

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

19 January 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre



HILLINGDON
LONDON

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| | <p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chairman) Colleen Sullivan (Vice-Chairman) Scott Farley (Opposition Lead) Janet Gardner Ekta Gohil Sital Punja Peter Smallwood</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Mark Billings, Housing Director Sophie Coughlan, Arboricultural Manager Stuart Hunt, Head of Green Spaces Ceri Lamoureux, Head of Finance - Place Gemma McNamara, Director - Service Finance & Transformation Natasha Norton, Community Engagement Project Officer Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer Helena Webster, Community Engagement & Town Improvements Manager</p> |
| 41. | <p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p> |
| 42. | <p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p> |
| 43. | <p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 24 November 2022 be agreed as an accurate record.</p> |
| 44. | <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 as Part I and would be considered in public.</p> |
| 45. | <p>2023/24 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Ceri Lamoureux (Head of Finance – Place) and Gemma McNamara (Director – Service Finance and Transformation) presented the budget report. It was confirmed that, following consideration by Cabinet in December 2022, the budget proposals for 2023/24 were now under consultation. Feedback from the Select Committees would be</p> |

included in the report to be presented to Cabinet on 16 February 2023. It was noted that the current economic environment was challenging both in terms of inflationary pressures and legacy Covid-19 impacts. The Council had originally been expected to make savings of £10m; this had now increased to £20m.

Members requested further clarification regarding the £2.1m additional funding allocated to address issues of homelessness in the Borough (as set out on page 17 of the agenda pack) and enquired whether this would be sufficient. It was confirmed that the Council had modelled the predicted increase in demand due to the current cost of living crisis to arrive at this figure. In terms of Covid legacy issues, Members heard that the 'new' and 'emerging' issues set out in the report included matters related to Covid such as domestic abuse. New and emerging issues relating to Covid would be kept under review and monitored in the future.

Members sought clarity regarding the proposed savings relating to increased fees and charges (page 18 of the pack). The Committee was advised that Council Tax income would provide approximately 75% of the funding to subsidise areas subject to fees and charges.

In response to their queries regarding homelessness figures, Members heard that it was estimated some 500 homelessness cases would be received over the next financial year; many of these were likely to be private sector evictions. It was confirmed that there were increasingly more people housed in temporary accommodation; numbers of domestic abuse cases were rising, and demand continued to grow. It was confirmed that homelessness figures had been increasing year on year over the last 4 to 5 years. Action plans were in place to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation going forward but it was a worrying time.

Members noted that LED lights were to be installed within Cedars and Grainges car parks (page 19) and enquired whether other car parks would be included in the scheme in the future. It was confirmed that present plans focussed on Cedars and Grainges car parks only. However, the Director – Service Finance and Transformation would explore this matter further and feed back to the Committee through Democratic Services. In response to their questions regarding increases in fees for special collections, Members heard that this service would run on a cost neutral basis and any additional fly tipping resulting from the increased fees would be monitored. At the request of Members, it was agreed that the Director – Service Finance and Transformation would explore the matter of GLA funding for housing regeneration and provide feedback to the Committee via Democratic Services.

In response to further requests for clarification, Members were reassured that, despite the proposed increases, Hillingdon's fees and charges would still be among the lowest in London; officers were commended for managing to achieve this in difficult circumstances.

In respect of graffiti removal, the Committee was informed that this service was largely contracted out; however, the Council had a small in-house team – the service was to be reviewed and streamlined to achieve the proposed savings. Members were advised that offensive graffiti would be removed within 24 hours.

Members enquired whether the wildflower displays around the Borough would continue noting that they were very good for biodiversity. It was confirmed that the flowers originally planted were to be allowed to regenerate naturally. In response to Members' questions regarding waste services, the Committee heard that service levels across the

Borough continued to be consistently high. In the future there would be a focus on recycling and a more cost-effective service.

