

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

16 January 2024



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chair), Colleen Sullivan (Vice-Chair), Scott Farley (Opposition Lead), Janet Gardner, Ekta Gohil, Sital Punja and Peter Smallwood</p> <p>Offices Present: Andy Goodwin, Head of Strategic Finance Joanne Howells, Street Scene Enforcement Service Manager Dan Kennedy, Corporate Director of Central Services Ceri Lamoureux, Head of Finance – Place Melissa Murphy, Housing Project Manager Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer</p>
38.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
39.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
40.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 29 November 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.</p>
41.	<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 in Part I and would be considered in public.</p>
42.	<p>2024/25 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Andy Goodwin, Head of Strategic Finance and Ceri Lamoureux, Head of Finance – Place, presented the budget report to Members to enable them to deliberate and assess the detailed budget proposals within the Committee's jurisdiction. It was confirmed that the budget report would be presented at the 15 February 2024 Cabinet meeting. Subsequently, the Cabinet would be tasked with advocating the budget proposals at the full Council meeting on 22 February 2024.</p>

Members were informed that, for the fiscal year 2023/2024, services under the purview of the Residents' Services Select Committee projected an overspend of £2.4 million. This overspend stemmed from three primary sources: Green Spaces savings impacted by external factors such as inflation; Community Safety enforcement influenced by issues at Heathrow, Brexit-related changes and the cessation of Government funding; and income pressures within the Planning service. Notably, there was a target of £12.5 million in savings within these services for the specified fiscal year. Among these savings, £242,000 was flagged as red, indicating concerns about delivery, while £1,642,000 fell under Amber 2, signifying progress initiation with some apprehensions regarding timely completion. A portion of this sum, specifically £839,000, related to fees and charges income, and the remaining £83,000,000 pertained to Green Spaces savings. Additionally, £267,000 was recorded as Amber 1, indicating ongoing progress with the likelihood of full delivery, albeit with potential spillage into the next financial year; this element also related to savings within the Green Spaces service area.

Moving to the Council's budget strategy, the consultation budget, presented to the December Cabinet, had estimated a saving requirement of £51 million by 2028/2029. The identified saving programme amounted to £33.4 million, leaving a residual gap of £17.6 million. Exceptional inflation, contributing £48 million to the budget gap by 2028/2029, remained the foremost factor in this Strategy. Within the Committee's jurisdiction, there were no exceptional inflationary items. However, the Committee's total requirement accounted for £6.5 million of the overall inflationary figure, with the pay award constituting the majority at £5 million and an additional £1.5 million linked mainly to contracts.

In terms of service pressures, Residents' Services forecasted an additional £24 million, with services under the Committee's remit contributing £8.1 million. Of this, £5.1 million was attributed to waste services due to population growth, and £3 million was driven by increased demand for homelessness support. Corporate items added £14 million to the saving requirement, with £7 million allocated for the Council's borrowing requirement and £5 million related to the TFL concessionary fares levy, both resulting from demand returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Following detailed analysis during the autumn, the consultation budget proposed a saving programme of £33.4 million, with £15.8 million of that set to materialise in 2024/2025. Within this programme, £6.6 million fell under the Committee's jurisdiction. Notable savings within this remit included £2.2 million against fees and charges, primarily linked to Yellow Box Junction charges, and a remaining portion attributed to inflationary uplifts. An additional £1.5 million was earmarked for maximising the use of Section 106 funding, with £6 million allocated to realign the Council's staffing budgets for Committee-related services and a further £1.5 million linked to smaller items, as outlined in the report.

Shifting focus to the capital programme, the proposed budget amounted to £218 million for the period up to 2028/2029, with £9 million allocated within the Committee's jurisdiction. The majority of this sum related to the £7.5 million Chrysalis programme budget, with an additional £1 million earmarked for environmental and recreational initiatives. The Housing Revenue Account established a capital programme budget of

£442 million to invest in housing stock, encompassing the supply of 614 new dwellings and maintenance of the existing 10,000-plus stock. On the revenue side, the Housing Revenue Account maintained a balanced budget over five years, ensuring reserves were maintained at £5 million over the medium term.

Members raised concerns about the overspend and pressures, particularly related to fees and charges and enquired about contingencies to compensate for the predicted shortfalls. The response highlighted the inclusion of rebasing in the budget build to account for shortfalls and enable consideration of new initiatives.

The Select Committee sought further clarification regarding the prediction to generate further income of £1.8 million from the enforcement of Yellow Box Junctions and enquired how this would work. It was confirmed that an additional member of staff in the CCTV room would be tasked with identifying hotspots where repeat offenders operated and using that information to work out who the culprits were, thereby facilitating the issuing of fines.

