

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

19 October 2022

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chairman) Colleen Sullivan (Vice-Chairman) Janet Gardner Ekta Gohil Sital Punja Peter Smallwood</p> <p>Witnesses Present: Tina, Local Resident</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Ian Billham, Interim Director of Community Safety and Enforcement Daniel Ferrer, Licensing Team Manager Joanne Howells, Team Leader – ASB and Environment Team Ceri Lamoureux, Lead Finance Business Partner Maureen Pemberton, Head of Revenues Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer Iain Watters, Director – Strategic and Operational Finance Debby Weller, Housing Policy & Strategy Manager</p> <p>Also Present: Councillor Barry Nelson-West (sub)</p>
19.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Scott Farley with Cllr Barry Nelson-West substituting.</p>
20.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
21.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 21 July 2022 be agreed as an accurate record.</p>
22.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THOSE MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items of business were marked Part I and would be considered</p>

	<p>in public.</p>
23.	<p>2023/24 BUDGET PLANNING REPORT FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Iain Watters, Director – Strategic and Operational Finance, introduced the budget planning report and highlighted the salient points. It was noted that the report focussed on the broader financial position; the report for consideration in January 2023 would set out more detailed budget proposals following the December Cabinet meeting. Members heard that the Council was currently in a strong position but faced significant challenges, particularly related to Covid 19 legacy costs and current high levels of inflation on energy costs. The next budget cycle would be more challenging and there would be a focus of service transformation to ensure cost effective and efficient service delivery.</p> <p>Members observed that, during their site visit to Harlington Road Depot, they had been informed that the introduction of the food waste service had saved the Council approximately £90k. It was confirmed that small changes to services could sometimes yield significant rewards; any money saved would be reinvested into the provision of other services.</p> <p>Members requested clarification as to which services would be transformed to save money. It was confirmed that demand on services in the Borough was constantly changing and being monitored. Services to be transformed included revenues and benefits. Future automation and self-service would reduce back-office processing work; further information on this would be available in January 2023. It was hard to anticipate demand on services, but officers worked closely with service departments to establish what was happening on the ground.</p> <p>The Select Committee commented that it was important to plan for contingency costs to allow for unforeseen demands on services e.g. in relation to homelessness. It was also important to focus on ‘value for residents’ not just ‘value for money’.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the financial context in which the 2023/24 budget setting process would take place in advance of detailed savings proposals being developed and approved at Cabinet in December 2022.</p>
24.	<p>SELECT COMMITTEE MINOR REVIEW - EMPTY HOMES COUNCIL TAX PREMIUM (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer, introduced the minor review into the feasibility of increasing the Empty Homes Council Tax Premium, applicable to non-exempt properties empty for more than two years, from the current 150% to 200%.</p> <p>Members heard from Tina, a Hillingdon resident, who was living next door to a property which had been empty for 13 years due to an ongoing probate issue. The Committee was informed that the house was in a state of disrepair and no longer habitable. The garden was overgrown and there was a rat infestation. Fly-tipping was also an issue. The condition of the neighbouring property was negatively impacting the value of Tina’s own property and she anticipated that it would be difficult to sell should she wish to move on.</p> <p>Iain Watters, Director – Strategic and Operational Finance, was in attendance and</p>

addressed the Committee confirming that it was anticipated an increase to the premium would act as an additional mechanism to encourage owners to make better use of an empty property.

Maureen Pemberton, Head of Revenues, was also in attendance and advised Members that the Council Tax premium was only chargeable on unfurnished properties. In cases where there were probate issues it was often difficult to establish who was liable to pay Council Tax. Officers monitored all cases and collected the tax due whenever possible; however, this was particularly challenging in cases of family disputes and probate issues and could be resource intensive. The forced sale route was also expensive.

Debby Weller, Housing Policy and Strategy Manager, addressed the Committee and offered her sympathies to the resident. It was acknowledged that this case was very complicated due to probate issues hence legal advice would be sought. In general terms, it was hoped that an increase in the Council Tax premium would bring pressure to bear on owners and encourage them to bring empty properties back into use. At present there was no data available to measure the success of the increased premium across other West London boroughs.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that there were currently 144 properties in Hillingdon which attracted the 150% empty homes premium. Each case was different and it was sometimes difficult to establish who was liable to pay the Council Tax - owners could not be traced, a property was still owned by the deceased or the deceased had had no family. In all cases Council Tax could not be charged until six months after probate had been decided.

Members requested a further breakdown of the 144 empty homes. It was confirmed that in approximately 60% of these cases, the empty homes premium was charged to a company or public organisation. The remaining 40% were privately owned. It was acknowledged that it was far easier to collect on commercial properties; the private cases were resource intensive and the costs of debt recovery could at times outweigh the financial benefit of recovering the Council Tax. Enforced sales were not a straightforward option for the Council at present and it was not possible to put a cap on the number of years a property could remain empty.

