



HILLINGDON
LONDON



Council

To all Members of the Council

Date: THURSDAY, 11
SEPTEMBER 2025

Time: 7.30 PM

Venue: COUNCIL CHAMBER -
CIVIC CENTRE, HIGH
STREET, UXBRIDGE UB8
1UW

**Meeting
Details:** The public and press are welcome
to attend and observe the meeting.

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2025

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Putting our residents first

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Agenda

Prayers

To be said by Rabbi Aaron Goldstein from Ark Synagogue.

- 1 Apologies for Absence
- 2 Minutes 1 - 16
To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2025 (*attached*)
- 3 Declarations of Interest
To note any declarations of interest in any matter before the Council
- 4 Mayor's Announcements
- 5 Public Question Time 17 - 18
To take questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.
- 6 Report of the Head of Democratic Services 19 - 20
- 7 Issuance of Recommendations Under Section 24, Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 21 - 42
To consider the recommendations contained in the External Auditor's report (*attached*)
- 8 Members' Questions 43 - 46
To take questions submitted by Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11
- 9 Motions 47 - 48
To consider Motions submitted by Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12

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Minutes

COUNCIL

10 July 2025

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



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Councillor Philip Corthorne MCIPD (Mayor)
Councillor Reeta Chamdal (Deputy Mayor)

	MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors: Naser Abby Scott Farley Stuart Mathers Shehryar Ahmad- Janet Gardner Douglas Mills Wallana Elizabeth Garelick Richard Mills Kaushik Banerjee Narinder Garg Peter Money Labina Basit Tony Gill June Nelson Adam Bennett Martin Goddard Barry Nelson-West Kishan Bhatt Ekta Gohil Susan O'Brien Jonathan Bianco Henry Higgins Jane Palmer Tony Burles Mohammed Islam Sital Punja Keith Burrows Kamal Preet Kaur John Riley Roy Chamdal Kuldeep Lakhmana Raju Sansarpuri Farhad Choubedar Eddie Lavery Jagjit Singh Peter Curling Richard Lewis Peter Smallwood Darran Davies Heena Makwana Colleen Sullivan Nick Denys Gursharan Mand Jan Sweeting Jas Dhot Kelly Martin Ian Edwards
	OFFICERS PRESENT: Tony Zaman, Dan Kennedy, Sandra Taylor, Lloyd White, Mark Braddock, Morgan Einon, Alice Pringault and Anisha Teji
12.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>) Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Wayne Bridges, Becky Haggar, Rita Judge and Steve Tuckwell
13.	MINUTES (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>) RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 27 February 2025 and 8 May 2025 be agreed as correct records.
14.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>) There were no declarations of interest in matters coming before this meeting.
15.	MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>) The Mayor reflected on a busy first nine weeks, highlighting the success of Picnic in the Park with over 1,500 attendees. Upcoming events include a bunker visit, charity cricket match and a family fun day in partnership with the Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce. The Mayor had also celebrated the DFN Project SEARCH graduation at

	Hillingdon Hospital and noted the value of recent school visits in reinforcing the purpose of public service.
16.	<p>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>To take questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.</p> <p>5.1 QUESTION FROM BRIAN LAWRENCE OF MEADOW VIEW ROAD, HAYES, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:</p> <p><i>“As there has been no notification as to why Hillingdon in Bloom & Autumn Show was cancelled, can you please provide an answer?”</i></p> <p>As the questioner was unable to attend the meeting, the Mayor asked the question on behalf of Mr Lawrence. Councillor Lavery thanked Mr Lawrence for his question and advised that he would provide him with a written response.</p> <p><i>[NOTE: The following written response was forwarded to Mr Lawrence after the meeting:</i></p> <p><i>Thank you for your question to me, which was asked by the Mayor at last week’s Council meeting.</i></p> <p><i>As part of our efforts to ensure that we continue delivering value-for-money services for residents, the council has had to make the difficult decision not to run our annual growing competitions, Hillingdon in Bloom and the Autumn Show, this year.</i></p> <p><i>I am aware that those residents who enter each year really look forward to it and dedicate a lot of time and effort to those entries, but unfortunately the cost of running two competitions in which relatively few residents participate was not sustainable and despite efforts to find a sponsor to foot those costs, we were not successful this year.</i></p> <p><i>We appreciate the enthusiasm and contributions of those like yourself who have taken part in past years and very much hope they will continue their efforts to grow remarkable produce and create gardens and blooms across the borough to boost biodiversity, improve air quality and keep the borough looking beautiful.</i></p> <p><i>We will continue to look for sponsors to support any opportunities for running these competitions in the future.]</i></p> <p>5.2 QUESTION FROM JASH PATEL OF LEAHOLME WAY, RUISLIP, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:</p> <p><i>“Please consider charging an entrance fee for visitors (to the Ruislip Lido) from outside the Borough of Hillingdon. The attached article (extract and link below) means that the Ruislip Lido will be visited by thousands of visitors, free of charge to enjoy the beach etc. The sufferers of this will be Hillingdon residents paying Council tax. The</i></p>

visitors park all across the surrounding area causing problems for the residents. I have been a resident of Leaholme Way for 48 years and am an ex-Hillingdon Council pensioner.

"I have made this request 2-3 times before. No joy.

"There's a sandy beach in London that many don't know about. A beach in London might sound like a myth, but for those in the know, Ruislip Lido offers a surprising slice of coastal charm just 30 minutes from the heart of the capital.

"Nestled on the edge of Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve in Northwest London, Ruislip Lido is fast becoming a viral sensation after a TikTok video by user Callum Ryan revealed its sandy shoreline and 60-acre lake to a wider audience"

Link to full article: [Secret sandy beach just 30 minutes from London | Travel News | Travel | Express.co.uk](https://www.express.co.uk/travel/secret-sandy-beach-just-30-minutes-from-london)

As the questioner was unable to attend the meeting, the Mayor asked the question on behalf of Mr Patel. Councillor Lavery thanked Mr Patel for his question and advised that he would provide him with a written response.

[NOTE: The following written response was forwarded to Mr Patel after the meeting:

Thank you for your question to me at last week's Council meeting which was asked by the Mayor.

I am aware of your long-standing residency in Leaholme Way and welcome your continued engagement with the Council regarding Ruislip Lido.

As you are aware, Ruislip Lido is a popular attraction appealing to many groups from those who enjoy walking their dog or running but also to those wishing to enjoy a day out. The Council is aware of the quoted article which does originate some years ago and is unhelpful in publicising the beach area at The Lido. We have raised this with the authors.

You mention that you have raised the question of a charge on previous occasions and I am aware of this fact. Let me assure you that the Council has considered this option on more than one occasion and sought advice on this. Survey data has shown that the majority of visitors are Hillingdon Residents although not necessarily from Ruislip.

The recurring issue is that the Lido also has multiple entrances from the car parks and public footpaths in the woods meaning the introduction of a charge is not straight forward.

We understand the impact that increased visitor numbers—particularly from outside the Borough—can have on residents, especially in terms of parking and general congestion, but please be assured that we have carefully considered various options and have already implemented measures aimed at mitigating these issues. These include enhanced parking enforcement, increased signage, and ongoing monitoring of visitor impact during peak times.

We are committed to continuing to explore further solutions that balance

accessibility with the needs of our residents.]

5.3 QUESTION FROM ANDREA SCRIVENS OF BROADWOOD AVENUE, RUISLIP AND THE FRIENDS OF THE RAGC, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE - COUNCILLOR PALMER:

“At the Cabinet meeting on 26 June (in relation to the item concerning the RAGC) it was stated that all those who required an assessment of their social care needs would have one. At a time when I understand social services to be already stretched, have they got the capacity to carry out those assessments, what is the timescale for their completion and what are the estimated costs?”

Councillor Palmer advised that Cabinet’s decision to close the Rural Activities Garden Centre’s retail element had been supported by Adult Social Care and ensured that all individuals with potential eligible needs had been assessed under the Care Act 2014. The service had maintained capacity for assessments, prioritised cases and provided support through Learning Disability Team social workers. Despite budget pressures, the service remained committed to its statutory duties.

5.4 QUESTION FROM ISABEL STEVENSON OF PARKFIELD ROAD, ICKENHAM, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE - COUNCILLOR PALMER:

“I am frightened for the safety of my son, who has been attending the Rural Activities Garden Centre as a gardener for many years. It is a safe and calming environment where our family can get respite for a few hours knowing he is safe with friends doing what he enjoys the most. Please can the Cabinet Member explain to me how the open aspect of the Civic Centre gardens allocated as the alternative provision to RAGC can be made safe for my son.”

Councillor Palmer advised that Adult Social Care recognised the vital role of carers and the need to manage changes to routine with care. Support had been made available through social workers and third-sector partners such as the Carers Trust. Each individual attending the Civic Centre had received a risk assessment and a detailed support plan, with familiar staff continuing to provide care. The service was managed by the experienced Daycare Team from Queens Resource Centre and the Civic Centre was equipped with robust safety measures including controlled access, CCTV and designated assembly points.

5.5 QUESTION FROM SARAH GREEN OF IVER LANE, UXBRIDGE, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

“The Council has a statutory responsibility to remediate the New Years Green landfill site and stop the landfill leachate polluting Ickenham Public Water Source on Breakspear Road South. After the 5-year period of Natural Monitored Attenuation (2013 to 2019), a report should have been written to inform decision makers of the pollution rates and what the recommended next steps are. Sufficient quantity of clean tap water is becoming critical in London. Can the Cabinet member tell the public the results of the Monitored Natural Attenuation at New Years Green landfill site and the next steps being taken?”

Attached Document:

Notice under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Part IIA – Section 78C, issued

by LBH to the Environment Agency of a decision that Contaminated Land at New Years Green Lane Landfill, Harefield is required to be designated as a Special Site Dated 26th May 2011

Councillor Lavery clarified that the water supply mentioned in the question was not an active source of public water for Ickenham or any other area. Concerns about water quality or quantity were best directed to the Environment Agency, the statutory regulator. The Council had been in discussions with the agency about the New Years Green Lane landfill site and its groundwater impact. Although earlier monitoring showed a reduced impact, it had prompted a review of future monitoring plans and details of the review would be made public once agreed.

5.6 QUESTION FROM JOHN SCRIVENS OF BROADWOOD AVENUE, RUISLIP AND THE FRIENDS OF THE RAGC, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES & PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

“In order to scrutinise the Cabinet's decision to close the Rural Activities Garden Centre, is the Council able to provide evidence that it has examined the option of Community Asset Transfer to transfer management of RAGC to Friends of RAGC, or other community organisation, as this is an obvious alternative to closure which would open additional funding opportunities for RAGC and be supported by the on-site RAGC operating team.”

Councillor Bianco confirmed that the Council had not yet explored future use options for the Rural Activities Garden Centre site. On 26 June 2025, Cabinet had agreed to close the retail element and had begun consulting on relocating social care services to the Civic Centre. Nominations to list the site and adjoining car park as community assets were under review in line with the Localism Act 2011. It was noted that no decision had been made to sell the site and the community asset transfer process would only apply if a sale was proposed.

5.7 QUESTION FROM MARK PEARMAN OF MELLOW LANE EAST, HAYES, TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR EDWARDS:

“We have seen it before where the Council promises what their plans are with no details and asks the residents to trust them. In the past we have seen Colham Green Day Centre close and used for a housing estate. This Centre was moved to a smaller centre (Parkview Day Centre) along the Uxbridge Road. After a few years that Centre was closed, and the service was moved to a warehouse in Uxbridge. Shortly after this closed too.

“Can the Leader of the Council explain why this time it will be any different and why the Council has been purposely managing the decline of the RAGC site?”

