

Minutes

COUNCIL

28 November 2024

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



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Councillor Colleen Sullivan (Mayor)
Councillor Philip Corthorne MCIPD (Deputy Mayor)

	<p>MEMBERS PRESENT:</p> <p>Councillors:</p> <table><tr><td>Naser Abby</td><td>Ian Edwards</td><td>Gursharan Mand</td></tr><tr><td>Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana</td><td>Elizabeth Garelick</td><td>Kelly Martin</td></tr><tr><td>Kaushik Banerjee</td><td>Narinder Garg</td><td>Stuart Mathers</td></tr><tr><td>Labina Basit</td><td>Tony Gill</td><td>Douglas Mills</td></tr><tr><td>Adam Bennett</td><td>Martin Goddard</td><td>Richard Mills</td></tr><tr><td>Jonathan Bianco</td><td>Ekta Gohil</td><td>Barry Nelson-West</td></tr><tr><td>Wayne Bridges</td><td>Becky Haggard OBE</td><td>Susan O'Brien</td></tr><tr><td>Tony Burles</td><td>Henry Higgins</td><td>Jane Palmer</td></tr><tr><td>Reeta Chamdal</td><td>Mohammed Islam</td><td>Sital Punja</td></tr><tr><td>Roy Chamdal</td><td>Rita Judge</td><td>John Riley</td></tr><tr><td>Farhad Choubedar</td><td>Kamal Preet Kaur</td><td>Raju Sansarpuri</td></tr><tr><td>Peter Curling</td><td>Kuldeep Lakhmana</td><td>Jagjit Singh</td></tr><tr><td>Darran Davies</td><td>Richard Lewis</td><td>Jan Sweeting</td></tr><tr><td>Nick Denys</td><td>Heena Makwana</td><td>Steve Tuckwell</td></tr></table>	Naser Abby	Ian Edwards	Gursharan Mand	Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana	Elizabeth Garelick	Kelly Martin	Kaushik Banerjee	Narinder Garg	Stuart Mathers	Labina Basit	Tony Gill	Douglas Mills	Adam Bennett	Martin Goddard	Richard Mills	Jonathan Bianco	Ekta Gohil	Barry Nelson-West	Wayne Bridges	Becky Haggard OBE	Susan O'Brien	Tony Burles	Henry Higgins	Jane Palmer	Reeta Chamdal	Mohammed Islam	Sital Punja	Roy Chamdal	Rita Judge	John Riley	Farhad Choubedar	Kamal Preet Kaur	Raju Sansarpuri	Peter Curling	Kuldeep Lakhmana	Jagjit Singh	Darran Davies	Richard Lewis	Jan Sweeting	Nick Denys	Heena Makwana	Steve Tuckwell
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	<p>OFFICERS PRESENT: Tony Zaman, Richard Ennis, Dan Kennedy, Lloyd White, Dan Dickinson, Mark Braddock, Morgan Einon, Alice Pringault and Nikki O'Halloran</p>																																										
	<p>ONE MINUTE'S SILENCE</p> <p>Those present observed a one minute's silence in memory of Past Mayor Michael Markham and former Councillor Michael Bull.</p>																																										
27.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Bhatt, Burrows, Dhot, Farley, Gardner, Lavery, Money, Nelson and Smallwood.</p>																																										
28.	<p>MINUTES (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>It was agreed that the first sentence of the third paragraph of Item 6.4 be amended to read "...Plans (EHCPs) and Ofsted and the CQC had seen...". The sixth paragraph of the same item would be amended to read "...why it had taken an Ofsted and CQC inspection to...".</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024, as amended, be agreed as a correct record.</p>																																										
29.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Mr Dan Dickinson, Head of Legal Services / Borough Solicitor, declared a non-</p>																																										