In response to further requests for clarification, Members heard that it was difficult to establish trends in other boroughs since the increase in premium was relatively new and the collection of taxes had been impacted by the pandemic. It was anticipated that the proposed increase in premium would bring some properties back into use, but it was not possible to confirm numbers at this stage. In cases like Tina's, the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Team would also be involved. It was confirmed that responsibility for empty properties lay with the private sector housing department. It was agreed that, following the meeting, officers would review the Council's approach to empty homes and develop an Empty Homes Strategy in 2023 in order to set out a pathway to progress for the Council. Further research would be conducted into other Councils' good practice, potential enforcement activity, costs and benefits and grant funding. All options would be considered to establish the most cost-effective and appropriate way forward.

It was agreed that Tina would be provided with a list of named contacts. Debby Weller would be requested to update the Select Committee once the new system was in place.

Tina was thanked for attending the meeting and for her invaluable testimony which had been extremely useful.

All Members indicated that they were in support of the proposed increase in premium from 150% to 200%. It was agreed that this matter would be re-visited once the ongoing review had been concluded.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the evidence heard at the witness session, reviewed the findings and agreed the proposed increase to the current Empty Homes Council Tax Premium, applicable to non-exempt properties empty for more than two years, from the current 150% to 200%.

25. **STATEMENT OF GAMBLING POLICY CONSULTATION** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Daniel Ferrer, Licensing Team Manager, introduced the report. Members heard that the Council was required to review the Statement of Gambling Policy every three years. A draft policy had been produced which now needed to be consulted upon, prior to final consideration by Cabinet or adoption by full Council. The draft policy had already been presented to the Licensing Committee and no major issues raised. All relevant parties including residents' associations etc had been consulted and the consultation period was due to end on 24 October 2022. The Select Committee was advised that the proposed changes to the policy were set out at Appendix A to the report. There had been no major changes in the Gambling Act or in the relevant guidance; the majority of the proposed changes to the policy related to remote gambling which did not directly affect the local authority. Members were informed that the revised policy was a more well-rounded document. The fees had remained unchanged.

Members were pleased to see that equality and human rights had been included in the new policy and felt it was a good piece of work. It was confirmed that the Chairman of the Licensing Committee had requested further data in relation to age verification and self-exclusion. No further concerns were raised by the Select Committee Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the revisions to the Statement of Gambling Policy and raised no concerns in relation to the proposed changes.

26. **SAFER HILLINGDON PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Ian Billham, Interim Director – Community Safety and Enforcement, introduced the report which outlined the changes to the Safer Hillingdon Partnership (SHP) structure, governance and delivery to ensure compliance with its statutory functions under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It was confirmed that the SHP was the statutory Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in Hillingdon. Members heard that a number of new responsibilities were being allocated to CSPs including the upcoming Serious Violence Duty, Combatting Drugs Strategy (Harm to Hope Guidance) and domestic abuse. The report outlined the responsible authority core membership. Priorities and performance measures to come before the Select Committee would be agreed with a focus on that which could be influenced and changed, particularly across the new areas of responsibility.

A new governance and tiered structure had been proposed as set out in the report. This entailed three overarching priorities underpinning themes. Member heard that the

reason for this approach was that it was likely strategic headlines would not change over a three-year period whilst the underpinning priorities would. This was a practice seen nationally. The importance of having the right membership across the structure was highlighted.

Members requested clarification as to which departments would be involved in the Community Safety Partnership Membership. It was confirmed that the report set out the core function of the Board only. Education would be included throughout the rest of the structure; possibly on the Business Support Group, Domestic abuse forum, Prevent forums and Combatting drugs forum – this was yet to be confirmed. At strategic level, the inclusion of the local education authority was also under consideration.

With regard to the Strategic Intelligence Assessment referenced in the report, Members enquired who would be doing the actual assessment. It was confirmed that this had been completed by Edge Consultancy on this occasion; their results would be compared with in house data. The Assessment was an annual undertaking - how this annual assessment would be carried out in the future had yet to be confirmed.

Members noted the importance of consistent annual reviews of the CSP going forward - strategic priorities would change year on year therefore needed to be monitored. It was confirmed that a core function of the CSP was to review itself on an annual basis.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that ways in which links with the Hillingdon Safer Neighbourhood Board could be improved were still under consideration.

Councillors requested further details regarding the benefit to residents. It was confirmed that locality-based hubs were under consideration to facilitate better engagement with residents at a local level. Residents' associations would be involved and local residents would be consulted to ensure the structure met their needs. The aim was to build resilience in the community with a preventative rather than a reactive approach. Members welcomed this preventative approach.