Councillor Edwards advised that the Council needed to change how it delivered services and used assets. These changes had been approached sensitively and with consideration for users' needs. The Rural Activities Garden Centre had been subject to a motion and further comments would follow later in the meeting. Councillor Edwards stated that the Council had closed the retail garden centre but the future of the horticultural activities at the centre had not yet been determined.

17. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (Agenda Item 6)

i) Urgent Implementation of Decisions

Members noted the urgent decisions taken since the Council meeting in May 2025, as detailed in the report.

ii) Political Groups on the Council, Calculation of Political Balance and Committee Memberships.

Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Bianco seconded, the motion as set out on the Order of Business, and it was:

RESOLVED: That the alteration of the overall political balance of the Council, following the formation of the Hayes Independent Party Group, be noted and the following changes to membership of Council Committees etc. be approved:

- **Licensing Committee – Councillor Gardner to remain a member of the Committee but representing the Hayes Independent Party Group.**
- **Pensions Committee – Councillor Basit to replace Councillor Burles and Councillor Sullivan to replace Councillor Burrows. Councillor Burles to be a nominated substitute.**
- **Registration and Appeals Committee – Councillor Curling to replace Councillor Makwana and Councillor Basit to replace Councillor Judge.**
- **Appointments Committee – Councillor Mathers to replace Councillor Curling.**
- **Residents Services Select Committee - Councillor Garelick to replace Councillor Gardner.**
- **Corporate Resources and Infrastructure Select Committee - Councillor Mand to replace Councillor Mathers and Councillor Islam to replace Councillor Garelick.**
- **Hillingdon Planning Committee – Councillor Sansarpuri to replace Councillor Mand.**

iii) Appointment of Statutory Officer

Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Bianco seconded, the motion as set out on the Order of Business and it was:

RESOLVED: That the new Corporate Director of Finance, Stephen Muldoon, be appointed to the statutory role of Section 151 and Chief Financial Officer of the Council once their appointment to the post of Corporate Director of Finance had been confirmed and they had commenced employment at the Council.

iv) North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Bianco seconded, the motion as set out on the Order of Business and it was:

RESOLVED: That Council agreed the changes to the NWL JHOSC Terms of Reference as set out in the report.

18. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS (*Agenda Item 7*)

To take questions submitted by Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.

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

The Mayor asked the following question on behalf of Cllr Haggar:

“What effect is the Cabinet decision to close the retail operation of the Rural Activities Garden Centre likely to have on the Social Care provision of horticultural therapy?”

Councillor Palmer advised that that Cabinet’s closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre’s retail arm had marked a strategic shift in delivering horticultural and life skills activities. Most users attended on a sessional basis and their other activities had remained unchanged. Gardening at the Civic Centre had already been established and was expected to continue, supported by familiar staff and new opportunities. The Civic Centre model reflected a move towards flexible, outcome-focused care aligned with national priorities and the Council, rated ‘Good’ by the CQC, remained capable of delivering quality care from any location.

There was no supplementary question.

7.2 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR SWEETING TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O’BRIEN:

“Why was Hillingdon’s important Annual Education Standard’s Report 2023/24 not considered by Cabinet this year as has been the case with similar reports in previous years?”

Councillor O’Brien advised that the Education Standards Report for 2023–2024 had been reviewed by the Children, Families & Education Select Committee in March 2025, with their feedback incorporated into the final report approved in June 2025. The Committee had noted attainment gaps and performance trends across key stages and had been reassured that steps were being taken to address these. The scrutiny had been deemed appropriate, in line with the Council’s Constitution and the report had not gone to full Cabinet due to its historical data.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Sweeting asked why the Children, Families and Education Select Committee’s comments noting that Key Stage 5, 4, 2, and Early Years results in Hillingdon were below regional outcomes and had not been made publicly available in any Council published documents.

In response, Councillor O’Brien confirmed that this information was publicly available as it was part of the Committee’s discussion, noted in the minutes and available on the Council’s website.

7.1 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DENYS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE & TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

“Will the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the Financial Improvement Programme which was initiated following the Budget setting at February Council?”

Councillor Goddard explained that the financial improvement programme, announced during the February budget setting, aimed to modernise finance operations and improve cost effectiveness. This included reviews of budget monitoring, forecasting, and the finance team’s structure, alongside the rollout of the Oracle Fusion EPM system, expected to be finalised by autumn 2025. Additional work had identified £14.6

million in savings from the high needs block, with break-even projected by 2027/28. The Council had also advanced digital and procurement reforms and a new Section 151 officer with relevant experience had been appointed. Due to financial modernisation processes, the final outturn report had been delayed to July Cabinet however regular budget monitoring would resume as scheduled.

There was no supplementary question.

7.6 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BURLES TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

“The Rural Activities Garden Centre is described as a 'hidden Gem' and for over 40 years has provided vital life changing services for our adults with learning difficulties. Can the Cabinet member explain why he did not seek alternative providers like the Council did for the Beck Theatre and Early Years Nursery Centres so that it can remain open?”

Councillor Lavery advised that the Council had financially supported the site, contributing £137,000 in the last year, and he believed a better outcome could be achieved at the Civic Centre. Councillor Palmer had already outlined the support in place for users. Councillor Lavery noted that previous relocations of services had also been opposed and they had ultimately been successful.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Burles asked whether the decision to close the Rural Activities Garden Centre had been rushed or politically motivated.

Councillor Lavery stated that the Cabinet report, presented in June 2025, had followed normal procedures and had detailed the closure of the loss-making retail operation and the support arranged for users, with Councillor Bianco having elaborated on it during the Cabinet meeting.

7.4 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR SMALLWOOD TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

“Can the Cabinet member confirm that Hillingdon Council is not levying parking charges on those visiting Breakspear Crematorium to pay their respects to deceased relatives?”

Councillor Lavery clarified that rumours of parking charges for crematorium visitors were false. The Council only applied charges to a small section used by Lido visitors, while crematorium visitors continued to park for free in the lower car park, where no machines had been installed. A small area had been used for Lido parking only on Easter Sunday and Father's Day.

There was no supplementary question.

7.9 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR PUNJA TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING, HOUSING & GROWTH - COUNCILLOR TUCKWELL:

“It is a year since Council resolved that a report be sent to Cabinet considering the sufficiency of evidence required under Part 2 Housing Act 2004 to extend licensing obligations to all properties with 3 bedrooms housing multiple unrelated occupants and to commence consultation on the implementation of this additional licensing obligation where it is justified.

“I note that the report is shown on the Forward Plan as due to be submitted to Cabinet in July. Please can the Cabinet member explain why it has taken a year to produce this report and what actions are going to be taken as the increasing rise in HMOs are changing our streets and impacting on our Council services?”

Councillor Lavery explained on behalf of Councillor Tuckwell that Cabinet had committed to a proper process for considering additional HMO licensing. Following approval in October 2024, the Council had begun gathering evidence and preparing for public consultation. The process typically took 12–18 months and skipping steps could lead to legal challenges. In the meantime, HMO-related concerns had continued to be addressed through enforcement where needed.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Punja asked whether delays in extending HMO licensing had been due to the Council avoiding licence fees by temporarily converting HMOs into temporary accommodation.

Councillor Lavery confirmed that this was not the case.

7.7 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BANERJEE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

“Can the Cabinet member please update Council on the rollout of the garden waste subscription scheme?”

Councillor Lavery reported that around 18,000 subscriptions to the new scheme had generated £1.6 million, with numbers rising after collections began and marketing efforts. The Council had prepared across departments and officers were thanked for a successful first week. Progress would continue to be monitored and adjusted as needed.

There was no supplementary question.

7.10 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MAND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE & TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

“Can the Cabinet Member please explain the absence and delays of budget monitoring reports and financial reports to Cabinet and Select Committee meetings?”

Councillor Goddard advised that this had been addressed in his earlier response to Councillor Denys’ question and he had nothing further to add.

In response to Cllr’s Mand’s supplementary question suggesting that the Council may already have met the threshold for a Section 114 notice and withheld this from backbenchers, Councillor Goddard confirmed that although the Council was experiencing financial pressures, it would not be required to file a S114 notice and that all relevant details would be presented in the July 2025 Cabinet report.

7.5 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BURROWS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

“Does the Cabinet member consider the decision to relocate Uxbridge Library to have been successful?”

	<p>Councillor Lavery reported that the library relocation had been a success, with increased book issues and membership. The new site was fully accessible, safer for families and more cost-effective. It had also enhanced the Civic Centre campus, with further improvements, including a museum and multi-purpose space, planned.</p> <p>There was no supplementary question.</p> <p>7.8 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BENNETT TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE - COUNCILLOR PALMER:</p> <p><i>“Following the CQC inspection, which rated Adult Social Care as ‘good’, can the Cabinet Member please provide any further updates on the service?”</i></p> <p>Councillor Palmer reported that, following a positive CQC rating, adult social care had continued to improve through strategic initiatives. Shared Lives and domiciliary care inspections had been rated “good,” digital tools and a tech-enabled care plan had been introduced and a principal social worker had been appointed. Despite financial pressures, the year was considered a strong one for the service.</p> <p>There was no supplementary question.</p>
19.	<p>MOTIONS (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>To consider Motions submitted by Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.</p> <p>8.4 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR EDWARDS</p> <p>8.4 Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Bianco seconded, the following motion:</p> <p><i>That this Council notes that Hillingdon has the highest number of asylum seekers housed in hotels or dispersed accommodation of any local authority in London (more than 4.5 times the London average) and possibly the highest nationally. It is unfair and unsustainable to require Hillingdon's residents to carry the grossly disproportionate burden of supporting former asylum seekers evicted from hotels as required by law. Council also notes with concern the commitment of Government to evict into this borough more than 2,300 asylum seekers presently housed in our hotels by the end of the present Parliament.</i></p> <p><i>To protect the interests of Hillingdon's residents, this Council requires Government to cease the practice of evicting former asylum seekers from hotels and dispersed accommodation within our borough without the necessary future support and accommodation having been secured and funded by the Home Office and to refund the cost shouldered by Hillingdon's residents to date.</i></p> <p><i>Furthermore, this Council calls on our three Members of Parliament to work with Government to secure the immediate funding for Hillingdon's asylum cost to date, to ensure that the responsibility for supporting and accommodating those evicted from hotels in the borough will from this point on be equitably shared nationally, and that the funding of port authorities is commensurate with the additional responsibilities that they discharge on behalf of the nation.</i></p> <p>Supporters of the motion stated that the Council had been unfairly burdened by the</p>

national Government's asylum policies, which had forced Hillingdon to spend millions of pounds, £16 million already, with projections reaching £21 million, on accommodation and support for asylum seekers without adequate support and funding from the Government. The shortfall had diverted resources from essential services and placed pressure on communities, especially due to the proximity to Heathrow. The motion had not been about party politics but about securing fair funding and protecting residents from the financial consequences of national decisions. The lack of planning and support from the Government had placed a strain on local services and communities and the motion had been presented as a necessary step to demand reimbursement, explore legal options and ensure that Hillingdon residents were not left to bear the cost of a national issue alone.

The distinction between asylum seekers and refugees was noted, focusing on those placed in hotels and released without support. Specific figures were withheld to avoid tension, but financial strain and a rise in looked-after children were highlighted. Unity was urged in demanding proper funding.

Those speaking against the motion argued that it was misleading, divisive and based on inaccurate claims. It was suggested that the Council was not obligated to house asylum seekers and only support those with priority needs. The motion had failed to acknowledge increased government funding, including a 380% rise in the asylum dispersal grant, and had omitted key data on the number of individuals supported. The motion was viewed as politically motivated and morally irresponsible, shifting blame onto vulnerable people and the new government. A past judicial review loss was recalled, and concerns were raised about fuelling division and damaging the Council's credibility.