	<p>pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6iv, as the item related to his role, and remained in the room during the consideration thereof.</p>
30.	<p>MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>The Mayor advised that she had had a busy few months, attending a variety of functions including a number of Christmas lights switch on events and 100th birthday parties. She had also had the honour of laying wreaths at memorials in Ruislip and Harefield and at the Royal Naval Association on Remembrance Sunday. The Mayor thanked those Councillors who had laid wreaths in other parts of the Borough on her behalf.</p>
31.	<p>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>It was noted that, in accordance with the Constitution, the Mayor had agreed to group the questions together to be answered together as follows: 5.1, 5.4 and 5.10; 5.2, 5.3, 5.5, 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9; 5.6.</p> <p>5.1 QUESTION FROM JONATHAN HAYNES OF THE GREENWAY, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:</p> <p><i>“Given that Blue Horizon have been appointed as consultants to find a new operator to run the Beck Theatre, what assurances can LBH give that they will act fast and with urgency to secure a new operator assuming one is found, and ensure the Beck’s long-term future? We are at a critical phase and have warned that if the venue closes in January, it will be very difficult for it to re-open - we need to ensure a deal is agreed in order for a seamless de-coupling with Trafalgar and keep the doors open.”</i></p> <p>5.4 QUESTION FROM HARPAL TAMBER OF GREAT PARK CLOSE, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:</p> <p><i>“Can the Council categorically confirm or deny that they are in possession of drawings showing a new residential development scheme on the Beck Theatre site?”</i></p> <p>5.10 QUESTION FROM EILISH STONE OF HATCH LANE HARMONDSWORTH TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:</p> <p><i>“My relationship with the Beck goes back over 30 years when my sons performed with the Youth Theatre and in Summer Projects. This gave them ‘skills for life’ transferable to many different careers, including performing arts.</i></p> <p><i>“Our Council’s tardy response to securing the future of the theatre has caused much upset and uncertainty to the employees, service users and community groups. As a member of the community choir, I despair of our elected Council/Cabinet members who claim to put ‘residents first’. It seems you only woke from your slumber when our media campaign to Save The Beck took off! Before that it was silence!</i></p> <p><i>“Have you a new operator to take over the running of the Beck when the Trafalgar Group exits on 13 January and, if not, what is your plan to ensure the theatre does not close?”</i></p>

Councillor Bianco provided a single response in relation to Questions 5.1, 5.4 and 5.10 as they related to the same issue and advised that the Council had been surprised and disappointed that Trafalgar would not enter negotiations with the authority unless the organisation was given a subsidy. The Council had subsequently acted quickly to appoint Blue Horizon to find a new contractor to run the Beck Theatre. They had already spoken to six or seven commercial groups about taking over the running of the theatre and received four expressions of interest which were currently being evaluated. It would be important to appoint a partner that wanted to work with the Council.

The notion of delays had been perpetuated in social media but had not reflected the amount of time and energy that had been put into the negotiations with Trafalgar to try to find a workable solution. The Council could not agree to continue to pay a financial subsidy beyond the current year. As soon as it had become clear that a resolution would not be found, the Council had worked quickly to appoint Blue Horizon.

Councillor Bianco advised that a feasibility study with drawings had been prepared in early 2023. The study had stated that the site would be unsuitable for a large residential development as it was a green space and would only be sufficient to have a small-scale development which would render it unsuitable. It was noted that this study predated the contract negotiations with Trafalgar.

5.2 QUESTION FROM EMILY HOPLA OF RUISLIP COURT, RUISLIP TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

"What evidence exists to support the Council's claim that there is no demand for the SRP at Coteford School when families like mine requested placements, and I have multiple emails from February — before the consultation closed—stating the SRP was no longer accepting admissions, suggesting this decision was predetermined?"

5.3 QUESTION FROM BETHANY GATES OF FORBES WAY, RUISLIP TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

"Regarding the proposal to close the SRP at Coteford Infant School, how can the Council claim that children in the SRP are in a mainstream setting 100% of the time when we have clear evidence, including timetables, that show speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and other essential interventions are provided outside the classroom in a specialised setting within the school?"

