

Minutes

RESIDENTS, EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

3 September 2020



Meeting held at VIRTUAL - Live on the Council's YouTube channel: Hillingdon London

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chairman), John Morgan (Vice-Chairman), Stuart Mathers, Paula Rodrigues, Jan Sweeting, Colleen Sullivan, Simon Arnold (In place of Alan Chapman), Carol Melvin (In place of Devi Radia), Raymond Graham (In place of Allan Kauffman) and Tony Little.</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Neil Fraser (Democratic Services Officer), Dan Kennedy (Director, Housing, Environment, Education, Performance, Health & Wellbeing), Ian Anderson (Business Manager, Complaints and Enquiries), Marcus Briginshaw (Finance Manager) and Graham Young (Lead Finance Business Partner)</p>
3.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillors Chapman, Kauffman & Radia. Councillors Arnold, Graham and Melvin were present as their substitutes.</p>
4.	<p>DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
5.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT ANY ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be considered in public.</p>
6.	<p>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>In relation to previous reports on school places planning, Cllr Sweeting advised that following a Member's Enquiry, she had recently received information relating to Year 7 placements in September, and suggested that this information should be shared with the Committee.</p> <p>In addition, it was requested that the school places report scheduled for the October meeting include details of the outcomes of any discussions on performance, or discussions held with the Strategic Education London Leads Head of Improvement Group.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 19 March and 14 May 2020 be approved as a correct record.</p>

7. **ANNUAL COMPLAINTS & SERVICE UPDATE REPORT** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Ian Anderson, Business Manager, Complaints and Enquiries, introduced a report detailing corporate complaints for 2019-20.

The Committee was advised that the number of informal complaints had reduced by 15% since the previous year, from 2,756 to 2,339. Stage 1 complaints (861), had risen by 3%, and of these, 9% (80) had been escalated to Stage 2. There had been no Stage 3 complaints.

Complaints considered by the Housing Ombudsman Service and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had fallen by 31% from 86 to 59 complaints. Of the 59 complaints investigated by the Ombudsman, 6 were upheld, 8 were partially upheld, 8 were not upheld, and 37 were not investigated. The majority of directorates were responding to complaints within their targeted timeframes.

Compliments received had increased by 29% from the previous year, from 234 to 301. In recent months many residents had complimented the Council on the planting of wildflowers and street cleansing.

Member Enquires (MEs) remained similar at 11,308 for 2018/19 and 11,047 for 2019/20. Waste Services accounted for 66% of all Members Enquiries (5,949).

Members referred to a previous request to have the report include details of Member Enquiries submitted by each Ward, which was absent from this report. Members were advised that such information would need to be approved by senior management for inclusion in future reports. Mr Anderson agreed to report back to the committee on this point.

Regarding the report's reference to delays when processing enquiries/actions from commissioning services etc. Members requested detail on what improvements had been made. The Committee was advised that a new management team was now in place, and performance had been seen to have improved.

Members asked whether there had been any impact due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee was advised that as the report detailed the period from 1st April 2019 to 31 March 2020, it only covered a very small period of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it was explained that the Council continued to deal with complaints as normal with no relaxation of timelines for responses, but there had been a reduction in the number of complaints and Members Enquiries received between 1 April to 30 July 2020.

Members asked whether the Stage 2 complaints were as a result of delays in responding to Stage 1 complaints, or whether there were other reasons for these complaints. The Committee was advised that Stage 2 complaints were received as part of an escalation process, should a resident be dissatisfied at the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint.

Members asked whether the instigation of a new Member Enquiry process had impacted on the number of MEs received. The Committee was advised that, barring a brief adjustment period following the introduction of the new process, there had been no marked impact recorded.

The report referenced case ref. 7388809, that had been upheld by the Ombudsman. Members requested detail of any lessons learned. It was agreed that further detail

would be forwarded to the Committee following the meeting.

Members highlighted that not all cases to the Ombudsman had been detailed within the report. The Committee was advised that the report included the required statutory detail, but that future reports could include non-statutory Ombudsman investigation outcomes as part of an overall summary.

The Committee requested that future reports include detail of complaints received for the past 5 years, in order to identify potential trends, and the percentage of complaints regarding in-house services versus commissioned services. Members were advised that the 5-year detail could be included, though further analysis was required to see whether the second request could be accommodated.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.

8. **BUDGET PLANNING REPORT FOR RESIDENTS SERVICES** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Marcus Briginshaw, Finance Manager, and Graham Young, Lead Finance Business Partner, introduced the 2021/22 Budget Planning Report for services within the remit of the Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee.

Key points from the report were highlighted. The budget gap, and therefore the savings requirements for the next two financial years, was calculated at £19,987k, (roughly 9% of the current Council budget of £234M), after allowing for an assumed 3.8% increase in Council Tax.

Detail of the budget gap was summarised as:

- £8.1m as 'business as usual' inflation and demand led pressures offset by increased funding;
- £5.5m as Capital Financing costs and other investment decisions; and
- £6.33m as unwinding prior use of balances to balance the previous budget.

The concluding calculation was confirmed to give the Savings Target requirement needed to achieve a balanced budget, without further recourse to General Fund Balances, as £10.6m in 21/22 and £9.3m in 22/23, for a total of £19.9m.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had been significant, with General Fund pressures totalling £25.182m. To help, the Council had so far received two tranches of additional grants, totalling £15.6m, with £1.964 applied in 2019/20. A further £8.5m was expected, which would be used to support up to 75% of the loss of income during the pandemic, with additional resources totalling £9.1m.