The motion was put to a recorded vote:

Those voting in favour: The Mayor (Councillor Philip Corthorne), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Reeta Chamdal), Councillors Ahmad-Wallana, Banerjee, Bennett, Bhatt, Bianco, Burrows, Roy Chamdal, Davies, Denys, Edwards, Goddard, Gohil, Higgins, Lavery, Lewis, Makwana, Martin, D Mills, R Mills, O'Brien, Palmer, Riley, Smallwood and Sullivan.

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

Those abstaining: None.

The motion was carried and it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council notes that Hillingdon has the highest number of asylum seekers housed in hotels or dispersed accommodation of any local authority in London (more than 4.5 times the London average) and possibly the highest nationally. It is unfair and unsustainable to require Hillingdon's residents to carry the grossly disproportionate burden of supporting former asylum seekers evicted from hotels as required by law. Council also notes with concern the commitment of Government to evict into this borough more than 2,300 asylum seekers presently housed in our hotels by the end of the present Parliament.

To protect the interests of Hillingdon's residents, this Council requires

Government to cease the practice of evicting former asylum seekers from hotels and dispersed accommodation within our borough without the necessary future support and accommodation having been secured and funded by the Home Office and to refund the cost shouldered by Hillingdon's residents to date.

Furthermore, this Council calls on our three Members of Parliament to work with Government to secure the immediate funding for Hillingdon's asylum cost to date, to ensure that the responsibility for supporting and accommodating those evicted from hotels in the borough will, from this point on, be equitably shared nationally, and that the funding of port authorities is commensurate with the additional responsibilities that they discharge on behalf of the nation.

8.2 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR MATHERS

Councillor Mathers moved, and Councillor Gill seconded, the following motion:

That this Council is seriously concerned at the Cabinet's broken promises to its residents with reversal of the affirmation agreed in July 2023 by Full Council that: "this Council affirms our commitment to free weekly bin collections, including recycling and green waste collections and thanks our Council staff for their dedication to their work."

And that this: "Council reaffirms that it rejects the idea of charging residents for the collection of garden waste".

The Cabinet reasons for supporting policies that have introduced an initial £70 subscription charge for this service in the borough was to save £34 million to balance the budget and avoid bankruptcy.

Therefore, this Council calls on the Cabinet to refer the implementation and introduction of charges for waste to the relevant select committee in order to scrutinise the effectiveness of this measure in achieving the desired savings at regular intervals over the coming financial year to assure residents that this and other aspects of the savings programme will raise the required funds in year to remain within budget.

Those speaking in support of the motion suggested that the introduction of a £70 garden waste subscription represented a serious breach of the Conservative administration's manifesto promise to maintain free weekly green waste collections. It was noted that there was no clarity provided on future charge increases and it had been framed as part of a broader trend of rising fees and broken commitments. Residents already faced steep increases in parking permits and service charges, and the Council had committed to annual 5% rises in fees since 2024. 79% of residents opposed the charge in the consultation, with many indicating that they would resort to fly-tipping or dispose of green waste in general waste bins. These actions could cost the Council more than the revenue generated. A lack of transparency and scrutiny were also criticised, with only 17% of residents reportedly indicating they would subscribe, casting doubt on the projected £2.5 million income. The motion had been presented as a call for accountability, with a referral to a select committee for review urged, alongside a restoration of public trust through honouring commitments and ensuring proper oversight.

Those speaking against the motion noted that the Council's decision to introduce a garden waste subscription had been a regrettable but necessary response to financial

pressures, which had been caused by broken promises from the Labour government. It was explained that the Council had been forced to abandon its July 2023 commitment due to an unexpected rise in employer National Insurance contributions, which had initially been promised to be offset by the government but had not been delivered. As a result, a budget gap had been created and needed to be addressed through the new charge. Criticism was also directed at the Labour government for its failure to control illegal immigration, rising public debt and its contribution to inflation and job losses, all of which were said to have intensified financial strain on local authorities. The motion was described as one that ignored these broader economic realities and unfairly targeted a voluntary £70 charge which was lower than those imposed by many neighbouring Labour councils, while overlooking the Council's efforts to manage its finances responsibly. It was suggested that free disposal options remained available to residents and that the motion was politically motivated rather than a genuine attempt to address challenges.

The motion was put to the vote and lost.

8.1 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR CURLING

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

That this Council notes the devastating impact that a third runway, at Heathrow airport, would have on our borough and its residents. Council further notes the well documented detrimental impact on the environment, as well as the adverse impact on the health and well-being of a significant number of residents within our borough, should a third runway be built and brought into operation.

This Council therefore reaffirms its strong, cross party, opposition to a third runway at Heathrow Airport.

Support from all parties was expressed for the motion on the grounds that the proposed third runway at Heathrow would cause irreversible harm to the environment and local communities, and that the Council's long-standing cross-party opposition should be reaffirmed. The proposed expansion would threaten historic villages, increase pollution, worsen health outcomes and contribute to the climate crisis. It was noted that Heathrow had already impacted more residents than any other major European airport, and that proposed mitigation measures were not considered adequate. Social impacts such as the loss of family homes, the rise in HMOs and the breakdown of community cohesion were also highlighted.

Successive governments were criticised for prioritising economic growth over public health and environmental sustainability. The motion was a call for stronger Council action through planning controls and enforcement as the runway would cause unacceptable disruption and long-term damage and continued opposition was essential.

The motion was put to a recorded vote:

Those voting in favour: The Mayor (Councillor Philip Corthorne), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Reeta Chamdal), Councillors Abby, Ahmad-Wallana, Banerjee, Basit, Bennett, Bhatt, Bianco, Burles, Burrows, Roy Chamdal, Choubedar, Curling, Davies, Denys, Dhot, Edwards, Farley, Gardner, Garelick, Garg, Gill, Goddard, Gohil, Higgins, Islam, Kaur, Lakhmana, Lavery, Lewis, Makwana, Mand, Martin, Mathers, D Mills, R Mills, Money, Nelson, Nelson-West, Palmer, Punja, Riley, Sansarpuri, Singh,

Smallwood, Sullivan and Sweeting.

Those voting against: None.

Those abstaining: None.

The motion was unanimously agreed, and it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council notes the devastating impact that a third runway, at Heathrow airport, would have on our borough and its residents. Council further notes the well documented detrimental impact on the environment, as well as the adverse impact on the health and well-being of a significant number of residents within our borough, should a third runway be built and brought into operation.

This Council therefore reaffirms its strong, cross party, opposition to a third runway at Heathrow Airport.

8.3 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR PUNJA

Councillor Punja moved, and Councillor Mathers seconded, the following motion:

That this Council agrees to call on Councillor Lavery, Cabinet Member for Community and Environment to reconsider the Cabinet decision to close the retail operations of the Rural Activities Garden Centre made on June 26th 2025 for the following

- a) failure to accurately analyse or calculate financial income year on year income under Financial Implications*
- b) failure to have sought and costed alternative providers for the site to remain open.*
- c) failure to have scoped, costed, assessed and consulted on new provision for gardeners with social care package to ensure a safe environment*
- d) misleading information on £1.2m needed for investment to meet Health and Safety standards as this cost was based on an improvement plan proposal.*
- e) failure to provide reasonable adjustments for adults with learning disabilities as per guidance in the Equalities Act at the initial engagement meeting of 30th May 2025*

This Council values robust reporting to make high quality decisions and asks the Cabinet member for Community and Environment to instruct officers to provide an updated report addressing, but not limited to, the concerns listed above and submit to the relevant Select Committees for scrutiny before going to Cabinet for a decision.

Support was expressed for reconsidering the closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre, which had been valued for its beneficial and inclusive services. Despite strong public opposition, the Conservative administration was reported to have approved the closure of its retail operations, with key Cabinet Members absent during the decision. The Cabinet report was criticised for inaccuracies and procedural failings and concerns were raised over the lack of alternative provision and consultation. A 90 day fundraising period was requested to avoid reliance on Council subsidy. The decision-making process was condemned as lacking integrity and compassion.

Opposition to the motion was based on the view that the Rural Activities Garden Centre had been a commercial, not commissioned, service. The subsidy withdrawal was defended as financially responsible, consistent with previous decisions on non-

	<p>essential services. Confidence was expressed in adult social care services and assurances were given that alternative support would be provided. The closure was described as limited to retail operations, with horticultural activities under review and engagement with families ongoing. It was maintained that the Council lacked the mandate to run a commercial garden centre.</p> <p>The motion was put to a recorded vote:</p> <p>Those voting in favour: Councillors Abby, Basit, Burles, Curling, Dhot, Farley, Gardner, Garelick, Garg, Islam, Kaur, Lakhmana, Mand, Mathers, Money, Nelson, Nelson-West, Punja, Sansarpuri, Singh and Sweeting.</p> <p>Those voting against: The Mayor (Councillor Philip Corthorne), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Reeta Chamdal), Councillors Ahmad-Wallana, Banerjee, Bennett, Bhatt, Bianco, Burrows, Roy Chamdal, Choubedar, Davies, Denys, Edwards, Goddard, Gohil, Higgins, Lavery, Lewis, Makwana, Martin, D Mills, R Mills, Palmer, Riley, Smallwood and Sullivan.</p> <p>Those abstaining: None.</p> <p>The motion was lost.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.17 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 Democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.

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QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

5.1 QUESTION FROM ANDREA SCRIVENS OF BROADWOOD AVENUE, RUISLIP, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES & PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

Since the announcement on 30th May of the plan to close the RAGC the Council has repeatedly stated that it has no other plans for the site. There is a rumour that the land has been offered for sale. Please could you confirm or deny this rumour?

5.2 QUESTION FROM JOHN SCRIVENS OF BROADWOOD AVENUE, RUISLIP, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES & PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

Friends of RAGC used the procedures laid down on the Council website to nominate the Rural Activities Garden Centre as an Asset of Community Value as specified in the Localism Act 2011. The statutory 8-week period during which the Council is required to make a decision on the nominations expired before the end of August so at the time of writing, the Council is in breach of the Localism Act.

Why did the Council neither process these ACV nominations within the statutory time limit nor provide us with any reason for this failure?

5.3 QUESTION FROM LYNN JACKSON OF DOWNS BARN ROAD, RUISLIP, TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

Having paid to have our garden waste collected, can I please ask why bags are being collected from homes where no payment has been made and the bags have no address or green tags on either? Is there a protocol in place to ensure this doesn't happen, if so, are all workers fully appraised of it? Are the Council also ensuring that garden waste placed in black bags are being refused?

5.4 QUESTION FROM DANIEL O'NEILL OF ASHBURTON ROAD, RUISLIP, AND ON BEHALF OF THE HILLINGDON ALLIANCE OF RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES & PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

The July Cabinet meeting was informed of a "particularly damning" fire risk assessment which identified urgent building safety concerns from inadequate fire detection systems at the Union Park Estate on Packet Boat Lane.

Consequently, Cabinet approved funding for a 'Walking Watch' at £4200 per day for six weeks, a measure deemed more cost-effective than the alternative of rehousing 250 households.

Could the Cabinet member please provide an update on the situation, including

- how our borough came to have thirteen residential units on a new development with such safety concerns?,
- what the Walking Watch entails?
- how its contract was awarded?

- what the day-to-day situation is for the residents on the estate?
- the future plan to ensure the buildings are made safe?
- when that might be and how the cost will be borne?