The Committee sought clarification regarding the proposed locality needs based approach to libraries mentioned on page 19 of the agenda pack. Officers indicated that bespoke services were planned aligned to resident demand. It was anticipated that a Library Strategy would be drafted during 2023 which would be subject to a consultation process. It was agreed that the Director – Service Finance and Transformation would confirm the expected timeframe for this and feed back to the Committee via Democratic Services. Councillors welcomed a needs-based approach which would enable the Council to make savings while continuing to provide a good service to residents.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Committee noted the budget projections contained in the report and commented on the combined budget proposals affecting the relevant service areas within the Residents’ Services Cabinet Portfolio, within the context of the corporate budgetary position;**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chairman (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead), to finalise the wording of the Committee’s comments on the budget proposals; and**
- 3. That the Director – Service Finance and Transformation provide feedback to the Committee via Democratic Services in response to their queries regarding future plans for LED lighting in car parks, GLA funding for housing regeneration and the timeframe for the Library Strategy.**

(Note: following the meeting, comments to Cabinet were agreed by the Chairman in consultation with the Opposition Lead. It should be noted that the Opposition Lead did not fully endorse the comments).

46. **TREE STRATEGY** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Stuart Hunt, Head of Green Spaces, presented the Tree Strategy report to the Committee. Members were informed that, at present, there were no set guidelines; a clear and unambiguous Strategy was therefore required to facilitate a well-managed tree stock thereby leading to a reduction in insurance claims and emergency works.

Noting the sensitivity of the matter, Members respectfully sought clarification regarding current policy relating to memorials affixed to trees following tragic accidents. The Committee was advised that a Highways Policy was in existence which covered this – new memorials could remain in place for up to twelve months at which point they would be removed. Thereafter, those affixed to mark anniversaries and other important dates would be removed in a timely fashion.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that trees newly planted along highways were inspected regularly. Reports of any trees which required re-planting would be dealt with as soon as possible. In respect of root growth affecting paths and pavements, attempts would be made to retain mature trees whenever possible by ramping over any roots which were causing issues. As a last resort, trees could be removed and replaced with something more appropriate.

Members were informed that, where possible, attempts would be made to locate new trees in the proximity of the site where trees had been felled. It was noted that it was

important to maintain the green feeling of the Borough. If a tree was not suited to a particular location, a replacement, more suitable tree would be planted in the same area if feasible. Councillors heard that the Council aimed to retain its current 67 green flags this year.

The Committee requested further clarification in respect of tree maintenance; particularly in respect of caring for newly planted trees to ensure they were able to thrive. It was noted that some such trees would die in hot weather if not properly cared for. In response, officers confirmed that attempts were made to water newly planted trees regularly for the first three years of growth; however, this had been particularly challenging over the last few years. Plans were in place to bring maintenance back in-house and it was anticipated that newly planted trees would be visited more regularly in the future. More drought tolerant species would be planted where possible and trees would preferably be planted in green areas where they could establish better. Members noted the importance of maintenance and suggested that a paragraph on this be incorporated into the Strategy.

In response to further requests for clarification from the Committee, it was confirmed that the reference to 'tenants' back gardens' on page 6 of the Tree Strategy should read 'tenants' gardens' (in general) - the Strategy would be amended accordingly. In relation to 'risk', this was something tenants took on as part of their tenancy agreement. However, it was recognised that some tenants were unable to take on this risk for a variety of reasons; in such cases the Council could possibly assist.

Members sought clarity regarding trees planted years ago which no longer served their purpose and now damaged the landscape. It was confirmed that such matters would be managed in-house. More trees were planted than removed on an annual basis hence, over the years, there would be a healthy mix of trees in the Borough to benefit the environment. Officers worked with nurseries to ascertain which trees were drought resistant and research was undertaken in an attempt to ensure the right tree was planted in the right place.

In response to their queries, Members heard that officers worked closely with Ruislip Woods Management Advisory Group (RWMAG) and other residents' associations on an ongoing basis. It was confirmed that, when a tree was removed, the removal contractor would ensure the area was made safe. Trees blown down during stormy weather would be replaced when possible – Councillors were invited to inform officers of any trees which had been missed or any areas where a tree was needed. It was noted that some ten trees at the memorial garden in Pole Hill had yet to be replaced; this work had not been completed due to flooding but would be carried out this winter if the issue could be resolved.

In terms of maintenance, Councillors were informed that new trees planted were accompanied by a label encouraging residents to water them. It was agreed that it may be possible to use the Council's website more effectively to encourage this.

Noting the importance of tree maintenance, it was agreed that officers, in conjunction with the Chairman and Labour Lead, would draft comments on behalf of the Select Committee regarding the Tree Strategy.