5.5 QUESTION FROM GEORGINA SWAKER OF HALE END CLOSE, RUISLIP TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

"The recent consultation report on the SRP at Coteford states that children with physical disabilities can have their needs met in any mainstream school. However, parents report being turned away because local schools state they lack the necessary resources. How can the council justify closing the SRP without first ensuring that all mainstream schools are adequately equipped and prepared to meet the needs of physically disabled children?"

5.7 QUESTION FROM STACY MCGOURAN OF GREEN LANE, NORTHWOOD TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

"The Council states that the SRP closure at Coteford School is "in the name of inclusivity," yet this decision removes vital therapies for children with physical disabilities without clear guarantees, funding, or support to replace them. How can this be considered inclusive when it leaves families struggling and children without the specialist care they need? Is this decision truly about inclusion, or is it a cost-cutting measure?"

5.8 QUESTION FROM NIKKY HUDSON OF MOUNT PARK ROAD TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

"As a parent, I'm concerned that EHCPs don't cover essential costs like therapy and equipment, leaving already deficit-hit schools to fill the gap. How will the Council ensure my child's needs are fully funded without shifting the burden onto schools?"

5.9 QUESTION FROM LEANNE FISHER OF DOVEDALE CLOSE, HAREFIELD TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:

"The Council claims "nothing will change" as SRP therapies move to the NHS, yet this shift risks harmful delays for children with special needs, causing developmental regression and long-term damage. How can the Council deny this harm, and what steps are being taken to address it?"

Councillor O'Brien provided a single response in relation to Questions 5.2, 5.3, 5.5, 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 as they related to the same issue and advised that she would be unable to discuss individual cases in this public forum. There had been a recent consultation in relation to Coteford Infant School's proposal to close the physical disability specialist resource provision (SRP) as there had been reducing demand for the SRP and many children with a physical disability were having their needs met within the mainstream school with reasonable adjustments. Every mainstream school had been required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that children with a physical disability were not discriminated against.

Currently, all children at Coteford Infant School accessed all of their lessons in inclusive mainstream classrooms. Therapeutic support was also available within the classroom as well as outside. SRPs would generally operate 15% to 50% of the child's timetable in a separate area of the school / classroom and the remainder in mainstream lessons. Coteford Infant School did not have a separate area for SRPs.

At the end of January 2024, there were 56 children and young people with a primary need of physical disability being educated and supported in mainstream schools in the Borough, compared to 30 being supported in SRPs across Hillingdon. The Council would continue to work with educational settings to ensure that they were inclusive of children and young people with additional needs. If needs were not being met because of a school's lack of resources, parents were encouraged to contact their Educational Care Coordinator as resources were provided to schools to ensure that they were able to meet the needs of a child as identified within their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Schools were also able to apply for funding for equipment.

Provision outlined in an EHCP was statutory and there had been no suggestion to change this provision as part of the proposal. Therapies were being delivered across all schools to meet the needs of the provision outlined in individual EHCPs and were delivered by CNWL (which had been jointly commissioned by the Council and the North West London Integrated Care Board). Almost all jointly commissioned therapies delivered by CNWL were undertaken in a school setting in Hillingdon. Irrespective of the decision of the school, therapies would continue to be delivered at the school to any child on roll at the SRP.

SRPs typically commissioned their own therapies so the proposed closure might mean that the therapies could be delivered by a different provider but there would be no change to the amount of contacts that a child received which would have been included in their EHCP. The level of funding for each child would not change as a result of the proposal. Coteford Infant School would have the option to keep its current therapists or opt for another service available to all other mainstream schools in Hillingdon.

No therapies, support or funding would be removed as a result of this proposal. Schools did not receive separate funding for therapies as this was commissioned centrally.