5.5 QUESTION FROM ADE BANJOKO OF THE FAIRWAY, SOUTH, RUISLIP TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR EDWARDS:

The protests on Saturday 30th September have spurred racial hatred both online and on the streets of Hillingdon, with calls for immigrants to be sent back. As a resident of the borough, I am deeply saddened and concerned by the rising levels of racial hatred being experienced here.

How can the Council reassure residents that it takes hate crime seriously when its own communications appear to be fuelling hostility against migrants.

I am especially worried about the impact this environment is having on children and young people. Research shows that racial prejudice can begin from as early as the age of four, and recent data reported in the Evening Standard shows over 15,000 suspensions last year for racist behaviour in schools – more than doubling since the pandemic, with incidents involving children as young as four.

Given this worrying trend, what specific actions will the Council take both to challenge racial hatred in our communities and to prevent the normalisation of racism among the next generation?

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Reporting Officer: Head of Democratic Services

i) URGENT IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS

RECOMMENDATION: That the Urgency decisions detailed below be noted.

Information

1. The Constitution allows a Cabinet or Cabinet Member decision to be implemented before the expiry of the 5-day scrutiny call-in period, provided the decision is deemed urgent and agreement is given from the Chair of the relevant Select Committee that the matter is urgent and to waive the scrutiny call-in period. All such decisions are to be reported for information only to the next full Council meeting.
2. Since last reported to Council, the following decisions have been made using urgency procedures:

Date of Decision	Nature of Decision	Reason for Urgency	Decision-Maker
1/8/2025	Update on the Beck Theatre - interim lease arrangements and payments, finalisation of a long-term lease and capital upgrade works to the Theatre.	To enable the new operator to continue with their programme of activities as per the Head of Terms agreement, whilst the long-term lease agreement is finalised.	Leader of the Council

Background Papers: Decision Notices

ii) CABINET PORTFOLIOS

RECOMMENDATION: That the alteration to Cabinet Portfolios detailed below, be noted.

Information

1. The Cabinet Portfolios are set out in the Constitution, are determined by the Leader of the Council and are reported to Council for information.
2. Accordingly, Members are asked to note that the responsibility for Fleet Management has been transferred from the Finance & Transformation Portfolio to the Planning, Housing and Growth Portfolio.

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Issuance of Recommendations Under Section 24 Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

Reporting Officers: Head of Democratic Services & Corporate Director of Finance

Introduction

1. On 24 July 2025, the Council's External Auditors issued the Council with a Value for Money Update and Recommendations Under Section 24 Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (S24 Report) – **attached as an appendix**.
2. The Act requires that Council must consider the recommendations in the Value for Money Update at a meeting held in public, before the end of the period of one month beginning with the day on which their report was sent to the Council, unless the local auditor is satisfied that it is reasonable to allow more time for the relevant authority to comply with this requirement.
3. Officers requested an extension of the period to hold the meeting in the week commencing 8 September 2025 in order to avoid the August summer holiday period and increase the probability of Members being able to attend. The external auditor confirmed that they were satisfied that this request was reasonable.
4. At the Council meeting Members will, therefore, be asked to decide if the External Auditor's recommendations are to be accepted and what, if any, action to take in response to these recommendations.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS: That:

- a) **the recommendations of the external auditor contained within the report issued under Section 24 Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, be accepted.**
- b) **the programmes of work and actions which were already in place to address the S24 Report recommendations, as clearly set out in the Financial Modernisation Programme (FMP) which commenced in February 2025, and the Governance Review Improvement Plan (GRIP) which commenced in March 2025, be welcomed and approved.**
- c) **the Audit Committee, who have already been monitoring the progress of the FMP and GRIP, be instructed to continue to monitor the delivery of the actions and report back to Council in no later than 12 months, or earlier if required, to ensure the S24 Report recommendations have been fully addressed.**

The S24 Report

5. The S24 Report reiterates the previous recommendations in the External Auditors' report dated 18 March 2025, emphasising the crucial nature of the work that the Council has been undertaking for some time in implementing those recommendations, particularly noting, and further recommending, that the Council must continue working at pace with its Governance Review Improvement Plan (GRIP), the Finance Modernisation Programme (FMP) and, as part of the FMP, addressing issues with the implementation of the Oracle EPM budget management system.

6. These two programmes of work, amongst a wider continuous improvement approach, address all of the External Auditor's recommendations.
7. The FMP and GRIP emerged from the Council's ongoing approach to improve and transform services and have been previously presented to the Audit Committee, with a resolution that that committee will track their progress.
8. The FMP is a significant transformation initiative by the London Borough of Hillingdon to review and strengthen the Council's financial systems, processes, and structures. It was initiated to address budget challenges and to modernise the Council's financial infrastructure. With the appointment of Grant Thornton in April 2025 to support this work and with the Local Government Association (LGA) providing objective oversight, it's aim is to assist the Council in modernising its financial processes, strengthen its financial management, develop a modern finance function, and embed processes and controls in the Council's financial system, Oracle. Whilst this programme is closely aligned with the Council's wider GRIP, it is recognised as a distinct and equally critical stream of work.
9. The GRIP is Hillingdon Council's strategic approach to enhancing its governance and implementing learning from related reviews presented to earlier Audit committees. It aims to strengthen internal controls, clarify internal decision-making, and improve accountability, ensuring the Council operates a continuous improvement approach to being well-governed corporately, financially resilient, and transparent. The programme was launched in March 2025, led by the Corporate Governance Group. The GRIP is structured around three workstreams - financial governance, directorate governance, and constitutional/democratic governance - each with defined actions and leadership.

The S24 Report Recommendations

10. The external auditor makes 7 formal statutory recommendations to the Council under Section 24 Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014:
 - a) That the Council ensures it has detailed implementation plans supporting all of the planned savings included within its 2025-26 budget and future medium-term financial strategy and identifies and develops implementation plans for further savings which can be pursued should additional budgetary pressures emerge, or the Council fails to achieve all of its currently planned savings.
 - b) That the Council reviews its service delivery models to ensure that they are efficient, represent value for money and achieve the outcomes required for the resources invested. Where opportunities to improve service delivery models are identified, the Council should develop detailed plans for implementation of service delivery transformation and how the up-front transformation costs will be funded.
 - c) That the Council should balance its schools' budget to prevent further growth in its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. In the absence of confirmed alternative arrangements, the Council should also perform scenario planning for how it would manage the impact of the current deficit on its financial position when the current statutory override ends in March 2028.
 - d) That the Council review its financial forecasting processes to understand why significant financial pressures, over and above those anticipated and reflected in the Council's annual budget, emerge and ensure future forecasting reflects the lessons learned.
 - e) That the Council urgently establishes a clear understanding of its current financial position, including the extent to which that position has diverged from the assumptions

underpinning the 2025-26 budget and may require immediate action to prevent further depletion of reserves during 2025-26.

- f) That the Council urgently addresses the issues it has encountered with implementation of Oracle EPM to ensure that, at both individual budget holder and overall Council level, decision makers are able to access accurate and complete budgetary information to inform decision making.
 - g) That the Council continues at pace with the development and implementation of its Financial Modernisation Programme, as well as the wider Governance Review Improvement Plan, and ensures that the scope of these programmes addresses all of the weaknesses in current arrangements highlighted by the various internal and external reviews the Council has received.
11. The External Auditor has recognised that the Council has already been taking steps to implement these recommendations. They do, however, consider it appropriate to highlight the actions the Council should take to ensure appropriate transparency and pace of improvement.
12. The Council has already progressed this work in an open and transparent manner through updates on the GRIP and FMP presented to Audit Committee meetings on 24 July and 28 August 2025.
13. The External Auditor also highlights where the Council is in the current democratic cycle, with Council elections taking place in May 2026, and the fact the Council will need to take firm action to address the recommendations above, prior to and following the next election cycle.

The Council's Response / Progress On the Recommendations

14. It is recommended that Council welcome the recommendations contained in the S24 Report, particularly as they recognise and emphasise the actions the Council has already progressed (before the report was issued) to address these concerns. As stated above, the Section 24 Report reiterates the previous recommendations in the External Auditor's report, dated 18 March 2025, emphasising the crucial nature of the work that the Council currently has underway in implementing those recommendations.
15. The Council began both the FMP and GRIP work prior to the issuing of even the draft Section 24 notice to officers, with Cabinet first approving a recommendation for a financial review in Cabinet in February 2025. Since this date, progress has been made against the FMP and GRIP work, with updates included in the finance report to Cabinet as well as updates to the Audit Committee in July and August.
16. Both Members and officers fully accept the crucial nature of the work underway and welcome the emphasis in the Section 24 report in recommending that the improvement work, as set out in the GRIP and FMP, must continue at pace and address issues with the implementation of Oracle EPM.

The Role of the Audit Committee

17. The Audit Committee on 28 August also considered the contents of the S24 Report and, in recognising the significance of the recommendations contained in the report, welcomed the action that had been taken to date (and prior to the issuing of the S24 Report) to address those recommendations. The Committee were keen to continue to monitor the action and

provide Member oversight of the pace of implementation.

18. Therefore, it is recommended that Council continue to address the S24 Report's recommendations through the urgent implementation of the key programmes highlighted above and request the Audit Committee to monitor progress via updates to each meeting – ensuring Member oversight of the progress.
19. Audit Committee will then update Council as required and, in any case, submit a full update report in one year's time to ensure that all 'decision makers', as identified in the report, are fully appraised of the progress made.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

20. The Council has already been engaged on the FMP since the last quarter of 2024/25 and had engaged with Grant Thornton to take this work forward. The implications of a Section 24 Statement is the implementation of improvements to correct the position. This will lead to increases in Audit Fees over this period, which will need agreement of the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), for additional work checking that improvements have been implemented.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

21. The legal implications of this report are set out in paragraphs 2-4 above.
22. A copy of the report has been sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Appended - Value for Money Update and Issuance of Recommendations Under Section 24 Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014
- Financial Modernisation Programme update, Governance Review Improvement Plan update and S24 Recommendations report to Audit Committee of 28 August 2025

**London Borough of Hillingdon
Value for Money Update and
Issuance of Recommendations
Under Section 24 Schedule 7(2)
of the Local Audit and
Accountability Act 2014**

24 July 2025



Private and Confidential

24 July 2025

Full Council
London Borough of Hillingdon
Hillingdon Civic Centre
225-226 High Street
Uxbridge
UB8 1UW

