

Minutes

FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

19 October 2023



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors John Riley (Chairman), Wayne Bridges (Vice-Chairman), Kaushik Banerjee, Kishan Bhatt, Narinder Garg, Raju Sansarpuri and Stuart Mathers (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Mark Braddock (Democratic Services); Ian Anderson, James Lake, Marion Finney, James Wright</p>
30.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>All Members were present.</p>
31.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>No interests were declared by Members present.</p>
32.	<p>TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2023 (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting held on 6 September 2023 were approved.</p>
33.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed all matters were to be considered in public.</p>
34.	<p>FIRST AID AWARENESS AND TRAINING, HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICES (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>The Committee received a report, requested at the last meeting, regarding health and safety, specifically focusing on first aid awareness and training within the Council.</p> <p>James Wright, Manager of the Council's Health and Safety Team, outlined the services' responsibilities, including maintaining health and safety management systems, collaborating with other departments, and delivering training programs. He explained their focus on first aid awareness and training within the Council and also for other organisations such as schools.</p> <p>Councillors raised their thoughts about the availability and visibility of first aid equipment, especially defibrillators as raised by the Chairman, in public areas and committee rooms. They stressed the importance of clear signage and awareness campaigns to ensure that staff, and third-party users of council buildings, were aware</p>

of the location of first aid equipment and how to use it effectively.

Furthermore, Councillors sought clarification about the accessibility of the building for individuals with disabilities. They inquired about evacuation procedures and the availability of facilities like chairs for stairs. Councillor Mathers then discussed the need for consistent practices across different council sites and affiliated groups, highlighting the importance of standardised first aid arrangements.

Councillor Bridges specifically asked about incidents being logged on Council premises and whether these incidents were reviewed to enhance safety measures. Mr Wright confirmed that all staff members are required to report incidents, which are then centrally monitored. Work-related incidents are closely monitored and analysed for trends to improve safety protocols.

Councillor Bhatt inquired about mental health training courses, considering the rising prevalence of mental health issues in the workplace. Mr Wright mentioned that there was a separate team handling mental health first aid training. Although he was not directly involved, he acknowledged the availability of courses and ongoing discussions about mental health awareness training.

A discussion ensued regarding the need for more obvious signage and information for visitors, particularly in areas where vulnerable individuals, like the homeless, seek assistance. Councillors emphasised the necessity of providing clear guidance on first aid arrangements to staff, visitors, and members of the public in various scenarios.

A point was raised about the inconsistency in knowledge and equipment among staff members who were first aiders working from home versus those in the office. Mr Wright explained the ongoing efforts to monitor staff members' designated roles, even when working remotely, to ensure effective first aid coverage.

The item concluded with a commitment to look into the points raised by the Committee. Councillors thanked Mr Wright for attending and acknowledged the importance of these discussions in enhancing safety protocols and agreed to revisit the topic at a future meeting to track progress.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report and provide any comments to officers as appropriate.

35. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT** (*Agenda Item 7*)

The Committee received an overview of Treasury Management within the Council. James Lake, Director of Pensions, Treasury and Statutory Accounts explained the importance of treasury management as the backbone of the Council's finances. He explained that Treasury functions are regulated by statute and guidelines from public sector accounting body CIPFA.

The overview highlighted several key points:

1. Definition of Treasury Management: Treasury management involved overseeing the Council's bank accounts, cash flow monitoring, investment, borrowing, and risk management. It was essential for controlling the movement of millions of

pounds daily.

2. Regulations and Practices: Treasury Management Practices are governed by CIPFA guidance. The Council follows specific codes of practice, focusing on risk management, security, liquidity, and yield when investing funds.
3. Capital Financing Requirement (CFR): The concept of CFR was likened to a household mortgage, where the Council's need to borrow is offset by existing reserves and other funding sources. This ensured prudent borrowing and responsible financial management.
4. Borrowing and Investments: The Council primarily borrowed from the Government's Public Works Loan Board due to its cost-effectiveness and flexibility. Investments were diversified but focused on secure and low-risk options. The Council employed a mix of fixed and variable rate debt to manage interest rate risks.
5. Reporting and Monitoring: The treasury team conducted daily, weekly, and monthly reports to monitor the Council's financial position. These reports underwent multiple checks and approvals, ensuring careful decision-making and adherence to regulations.
6. Challenges and Risks: Despite stringent regulations, Treasury management was not entirely risk-free. Economic fluctuations and unforeseen events could impact investments and borrowing decisions, requiring constant vigilance and prudent financial strategies.

Mr Lake provides reassurances about the cautious approach taken by the Council in managing its finances, even within the established regulations and guidelines.

Councillor Mathers asked about the agility and strategies employed to cushion unexpected changes, particularly regarding interest rates and inflation. He inquired about lessons learned from recent volatility and how it impacts local government treasury. Mr Lake explained the risk associated with inflation was the erosion of capital value and managing investment returns to offset higher inflation. He mentioned daily monitoring of cash flow, forecasting, and engagement with various departments to ensure cash flows are understood and funds are managed effectively.