5.6 QUESTION FROM LINDA GATES OF FORE STREET, EASTCOTE TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR EDWARDS:

“The results report on the Consultation to close the SRP at Coteford Infant School state that 96% of the community wants the SRP to stay, showing overwhelming opposition to its closure. Given the fundamental purpose of a consultation is to consider community impact and opinions, does the Leader of the Council genuinely care about the views of constituents, or will this decision disregard the voices of the very people it affects most?”

Councillor Edwards confirmed that he cared about residents and advised that a decision had not yet been taken by Cabinet. The consultation had been undertaken to help the Council make better decisions and had enabled residents to draw the authority’s attention to issues that may not previously have been considered. However, there was also a need to consider the views of those residents that had not responded to the consultation but who would be affected by any decision made.

Councillor Edwards advised that it was important to ensure that disabled children were afforded the same options and choices as able-bodied children. They needed to be able to socialise at school with children from their neighbourhood and grow and learn in an inclusive setting. The formal consultation responses would be considered as part of the decision making process.

32. 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 September 2024, as detailed in the report.

ii) SELECT COMMITTEES’ 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 note the appointment of Cabinet Members and the new portfolios, and the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to make relevant changes to the Council Constitution to reflect the new Cabinet structure – including to the Terms of Reference of the Council Select Committees.

iii) CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS 2024/25

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

RESOLVED: That the following changes to committee memberships for 2024/25 be approved:

- Registration and Appeals Committee – Councillor D Mills to replace Councillor Tuckwell.
- Pensions Committee – Councillor D Mills to replace Councillor Riley and Councillor Riley to replace Councillor Corthorne as a named substitute.

iv) APPOINTMENT OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

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

RESOLVED: That:

- a) Mr Dan Dickinson be appointed to the statutory role of Monitoring Officer of the Council; and
- b) the Constitution and the Officer Scheme of Delegations be amended, and Mr Dickinson be empowered to undertake all of the statutory functions of a Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services / Borough Solicitor as set out in the Constitution on an interim basis until such time as a formal appointment to the position of Head of Legal Services is made.

33. POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW (*Agenda Item 7*)

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

RESOLVED: That the proposed parliamentary polling arrangements within the Borough for 2025 onwards, as detailed in Appendix B of the report, be approved subject to the Returning Officer being instructed to:

- a) seek the use of alternative venues, where possible to school buildings in the following Wards:
 - Belmore,
 - Eastcote,
 - Hayes Town,
 - Hillingdon East,
 - Northwood Hills,
 - West Drayton,
 - Wood End, and
 - Yeading.
- b) seek potential additional venues in Charville and Ruislip Wards.

34.	<p>YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2024-2029 (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>Councillor O'Brien moved, and Councillor Makwana seconded, the motion as set out on the Order of Business and it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Youth Justice Plan 2024-2029, as set out in the appendix of the report, be adopted.</p>
35.	<p>MEMBERS' QUESTIONS (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>9.2 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BANERJEE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION - COUNCILLOR GODDARD:</p> <p><i>“It has been widely publicised that local authorities in England & Wales are experiencing serious financial difficulties. Can the Cabinet Member please comment on the extent to which these difficulties are expected to have an impact on the London Borough of Hillingdon, particularly in the light of the budget monitoring pressures in the current financial year recently reported at Cabinet?”</i></p> <p>Councillor Goddard advised that local government funding had reduced by 70% despite significant rises in inflation and demand for services which had increased costs. In 2025/26, the local government funding gap was in the region of £2.3bn. In 2026/27, it was expected to be around £3.9bn. The cost of adult social care had increased by £3.7bn over the last five years and Home to School Transport costs had increased by 63%. All of this, along with the public sector pay settlement, had resulted in significant financial pressure on local authorities, which was likely to increase following the recent Government budget statement.</p> <p>Although the Government had promised local authorities a three-year settlement, councils had only been given a one-year settlement. Hillingdon already had one of the lowest levels of Council Tax in London which meant that it didn't have as much leeway to deal with the financial pressures it was now facing. This was a national issue which would not be resolved until the local government funding pressures were addressed by the Government.</p> <p>By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Banerjee asked what the financial implications would be of the increased Employers National Insurance (ENI) contributions.</p> <p>Councillor Goddard advised that the ENI contributions had been expected to increase in the autumn statement but the reduction in the threshold at which employers started paying contributions had not been anticipated. There was a possibility that local government could receive relief in relation to ENI but those who contracted with councils were unlikely to receive the same relief.</p> <p>9.6 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR PUNJA TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN:</p> <p><i>“Can the Cabinet Member explain what will happen to those children with physical disabilities, that will be remaining in Coteford Infant School after the proposed closure of the SRP funding, if the percentage of children having education health and care plans falls below the threshold at which the Council provides this non-statutory funding?”</i></p>