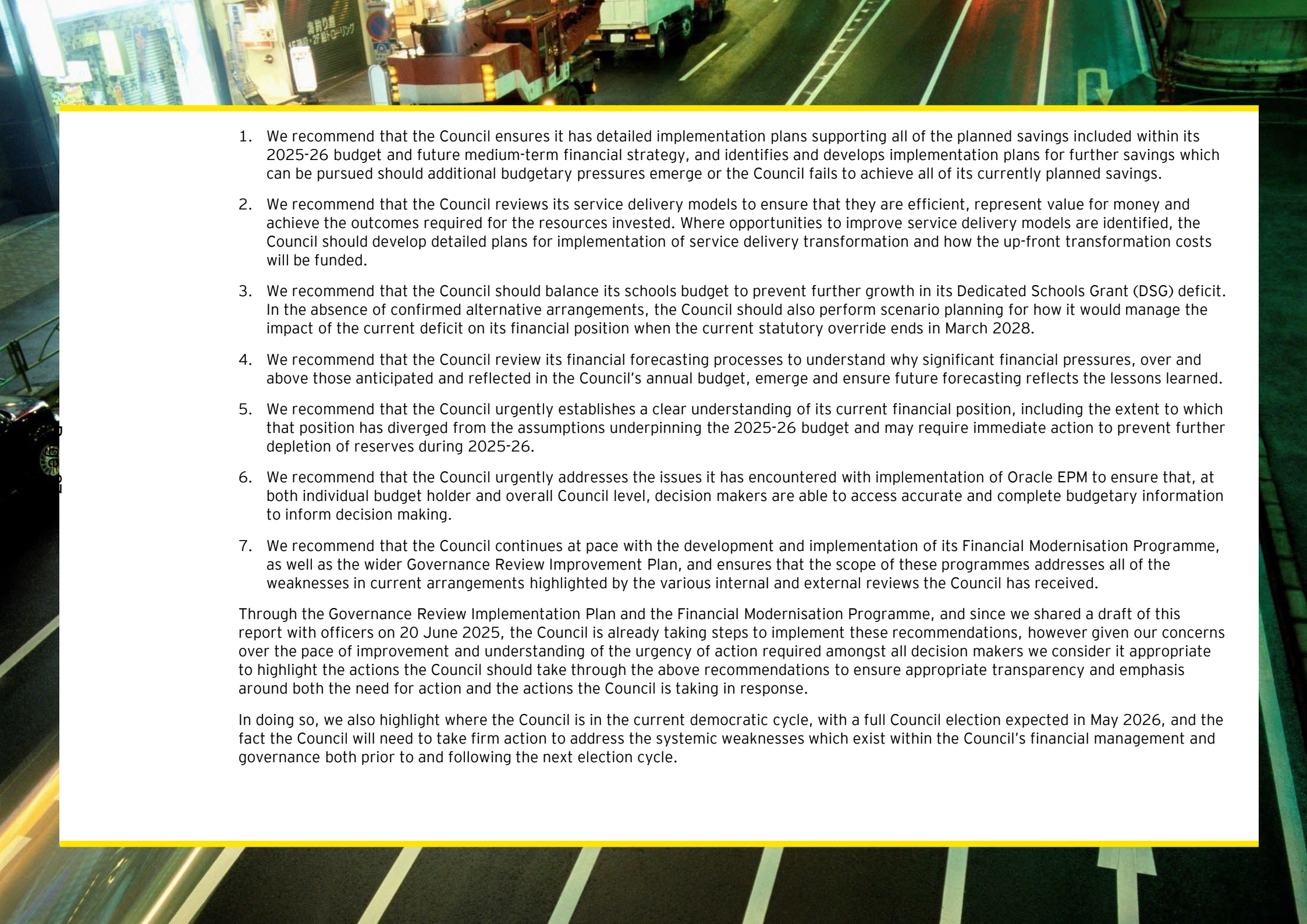
Dear Elected Members (members) of the London Borough of Hillingdon

In our Audit Results Report for our 2023-24 audit, presented to the Audit Committee in February 2025, we reported that we had observed evidence which led us to conclude that the Council did not have proper arrangements in place to identify and manage risks to its financial resilience during the year ended 31 March 2024. We also reported that the Council did not have proper arrangements in place to ensure it took properly informed decisions and supported challenge and transparency as a result of poor data quality within the organisation, and that this was likely a contributing factor to the absence of proper arrangements to identify and manage risks to its financial resilience. At the same time, we made recommendations to the Council to address our observations and emphasised that failure to take significant and urgent action to address the Council's financial position places the Council's financial sustainability at significant risk.

This report sets out our observations on the Council's arrangements to identify and manage risks to its financial resilience for the period since 1 April 2024 up to the date of this report. Given the timing of our previous reporting, the recommendations we issued to the Council to address our observations on the Council's arrangements during the year ended 31 March 2024 were issued during the period covered by this report.

This report provides our assessment that whilst the Council has recognised the need for action and is taking steps to address weaknesses in its financial management and governance, including through the introduction of the Governance Review Implementation Plan (GRIP) and the Financial Modernisation Programme (FMP), the Council's financial position has continued to deteriorate since the period we previously reported on and we are not confident that the Council has a clear understanding of its current financial position or that the pace of improvement is sufficient to address the systemic weaknesses which exist within the Council's financial management and governance. We are also not confident that the urgency of the need to address these systemic weaknesses is fully recognised by all decision makers.

Within this report, we make 7 formal statutory recommendations to the Council under Section 24 Schedule 7(2) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014:

- 
1. We recommend that the Council ensures it has detailed implementation plans supporting all of the planned savings included within its 2025-26 budget and future medium-term financial strategy, and identifies and develops implementation plans for further savings which can be pursued should additional budgetary pressures emerge or the Council fails to achieve all of its currently planned savings.
 2. We recommend that the Council reviews its service delivery models to ensure that they are efficient, represent value for money and achieve the outcomes required for the resources invested. Where opportunities to improve service delivery models are identified, the Council should develop detailed plans for implementation of service delivery transformation and how the up-front transformation costs will be funded.
 3. We recommend that the Council should balance its schools budget to prevent further growth in its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. In the absence of confirmed alternative arrangements, the Council should also perform scenario planning for how it would manage the impact of the current deficit on its financial position when the current statutory override ends in March 2028.
 4. We recommend that the Council review its financial forecasting processes to understand why significant financial pressures, over and above those anticipated and reflected in the Council's annual budget, emerge and ensure future forecasting reflects the lessons learned.
 5. We recommend that the Council urgently establishes a clear understanding of its current financial position, including the extent to which that position has diverged from the assumptions underpinning the 2025-26 budget and may require immediate action to prevent further depletion of reserves during 2025-26.
 6. We recommend that the Council urgently addresses the issues it has encountered with implementation of Oracle EPM to ensure that, at both individual budget holder and overall Council level, decision makers are able to access accurate and complete budgetary information to inform decision making.
 7. We recommend that the Council continues at pace with the development and implementation of its Financial Modernisation Programme, as well as the wider Governance Review Improvement Plan, and ensures that the scope of these programmes addresses all of the weaknesses in current arrangements highlighted by the various internal and external reviews the Council has received.

Through the Governance Review Implementation Plan and the Financial Modernisation Programme, and since we shared a draft of this report with officers on 20 June 2025, the Council is already taking steps to implement these recommendations, however given our concerns over the pace of improvement and understanding of the urgency of action required amongst all decision makers we consider it appropriate to highlight the actions the Council should take through the above recommendations to ensure appropriate transparency and emphasis around both the need for action and the actions the Council is taking in response.

In doing so, we also highlight where the Council is in the current democratic cycle, with a full Council election expected in May 2026, and the fact the Council will need to take firm action to address the systemic weaknesses which exist within the Council's financial management and governance both prior to and following the next election cycle.

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 requires that the Council must consider these recommendations at a public meeting held before the end of the period of one month beginning with the day on which it was sent to the Council, unless the local auditor is satisfied that it is reasonable to allow more time for the relevant authority to comply with this requirement. Officers have requested extension of the period to hold this meeting to the week commencing 8 September 2025 in order to avoid the August summer holiday period and increase the probability of members being able to attend. We confirm that we are satisfied that this request is reasonable.

At that public meeting, the Council must decide whether the recommendations are to be accepted and what, if any, action to take in response to these recommendations.

A copy of this report has been sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Reid', written over a horizontal line.

Stephen Reid

Partner, for and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP



Our previous observations



Value for Money

The Council's responsibilities for value for money

The Council is required to maintain an effective system of internal control that supports the achievement of its policies, aims and objectives while safeguarding and securing value for money from the public funds and other resources at its disposal.

As part of the material published with the financial statements, the Council is required to bring together commentary on the governance framework and how this has operated during the period, in a governance statement. In preparing the governance statement, the Council tailors the content to reflect its own individual circumstances, consistent with the requirements of the relevant accounting and reporting framework and having regard to any guidance issued in support of that framework. This includes a requirement to provide commentary on arrangements for securing value for money from the use of resources.

Auditor responsibilities

Under the NAO Code we are required to consider whether the Council has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources. The Code requires the auditor to design their work to provide them with sufficient assurance to enable them to report to the Council a commentary against specified reporting criteria (see below) on the arrangements the Council has to secure value for money through economic, efficient and effective use of its resources for the relevant period.

Page 30

The specified reporting criteria are:

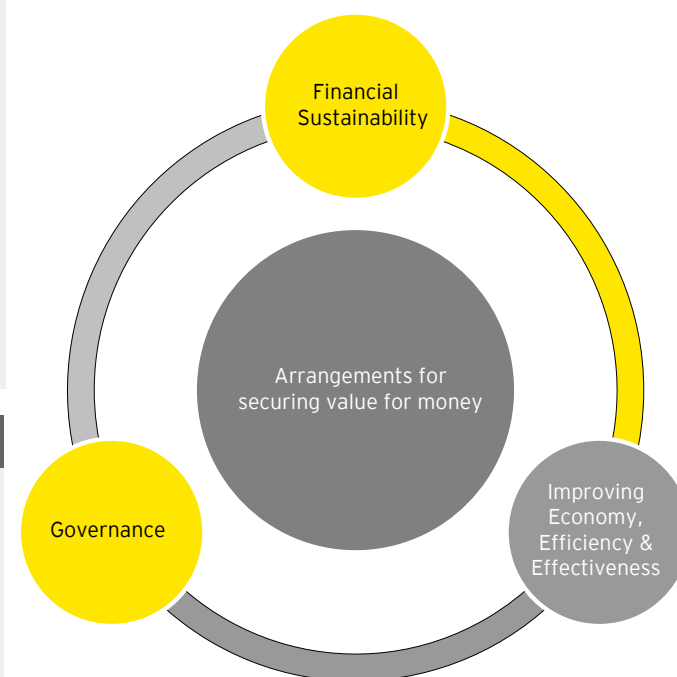
- ▶ **Financial sustainability** - How the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services.
- ▶ **Governance** - How the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.
- ▶ **Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness** - How the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

Our observations

In our Audit Results Report for our 2023-24 audit presented to the Audit Committee in February 2025, we reported that we had observed evidence which led us to conclude that the Council did not have proper arrangements in place to identify and manage risks to its financial resilience during the year ended 31 March 2024. We also reported that the Council did not have proper arrangements in place to ensure it took properly informed decisions and supported challenge and transparency as a result of poor data quality within the organisation, and that this was likely a contributing factor to the absence of proper arrangements to identify and manage risks to its financial resilience.

We concluded that these matters constituted significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements to secure value for money, and made recommendations to the Council to address these weaknesses.

We recognise that the Council has had limited time to respond to these recommendations, therefore our reporting in this report focuses on our further observations on the Council's arrangements since 31 March 2024.



Arrangements since April 2024





Value for Money

The Council's Financial Performance During the Year Ended 31 March 2025

The Council's Budget for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

The Council's budget for 2024-25 was approved at the meeting of full Council held on 22 February 2024, and included net expenditure on services to be funded through Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and government grants of £284.4 million. The Council's gross expenditure is significantly higher than this, and includes spending in relation to schools and the Housing Revenue Account for which there are separate budgets, however the net expenditure on services is the key budgetary total against which the Council measures its financial performance.

In producing a balanced budget for 2024-25, the Council included savings totalling £15.8 million which would require delivery during the year. Subsequent to this, the Council identified £5.7 million of savings which were planned for delivery in 2023-24 but would require delivery during 2024-25 instead bringing the total level of savings required to be delivered during 2024-25 to £22.5 million.

Given that the Council is required to have its budget for the following financial year in place before the commencement of the period to which it relates, the Council's budget for 2024-25 was prepared prior to conclusion of the year ended 31 March 2024 and required the Council to make assumptions about the level of reserves it would carry into 2024-25. The Council's final reserves balance at 31 March 2024 was £35.2 million, £2.2m lower than assumed in setting its 2024-25 budget and only £3.2 million above the £32.0 million minimum level determined by the Council's Section 151 Officer. The Council also reported a cumulative deficit on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) at 31 March 2024 of £47.5 million, which we highlighted in our value for money commentary for the year ended 31 March 2024 exceeded the Council's level of reserves and posed a significant risk to the Council's financial viability.

