

Minutes

COUNCIL

22 September 2022

Meeting held at Council Chamber - Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Councillor Becky Haggar (Mayor)
Councillor Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana (Deputy Mayor)

	<p>MEMBERS PRESENT:</p> <p>Councillors: Kaushik Banerjee Scott Farley Stuart Mathers Labina Basit Janet Gardner Douglas Mills Adam Bennett Elizabeth Garelick Richard Mills Kishan Bhatt Narinder Garg Peter Money Wayne Bridges Tony Gill Barry Nelson-West Tony Burles Martin Goddard Susan O'Brien Keith Burrows Ekta Gohil Jane Palmer Reeta Chamdal Henry Higgins Sital Punja Roy Chamdal Mohammed Islam John Riley Farhad Choubedar Rita Judge Raju Sansarpuri Philip Corthorne Kamal Preet Kaur Jagjit Singh Peter Curling Kuldeep Lakhmana Peter Smallwood Darran Davies Eddie Lavery Colleen Sullivan Nick Denys Richard Lewis Jan Sweeting Jas Dhot Heena Makwana Steve Tuckwell Ian Edwards Gursharan Mand</p>
	<p>OFFICERS PRESENT: Tony Zaman, Andy Evans, Perry Scott, Sandra Taylor, Gemma McNamara, Glen Egan, Lloyd White, Mark Braddock, Morgan Einon, Sue Albu and Nikki O'Halloran</p>
	<p>ONE MINUTE'S SILENCE</p> <p>Those present observed a one minute's silence in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and former Councillor Brian Stead.</p>
21.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Bianco, Chapman and Nelson.</p>
22.	<p>MINUTES (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022 be agreed as a correct record.</p>
23.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest in matters coming before this meeting.</p>

24.	<p>MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>The Mayor expressed her deepest condolences to the Royal Family following the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Many staff and residents had been involved in attending and / or organising a range of events during the period of mourning and she thanked them for the role that they had played. The Mayor stated that she had been honoured to represent Hillingdon on numerous occasions during the mourning period including being present at RAF Northolt when the Queen's coffin had arrived in London.</p> <p>The Bollywood night, the Mayor's first fundraising event, had sold out and had raised £2,800. She thanked those who had attended for their support (including five London mayors, past mayors, Councillors, staff and residents) and thanked those businesses that had sponsored the event.</p>
25.	<p>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>5.1 QUESTION FROM MR STEVE GARELICK OF STOWE CRESCENT, RUISLIP TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR RESIDENTS' SERVICES - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:</p> <p><i>"In a question to the previous administration, I asked why pay-by-phone parking had not been implemented, despite the ease at which a Hillingdon resident's card could be linked to an on-line account or 'phone number. I was advised that new parking machines were being installed and, as these would take credit card there was no reason to add this system (which has been adopted by the majority of councils over the years).</i></p> <p><i>"Given the fact the parking system suggested by myself in my earlier communication would have saved residents' time (the palaver alone of trying to solicit a ticket from a machine is reason enough) I would like to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a) why did the Council not implement this years ago when the opportunity existed?</i> <i>b) why have the Council been so luddite in their approach?</i> <i>c) what is the banking cost for the loose change collected from the Council's machines? and</i> <i>d) does Hillingdon receive a preferential rate for cash deposits and how much has this cost residents?"</i> <p>Councillor Lavery advised that the administration would always put residents first. When looking at the parking machines, it was important that they were compatible with the Hillingdon First card to ensure that residents received a preferential parking rate. However, during initial investigations into mobile phone parking, suppliers had seemed unable to enable preferential parking rates for residents. However, a contractor had now been appointed and officers were testing the system and software. Once in place, motorists would be able to choose whether to get their car parking ticket using their mobile phones or using the machines.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member advised that the administration would not take knee jerk action and would only implement new systems if there were benefits for residents.</p> <p>It was noted that, as they were related, Councillor O'Brien would provide a single comprehensive response on behalf of herself and the Cabinet Member for Finance in relation to public questions 5.2, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6.</p>

5.2 QUESTION FROM OREST BAKHOVSKI OF MYDDLETON ROAD, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

“What options were considered in trying to reduce the deficit for the early years? The report shared publicly seems very light on this.”

5.4 QUESTION FROM CHARLOTTE DOLAN-BAKHOVSKI OF MYDDLETON ROAD, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

“Please can you confirm what the average standard private nursery day rate is in the Borough? For both under 2s and over 2-year-olds.”

