

Minutes

SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

20 July 2017

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors: Wayne Bridges (Chairman) Jane Palmer (Vice-Chairman) Teji Barnes Peter Davis Becky Haggar Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana Tony Eginton Peter Money June Nelson</p>
	<p>CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT: Mary O'Connor</p>
	<p>OFFICERS PRESENT: Dan Kennedy (Deputy Director of Housing, Environment, Education and Health and Wellbeing) , Gregory Pike (Operational Finance Officer), Luke Taylor (Democratic Services Officer) and Tony Zaman (Corporate Director for Adults, Children and Young People's Services)</p>
4.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO REPORT THE PRESENCE OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
5.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
6.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 19 APRIL AND 11 MAY 2017 (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 19 April 2017 and 11 May 2017 were agreed as a correct record.</p>
7.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED IN PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that there were no Part II items, and that all business would therefore be conducted in public.</p>
8.	<p>WITNESS SESSION FOR MAJOR REVIEW - BENEFIT REFORMS</p>

(Agenda Item 5)

At the Social Services, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee meeting held on 19 April 2017, it was suggested recommending that the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Health and Housing requested officers review the feasibility of returning housing deposits to the Council.

Since then, the matter was reviewed internally, and the officer concluded that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) guidelines clearly state that the Local Authority can only recover a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) if they decide the payment has been made as a result of a misrepresentation or failure to disclose a material fact by the claimant, or an error was made when the application was determined. In these cases, the DHP can be recovered because it is classified as an overpayment.

It was suggested that any questions regarding these developments be directed to the relevant officer, and a response would be received outside the meeting.

Members commented that they had a number of supplementary questions which they would send to the relevant officer after the meeting, and it was agreed that a written response would be provided to Councillors prior to the next Committee meeting.

With regards to collecting and reallocating a DHP, if was questioned whether money could be collected and reallocated to other residents despite there being no legal basis for this, and Members noted that legislation did not allow it, and another route would be required if this were to be possible.

The Committee asked for clarification regarding the self-service facilities that were available at Hillingdon Council, the One Stop Shop and Hillingdon Libraries, and noted that it was still important for staff to help residents with paperwork or online forms, particularly as many residents did not have English as a first language. It was suggested that training for librarians may be beneficial to prevent any mistakes being made when applying for Housing Benefit of Council Tax Reduction.

The Chairman requested that an officer and legal representative attend the next meeting to answer any follow-up questions on the issue that may stem from the written responses.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and supplementary questions be forwarded to the relevant officer.

9. **BUDGET PLANNING REPORT FOR SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH** *(Agenda Item 6)*

The report provided the first of two opportunities within the budget planning cycle for the Committee to consider issues relating to budget planning for 2018/19. The context of the report was the broader financial position of the council, alongside signposting major issues within Social Services, Housing and Public Health Services budgets. A further report is to be considered in January 2018, and will set out the detailed budget proposals, once the proposals have been included in the report to Cabinet regarding the Medium Term Financial Forecast in December.

The Operational Finance Officer noted that in February 2017, the budget report to Council identified the savings requirement for 2018/19 as £22.2m, with £5m planned drawdown from balances and £1.1m previously developed and approved savings initiatives reducing the budget gap to £16.1m. Further social care funding announcements and a release from the Council's Collection Fund further reduced the gap to be managed to roughly £11.6m.

The Committee was informed that the Council remains strongly placed to deal with the financial challenges ahead, and retain balances of £38.7m, although £14.5m is expected to be drawn down from 2017/18 to smooth the impact of Government funding reductions.

Members questioned whether there was a risk that companies may withdraw from contracts or ask for retrospective increases due to rising social care costs and inflation, and whether current provisions were enough if this happened. The Corporate Director for Adults, Children and Young People's Services, confirmed that a range of above inflation requests have been met and were planned for, and additional increases have been prepared for and are built into current provisions. Responding to further questioning, it was confirmed that there was increased provision for high-needs children and elderly residents, and historic demographic profiling in the Borough has allowed the Council to prepare for these issues.

Councillors raised the case of a resident who had waited nine months for the Council to visit their property, and the Deputy Director of Housing, Environment, Education and Health and Wellbeing confirmed that, while he is not sure of the specific case, the Council has moved more resources to that area to help with the high demand, and improvements are being made to the team structure too. Members were also informed that the Deputy Director of Housing, Environment, Education and Health and Wellbeing sees a report of these cases on a weekly basis, and the department is trying to speed up the process to tackle these issues.

Responding to questioning regarding the High Value Void Levy, the Deputy Director of Housing, Environment, Education and Health and Wellbeing confirmed that there has been no guidance and this has led to uncertainty, particularly following the political changes over the previous year. It is understood that any changes will be staggered, however, the Council are waiting on further information and prepared for the possibility that if the levy is applied, its impact will be significant.

Members heard that the current stock has also been assessed, and 36 properties, worth roughly £14m, may be impacted by this potential levy. The Council would, however, like to retain this housing stock for its own residents, and these larger houses are particularly difficult to find for families in need.

The Committee commented on the increased pressure on Adult Social Care services and, questioned what the Council was doing to ensure expedient discharges were effective. The Corporate Director for Adults, Children and Young People's Services confirmed that a lot of work was being done on the issue, including more focus on re-engineering the clinical fitness of those patients being discharged. Furthermore, the NHS was driving schemes to assess a patient is medically optimised before they were discharged, and

then an assessment of the patient takes place at their home or car home. These processes should ensure discharges are safer. Members noted that a number of organisations were successfully working hand-in-hand regarding discharges, and it was also noted that Hillingdon Health Trust was working hard on the issue.

RESOLVED: That the budget planning report for Social Services, Housing and Public Health Services 2018/19 was noted, in advance of detailed savings proposals being developed and approved at Cabinet in December 2017.

10.	<p>SCOPING REPORT FOR NEXT MAJOR REVIEW (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>The Committee was presented with a report which highlighted the suggested potential topics for reviews in 2017/18. It was proposed that a review into loneliness and isolation in Hillingdon's older residents / people with mental health issues would add the most value to the Council's strategy and actions in respect of the health and wellbeing of local residents, and a scoping report into this topic was brought in front of Members.</p> <p>Members confirmed that the topic was supported when it was suggested at a previous meeting, and commented that scoping report was thorough and helpful in laying out the background to the view.</p> <p>The Committee confirmed that they were happy to endorse the proposed review topic, and progress the review to the next stage</p> <p>RESOLVED: That "Loneliness and social isolation: local partnership efforts to mitigate social isolation amongst older residents and people with mental health issues" was selected as the Policy Overview Committee's major review topic for 2017/18.</p>
11.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.</p>
12.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18 (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The work programme 2017/18 was noted.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.02 pm, closed at 7.29 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Neil Fraser - Democratic Services Officer on 01895 250692. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.