Note: The Council reports and monitors its level of reserves in reference to what it terms its 'available usable reserves', which consist of its General Fund and earmarked reserves not already committed and represent the reserves available to the Council to meet unplanned budgetary pressures. Throughout this report where we refer to the Council's level of reserves we are referring to this measure unless otherwise stated.

Identification of Risks and Pressures

By the end of May 2024, the Council had identified a number of significant financial risks and pressures including increased demand for homelessness and adult social care services over-and-above levels assumed in setting its 2024-25 budget which it had quantified at £26.8 million. The emergence of significant financial pressures early in the financial year was also noted in 2023-24, and the recurring nature of this observation is indicative that the Council has not accurately captured the scale of the increasing demand for its services or the cost pressures it faces.

In response to the pressures emerging early in the financial year, the Council launched a Council-wide zero-based budgeting exercise to scrutinise and challenge the assumptions underpinning its budget and future financial forecasts. The Council also brought in external budgeting and financial management support to assist with this exercise.

The zero-based budgeting exercised performed by the Council consisted of a root-and-branch review of all of the Council's significant budgets, and took several months to complete. During this time, the Council's financial forecasts and assessment of its likely outturn against budget for 2024-25 were subject to significant fluctuations and the Council opted not to provide formal updated outturn assessments for June or July 2024. The Council was also forecasting the in-year deficit on its schools budget to be £16.1 million, a significant reduction on the £25.6 million deficit in the prior year but still a significant increase to the cumulative deficit.



Value for Money

The Council's Financial Performance During the Year Ended 31 March 2025 (continued)

By August 2024, the Council had concluded the zero-based budgeting exercise and established that the financial risks and pressures arising from demographic growth, service demand pressures and challenges in delivery of some of the planned savings were more significant than previously identified. The total forecast deficit against budget for the year was quantified at £44.3 million and prompted the Council to take a number of measures to seek to mitigate this impact, including:

- Identifying a number of 'strategic management actions' which required further development but were expected to deliver of £11.9 million of additional savings, including through containing inflationary uplifts within Health and Social Care to a level below the budgeted uplift, additional income from the West London Waste Authority and interventions to manage demand for homelessness services.
- The introduction of senior officer star chambers, the focus of which were to build upon the zero-based budgeting exercise and identify urgent actions which could be taken to recover the in-year financial position. Star chamber sessions were held for each service area within the Council, as well cross-service thematic sessions also taking place. As of August 2024, these sessions had identified £15.9 million of savings, but were an ongoing exercise.
- A review of the Council's balance sheet for options to realise existing assets, which was expected to generate a further £10.0 million of savings.

Not all of the above plans had been fully developed by the Council, but even if fully delivered there remained a forecast overspend of £6.5 million for which mitigating actions had not yet been identified by the Council. As a result, the Council assessed that there was a possibility that reserves would drop below the minimum recommended level of £32.0 million before the end of 2024-25.

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The Basis for the 2025-26 Budget

During the remainder of the year, the Council continued to invest significant time and effort in identifying further measures to respond to its financial pressures including ongoing use of senior officer star chambers. By December 2024, the Council had managed to implement a number of actions it had identified as of August, as well as a number of additional actions subsequently identified. In addition, it planned for an additional assumed £11.0 million of revenue expenditure capable of being funded through the capital budget identification of which remained in progress. Even with these measures, the Council was still forecasting a significant overspend for the year of £10.1 million.

This forecast overspend position, as well as the impact it would have upon the Council's reserves as at 31 March 2025, was reflected in the preparation of the Council's budget for 2025-26 which assumed reserves at 31 March 2025 would be £24.5 million, £7.5 million below the recommended minimum level. This fact was acknowledged by the Council's Section 151 Officer in their Section 25 Statement accompanying the Council's 2025-26 budget, which noted that *"Reserves are adequate, given the pressures the Council faces but this is a marginal call judgement. To be clear this is very different to concluding that the reserves are ample, but rather that reserves are only just enough. Reserves are very low and must be rebuilt"*.

Final 2024-25 Outturn

By February 2025, the Council had assessed the deficit for the year as increasing, and reserves at 31 March 2025 of decreasing, by a further £5.6 million against the assumptions underpinning its 2025-26 budget. A significant contributor to the forecast deficit for the year has been the non-achievement of savings, with £9.4 million of planned savings being written-out as either unachievable or superceded by the rebasing of service operating budgets through the zero-based budgets exercise and £2.7 million identified as having 'significant problems in delivery'.



Value for Money

The Council's Financial Performance During the Year Ended 31 March 2025 (continued)

The Council would ordinarily report on its outturn against budget for the previous financial year at its June Cabinet meeting. Reporting on the Council's outturn against budget for the 2024-25 financial year was delayed from the June Cabinet meeting to the July Cabinet meeting due to difficulties the Council has encountered in confirming its final outturn for 2024-25. Publication of the Council's 2024-25 outturn report occurred on 22 July 2025, two days before the July Cabinet meeting, and highlighted the reported position as draft due to ongoing review of debtor, creditor and provision balances at 31 March 2025.

The 2024-25 outturn report showed significant further deterioration in the Council's financial performance for 2024-25 from that assessed in February 2025. The final outturn reported by the Council was a deficit of £31.5 million, consisting of a £17.4 million overspend against the planned budget for 2024-25 and £14.1 million of one-off impacts arising from a balance sheet review performed as part of the Council's Financial Modernisation Programme. As a result, the Council's reserves at 31 March 2025 were just £6.7 million. This level of reserves is £25.3 million below the minimum level determined by the Council's Section 151 Officer for 2024-25, and £17.8 million below the level of reserves assumed to exist at 31 March 2025 in setting the Council's 2025-26 budget. The 2024-25 outturn report highlighted the assessment that *"these reserves are deemed to be inadequate by the Section 151 Officer"*.

The Council's 2024-25 outturn report also showed that its cumulative DSG deficit increased to £65.6 million at 31 March 2025. This balance is almost ten times the remaining reserves of the Council, and is likely to continue to increase as the Council does not have plans to balance its schools budget until 2027-28. The statutory override currently in place allowing the Council to treat its DSG deficit as an unusable reserve was recently extended from March 2026 to March 2028, and the Council is wholly reliant on that being further extended or an alternative central funding mechanism being established by central government.

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The continued deterioration in the Council's financial standing is of significant concern. The Council is rapidly consuming its already depleted reserves, and the rate at which those reserves are being consumed is accelerating not slowing. Given these factors, we are unable to conclude that the Council has had proper arrangements in place to manage its financial position during 2024-25 and conclude that the absence of such arrangements represents a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements to secure value for money.

We are sufficiently concerned by this that we consider it appropriate to escalate the recommendations we made to the Council as part of our 2023-24 value for money commentary to statutory recommendations. Accordingly, we make the following recommendations as recommendations under Section 24, Schedule 7(2) of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014:

- 1. We recommend that the Council ensures it has detailed implementation plans supporting all of the planned savings included within its 2025-26 budget and future medium-term financial strategy, and identifies and develops implementation plans for further savings which can be pursued should additional budgetary pressures emerge or the Council fails to achieve all of its currently planned savings.***
- 2. We recommend that the Council reviews its service delivery models to ensure that they are efficient, represent value for money and achieve the outcomes required for the resources invested. Where opportunities to improve service delivery models are identified, the Council should develop detailed plans for implementation of service delivery transformation and how the up-front transformation costs will be funded.***
- 3. We recommend that the Council should balance its schools budget to prevent further growth in its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. In the absence of confirmed alternative arrangements, the Council should also perform scenario planning for how it would manage the impact of the current deficit on its financial position when the current statutory override ends in March 2028.***
- 4. We recommend that the Council review its financial forecasting processes to understand why significant financial pressures, over and above those anticipated and reflected in the Council's annual budget, emerge and ensure future forecasting reflects the lessons learned.***



Value for Money

The Council's 2025-26 budget

Required Savings

In setting a balanced budget for 2025-26, the Council opted to increase Council Tax by the maximum amount permitted without holding a local referendum but still identified the need for £34.0 million of savings to be delivered during 2025-26. As a result of further savings of £4.8 million originally planned for delivery in 2024-25 but carried-forward for delivery in 2025-26 following conclusion of 2024-25, the total level of savings the Council is required to deliver during 2025-26 is £38.4 million. This represents a significant increase on the £22.5 million required during 2024-25, and against which the Council has reported achieving just £7.1 million - though the Council has also delivered additional in-year savings not included within the original £22.5 million planned savings for 2024-25.

The level of savings required during 2025-26 are highly significant in comparison to the available reserves of the Council. The required savings of £38.4 million represent more than five times the reserves of the Council at the start of the 2025-26 financial year. This means that non-achievement of savings during 2025-26 poses a serious threat to the financial viability of the Council, and the Council has insufficient reserves to absorb any significant non-achievement of planned savings.

Reliability of the 2025-26 Budget

The Council itself has identified that there are significant doubts over the reliability of the budget it has set for 2025-26, including the sufficiency of required savings. These concerns were highlighted within the budget report itself, which stated *"The Council has two significant weaknesses reported on by the External Auditor EY that have been reported to the Audit Committee on 11th February. These areas are financial sustainability and quality of the Council's information. This information quality has remained and been a significant issue in building the budget for 2025-26"*.

Concerns over the reliability of the Council's 2025-26 budget were further highlighted by the Council's Section 151 Officer in their Section 25 Statement accompanying the Council's 2025-26 budget, which concluded that *"The estimates are not sufficiently robust for the purposes of the budget calculations, given the scale of delivery needed, and the issues and uncertainties set out above [within the Section 25 Statement]"*.

The emergence of £5.6 million of additional financial pressures by the end of period 11 in 2024-25, beyond those considered in setting the 2025-26 budget and of which a significant proportion are expected to continue into 2025-26, also concerned the Council's management. In March 2025, members of the Council's Corporate Management Team performed a review of their financial forecasts for 2025-26 which informed a revised 'P0' forecast which was presented to the Council's Corporate Management Team in early April 2025.

This P0 forecast indicated a significant deterioration in outlook for 2025-26 from that assumed in setting the Council's 2025-26 budget, including consumption of the majority of the Council's remaining reserves by 31 March 2026 (at the time of the 'P0' report, reserves at 31 March 2025 were still expected to be significantly higher than those subsequently reported). There were however significant reservations amongst the Council's Corporate Management Team over the reliability of this forecast, with senior officers describing it as 'unreliable' and 'not evidence based'. The Council's Chief Executive held one-to-one meetings with senior officers to review 2025-26 budgets on a line-by-line basis, however the Council was not able to finalise a forecast it did consider reliable until the P2 (May 2025) budget monitoring report presented to the Council's Cabinet in July 2025 alongside the 2024-25 outturn report.



Value for Money

The Council's 2025-26 budget

The revised assessment set out in the P2 forecast anticipates further overspends of £16.4 million against the Council's approved budget for 2025-26. The forecast overspend of £16.4 million is also after the full use of £10.5 million of contingency included in the 2025-26 budget, £5.0 million of anticipated interventions and assuming savings of £33.2 million (out of the £38.8 million originally planned) can still be delivered, and therefore is likely to increase further based on the Council's experience in previous financial years. As highlighted in the Council's 2024-25 outturn report, the reserves balance at 31 March 2025 of £6.7 million is also provisional and dependent upon resolution of ongoing reviews of the Council's debtors, creditors and provisions not having any further adverse impact.