Other funds were detailed as part of a corporate overview. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a ring-fenced account with £57.8m of rental income, supporting the tenancy management functions. This was then reinvested in maintenance of stock and investment in the HRA Capital programme, which was funding 495 new units, mitigating the anticipated loss of 280 units due to the Right To Buy scheme. The financial standing of the HRA remained sound, with the 30 Year Business Plan supporting sustainability over the long term.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was another ring-fenced account, though the funding shortfall that began after the Children's and Families Act 2014, in conjunction

with the growing demand on High Needs services, had led to an expected deficit of £7.1m in 20/21, with a cumulative figure of £20.8m. The Council had submitted a disapplication request to the Secretary of State in February 2020 with a request to transfer 3.1% of individual schools budgets to the Higher Needs – this was rejected, with the implication that any deficit can only be covered by the General Fund.

2019/20 outturn and monitoring were both showing increased pressures with the former (outturn) being £1.35m lower than forecast, and monitoring showing a £1.15m increase on the expected £7.1m pressure, giving a deficit of £23.3m by the end of March 2021.

Regarding strategies to deal with the budget gap, the Committee was informed that there were some overarching uncertainties, including the delay of the Spending review; the delay of the review of the Business Rates Retention policy; and pressures and risks as a result of Covid-19. However, as in previous years, the Council was taking a thematic approach, with the following themes continuing to form the basis of savings proposals for future years:

1. Service Transformation
2. Savings from Zero Based Budgeting
3. Procurement Savings
4. Preventing Demand
5. Income generation and commercialisation
6. Changes of responsibilities and new funding streams that are associated.

Members sought clarity on a number of points, including:

High Needs spend had consistently been under forecast. What had been done to ensure accuracy of forecasting moving forward?

Forecasts had been reviewed and re-aligned with demand growth, allowing officers to move forward with confidence. A recovery plan was in place, with Finance officers working to reduce costs in the relevant areas.

Five schools were shown to be operating at a deficit. What was the Council doing to increase resources or control costs at these schools?

The Council had provided additional officers to work with the schools to control costs moving forward.

The report made reference to a savings programme of £6.8m being hindered by Covid-19. Were the savings of £6.8m deliverable?

Savings for the current year had been impacted by Covid-19. Grants from central Government would be utilised within the current financial year, with some delayed savings to start later this year or early next year.

Was the use of reserves impacted due to some reserves being unavailable?

The Council held a number of earmarked reserves, some of which were created following underspend in previous financial years. Some of these reserves were

subsequently to be used in specific service areas where costs had increased due to Covid-19. It was expected that such expenditure would be recovered from central Government.

How was the Council dealing with a reduction in funding from central Government?

Senior officers and Council leadership were regularly reviewing all potential savings, such as reviewing the capital programme.

What percentage of savings would come from zero based reviews, versus efficiencies?

Zero based reviews were not anticipated to form a large percentage of future savings. Such reviews had been used to make savings in previous years, but moving forward, it was more difficult to remove money from base budgets. However, all budgets would be reviewed to determine their accuracy.

The DSG budget showed a potential deficit of circa £23m. The 1986 Local Government Act required Councils to cover such deficits. Was this figure a concern?

It was considered that the deficit was a large figure, though conversations with central Government had helped to allay such concerns. Further information could be forwarded to the Committee following the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

9. **REVIEW INTO LITTERING AND FLY-TIPPING - FINAL APPROVAL** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Members were asked to formally endorse the final report on the Committee's review into Littering and Fly-Tipping within Hillingdon, for submission to Cabinet.

Members were happy to endorse the report, but requested that robust monitoring of all implemented recommendations be in place moving forward. Members were reminded that monitoring of past reviews was regularly carried out via the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be endorsed for submission to Cabinet.

10. **NEXT MAJOR REVIEW - TOPIC DISCUSSION** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Members suggested a number of topics for consideration as the Committee's next review. These included:

- Hillingdon Youth Services, including multi agency work and services beyond Fiesta;
- ASBET Team effectiveness;
- Early Years Provision, particularly children's' centres, or impact of Covid-19;
- Impact of transport and infrastructure projects on the Borough, e.g. HS2 or third runway at Heathrow, change of priorities at TfL or reduction in funding from central Government;
- Recent changes to Planning Law and its impact on residents;
- Dog Fouling, particularly around prosecution within residential areas and parks

	<p>and open spaces;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree planting, including how areas are chosen, how the areas are maintained, and how we include residents views; • Canals and towpaths, e.g. developments in Hayes; • Pest control. <p>It was confirmed that the clerk would review the suitability of these potential review topics and would provide an update at the next meeting of the Committee.</p>
11.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.</p>
12.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>Members suggested items for future Committee meetings, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing capacity in Hillingdon Primary schools, and its impact on schools; • Education of asylum seekers and unaccompanied children; • New Planning policies; • Rivers and flooding; • Diversity and inclusion at cultural and heritage events. <p>It was requested that future school attainment reports be broken down into more easily digestible sections, rather than one large report.</p> <p>It was also requested that the next quarterly school places planning report include SEND capacity and projections of future need.</p> <p>It was confirmed that the clerk would review the suitability of these items and would provide an updated forward plan at the next meeting of the Committee.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.05 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Neil Fraser on 01895 250636. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.