5.5 QUESTION FROM AMIR CHAUMOO OF QUEENS WALK, SOUTH RUISLIP TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

“Our extensive survey of parents affected by the closures of early years nurseries shows that only 30% have been able to relocate their children to alternative nurseries. Can you expand on the details of the assessment that was done which concluded that there was ample availability in neighbouring nurseries to cover the affected children?”

5.6 QUESTION FROM MICHAEL SHARKEY OF NORTH WAY, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

“Where in Hillingdon do children with Education Healthcare Plans go if they have complex physical health needs or learning disabilities if not to the uniquely resourced Early Years settings?”

Councillor O'Brien noted that there had been a deficit in the budget to support Council run early years centres (EYC) in the Borough for many years. In 2015/16, this deficit had reached £334k but had been subsidised by the Schools' Forum. In 2016/17, this subsidy had been removed and, since then, the deficit had grown to £532k in 2021/22 and had had to be met by the Council (a subsidy of around £6k per child using the Hillingdon EYCs).

The deficit had arisen partly as a result of underutilisation because, although use of the centres had increased from 61% to 87%, the service needed to run at 100% capacity to break even. Consideration had been given to how the service could break even, including staffing structures, contracts, outsourcing (there had been no interested parties) and increasing the unit price (this would increase fees by around £6k per child per year if the service was at capacity).

The Cabinet Member advised that EYC was not a core function of the Council and there had been no statutory requirement for the authority to consult on its decision to close them. It was thought important to make the decision quickly to prevent new children starting at these EYC as some of the older children moved on to schools and left vacancies. The decision had been based on the financial implications of continuing to operate a service in deficit.

Councillor O'Brien advised that there was capacity in the wider childcare market and

that the Council met only 1% of the demand in the Borough. Officers had contacted the 75 day nurseries in the Borough and established from the 56 responses that the average day rate for a child over 2 was £64.66. The minimum was £42 per day and the maximum was £100.22 per day. It was recognised that the fees varied and that the day rate for children under 2 was more expensive. However, providers were unwilling to share these costs as the information was deemed to be more commercially sensitive.

Although the Council was required to ensure that there was sufficient childcare availability in the Borough, the local authority was not required to provide it. Calculations had been undertaken using information such as the number of working households in the Borough as well as the number of children under 2, aged 2 and aged 3-4, to determine the demand.

Insofar as the children who currently used the EYCs in Hillingdon were concerned, Councillor O'Brien was aware that over half had already made alternative arrangements (7 had found alternative settings and had left already, 41 had found alternative settings and would be leaving between October and December and officers were working with 4 families to find alternative provision).

Officers were available to help families find alternative provision including those with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). They were also available to help the providers, many of whom were already equipped and able to support SEN.

The Cabinet Member recognised that the EYC staff did a superb job in looking after the children in their care. Managers were working with these staff to achieve a good outcome.

It was important for families to be involved in shaping services and this had taken place with regard to the development of the Family Hubs which provided support to a large number of families for a range of needs. Public funds could not be expected to fill a £532k annual funding gap for a non-statutory service that supported only 100 children.

5.3 QUESTION FROM ALEXANDER SIM OF VICTORIA ROAD, RUISLIP MANOR TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLOR EDWARDS:

"In July 2022 you stated in a report hosted by London Councils that "having families involved in shaping services to better meet their needs is crucial". How do you reconcile that statement with an autocratic announcement only a month later on 4th August 2022 to close all Council run nurseries in this borough without any prior consultation period with the families affected? There was ample opportunity to do so, as in your report it states these nurseries have been under review since autumn 2020 and Consultation periods are recommended best practice by the very London Councils forum of your quote in July."

Councillor Edwards advised that the London Councils report referred to in the question was titled "Beyond Boundaries" and looked at the integration of services between the health, public and voluntary sectors and other partners. It was about ensuring that the right support and access was provided at the right time. As such, the Leader stood by the statement that had been quoted in the question. He stated that the decision to close EYC in Hillingdon had been based on financial issues and had had nothing to do with shaping services.