The forecast overspend for 2025-26 of £16.4 million, even without further pressures emerging, is more than double the level of reserves held by the Council at 31 March 2025, and forecasts that the Council will completely consume its remaining reserves during the course of 2025-26. The financial position of the Council is now critical and it is our view that the Council is not compliant with its legal obligation to set a balanced budget. In such circumstances the Council's Section 151 Officer is required to consider whether to make a report under Section 114 (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (a 'Section 114 Notice') which requires that:

"The chief finance officer of a relevant authority shall make a report under this section if it appears to him that the expenditure of the authority incurred (including expenditure it proposes to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources (including sums borrowed) available to it to meet that expenditure"

Within the P2 budget monitoring report the Council's Section 151 Officer has set out their assessment that a Section 114 notice is not currently required:

"Whilst it is recognised that the Council legally has to set a balanced budget and it is the duty of the Section 151 Officer to consider if a Section 114 notice is required, the Council is reporting that it has begun conversations with the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and therefore it is the view of the Section 151 Officer that a Section 114 notice is not issued at this time"

Given the ongoing work to finalise the Council's 2024-25 outturn and level of reserves at 31 March 2025, as well as the emergence of significant additional cost pressures at multiple points since the Council set its budget for 2024-25 in February 2024, it is not clear to us that the Council has a good understanding of its financial position or its trajectory for 2025-26. Unreliable forecasts increase the risk that the measures being taken to manage the Council's financial position will be insufficient, with the likely result that the Council will not appropriately identify and mitigate all of the financial pressures it faces. This is of significant concern, therefore we make the following recommendation to the Council under Section 24, Schedule 7(2) of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014:

5. ***We recommend that the Council urgently establishes a clear understanding of its current financial position, including the extent to which that position has diverged from the assumptions underpinning its 2025-26 budget and may require immediate action to prevent further depletion of reserves during 2025-26.***



Value for Money

The Oracle Upgrade

New System Implementation

At the commencement of 2024-25, the Council operated the majority of its main IT systems under the on-site Oracle R12 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform. The Council planned to transition to the Oracle Fusion cloud-based platform from the start of 2025-26, however implementation of the new system was delayed by a month until 1 May 2024 to ensure the Council was fully prepared for the transition. Alongside changing to a cloud-based platform, the Council planned to adopt the Oracle Enterprise Performance Management (EPM) suite of tools as the basis for its budgeting, forecasting and performance monitoring. Implementation of Oracle EPM occurred slightly later than the main system upgrade, taking place during June 2024.

The Council has encountered significant challenges with its implementation of the Oracle upgrade. Officers have described these challenges as focused on the implementation of Oracle EPM, with the core financial accounting element of Oracle Fusion going more smoothly, however we note that the Council was not able to commence the inspection period for its draft 2024/25 Statement of Accounts by the statutory deadline of 1 July 2025 and has cited difficulties encountered in closing its ledger under the Oracle Fusion platform as a contributing factor.

The root causes of these challenges have not been fully assessed, as the Council has had to invest significant resources into understanding and resolving issues impacting on the day-to-day execution of Council functions, however reports submitted to Cabinet have stated that *"The Oracle system implementation was not sufficiently resourced and was seen as a finance project rather than fundamental change to the whole Council's operating system. Oversight was poor and siloed"*.

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The Impact on the Council

A review of budget monitoring across the Council performed by internal audit after the Oracle system upgrade identified a number of significant issues arising from the use of Oracle EPM which are having a significant impact on the Council's financial management. These include inaccurate user lists within EPM meaning budget holders are incorrectly identified, and hence correct budget holders are not able to access their budget information and individuals who should not have access do so, frequent issues with the completeness and accuracy of budget information provided to budget holders and licensing issues impacting the completeness of information available to users. Internal audit also noted more broadly that *"financial governance was also significantly impacted during the year due to issues with the implementation of the Oracle finance system"*.

As a result of these issues, senior officers and finance staff have reported that significant levels of manual intervention are being required from finance staff to support budget holders with understanding and managing the budgets for which they are responsible. This is placing significant pressure on the Council's finance team, and there is a pervasive lack of confidence across the organisation amongst budget holders in their ability to manage budgets without direct support.

Officers have reported significant volatility in month-on-month forecasts during 2024-25, which is highly likely to be a function of a combination of the high-levels of manual intervention required - which also increases the risk of errors or inconsistency in treatment arising - and a lack of understanding amongst budget holders stemming from poor quality data.

The Council has also expressed a desire, as part of its wider efforts to improve financial governance, to move more of the responsibility for budgetary management away from the finance team and into service lines. The significant reliance currently being placed on the finance team to 'work around' issues with Oracle EPM is prohibitive to the Council making this change, and therefore a significant barrier to one of the key measures the Council considers necessary to address its deteriorating financial position.



Value for Money

The Oracle Upgrade (continued)

These issues are key sources of the lack of confidence the Council has in its financial forecasts as described earlier in this report. The Council is unlikely to be able to build a proper understanding of its financial position and the sufficiency of measures it is taking to protect its reserves until it is able to reliably obtain accurate and complete financial information from its systems and consistently provide this information to decision makers.

Accordingly, we make the following recommendation to the Council under Section 24, Schedule 7(2) of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014:

6. *We recommend that the Council urgently addresses the issues it has encountered with implementation of Oracle EPM to ensure that, at both individual budget holder and overall Council level, decision makers are able to access accurate and complete budgetary information to inform decision making.*

Impact on Wider Governance and Internal Controls

Overriding Focus on Finance and Breakdown in Internal Control

Officers have reported that the significance of the deterioration in the Council's financial position, and the resulting significant focus on the identification and realisation of measures to protect the Council's reserves, has consumed significant bandwidth across the organisation during 2024-25 and had a detrimental impact on the delivery of normal functions. In particular, senior officers have reported that the focus has become short-term in nature and they have had not had the capacity to undertake the more strategic-level planning the Council needs to address its financial challenges over the medium-to-long term.

The impact of the challenges the Council has faced with Oracle EPM and the significant focus of senior officers on management of the immediate financial position has been consistently highlighted by the Council's internal auditor throughout 2024-25 as having a significant impact upon the Council's internal control environment. Whilst recognising that "2024/25 was a particularly difficult year for the Council due to significant demand pressures in key areas such as adult social care, children and young people services and homelessness, with limited funding and capacity within the services", the Council's internal auditor noted "a significant increase in the number of Limited and No assurance reviews and include some key areas of governance, for example Asset Management, Contract Management Oversight and Budget Monitoring".

The cumulative impact of internal audit's observations during the year was that the Head of Internal Audit was not able to offer any assurance over the Council's internal control, risk management and governance arrangements in place during 2024-25. In explaining this, they noted "The increased focus on cost saving proposals was essential given the financial challenges facing the Council. However, this also led to increased uncertainty around forward planning, weakened oversight controls due to limited capacity at a senior level, and significantly reduced focus on core areas of governance" and "Common themes arising from the Internal Audit findings raised in 2024/25 include poor data quality and poor oversight controls, often due to limited capacity at a senior management level due to the increased focus on Council-wide transformation. At an operational level governance arrangements were often sporadic and related to specific areas rather than a consistent, overarching reporting framework".

In our view, the inability of the Council's internal auditor to offer any assurance over the internal control environment during 2024-25 is exceptional and something the Council should take very seriously. It is indicative that urgent action is required to address pervasive weaknesses in the Council's arrangements which go beyond the management of its financial position, and have the potential to impact upon all areas of the Council's governance arrangements and operations.



Value for Money

Impact on Wider Governance and Internal Controls (continued)

Turnover in Finance Personnel

The Council's permanent Section 151 Officer left the Council in August 2024 and the Council appointed an interim Section 151 Officer in September 2024. This interim appointment ended in April 2025, with the Council's Deputy Section 151 Officer assuming the role of Section 151 Officer on a temporary basis. On 9 July 2025, the Appointments Committee approved the appointment of a new permanent Section 151 Officer who will take up post after completing their notice period with their current employer. When the new Section 151 Officer commences their role, the Council will have had four Section 151 Officers within a period of little more than 12 months. The Council's Director of Pensions, Treasury and Statutory Accounts also left the Council in September 2024, with a replacement appointed in April 2025.

For any organisation, significant levels of turnover amongst senior finance staff poses a risk of weakening financial management and governance as well as a loss of momentum on key projects and programmes. For the Council, these risks are heightened by the strained nature of the Council's financial position, the urgency of required action and the culture within the Council which places more emphasis on the finance function than in many comparable authorities.

The Council's Response

The Council has recognised that it needs to improve. The Council has an extensive internal audit programme, and senior officers do not shy away from directing internal audit reviews towards areas where the Council knows there are weaknesses in its internal controls. In addition, the Council commissioned two external reviews into its financial management and governance during the final quarter of 2024-25 to help it understand the areas where its performance needs to improve.

The commitment to understanding the nature and scale of weaknesses in its arrangements, particularly in relation to financial management and governance, is an encouraging first step by the Council towards being able to address them, however the findings and conclusions of the external reviews it commissioned demonstrate the severity and pervasiveness of the weaknesses which currently exist within the Council's arrangements.

The first external review commissioned by the Council was a 'five pillars' review of the Council's financial management performed by Grant Thornton. This review assessed the Council's arrangements against the five criteria of 'financial governance', 'financial infrastructure', 'financial planning', 'financial delivery' and 'financial culture'. The review concluded that 'significant strengthening [is] required' in each of the five areas, and stressed the need for urgent action by the Council.

The second external review commissioned by the Council was an initial turnaround diagnostic performed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). This review concluded that:

"The Council has good services, low taxation and charging policies and members are committed to their local area, but affordability to maintain this position and the current operating model is untenable. The Council has some ongoing improvement activity and has brought in temporary support to address the budget challenges in particular. However, it is evident that the culture and working practices and Oracle system issues around financial management are currently inadequate and the council's and some budget holders understanding of the position the council finds itself is of real concern. Morale within the finance team is low, and service managers do not 'fully own' their budgets.

Financial management remains weak and does not currently meet the standards specified in the FM code. We found that the monitoring of revenue spend in 2024-25 isn't timely, is cumbersome and unreliable. Budgets do not align with responsibilities and the potential savings for 2025-26 do not offset the anticipated growth pressures or are underdeveloped. Senior finance staff have been heavily involved in addressing gaps and issues as they arise and other finance staff have been drawn into basic operational tasks which reflect continued capacity issues. As a consequence, there has been insufficient communication and drive in addressing the underlying wider issues, including governance, needed to build stronger financial management.



Value for Money

Impact on Wider Governance and Internal Controls (continued)

The Council has some fundamental weaknesses in its people, processes and systems. The Finance team has experienced considerable turnover and there is a high reliance on interims and vacancies in key posts. As a result, there is limited knowledge of the Council within the team, low morale, indications of a blame culture and poor communications. All those we interviewed demonstrated a commitment to the Council. Despite the improvement plan actions taken to date, however, the underlying issues are daunting and there is clear need to have a sharper focus and make progress in some fundamental areas."

Having now developed a detailed understanding of the weaknesses which exist within its arrangements, the Council is seeking to address them through the development of a Financial Modernisation Programme and has commissioned Grant Thornton to provide support and external expertise. The Financial Modernisation Programme, which commenced in April 2025, is the first of three 'strands' to the Council's wider Governance Review Improvement Plan (GRIP) which seeks to ensure the Council is adhering to good practice in governance beyond financial governance. The other 'strands' to the Governance Review Improvement Plan focus on officer decision making and a catch-all for the Council's other governance (including its Constitution, member decision making and legal governance).