RESOLVED: That authority be delegated to Democratic Services, in conjunction with the Chairman and in consultation with the Labour Lead, to draft comments regarding the draft Tree Strategy prior to formal submission to the Cabinet Member.

47.

HOUSING TRANSFORMATION PROJECT (*Agenda Item 7*)

Mark Billings, Housing Director, presented the report. Members heard that, in July 2022, PwC had introduced Perform Plus in the Housing Management, Housing Needs and Private Sector Housing Services. Perform Plus was a coaching programme for managers and their teams which aimed to build engagement and empower staff to adopt new ways of working. Elements of Perform Plus had been introduced to teams through on the job coaching via PwC over a 14-week period, between August and November 2022.

Members heard that, as part of the development of Perform Plus, each team had identified a vision, success factors and enablers to achieve success. The teams had developed a problem-solving tracker, best practice guides and 100 day delivery plans. The new approach encouraged officers to be more open and share best practice. 'Huddles' had been introduced which gave the teams an opportunity to touch base, set targets for the week, share their successes and adopt a more active approach to problem solving. The project had facilitated new ways of working and had enabled officers to deliver services differently and feedback had been very positive so far. It was reported that the 100-day delivery plans were now coming to an end at which time PwC would visit again.

At the request of Members, it was agreed that the Housing Director would confirm the total cost of the project. The Committee heard that 'rock' and 'sand' as referenced in the report related to the prioritisation of workload. Ways in which officers worked together was key to success, especially in such a stressful environment. The new approach ensured everyone 'met' on a daily basis even if some officers were working remotely.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that, whenever possible, a case officer would work on a case from start to finish; however, it was recognised that this was not always possible as staff sometimes left and some cases could be very lengthy. It was recognised that it was confusing for residents when several people were involved in a case. Officers were looking at offering pre-application housing advice to support residents prior to them submitting a housing application. Members heard that residents could apply online but were also able to access the service in person at the Housing Reception.

At the request of Members, it was agreed that the Housing Director would provide an update to the Residents' Services Select Committee at a future meeting once the new way of working had bedded in. Case studies would also be provided at that time. Democratic Services would add this to the Work Programme.

Members sought clarification regarding the objective of the transformation project. It was confirmed that the aim had been to increase morale and productivity in staff and to work more effectively in the future. It was anticipated that the new system would free up officer time and ensure residents received a better service. With regard to future projects, Councillors were informed that a team had recently been set up to work on homelessness cases in respect of single people, noting that these individuals were often extremely vulnerable. Going forward, the intention was to set up similar teams of case workers to consider other areas such as domestic abuse.

RESOLVED:

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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Democratic Services add a future Housing update to the Select Committee Work Programme; 2. That the Housing Director confirm the total cost of the project; and 3. That the Housing Transformation Project report be noted. |
| 48. | <p>SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW: ALLEY GATING - SCOPING REPORT (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>Helena Webster, Community Engagement and Town Improvement Manager, presented the scoping report commenting that the alley gating review was very welcome and would provide an opportunity to shape the service to the benefit of residents. It was confirmed that the scoping report set out the background to the scheme. Members heard that there were a number of older schemes in the Borough; it would be useful to assess these as part of the review. It was noted that delivery and implementation of the alley gating scheme was well embedded but there could be lessons to be learnt regarding support for residents with older schemes. Members commented that a list of all the older schemes would also be useful.</p> <p>In terms of witnesses, it was anticipated that Hillingdon residents, together with officers from other local authorities, would be invited to contribute. Natasha Norton, Community Engagement Project Officer, was preparing a list of local authorities which already had alley gating schemes in place - it was reported that, of the neighbouring boroughs, only Ealing currently had an alley gating scheme. Members suggested that it would be interesting to hear from a witness representing a controversial scheme which was not universally welcomed. It would also be useful to hear from the Police and from officers representing other Council departments impacted by the implementation of alley gating schemes. A site visit was another option.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Select Committee commented on and approved the scoping report to initiate the review.</p> |
| 49. | <p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p> |
| 50. | <p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>At the request of Members, it was agreed that a site visit to Yiewsley amenity site would be added to the Work Programme. The Committee also requested a live presentation on Locata to demonstrate how it worked.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee considered the Work Programme and agreed any amendments.</p> |
| | <p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.35 pm.</p> |

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