26.	<p>REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>6.1 URGENT IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS</p> <p>The recent urgent decisions taken were noted.</p>
27.	<p>MEMBERS' QUESTIONS (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>7.2 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BENNETT TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:</p> <p><i>“It is clear that, just like all local authorities in the United Kingdom, the London Borough of Hillingdon is currently experiencing and will continue to suffer substantial financial pressures, brought on by the COVID-19 legacy and rising inflation. Can the Cabinet Member please advise what measures are being taken to address these issues?”</i></p> <p>Councillor Goddard advised that the Council’s Medium-Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) had recognised the financial pressure that had started to build. On 31 March 2022, Government funding in relation to Covid had ended, despite costs to the Council associated with the pandemic continuing. Although back-office functions had already been streamlined, the advent of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia had started on the same day that the Council’s 2022/2023 budget had been agreed in February 2022. This conflict had had a global economic impact, so officers had had to look at issues such as external contracts, fuel, staffing, etc. There had been increased costs associated with services such as social care and leisure centres and officers had had to work with Cabinet Members to monitor and reduce the funding gap that had opened up.</p> <p>Consideration had been given to reducing non-essential costs in the delivery of front-line services and a moratorium would be put on discretionary items to try to reduce costs. Whilst the Council did need to ensure that it was receiving best value for money, it also needed to ensure fairness so that contractors stayed in business.</p> <p>A forward purchasing contract was being investigated which, if agreed, would take effect from April 2023 and consideration was being given to outsourcing contracts. Fees and charges and the dedicated schools grant were also being rebased to reflect inflation.</p> <p>Councillor Goddard was in little doubt that difficult decisions would need to be made and that the administration would not shy away from making these decisions. Hillingdon was not unique in dealing with these financial challenges, with the LGA noting that there would be a £3.6bn pressure on local authorities from the pay award alone and a number of councils had stated that they would struggle to balance their budgets in 2023/24.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member thanked the finance team for their continued efforts.</p> <p>By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Bennett asked whether, in light of the extensive work that had been undertaken, the Council would be able to produce a balanced budget in 2023/24.</p> <p>Councillor Goddard advised that the Council was awaiting the Government announcement on financing. However, the authority had not relied heavily on this</p>

announcement and had instead looked to its earmarked reserves which were designed for this purpose. He noted that the Council would not have been in as good a position if it had agreed to the budget amendments proposed by the Labour Group in February 2022. Consultation on the 2023/24 budget would start in December 2022 and the Cabinet Member was confident that the Council would deliver a balanced budget and would look to expand earmarked reserves.

7.3 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR REETA CHAMDAL TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

“Would the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the number of school places offered to primary and secondary pupils in Hillingdon for the academic year 2022-2023?”

Councillor O'Brien advised that the Council had prioritised school places and had offered 3,603 primary reception school places this year, which had been around 300 less than 2020/2021. This equated to a 1.7% reduction in demand in Hillingdon compared to the 1.31% reduction across London, with 99.5% being offered one of their preferred primary school places and 94.3% being offered their first preference (compared to the London average of 87.9%). Hillingdon had received the 9th highest number of applications in London (down from 6th during the previous year).

This year, 3,659 secondary transition to Year 7 school applications had been processed in Hillingdon, an increase of 1.4% (there had been 0.4% average increase across London). In Hillingdon, 94% had been offered one of their preferred secondary school places, compared to the London average of 93%. 71% of children were offered their first preference, compared to the London average of 69.95%. Hillingdon had had the 9th highest number of applications in London (which had been the same as the previous year).

There had been 664 late applications processed this year and a total of 3,988 in-year applications processed. The Cabinet Member thanked the admissions team for their hard work.

The forecast for school place planning continued and the Council remained committed to ensuring that there was a school place available for every child in the Borough.

There was no supplementary question.

7.1 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BHATT TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE - COUNCILLOR PALMER:

“Could the Cabinet Member please advise if there are any plans to help alleviate the pressures that some of our residents are likely to face this winter?”

Councillor Palmer advised that it was likely that there would be an increase in the number of cases of Covid and flu as winter approached and that this would be exacerbated by the issues that financially vulnerable residents would be facing with regard to the rising cost of food and fuel. Cold and hunger would likely affect some residents' physical and mental health and, as such, a whole system approach was required between the Council, NHS, community groups and residents. The good partnership working already underway was recognised with plans being scaled up in anticipation of the increase in demand. Residents would be encouraged to get their

winter vaccinations and would be directed to the right support at the right time. 'Warm Banks' would be set up across the Borough to provide residents with somewhere warm to go and they would also be provided with advice and information in a single point of contact.

The Cabinet Member noted that prevention was key and that enabling access to GPs, pharmacies and NHS111 would help prevent ill health. Support had been provided to around 12k children who had already benefitted from food vouchers via the Household Support Fund delivered by the Council this year and assistance had been given with the cost of utility bills (it was anticipated that the Government would continue with this programme this winter to help with food and utility costs). The Council had issued the £150 Council Tax energy rebate to more than 77k households in the Borough and continued to put its residents first.