In response to further questions from the Committee regarding "black cash settlements" Members heard that this related to the assumption of static Central Government grant funding until 2024/2025, acknowledging potential adjustments based on Government policy changes. With regard to the two sets of figures in the savings proposals as set out on pages 18 and 19 of the report, it was confirmed that the £5.8 million mentioned was the total figure.

Members enquired about incorporating corporate sponsorship models into the tendering process for contracts. The response highlighted an ongoing review for a standardised corporate sponsorship policy.

In response to queries regarding the financial impact of the Mayor of London's ULEZ expansion it was indicated that an estimated cost of £240,000 had been incorporated into the budget proposals for 2024/2025.

Officers were commended on delivering an excellent budget. Members expressed satisfaction with the ring-fenced HRA funds and sought information on the historical impact of COVID-19 on the Council's resources and finances. The response acknowledged ongoing challenges and highlighted the utilisation of local funds to meet pandemic-related costs until 2023/2024.

Concerns were raised about fly tipping and additional CCTV cameras were proposed. The response emphasised the data-driven approach in the budget and assured ongoing monitoring to address any risks.

It was agreed that the Chairman would formulate budget comments outside the meeting in consultation with the Opposition lead.

RESOLVED That:

- 1. The Residents' Services Select Committee noted the budget projections contained in the report and commented as appropriate on the combined budget proposals affecting the relevant service areas within the Residents' Services Cabinet Portfolio, within the context of the corporate budgetary**

position; and

2. **The drafting of the Committee's comments in response to the budget to be submitted to Cabinet be delegated to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chairman (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead).**

(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).

43. **POTENTIAL MAJOR REVIEW: HOMELESS PREVENTION & CUSTOMER JOURNEY** *(Agenda Item 6)*

Melissa Blower, Housing Project Manager, and Dan Kennedy, Corporate Director of Central Services, presented the report confirming that, at the previous meeting, the Committee had agreed to undertake a major review of the Council's Housing Advice and Homelessness service. The terms of reference for the review were set out in the agenda pack and the proposed review would focus on the Council's homeless prevention service, resident journey, and effectiveness of the service response in meeting need. Service users' feedback would be sought as part of the review, and officers would be open to consider what other local authorities were doing to meet the rising demand and need for housing advice and homelessness.

The Housing Project Manager highlighted the local challenges, noting a 27% increase in approaches for housing advice and support over the last year, mainly due to the end of private renter tenancies. The reduction in available affordable private rented accommodation in Hillingdon and across London had led to difficulties in finding suitable housing, resulting in increased local authority financial contributions and benefits paid to support individuals with their housing costs. The rise in the number of people in temporary accommodation was emphasised.

The Chairman informed Members that a prior meeting with officers had taken place several weeks previously. Additional concerns regarding damp and mould had been raised at said meeting and it had been agreed that these matters would be the focus of a future minor review once the proposed major review had been completed. The focus of the major review was to delve deeper into the residents' experience when seeking housing assistance.

Members suggested inviting third-party charities to participate in the review. The discussion emphasised engaging with organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Shelter.

The Committee enquired about the impact of asylum seekers on the homelessness figures. It was acknowledged that there were a high number of asylum seekers in Hillingdon compared to other boroughs. Members were informed that those who were

not eligible for assistance were provided with advice and guidance and referred on to other organisations who may have accommodation and be able to assist them.

Officers outlined plans to address the housing shortage; these included increasing social rented properties, working with Housing Associations, and exploring options to buy properties locally. One option to make accommodation more affordable was for the Council to pay the difference between the benefit rate and the market rate for accommodation and secure that on a two-year tenancy. Financial details were yet to be finalised and were expected to be part of the February budget plan.

Members reiterated their request for a crib sheet regarding Locata. It was agreed that officers would follow up on this matter after the meeting.

It was noted that some residents made their own situations more vulnerable in respect of housing as they did not fully understand the implications of becoming 'intentionally homeless'. Officers were looking at a number of ways in which information and advice could be provided to help residents understand the implications of certain actions or decisions on their longer-term options.

Councillors suggested considering housing cooperatives and proposed inviting social prescribers and exploring a mystery shopper scheme as part of the review. It was noted that GPs and social prescribers would fall under the remit of the Health and Social Care Select Committee rather than the Residents' Services Select Committee. Democratic Services would work with officers to explore this further.

Members welcomed the housing review and proposed a Code of Conduct and Housing Charter. The need to work with organisations like Trinity was highlighted and better communication with social housing developers and letting agencies was recommended.