Councillor Banerjee inquired about active management of working capital, including accounts payable, accounts receivable, and inventory and asked if the Council actively interacted with departments to optimise working capital. Mr Lake clarified the minimal inventory the Council holds and explained standard payment procedures and highlighted the focus on ensuring the Council receives what was committed in terms of revenue. He advised that the Treasury function did not directly manage debt collection, but instead monitored actual cashflows with forecasts. Cashflow modelling would be adjusted where necessary.

Councillor Bhatt raised questions about investment strategies considering economic volatility, the frequency of investment reviews, and the use of external advisors. Also, he inquired about the Council's approach to ethical and sustainable investing, especially concerning fossil fuels. Mr Lake explained the constant evaluation of market conditions, credit ratings, and buffer analysis to ensure safety in investments. He referred to the Council's focus on ethical investments, being predominantly in the

separate pensions arena. However, the Council does ensure treasury counterparties align with relevant ethical codes.

Councillor Sansarpuri asked about the Council's policy on investing in foreign banks and whether there was a shift in strategy. Mr Lake explained that investing in foreign banks was currently not worth the risk due to low interest rates and increased credit risk and hence the preference for investing in the UK Government.

Councillor Banerjee asked about the possibility of collaboration with other councils to obtain more favourable interest rates and discussed the challenges faced in such collaborations. Mr Lake discussed the challenges related to legal complexities and costs associated with collaborative ventures among local authorities.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lake for the comprehensive report and the insightful discussion.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report and provide any comments to officers as appropriate.

36. **UPDATE ON THE NEW MEMBER'S ENQUIRY PROCESS** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Ian Anderson, Complaints and Members' Enquiries Manager, provided an update on the Members' Enquiries system used by Councillors. He shared data indicating that between 1 November 2022 and 15 September 2023, there were a total of 3,872 Members' Enquiries and 3,450 service requests. Out of these, 3,242 inquiries were from Councillors, while 630 were from Members of Parliament. Mr Anderson compared these figures to the previous year's data, highlighting a similar pattern.

During the discussion, Mr Anderson outlined the ongoing efforts to improve the system. He explained the importance of making changes that were both cost-effective and valuable for the organisation. One significant proposal came from Councillor Bennett, who had presented icons designed for service requests. These icons aimed to simplify the identification of various types of issues, making it easier for Councillors to navigate and address residents' concerns. The Committee were asked to endorse them, recognising their potential to enhance user experience.

Councillor Mathers expressed concerns about the system's effectiveness, particularly regarding the challenges faced by elected members in efficiently resolving residents' issues. He pointed out that councillors were spending significant amounts of time completing service requests on the current portal, often facing complexities and inefficiencies in the process. Councillor Mathers stressed the need for a more streamlined and user-friendly system, expressing worry that the current challenges might tarnish the Council's reputation.

Councillor Riley intervened stating that a comprehensive review to address the issues raised during the meeting may be a way forward and acknowledged the frustration faced by councillors and agreed on the necessity of finding practical solutions to enhance the system's functionality.

Councillor Mathers asked that it be put on the record that the Opposition felt that they

had not been able to fully discuss what they had wished to during the item that evening.

The discussion continued with matters raised by other Committee Members.

Councillor Banerjee sought information on the breakdown of specific issues over the years and whether there were recurring patterns. He questioned whether the council was addressing these problems strategically or merely plugging holes as they emerged. Mr Anderson acknowledged that certain issues like waste and housing consistently appeared in inquiries, and he agreed to provide detailed data for further analysis.

The Chairman inquired about the progress of the sharing option, emphasising the need for a coordinated approach among councillors to avoid duplicate efforts. Mr Anderson explained that the functionality was under development, acknowledging the frustration faced by councillors in such situations. He mentioned the ongoing work to enhance search functionality, making it easier for councillors to identify and address specific inquiries within the system.

Councillor Garg raised the issue of duplicates within wards and suggested that analysing this data could offer valuable insights. Mr Anderson agreed to explore this analysis further, indicating the willingness to provide the necessary information.

Councillor Bridges sought clarification on sharing resident details in Member Enquiries, especially concerning GDPR regulations. He pointed out that similar platforms like Fix My Street allowed easy access to shared data and requested a review of this aspect for service requests. Mr Anderson acknowledged this as part of the system functionality. The Chairman indicated that this was a decision made at a more senior level to determine whether that progresses or not. Mr Anderson was thanked for his presence at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1) Note the contents of the report and provide any comments to officers as appropriate and;**
- 2) Endorses the change to the look and feel of the Service Request page by adding in icons set out in Appendix B.**

37. REFERRAL FROM FULL COUNCIL: THE COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS *(Agenda Item 8)*

The Committee discussed a referral from the Full Council regarding the Council's consultation arrangements, focusing on how the Council engaged with diverse communities and ensured geographical parity.

Marion Finney, Customer Engagement Manager, outlined the Council's consultation arrangements. She mentioned that her team coordinated consultation events, engagement activities, and housing estate-based initiatives. Marion highlighted that some consultations were statutory, and they had specific demographic targets. She discussed the development of a resident engagement strategy and emphasised the importance of partnerships with other organisations.