Councillor O'Brien advised that there would be no impact on the funding for children currently on the school roll to 2025.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Punja noted that the Select Committee report had stated that nothing would change, and asked for confirmation that the funding would continue.

Councillor O'Brien advised that the Council had committed to provide the equivalent funding of £6k.

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

“Given the high demand for housing, can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on what is being done to prevent homelessness in Hillingdon?”

Councillor Tuckwell thanked officers for their dedication and commitment to preventing homelessness in Hillingdon. They had taken a proactive approach to deal with unprecedented levels of demand (there had been a 28% increase), spiralling costs and a lack of available properties. The Council had taken action to strengthen triage, liaised with landlords and addressed arrears. 259 private sector placements had been made but there had been an increase in the cost of temporary accommodation across London (around £114m each month). Councils were not able to cope with this increasing demand alone and needed the Government to provide additional resources.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Higgins asked the Cabinet Member to provide an update on the work undertaken by the Council to reduce the pressures on temporary accommodation.

Councillor Tuckwell advised that officers had drafted the Temporary Accommodation Strategy which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in January 2025. The Strategy would help to reduce demand, increase the number of residents in settled accommodation and reduce the costs of temporary accommodation. A new Social Housing Supply Programme was also being developed to take the pressure off temporary accommodation by increasing the housing supply and financial assistance was being provided for private rentals.

The Council had been taking direct action to alleviate the pressure on temporary accommodation but costs were spiralling and the situation had become unsustainable. The Housing Team had refined its procedures to deal with residents more quickly but residents deserved a Government that treated the housing crisis as a serious issue that needed to be fixed.

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

“The report to the Cabinet meeting on 7 November 2024 - agenda Item 7, page 125, paragraph 14 - states that the Designated Schools Grant cumulative deficit carried forward to 2025/26 is forecast at £68.8 million

“As the Statutory Override which currently separates this deficit from the Council's General Fund reserves is in place only until March 2026, what plan does the Council have for paying back this deficit which is greater than the Council's reserves if the

Statutory Override is not extended beyond March 2026?”

Councillor O'Brien confirmed that the Statutory Override would expire in March 2026. If the Government decided not to extend the Statutory Override, it would become a significant national issue as well as an issue in Hillingdon. As such, it was anticipated that the Government would extend the arrangement.

Consideration was being given to possible solutions and progress had been made in relation to in-year places. Councillor O'Brien thanked officers for the work that they had undertaken to meet the demand for high need places.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Sweeting asked what would happen if the Government did not extend the Statutory Override beyond March 2026 and asked for an account of why and how the Council had arrived in this situation when more than 88% of local authorities had not needed to seek a financial bailout.

Councillor O'Brien advised that she was unable to provide a comprehensive response. She noted that the opportunity to have a Statutory Override agreement had been withdrawn so additional local authorities in need would not now be able to sign up. The Council would continue to work with the information that was currently available.

9.5 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DAVIES TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

“Could the Cabinet Member provide an update on the future of the Beck Theatre, confirm the Council’s commitment to retaining the theatre on its current site to continue serving the local community and, in addition, inform us on the progress with the consultants involved in this matter?”