The Chairman asked Members to review the terms of reference on page 27 of the agenda pack and liaise with Democratic Services regarding any amendments or additions to the proposed review.

The Committee suggested including the GLA (City Hall) in point four of the terms of reference. Additionally, the need to better support protected and vulnerable groups (such as LGBTQ+ groups and victims of domestic abuse) who were exposed to homelessness was noted and it was suggested that representatives of these groups be invited to attend a witness session.

Councillors raised concerns about people placed out of the Borough and suggested liaising with local schools to address the challenges faced by children commuting from other areas.

The Chairman concluded that the consensus of the Committee was to adopt the

proposed review. The Committee expressed agreement to this, and the scoping report for the review was scheduled to be considered at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Committee agreed to adopt the proposed major review of Homeless Prevention and the Customer Journey; and**
- 2. That the Homeless Prevention & Customer Journey report be noted.**

44. **ASBET UPDATE** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Joanne Howells, Street Scene Enforcement Service Manager, had prepared the report in the agenda pack and invited Members present to raise any comments or requests for further clarification.

Members raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of website content management and incorrect classification. Difficulties in locating the right place on the website to report an ASBET issue were highlighted. The Committee heard that residents had been able to access the system since 2019/2020, and the GOS system, a reporting tool, had gradually incorporated different teams and services. With regard to the department's role in website design and assisting residents in correctly classifying issues, it was explained that a Business Process and Improvement Team had been implemented to work with Corporate Communications, review and improve the current web pages and work with the customer access team for GOSS ensuring clarity for residents and correct redirection to relevant teams.

Councillors raised further concerns regarding residents' misunderstanding of the current system and the fact that many struggled to understand the definitions. It was acknowledged that there were challenges and that the solution involved both system corrections and a service team to focus on this. It was confirmed that there were ongoing efforts to reorganise information for clarity and ensure proper redirection from the beginning.

The Committee shifted the discussion to communications about potential fines and legal consequences. Current strategies were outlined, including increased fines from 1 April 2024, better management of fly tipping, and utilisation of CCTV footage to identify offenders and hotspots. It was confirmed that residents were appraised of court prosecutions and fines via corporate communications and social media. It was acknowledged that education was also key to ensure residents fully understood the possible legal implications of fly tipping and enforcement action. At the request of Members, it was agreed that a guidance note for Councillors regarding the process would be prepared.

Councillors proposed obtaining a list of HMOs in the Borough to assist in addressing issues related to mattresses being fly tipped in certain areas. Members were informed that ongoing discussions with Waste Services were underway to explore potential

enforcement action against landlords or managing agents in cases where there was sufficient evidence to support this.

Members sought further clarification regarding the evidence required for issuing fines, citing discrepancies in processes observed. It was explained that there was a need for sufficient and appropriate evidence, which could include eyewitness accounts, CCTV footage, or documentation found in waste. The importance of satisfying a criminal standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt was emphasised.

Concerns were raised regarding possible discrepancies in the treatment of different cases. Hillingdon's enforcement policy was clarified, which followed a stepped approach, advising and warning residents before escalating to enforcement action. It was noted that many of the residents in question were vulnerable and possibly unaware of their responsibilities in terms of storage and waste.

Members suggested a streamlined approach based on whether the issue was on public or private land. Past misdirection issues were acknowledged, and the current classification system was explained, whereby public land issues without evidence were referred directly to Street Waste Services for clearance. If potential evidence was found, it was redirected to ASBET for further action.

RESOLVED: That the ASBET Update be noted.

45. **FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 8*)

It was noted that the Forward Plan in the agenda pack was not the latest version. A number of updates were provided by Democratic Services:

Page 41- the Cowley House item would be going to Cabinet in March 2024 and three items had now been approved (Dry Recycling materials, Planning Obligations / CIL monitoring report and CCTV service contract);

The Private Sector Placement Policy, Shared Ownership Policy and ASB Policy were Cabinet Member decisions which were scheduled for February 2024;

Page 42 - the Housing Allocation Policy Consultation Draft item had moved to April Cabinet; and

Page 44 - the Housing Allocation Policy had moved from May to July Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan and the updates be noted.

46. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 9*)

At the request of the Chairman, and with the agreement of the Labour Lead, it was agreed that the date for the Committee's April meeting would be moved from 10 April to 16 April 2024. The Work Programme would be updated accordingly.

A further site visit to Botwell Leisure Centre was to be arranged. It was anticipated that

	<p>this would take place one evening in February. The date would be confirmed in the near future.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Work Programme and the revised date for the April 2024 meeting be noted.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.08 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@hillington.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, officers, the press and members of the public.