The Council intends for the Governance Review Improvement Plan to be 'a review phase, whereby the Council takes stock of recommendations provided by an independent review, or auditor' which will then be followed for each 'strand' by a Governance Recommendations Improvement Plan which will be 'an implementation phase, where the Council will set out its plan of action and detail for implementing the GRIP recommendations'. The Council has arranged a special Audit Committee meeting for 24 July 2025 to present its Financial Modernisation Programme and Governance Review Improvement Plan to members, with planned actions due for completion between 31 July 2025 and 31 March 2026.

Both the Financial Modernisation Programme and wider Governance Review Improvement Plan are in the early phases of implementation, and it remains to be seen whether they will deliver the improvements in internal controls and governance which are urgently required. The Council needs to act quickly to begin to address the weaknesses in its arrangements which have been identified, however embedding the cultural changes necessary are also likely to take time and sustained focus from the Council. These are critical actions necessary to restore good governance to the Council, therefore we make the following recommendation to the Council under Section 24, Schedule 7(2) of the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014:

- 7. We recommend that the Council continues at pace with the development and implementation of its Financial Modernisation Programme, as well as the wider Governance Review Improvement Plan, and ensures that the scope of these programmes addresses all of the weaknesses in current arrangements highlighted by the various internal and external reviews the Council has received.**

Ability to support the 2024-25 external audit

The difficulties the Council has encountered in finalising its outturn for 2024-25 have also caused delay to the production of the Council's Draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025, and the Council did not meet the statutory deadline for commencement of the public inspection period of 1 July 2025. The Council expects to be in position to commence the public inspection period in early August 2025, however risks remain to the achievement of this.

This delay in production of the Council's Draft Statement of Accounts, and associated demands on the Council's finance team over an extended period, are indicative that the quality of data and finance team capacity challenges encountered during the delivery of our audit for the year ended 31 March 2024 may reoccur and impact upon our ability to conclude our audit of the Council's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025 ahead of the statutory 'backstop' date of 27 February 2026.

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QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

8.1 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR GOHIL TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING, HOUSING & GROWTH – COUNCILLOR TUCKWELL:

Can the Cabinet member provide an update on the practical steps the Council has been taking, alongside government, the London Fire Brigade, and the freeholder, to address the building safety issues at Union Park in Cowley - and to give residents the reassurance they need?

8.2 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DENYS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

The government announced in November 2024, wide reaching reforms to Children's Social Care. Can the Cabinet member provide an update on progress made to date in preparing for these reforms and offer assurance of readiness for 2026?

8.3 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MAKWANA TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

Can the Cabinet member please provide an update on the progress of managing the High Needs budget and how the team are progressing the SEND improvement plan whilst being more financially efficient?

8.4 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DAVIES TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR EDWARDS:

Could the Leader of the Council share his view on what message is sent to residents when Full Council votes unanimously to oppose plans for a 3rd runway at Heathrow and then one member of the opposition, who joined the vote to oppose the expansion, then appears in a promotional video supporting the scheme?

8.5 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR SWEETING TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

The Audit Committee report of 28th August 2025, page 60, provides details, in the Value For Money section, of the weaknesses highlighted with regards to Financial Sustainability and Quality of Council information, with 7 recommendations proposed in the Final 2023/24 Auditor's Annual Report, one of which being: *"that the Council should seek to balance the schools' budget to prevent further growth in its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit.....and that the Council should also perform scenario planning for how it would manage the impact of the current deficit on its financial position when the current statutory override ends."*

Although the Government statutory override has now been extended to March 2028, and although the Council has taken action to reduce annual overspend on DSG to £15M at the end of March 2025, could the Cabinet member, provide details of how the deficit of £65.71M is being addressed, as it is still the highest of any London borough and is still increasing?

8.6 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR PUNJA TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

Can the Cabinet member explain why Grant Thornton were procured for the implementation of the Financial Modernisation Programme in a sole procurement tender, when Cabinet had resolved in February in 2025 that CIPFA would be delivering on financial improvements?

8.7 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR SINGH TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

The budget report agreed by Cabinet in July 2025 points the finger at previous Section 151 officers for not remedying the situation. So, will the Cabinet member now be seeking to provide an independent report from Ernst and Young on the reported actual savings against target for the past 15 years, so that this Council has a clearer picture on the state of the Council's finances?

8.8 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR GARELICK TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

The Annual Audit report by external auditors, Ernst & Young, page 12, states that *"We have not been able to complete our specific processes to address the risk of mis-statements due to fraud or error, nor were we able to complete all of our audit procedures over the financial statements and are therefore unable to conclude on whether the financial statements are materially misstated as a result of fraud or error."*

When will this Conservative administration be in a position to provide the required information to the independent auditor which would establish whether the issue is either misstated information or actual fraud?

8.9 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR GILL TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

Can the Cabinet member provide clarity on the reasons why there is now an adverse variance of £31.5M against the outturn 2024/25, representing an adverse movement of £20.5M from month 10 which is made up of the need to write out a negative reserve of £5.5M, an assessment of the Council's Treasury Approach which has led to an adjustment of £4.5M and an evaluation of the bad debt provision policy which has led to an adverse movement of £4.1M along with £5.1M of previously reported intervention not crystalising, meaning that reserves at the end of the 2024/25 financial year are now a meagre £6.7M which are deemed inadequate by the Section 151 officer?

8.10 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MATHERS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

A report on Hillingdon's Youth Offer was presented to the Children, Families and Education Select Committee Meeting of 13th November 2024 which stated that, *"the Transporter buses were an invaluable resource in youth work...and that funding for two new Transporter buses had been secured and that the Fleet Team were*

currently working on the tender process, using a similar specification to that of the London Borough of Barnet Youth bus."

Therefore, could the Cabinet member explain why it has taken multiple attempts by opposition members of the Select Committee in November, January, April and June, plus a Member's Enquiry and a further enquiry through Democratic Services, to establish that the procurement process for delivering the 2 new Transporter buses had only started in late July 2025, with the estimated completion date being as late as June 2026, meaning that certain areas of the borough with limited or no venues to deliver the Youth Offer will, until June 2026, continue to be deprived of this publicly acknowledged "invaluable resource".

8.11 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MAND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES & PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

At the Corporate Resources and Infrastructure Select Committee Meeting of 23rd July 2025, (page 16 refers), it was confirmed that, *"There is still no central register of all known hireable Council spaces and buildings, who is responsible for them, how they are let, or importantly, how they are promoted or if they are promoted at all. It appears that there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of what spaces are available, their potential and strategic management of these spaces."*

Therefore, could the Cabinet member provide the timescale for when this vital and important audit of the Council's spaces and buildings will be completed which would need to show where the responsibility lies for ensuring *all* marketing potentials are explored?

8.12 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BRIDGES TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR EDWARDS:

The Home Office told the Court of Appeal that the rights of people who are in this country illegally outweighed the concerns of British citizens. Does the Leader agree with the Home Secretary, and will her approach determine the actions of this Council?

8.13 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BANERJEE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

There has been much comment in the national media about the indebtedness of councils and the amount of residents' council tax used to pay the interest on the debt.

Would the Cabinet member please tell me what is our level of borrowing and how we compare with other councils?

8.14 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR NELSON-WEST TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT - COUNCILLOR LAVERY:

Can the Cabinet member explain the rationale behind closing the RAGC to members of the public who also used and enjoyed the garden for a place of sanctuary and peace?

8.15 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BURLES TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:

The Chief Finance Officer's Section 25 Statement clause 21 stated, *"Government will be reluctant to provide exceptional financial support midyear and therefore, were the authority to be in a position where its outgoings were to exceed its income there is a possibility that a s114 Notice would need to be issued"*.

With a forecast opening balance of £6.7M, a £16.4M in-year overspend and a Section 24 notice by external auditors Ernst & Young, the then fragile balanced budget for 2025/26 now looks untenable.

What level of Exceptional Financial Support funding from central Government does the Cabinet member calculate that the Council needs to avoid a Section 114 Notice and what will be the cost to Hillingdon Tax Payers?

MOTIONS

9.1 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR CURLING

That this Council notes that research clearly demonstrates adult gaming centres and betting shops are disproportionately located in some of the most deprived areas, and that places such as Hayes Town already has more than its fair share, with yet another gaming centre due to open in the old Barclays Bank building.

Council also notes that, with changing shopping habits, all our high streets are subject to dramatic change and susceptible to increased gaming centres and betting shops, which could come to dominate our local high streets, if their proliferation is not more robustly controlled.

Council further notes that local councils have very little powers to stop new gaming centres opening, and that a coalition of over 40 councils, of all political persuasions, is calling for 'urgent gambling reform' to prevent betting shops and gaming centres from 'taking over' high streets.

Council therefore calls for the Cabinet to consider joining the coalition of councils seeking the appropriate changes to gambling regulations.

9.2 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR PUNJA

That this Council notes:

- The Council's finances are in a "critical" state, according to independent auditors Ernst & Young (EY) who have served notice under the Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.
- The Council's reserves are the lowest of any London borough with insufficient reserves for this financial year.
- This Council has had 4 Section 151 officers in the past 18 months.
- Persistent delay notices relating to the Financial Report for year ending 2024-25
- Auditors Ernst Young report "fundamental governance weaknesses", including poor-quality data and unreliable forecasting.
- The Internal Audit report offered "no assurance" on internal controls, risk management, or governance.
- The Council Forecasts for 2025-26 show a further £16.4m overspend, more than double the reserves left.
- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit has hit £65.71 million, nearly ten times the Council's reserves, threatening the future of education funding.
- Failure to achieve savings targets year on year leaving £34million in year savings target for 2025/26.
- The Council is now seeking an unplanned, midyear "Exceptional Financial Support" from the Labour Government, to cover up their inability to deliver a balanced budget, proving that the Conservative administration has lost complete control of the accounts.

Therefore, this Council expresses its complete lack of confidence in:

- Cllr Ian Edwards, Leader of Hillingdon Council – for failing to provide leadership or accountability during this financial collapse; and
- Cllr Martin Goddard, Cabinet Member for Finance – for presiding over catastrophic budget management, failed reforms, and a total loss of public trust.

This Council calls upon the two Members to resign with immediate effect and further instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Government calling for an urgent formal investigation into the financial position of this local authority.

9.3 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR GARELICK

That this Council recognises that the presentation and cleanliness of our residential streets across the whole borough have been in sharp decline this year, clearly indicating that the Council's financial troubles are having a significant impact on our frontline services such as refuse collection, street cleansing, and weed removal.

Therefore, this Council calls on the administration to take action to improve these frontline services, in order to keep our streets clean and restore a sense of pride in our communities.

9.4 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR RILEY

That this Council has a proud record and tradition of promoting Civic Pride in many forms and celebrating its heritage encouraging the coming together of our diverse communities.

This Council, therefore, reaffirms and supports whole heartedly the Leader's words in his recent statement about the flying of the flags of the United Kingdom and England across the borough. Those flags represent the history, freedoms and values of this country and its people and they are a beacon to others. We eschew the disgraceful negative attitude of those who are willing to surrender our national flags to extremists by claiming them to be symbols of racism. Flying our country's national flags serves any numbers of good purposes, providing a sense of identity and belonging and it is supported by our residents.

This Council also recognises that increasing protest against the failure of the government to stop illegal entry into this country and stop the housing of asylum seekers in our hotels, may be unnerving to more recently settled residents of this country. It therefore welcomes the recent public statement by Hillingdon Inter Faith Network and commits to working with the Network to ensure community cohesion.