Councillors enquired whether Edge Consultancy had taken into consideration how things operated in the Borough on the ground noting that levels of abuse and crime were intrinsically linked to housing and how / where people lived. A shift of consciousness around planning was required to address this. It was acknowledged that developers needed to consider the local demographics of an area to understand its communities and local needs. In the longer term, area profiles would be carried out to identify socioeconomic factors and demographics – this would be the preventative approach. It was acknowledged that a reactive approach was also required – officers would be going back to the basics of estate and neighbourhood management and would look at how antisocial behaviour, environmental issues and housing enforcement were managed. Local hubs would engage with landlords and the aim would be to improve that engagement on an ongoing basis. Members heard that this approach had been effective in other areas, though it was recognised that London was more challenging due to crossover between boroughs and differences in area.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was acknowledged that Safe Spaces were a great piece of work and would be taken into consideration. It was recognised that domestic abuse was intrinsically linked to exploitation, radicalisation, drug use etc and it was important to understand these links. A co-ordinated approach was essential and early intervention was key.

Members expressed their concern that many registered social landlords either did not have a domestic violence policy in place or failed to implement it to protect victims. It was confirmed that officers would work towards incorporating domestic abuse into tenancy agreements to ensure victims were prioritised over perpetrators. There was a need to improve engagement with registered social landlords. An in-depth piece of work was also underway regarding the allocation of accommodation and how this could be tracked. It was anticipated that this would be captured in the new Strategy.

The Select Committee noted that further SHP updates were scheduled on the Work Programme for November 2022 and March 2023. It was not yet possible to endorse the new arrangements for SHP as a consultation was still underway.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the content of the report and the proposals for SHP.

27. **FLY-TIPPING, FLYPOSTING AND TO-LET BOARDS** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Joanne Howells, Team Leader – ASB and Environment Team, introduced the report. The Select Committee was advised that new innovative methods to address the issue of fly-tipping were being explored as fly-tipping was prevalent across the Borough. The Team was working with colleagues in the CCTV room and new intelligence packages were being used to identify repeat offenders and take enforcement action. In one recent high-profile case, a prolific offender had been jailed for 24 months which was a good result. It was recognised that education was key to raise residents' understanding of how to store and handle waste correctly, recycling options etc; enforcement was always the last option.

Members recognised that there was a seasonal fly-tipping problem in Brunel Ward linked to students moving in and out of university accommodation and enquired whether officers worked with the CCTV team to identify offenders. The Committee heard that, since students were transient, any items left behind and subsequently fly-tipped became the landlords' responsibility who would be liable to enforcement. Officers engaged with landlords in an attempt to address this problem. CCTV and social media were used to assist in identifying offenders; once identified, enforcement action would be taken – a fixed penalty notice would be issued in the first instance and repeat offenders could be taken to Court.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that the 14-day rule applied to all estate agent boards placed on private property in Hillingdon. At the request of the Committee, it was agreed that officers would confirm how many of the 74 court cases processed by the ASB Team since September 2021 related to non-payment of fines for estate agent boards.

Councillors observed that fly-tipping hot spots seemed to vary depending on the siting of CCTV cameras; additional cameras would be welcomed in Yiewsley to address the antisocial behaviour issues there. It was also noted that industrial sites were disposing of waste into local canals, rivers, parks and streets and this was a matter of concern.

Members enquired how the Council could support private landowners and estates experiencing ASB and fly-tipping problems. It was agreed that this was very challenging; the Council was obliged to charge when clearing fly-tipped waste from private property and identifying the offenders was difficult. It was recognised that fly-

tipping was a commercial business for some offenders; boroughwide operations were undertaken in an attempt to identify vehicles used in fly-tipping offences.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that the Environment Enforcement Team proactively took action to locate and remove flyposting. Letters were sent to residents to raise awareness and understanding of what was acceptable. Cameras acted as a deterrent and officers worked in conjunction with the ASB teams in Ealing, Harrow and other neighbouring boroughs. Officers wore body cameras when speaking to offenders and the evidence would be admissible in Court. However, it was noted that identifying offenders was challenging. Innovative ways to tackle the problem were being explored.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the content of the report and sought clarification from officers as necessary;**
- 2. That the Team Leader – ASB and Environment Team be requested to confirm how many of the 74 court cases processed by the ASB Team since September 2021 related to non-payment of fines for estate agent boards.**

28. **FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 10*)

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be noted.

29. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 11*)

It was noted that Members were welcome to invite residents to attend the Select Committee as witnesses; suggestions for witnesses for the proposed alleygating scheme would also be welcomed.

Members requested a timeline for the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, clarifying when and how the consultation on this would be carried out. It was agreed that Democratic Services would provide this.

With regard to the Select Committee recent site visits, Members confirmed that these had been very positive and useful. The high morale and enthusiasm of the officers they had met had been good to see. It was noted that the next site visit to Hillingdon Fire Station was scheduled for 7 December 2022. Members were invited to suggest other ideas for future site visits.

It was agreed that the Committee's next major review would be on the topic of alleygating in the Borough. The proposed review of the Housing Department would be undertaken at a later stage once the ongoing restructure had been completed.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the Work Programme;**
- 2. That the Residents' Services Select Committee agreed to undertake a major review of alleygating in the Borough; and**

	3. That Democratic Services provide Members with a timeline of the Local Flood Management Strategy consultation period.
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.44 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Liz Penny on 01895 250185 or epenny@hillington.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.