Councillor Davies advised that Councillor Bianco’s response to the public questions had addressed the issue that he had raised and that he would therefore like to withdraw his question.

9.1 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BURLES TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE - COUNCILLOR PALMER:

“With an ever-increasing demand and waits for GP services, can the Cabinet member please provide an update on the expenditure of funds received from the St Andrews development on the RAF Uxbridge site, for primary healthcare in Uxbridge?”

Councillor Palmer advised that NHS providers were responsible for the delivery of health services. The Council had arrangements in place to collect Section 106 money in relation to local developments and had secured £624k from the St Andrews development in June 2015, £117k of which had been used on the Uxbridge Health Centre. In August 2024, approximately £450k had been allocated towards a new Health Hub in Uxbridge – the NHS was currently looking at options and developing a business case.

There was no supplementary question.

9.7 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BRIDGES TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND PROPERTY - COUNCILLOR BIANCO:

“Could the Cabinet Member please give the Council an update on the disposal of

Barra Hall in light of recent disinformation being disseminated by the Labour Group.”

Councillor Bianco advised that the Government had asked that local authorities dispose of their surplus assets. Barra Hall was one such asset which had been underutilised as only a small part had been used as a Children’s Centre but had relocated to the Hayes Family Hub in January 2024, with staff being redeployed to other Children’s Centres. Barra Hall was a listed building that needed a significant amount of investment to bring it up to a standard that would enable it to be leased out.

Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge Colleges (HRUC) had bought Barra Hall which would be used to provide SEND services for those aged 18-25. The sale had included a requirement that the property only be used for education purposes. HRUC would be providing local education placements, supporting the safety valve agreement.

The sale of Barra Hall had been deemed to be a good news story as it had provided the Council with a financial saving and capital receipt, ensured the continued use of the building and provided an education facility.

There was no supplementary question.

9.8 QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MAKWANA TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - COUNCILLOR O’BIEN:

“Can the Cabinet Member please explain what has been the impact of the Council’s revised Fostering Offer since its launch?”

Councillor O’Brien advised that the revised fostering offer had been introduced in May 2024. Fostering provided a stable environment for children’s development and it was important to ensure that sufficient foster carers were available to help children in their communities. The number of people fostering had been at an all time low so the new offer had changed the recruitment approach and simplified the application form to try to recruit more foster carers. Officers had seen an increase in the number of enquiries about fostering since the launch of the new offer (around 200 enquiries since May 2024 compared to 43 in the same period last year).

The new offer included an enhanced and streamlined recruitment process that had been simplified. Foster carers were also provided with PACE training (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) as well as a payment and benefit package.

There was no supplementary question.

36. **MOTIONS** (*Agenda Item 10*)

10.3 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR EDWARDS

Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Goddard seconded, the following motion:

That this Council is greatly concerned that the government’s increase in the Employer’s National Insurance Contributions and the reduction in the threshold for payment will add further pressure on Council budgets and on our residents.

Whilst the government have said, but not yet confirmed, that Councils will be fully reimbursed for their direct cost arising from this change, financial assistance will not

be given to our care service and early year providers and charities upon which this Council relies to support our residents. The additional taxation these providers will now have to pay will most likely cause them to increase their charges and ultimately it is the hard-working families and residents of this borough that will have to pay as that cost is passed on to them.

Therefore, to mitigate this new pressure, this Council will reaffirm its commitment to sound financial management and good business practices that has enabled Hillingdon Council to deal with underfunding to date.

Those speaking in support of the motion noted that businesses would be paying for the additional burden and that the Council would be unable to absorb this new financial pressure. Inflation would be stimulated and employment stifled. Local austerity had been worsening, in the light of which the Council had reaffirmed its sound financial management. The disposal of Barra Hall and the move of Uxbridge Library would reduce costs to the Council but had been opposed by the Labour Group. An increase in fees and charges and cuts to services would be needed to fund the National Insurance increase which would impact on all working families as costs would need to be passed on to Council Tax payers.