The Chairman, Councillor Riley, stressed the need for a clear understanding of the target audience and the challenges in engaging various communities. He suggested analysing response rates and comparing them with similar demographics in neighbouring areas. He also proposed leveraging the Mayor's involvement to encourage participation in consultations.

Councillor Bridges expressed concerns about low response rates in broader consultations, such as those related to the Budget, SEND strategy and Libraries. He requested a detailed report on previous consultations, including response rates and demographic data, to understand engagement trends better.

Councillor Mathers emphasised the importance of reflecting on response quantity and demographics. He raised concerns about the lack of diverse voices in consultations and suggested exploring innovative approaches to encourage participation.

Marion Finney responded, acknowledging the challenges and the consistent demographic patterns observed in responses. She highlighted efforts to adapt consultation methods, such as utilising digital platforms and diverse communication formats. She also welcomed feedback from Councillors to improve engagement strategies.

The Chairman agreed with the points raised by Councillors and emphasized the role of Councillors in encouraging participation. The Committee supported a single meeting review on this at a subsequent meeting and the Chairman asked Councillors to submit their ideas and areas of interest so officers could draft a suitable report, to be discussed further. Marion Finney was thanked for her presence at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the contents of the report and provide any seek clarification from officers as appropriate.**
- 2. Agree to consider a single meeting review on the matter and for officers to prepare a report accordingly.**

38. REVIEW FINDINGS - PROCUREMENT IN HILLINGDON: SECURING VALUE FOR OUR RESIDENTS (*Agenda Item 9*)

The Committee focused on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations regarding their review into Procurement. The Chairman expressed the importance of the practicality of the proposed recommendations. He stressed the need for suggestions that wouldn't just gather dust on a shelf but would be actively implemented by the Cabinet. One new recommendation put forward by the Chairman was the introduction of a mandatory review for contracts that had been running for a decade. This suggestion aimed to ensure that contracts, even ones with a successful history, underwent a rigorous evaluation to confirm their ongoing suitability and effectiveness.

Councillor Mathers discussed supporting local businesses and potential barriers within contracts that could discourage local businesses from participating. Cllr Mathers highlighted the need for a conscious effort to remove these barriers, ensuring that local enterprises had equal opportunities in the procurement process. He also referenced

	<p>the impact of long-term contracts on the Council's goal of transitioning to Net Zero by 2035.</p> <p>The management of subcontractors within contracts was raised. There was a call for consistency in how subcontractors were handled, including the importance of maintaining the quality of service for residents. The Committee recognised the complexity of managing contracts, especially those involving subcontractors, and ways to standardise practices across the Council.</p> <p>The Senior Democratic Services Manager advised a minor change to one recommendation to take into account Councillor Mathers' point about reducing barriers to local businesses which was supported by the Committee. He also advised that a change to the Constitution would be required regarding the proposed 10-year contract review process by Cabinet. He proposed incorporating a monetary threshold to capture contracts of significant value, thereby preventing an overload of minor contracts flooding the Cabinet. The Chairman supported this idea and suggested Cabinet Member and Officer discussion to set the monetary limit.</p> <p>The Committee agreed the final recommendations, as amended, for their upcoming report to be presented to the Cabinet, aiming for a practical and effective support to the Council's procurement strategies going forward.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Agree the final findings, conclusions, and recommendations to Cabinet on their procurement review; and 2) Delegate authority to the Democratic Services Officer, to complete the final review report for submission to Cabinet with the agreement of the Chairman, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead, noting that all Committee Members will also receive a copy for any final feedback (or bring back to the subsequent meeting for approval).
39.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>The Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the Committee considers the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p>
40.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 11</i>)</p> <p>The Senior Democratic Services Manager presented the Committee's proposals for their work programme and next major review topics. The options discussed included HR practices, digital transformation and the user experience, particularly concerning Members' Enquiries.</p> <p>The Chairman expressed gratitude for the insights gained from the recent visit to the Contact Centre, explaining the importance of understanding digital communication. Councillor Mathers reiterated his thanks to the staff in the Contact Centre for his recent</p>

visit with Councillor Garg. He highlighted the need to focus on the user experience related to digitalisation and Members' Enquiries. Others in the committee echoed these sentiments, agreeing that digital transformation, especially concerning Members' Enquiries, should be a priority due to the challenges faced.

There was a consensus that the HR-related review could wait, given the HR department's clearer direction and the need to delve into digital transformation challenges. The Committee Members expressed the importance of understanding the current digital landscape, including the immediate plans and challenges faced.

The Committee discussed the need to consult with the Council's new Chief Digital and Information Officer and suggested outlining specific steps and potential ways to approach the review. The Chairman encouraged Members to share their thoughts and ideas with Democratic Services to further develop the plan for the digital transformation review.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee considers the Multi-Year Work Programme, agreed changes and that Resident/Member user experience in the Council's digital journey should be explored as their next major review.

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.28 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Email: democratic@hillington.gov.uk on . Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.