiencies, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the plans to redesign customer spaces in Brent Civic Centre.
- (2) To approve a budget of £1.96m for the redesign work and inclusion within the Capital Programme.
- (3) To support the Libraries, Arts and Heritage Service in submission of a National Lottery Heritage Fund bid and delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Resident Services to make decisions regarding this funding bid on the Council's behalf.

15. **Council Tax Support Fund 2023/24**

Councillor Southwood (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Economy & Citizens Experience) introduced a report outlining recent changes introduced for 2023/24 and beyond in relation to Council Tax liability and support for those in receipt of Council Tax Support and in relation to households in need and seeking approval to an amendment to the Council's existing 13A(1)(c) Policy in order to introduce the related new discretionary relief policy.

In considering the report, Cabinet was advised that the updated funding regulations and guidance had been issued by the Government on 23 December 2022. Members welcomed the additional support provided, which it was noted would enable the Council to further reduce Council Tax bills for those in receipt of Council

Tax Support and to use the remaining funding to further support households in need.

In commending the ongoing inclusion of support for care leavers within Brent's Council Tax Support Scheme and wider relief being made available for vulnerable local residents, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the proposed discretionary reduction Policy pursuant to section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Act 1992 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- (2) To note that the proposed Policy pursuant to section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Act 1992 links to council support for vulnerable residents alongside other support mechanisms such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Resident Support Fund (Local Welfare Assistance).
- (3) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Resident Services in consultation with the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources in respect of decisions on individual applications for reducing Council Tax payable pursuant to the proposed policy under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

16. **New Repayment Framework for Major Works billing for Leaseholders in Brent**

Councillor Knight (Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security) introduced a report providing an overview of recent changes in legislation relating to leasehold management and how these were expected to impact on leaseholders in Brent. The report also outlined both a new and improved existing offer for leaseholders when they received service charges/major works bills from the Council designed to increase repayment options and flexibility taking account of current economic pressures and challenges.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the details of the current offer available to leaseholders and proposed new offer, as detailed in section 8 and Appendix 1 of the report, the development of which had been subject to an extensive benchmarking exercise with other local authorities. The results of the benchmarking, which had been detailed within section 7 and Appendix 2 of the report, had demonstrated that the proposed offer would ensure Brent remained competitive when compared with other London Boroughs, whilst ensuring that payment terms were updated to provide the best options available enabling leaseholders to benefit from necessary improvement, modernisation and energy efficiency works.

In recognising the wider improvements made in relation to the service offer available to leaseholders, members also welcomed the timely nature of the report as a further means of assisting to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and in recognition of the challenging position faced by many leaseholders as a result of rising costs for building maintenance, repair and safety works. The offer outlined within the report was therefore welcomed and supported by members in recognition of the efforts made to provide fair, affordable, manageable and sustainable repayment options aimed at minimising the risk of debt and financial hardship being experienced by leaseholders (often outside of their direct control) and to support

them in sustaining their residency, whilst also balancing the need to recover charges as efficiently as possible.

In supporting the approach outlined and efforts being made to enhance the offer available to leaseholders, Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To extend the interest free periods in respect of major works for resident leaseholders from 2 years (currently) to 5 years.
- (2) To agree the repayment offer as set out in section 8 of the report.
- (3) To promote the option to all resident leaseholders (in those blocks scheduled for major works as set out in 5.1 of the report) for the Council to 'Buy Back' their home at market value (reduced to 75% of market value, if they choose to become secure tenants), and for non-resident leaseholders of those same blocks to have the option for the Council to buy back their leasehold property at 100% of the market value.

17. Authority to award contract for the provision and management of bike hangars in Brent

As a result of Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action) having submitted her apologies for the meeting Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) introduced a report outlining the procurement process and recommended award of a contract for the purchase and management of future bike hangars and transfer of the management and maintenance of current bike hangars.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the progress made in the supply and installation of bike hangars alongside the increasing level of demand across the borough, with the procurement process outlined within the report having been designed to increase supply whilst standardising annual costs for future and existing bike hanger users.

Having considered the report Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the award of a contract for the purchase and management of future bike hangars and the transfer of the management and maintenance of current bike hangars to Lock It Safe Ltd for an initial contract period of three (3) years, with an option to extend for up to a further two (2) years on an annual basis.
- (2) To note that the value of the contract referred to in (1) above was estimated to be £90,000 for year 1 but that this value may increase if further funding was made available through S106 developer funding and Transport for London Local Implementation Plan funding in future years.

18. Determination of Brent Council's School Admission Arrangements for Community Primary Schools 2024-25

Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools) introduced a report seeking approval to the proposed admission arrangements and

schemes of coordination for Brent Community Primary Schools for 2024-25, following the required consultation and in accordance with statutory requirements.

In noting the rationale provided for the proposed changes to the admission arrangements and outcome of the consultation process on them, as detailed within section 4 of the report, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to agree the admission arrangements for Brent community schools and the scheme of co-ordination for maintained schools in Brent for the 2024/2025 academic year, as detailed within Appendices 2 and 3 of the report.

19. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

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

20. **Any other urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 11.12 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair