

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

22 April 2025



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

Committee Members Present:

Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chair), Peter Smallwood (Vice-Chair), Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana, Scott Farley (Opposition Lead), Janet Gardner and Kamal Preet Kaur

Witnesses Present:

Others Present:

Liz Penny (Democratic Services Officer), Richard Webb (Director Community Safety & Enforcement), Karrie Whelan (Consultant - Place Directorate), Julia Johnson (Interim Head of Strategic Planning), Joanne Howells (Team Leader ASBET), Martin King (Trading Standards Manager), Ceri Lamoureux (Head of Finance - Place), Gary Penticost, Sam Strong (Head of Housing Management), Stephanie Waterford (Head of Public Protection and Enforcement), Nicola Herbert and Geeta Blood (Head of Finance - Place)

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Darran Davies and from Councillor Ekta Gohil with Councillor Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana substituting for the latter.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

70. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The Chair noted that, prior to the 13 March meeting of the Select Committee, correspondence had been received from the Harmondsworth and Sipson Residents' Association and from St Mary's Church who wished to place on record their thanks and appreciation of the Community Payback Scheme.

At the request of Members, it was agreed that Joanne Howells, Street Scene Enforcement Service Manager, would provide Democratic Services with an update regarding the rehabilitation rates of participants as referenced in the minutes of the previous meeting.

After the meeting it was confirmed that officers administered the scheme, arranged works and ensured offenders completed the required hours as issued by the Courts but did not collect any data regarding rehabilitation.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 13 March 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

71.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THOSE MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE <i>(Agenda Item 4)</i></p> <p>It was confirmed that all items of business were marked Part I and would be considered in public.</p>
72.	<p>BUDGET AND SPENDING REPORT <i>(Agenda Item 5)</i></p> <p>The budget and spending report was introduced as a new item on the agenda. The Corporate Director - Place explained that the report outlined savings proposals for Residents' Services, with a requirement to make considerable savings this year, totalling £15 million. It was confirmed that Cabinet had reviewed these proposals in detail, and they had been agreed at Full Council.</p> <p>It was explained that the green waste charging provision was expected to save £2.5 million. The importance of assessing and monitoring demand was emphasised. It was noted that there had been an uplift in crematory charges and parking penalty charges had increased across London.</p> <p>In respect of services falling within the Community and Environment portfolio, it was confirmed that the Council aimed to bring in additional housing stock in the near future to reduce the costs of temporary accommodation. The Corporate Director of Homes and Communities would be in attendance at the June meeting of the Select Committee to respond to Members' queries.</p> <p>Members noted that a traffic light system (RAG rating) would be helpful to highlight areas of concern. Officers acknowledged the request and confirmed that further work around the profiling of budgets was underway. The Committee heard that Corporate Directors met to discuss the budget on a weekly basis. Monthly budget monitoring was also undertaken.</p> <p>Councillors enquired about the increased car park revenue and the out-of-hours noise service review. The parking strategy and the need to review statutory nuisance and environmental enforcement work were highlighted. Members emphasised the importance of transparency and asked about the backup plan if the garden waste consultation did not go ahead. It was explained that alternative savings would be found if the consultation did not proceed.</p> <p>Members sought further clarification regarding the temporary accommodation renegotiation and the impact on rates. It was confirmed that the backup plan was to acquire more properties from the open market using HRA funding; the local authority would then be less reliant on private landlords. £5 million had been added to the budget to address risks. Members were informed that the aim was to reduce the Council's use of temporary accommodation. Long-term leases were being considered, and officers were attempting to bring empty properties back into use. It was acknowledged that most London boroughs were facing similar challenges.</p> <p>Councillors asked about the Council's adaptability in reviewing the budget situation. The monthly budget monitoring process and the steps taken to address pressures were highlighted. Members heard that, to assist with budget management, profiling was in use to reflect key dates during the year.</p>

In response to further questions from the Committee, regarding the impact of efficiency savings on frontline services, the role of the transformation team and the performance standards monitored by external regulators was highlighted.

Members enquired about the employee terms and conditions review. It was explained that the HR department was reviewing contracts to ensure harmonised terms and conditions across the organisation.

It was agreed that the Chair would liaise with the Labour Lead and Democratic Services to finalise the Committee's requirements in terms of the Budget and Spending report going forward.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the proposed approach to financial monitoring at the Residents' Services Select Committee as set out in the report.

73. **LANDLORD SERVICE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS (Agenda Item 6)**

Sam Strong, Assistant Director - Homes and Neighbourhood, and Gary Penticost, Director of Operational Assets were in attendance to respond to Members' questions and requests for clarification regarding the matters set out in the report.

In response to Members' questions regarding the four consumer standards set out on page 16 of the agenda pack, it was acknowledged that there were issues with the complaints process, as per feedback from residents. Officers highlighted the importance of transparency and accessibility when dealing with residents and noted an increase in tenancy satisfaction measures over the last year, except in relation to the handling of complaints, which had only increased by 1%. They emphasised the importance of learning from complaints and referenced an ambitious restructure within the housing service, which included a member of staff responsible for complaint learning analysis to solve recurring issues.

In reply to further questions from the Committee, the need to improve the way the service put residents first was noted. It was confirmed that a lead for complaint analysis had recently been recruited and the importance of common sense in handling complaints was emphasised. Officers confirmed that staff were now required to call the complainant before writing a complaint response; this had resulted in a 1% increase in satisfaction. They expressed confidence in delivering better complaint handling the following year.

Councillors noted that eight cases had been upheld by the Ombudsman and enquired what lessons had been learned to reduce the number of upheld cases. It was confirmed that officers defined success as any percentage improvement in handling complaints and aimed for a 30% improvement the following year. Members heard that a restructure would increase frontline staff and improve accessibility to residents. Officers emphasised the importance of recording complaints accurately and learning from them.

Members referred to pages 31-33 of the agenda pack, which provided an update further to the Special Interest Group meeting held on 17 January 2025 and noted the feedback statements from residents. Councillors sought further clarification regarding the status of the action points and ongoing issues mentioned, including IT and telephone system problems. It was acknowledged that the 56-page document was a

heavy-read, and it was agreed that future documents would be more accessible. Officers highlighted the recruitment of someone to lead the learning from the Special Interest Group and noted the importance of demonstrating outcomes clearly.

Councillors sought further clarification regarding deadlines for referring issues to other departments and the time frame for resolving them. It was noted that improvements to the NEC housing system could take some 6-8 months. Plans for improvement were being shared with the housing regulator and officers expressed confidence in delivering these improvements.

The Committee asked about the diversity of the 8 members of the Special Interest Group and whether it was representative of the entirety of the Borough. It was confirmed that representation from both the north and the south of the Borough would be ensured.

In response to concerns raised by the Committee in respect of language barriers, it was confirmed that complaints could be handled in the complainant's language and the importance of responding to stage one complaints within 10 days was highlighted.

In respect of complaints handling training, it was acknowledged that training was essential and would be delivered within the next three months.

With regard to deadline extensions for stage 1 and stage 2 complaints, officers shared concerns about the validity of deadline extensions in some cases and mentioned efforts to reduce them. It was explained that complex complaints involving multiple services might require extensions and the importance of accountability was emphasised. It was noted that officers aimed to stop complaints from progressing to stage two whenever possible. The Committee heard that the deadline for a response to a stage two complaint was 20 days.

Councillors enquired about compensation for complaints and quality control for contractors' work. The need for a clear housing compensation policy was acknowledged – this would be co-designed with residents. Officers explained that external contractors must provide photographic evidence of completed works, and tenant feedback was used to determine if inspections were needed. It was confirmed that contractors undertaking larger projects had to provide evidence of completed works, which was loaded into the system for a full evidence track. If tenants were unsatisfied, inspections were undertaken.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee:

- 1. Commented on the data, learning and feedback captured by the Landlord Service during 2024/25 as set out in Appendix A of the Template Housing Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report;**
- 2. Noted the Housing Ombudsman Service Guidance set out in Appendix B on 'Effective involvement of governing bodies';**
- 3. Noted the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code set out in Appendix C; and**
- 4. Noted the updated Complaints Action Plan – Appendix D which was produced following the 2023/24 self-assessment against the Complaints**

	<p>Handling Code and published in June 2024.</p>
74.	<p>ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Joanne Howells, Street Scene Enforcement Manager, Stephanie Waterford, Head of Public Protection and Enforcement and Richard Webb, Director of Community Safety and Enforcement, were in attendance to respond to Members' questions and requests for clarification regarding the matters set out in the report.</p> <p>Councillors enquired about the prohibitory measures, partial closure, and closure orders for tower blocks, mentioning feedback from residents about the effectiveness of these measures in addressing antisocial behaviour. It was explained, that while evidence may be clear, CCTV evidence and resident reports were relied upon, and other enforcement actions could be considered.</p> <p>Members asked about the presence of uniformed environmental enforcement officers, expressing concerns about their visibility and the worsening issue of women being hassled and receiving racist comments. Officers explained that ten uniformed officers covered the entire Borough, working seven days a week, and collaborated with other teams to address antisocial behaviour, including threats and discrimination.</p> <p>The Committee raised concerns about the operation hours of the CCTV room and the need for more staff and cameras in hotspots. In response, the importance of CCTV for visual reassurance was acknowledged and it was explained that staffing was a funding decision, with gaps emerging due to leave or sickness.</p> <p>Councillors sought further clarification regarding the high percentage of misdirected and actionable reports and the process of redirecting them to the appropriate teams. Officers explained that misdirected reports were redirected to the relevant teams within the Council, and efforts were being made to refine the portal and triaging processes to limit misdirected service requests.</p> <p>In response to Members' concerns regarding the safety of officers and the number of instances of obstruction and assaults on officers, the procedure for dealing with engine idling and obstruction was explained and it was noted that assaults on officers were very low.</p> <p>In response to their request for a breakdown of fines by ward for various offences, Members heard that the systems used by the teams did not currently support collecting enforcement data by ward, but that they were exploring how datasets could be collated and provided by ward in the future.</p> <p>Councillors enquired about the targeting of hotspots for enforcement actions and the outcomes of action days. Officers explained that hotspots were identified from reports and intelligence, and it was noted that action days had achieved good results.</p> <p>With regard to the criminal element of fly posting and the difficulty in identifying offenders, it was confirmed that officers made attempts to engage with organisers and took enforcement action when possible. It was acknowledged that it was often difficult to establish who was responsible for fly posting – the service was intelligence and complaint led. Officers were happy to attend ward panel meetings to discuss specific concerns if invited to do so.</p>

Members noted that fly tipping was a serious issue and a blight on the Borough, yet, as detailed on page 87 of the agenda pack, only 52 FPNs had been issued in 2024. In response, officers highlighted the challenges of prosecuting fly-tipping offenders due to the need for criminal burden of proof and identifying the offenders, often seen on CCTV without vehicle registrations. Members heard that action days had been initiated to address improper disposal of rubbish, which could be prosecuted under different legislation. Successful prosecutions had occurred, resulting in suspended custodial sentences. It was confirmed that fly-tipping fines had been increased to £1000, making them the most substantial fixed penalty notices (FPNs) available. This method had proved to be a quicker and more effective enforcement tool compared to lengthy court prosecutions.

Members raised concerns about the presence of beggars and their aggressive behaviour. Officers outlined the reliance on the police for dispersing beggars and identifying them, and the consideration of including powers in the PSPO to deal with them.

Councillors asked about the response time for Members' Enquiries and the definition of a meaningful response. It was explained that a meaningful response including details of the investigation and enforcement actions available would be provided within 10 working days of receipt of the enquiry.

In response to Members' questions regarding the impact on antisocial behaviour of not locking parks and car parks overnight, Members were advised that the decision was being monitored, and data would be reviewed to determine if locking the spaces again was necessary.

In respect of fines for delivery drivers and the enforcement process, officers explained the difficulties in identifying offenders and the collaboration with proprietors to address aggressive behaviour.

Councillors raised concerns about the fines for spitting and suggested reviewing the legislation used by other councils. It was noted that the fines for spitting were set under the PSPO and were at the maximum permitted level.

Members suggested reviewing the fines for littering and other offences to ensure they were set at the maximum permitted level. Officers explained the considerations for setting fines and the balance between the likelihood of payment and the impact on people's pockets.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the contents of the report and asked questions in order to clarify matters of concern or interest in the Borough.

75.	TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE - UNDERAGE SALE OF VAPES AND ALCOHOL (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)
	Martin King, Trading Standards Manager, was in attendance to respond to Members' queries and requests for clarification in respect of the report included in the agenda pack.

Members thanked the Trading Standards Manager for the efforts being made and

complimented the work being done.

Councillors enquired about the recruitment and remuneration of young volunteers, suggesting the use of cadets or Scouts and raising concerns about their safety. In response, it was confirmed that volunteers were predominantly staff members' children, recruited through staff emails, and were given Amazon gift cards and thank-you letters as a gesture of gratitude for their work. Officers emphasised the importance of safety, ensuring volunteers did not frequent the shops they were sent to.

It was explained that shops targeted for test purchases were those with complaints and intelligence from local residents. If an underage sale was made, both the seller and the owner were invited to an interview under caution, with potential outcomes including written warnings, formal cautions, or prosecution. Members sought further clarification regarding the disposal of seized products, and it was confirmed that alcohol was tipped down the sink and cigarettes or nicotine were destroyed.

Members raised concerns about the environmental impact of disposable vapes and the potential market surge following their ban. It was confirmed that shops would be targeted to ensure proper disposal and prevent underground sales. The Committee heard that intelligence was received from various sources, including Youth Services, schools, and the police. Officers also collaborated with the local police licensing team.

In response to further questions from Members, the officer explained that volunteers were generally available during evenings, weekends, and school holidays, and that test purchases were conducted four times a year. The logistical challenges of conducting test purchases during school hours and the resource-intensive nature of such operations were highlighted. Members heard that occasional after-school test purchases were carried out, managing about three in a session.

Councillors suggested working directly with schools to recruit volunteers, but it was clarified that, while officers received intelligence from schools, they did not use students from those schools for test purchases. The officer emphasised the importance of collaboration with the police schools' team and the local police licensing team.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee:

1. Noted the important work being carried out by the Trading Standards Service in relation to underage sales of alcohol and vapes; and
2. Noted the important work being carried out by the Trading Standards Service in relation to the importation, sale and supply of unsafe and non-compliant e-cigarettes.

76. REVIEW OF HOMELESS PREVENTION AND THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY IN HILLINGDON – DRAFT FINAL REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

RESOLVED: That the Select Committee:

1. NoteD the recommendations previously agreed and agreed in principle the final review report and for its submission to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity; and
2. Delegated any minor textual changes required prior to submission, to the Democratic Services Officer, in consultation with the Chair.

77.	<p>FORWARD PLAN <i>(Agenda Item 10)</i></p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p>
78.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME <i>(Agenda Item 11)</i></p> <p>Democratic Services noted that the Parking Annual Report had been deferred on the Work Programme for consideration at the 12 June 2025 Select Committee meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee considered the Work Programme report and agreed any amendments.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.03 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer on epenny@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, officers, the press and members of the public.