These were difficult and anxious times but the Council would support residents through the winter and help them to weather the storm.

There was no supplementary question.

28. **MOTIONS** (*Agenda Item 8*)

8.1 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR EDWARDS

Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Curling seconded, the motion as set out on the Order of Business.

It was noted that, whilst the country had lost its sovereign, the Royal Family had lost its matriarch. The Queen had provided the country with reassurance, stability and comfort and had set an example to the world. She had possessed an unwavering sense of duty and dedication to her role, undertaking a number of visits to the Borough during her reign. She had displayed a great sense of humour, had been interested in what others had had to say and had made them feel important. It had been estimated that 4.1 billion people had watched the Queen's funeral on television which had been testament to her impartiality and leadership.

Members thanked the Mayor for the role that she had played over the last few weeks with regard to things such as the arrival of the Queen's coffin at RAF Northolt and the proclamation of the new King on the steps of the Civic Centre. She had conducted herself with great dignity and had been a credit to the Borough.

May Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace. Long live the King.

RESOLVED: That this Council wishes to express its deepest sympathy to the Royal Family upon the death of our Sovereign, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

This Council acknowledges and gives thanks for Her Majesty's long service of over 70 years, her complete dedication to our country, overseas territories and Commonwealth throughout her life and her embodiment of all aspects of our British way of life. This service to our country is something none of us will ever see again in our lifetimes.

This Council also takes this opportunity to pledge its loyalty and allegiance to our new King Charles III and look forward to the new era that his reign brings.

8.2 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR CURLING

Councillor Curling moved, and Councillor Kaur seconded, the following motion:

“That this Council recognises the importance of play and pre-school education for the development of our children, and to give them the best start in life, as well as the need for parents to have access to local, affordable and reliable childcare.

“This Council also recognises the excellence and professionalism of our staff at the three, council-run early years centres, in South Ruislip, Uxbridge and Hayes.

“This Council therefore regrets the decision of the Cabinet to close these nurseries and calls for the Cabinet to urgently review their decision and to explore alternative ways of tackling the budget deficit and keeping the nurseries open.”

Those speaking in support of the motion hoped that Cabinet would rethink the decision that had been made to close the three Early Years Centres (EYCs) in the Borough as it had done when there had been opposition to the changes proposed to the Hillingdon Music Service some years previously. It was suggested that these EYCs provided a service for vulnerable children that other nurseries did not cater for and that local schools used to contribute towards their running costs.

The use of special urgency powers to make the decision during the school holidays was disputed, as was the Select Committee Chairman’s waiver of the associated call-in period. Members in support of the motion stated that it had been unethical to close the EYCs without first undertaking a consultation exercise or seeking a second opinion on options, especially when this issue had seemingly been under review since January 2020.

It was suggested that the childcare market was on the brink of collapse and that the closure of EYCs in Hillingdon was not a wise decision. The EYCs were thought to be a unique provision with links to relevant Council departments and their closure in Hillingdon would affect over 100 real lives. It was questioned how much publicity had been given to the availability of places in other nurseries and why Councillors had not been advised of the proposal beforehand. The Council was advised that the parent-led campaign against the closures would continue.

Those speaking against the motion acknowledged the importance of play and early years development but recognised that Council resources needed to be spent on delivering statutory services. Closing a service was never going to be an easy decision and closure of EYCs in Hillingdon had been motivated by a loss of £532k per year, not profit. It was suggested that those in favour of the motion needed to identify which service the Council should take £500k from each year in order to maintain the EYC service and whether that would be a fair way forward.

The motion was put to a recorded vote.

Those voting for: Councillors Basit, Burles, Curling, Dhot, Farley, Gardner, Garelick, Garg, Gill, Islam, Judge, Kaur, Lakhmana, Mand, Mathers, Money, Nelson-West, Punja, Sansarpuri, Singh and Sweeting.

	<p>Those voting against: The Mayor (Councillor Haggar), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Ahmad-Wallana), Councillors Banerjee, Bennett, Bhatt, Bridges, Burrows, Reeta Chamdal, Roy Chamdal, Choubedar, Corthorne, Davies, Denys, Edwards, Goddard, Gohil, Higgins, Lavery, Lewis, Makwana, D Mills, R Mills, O'Brien, Palmer, Riley, Smallwood, Sullivan and Tuckwell.</p> <p>The motion was lost.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.10 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Lloyd White, Head of Democratic Services on 01895 556743. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.