Low margin businesses, charities and social care providers would all be impacted by the increase and smaller providers would not be able to provide as many services as it would be unaffordable. Residents had a variety of needs so required a variety of partners for personal services. Although it would be important to continue to support care providers to ensure that residents had a choice, it was suggested that no government of any party had ever followed through to meet the needs of social care. There would need to be a reliance on excellent partnership working to provide care to residents.

The majority of charity funding streams were grant based and the funds secured had to be used for the purpose that they had been given. This meant that charities would need to raise additional funds to pay for the increased staffing costs or use donated money that would be better placed supporting clients. Around 7,300 charities and voluntary organisations had urged urgent action but it was queried whether the Government would help them financially, despite having given inflation-busting pay awards to unions.

It was noted that, since 2010, the administration had renovated all of the libraries in the Borough, built new school places, improved green spaces and frozen Council Tax. Voluntary groups had been doing a brilliant job but the increased costs would have an impact on the vulnerable residents that they helped. The national living wage increase had been welcomed but had disregarded the pressure on providers and, ultimately, on residents.

The Council had a finite amount of money to mitigate the pressures that it faced and, in December 2024, Cabinet would need to consider the budget for 2025/26 to decide what action the local authority needed to take.

Those speaking against the motion queried why the administration was so concerned when it had not been concerned before. There had been no concern about the austerity measures put in place in 2010, welfare spend reductions, cuts to the police and courts and the length of NHS waiting lists. It was suggested that motions could have been submitted about these issues previously but it would have been criticising a Conservative Government. The current Labour Government was having to work

with the fragile financial situation that had been left by the previous Conservative Government.

It was suggested that the motion was being used as an opportunity to criticise the Government, even though it had only been elected six months previously. The administration had used the same argument when the minimum wage had been introduced.

It was noted that good charities and businesses would have built resilience into their finances. The previous government had put things in motion which had meant that things now needed to change. The current Government had stated that local authorities would be reimbursed so it was unclear what the impact would be on the Council at this stage.

The motion was put to the vote and it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council is greatly concerned that the government's increase in the Employer's National Insurance Contributions and the reduction in the threshold for payment will add further pressure on Council budgets and on our residents.

Whilst the government have said, but not yet confirmed, that Councils will be fully reimbursed for their direct cost arising from this change, financial assistance will not be given to our care service and early year providers and charities upon which this Council relies to support our residents. The additional taxation these providers will now have to pay will most likely cause them to increase their charges and ultimately it is the hard-working families and residents of this borough that will have to pay as that cost is passported on to them.

Therefore, to mitigate this new pressure, this Council will reaffirm its commitment to sound financial management and good business practices that has enabled Hillingdon Council to deal with underfunding to date.

10.1 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR MATHERS

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

That this Council deeply regrets the entirely avoidable closure of the Beck Theatre in January 2025 and the significant negative impact this will have on the arts and culture provision within our borough and calls on the Cabinet to:

- a) reopen the theatre with an appropriate operator at the earliest opportunity in 2025, that maintains the quality of programming and community engagement historically delivered at this wonderful venue and*
- b) immediately conduct an independent review to investigate the delays and communications that occurred between the council and existing operator resulting in the forthcoming closure of the theatre. This review will determine what lessons can be learnt and will be conducted independently of the Council and operator.*

The scope of the review should investigate:

- negotiations between the Council and the operator including offers made informally or formally over recent years, their correspondence, negotiations and preparations for agreements.*
- the Council's and Cabinet's decision making over recent years regarding this*

tenure.

- the use of Council's external and internal communications including social media channels.
- any other relevant aspects as determined by the independent investigator.

The review to then be presented to the relevant Select Committee within the next six months.

Those speaking in support of the motion noted that there had been a lack of response at the end of the lease, despite dialogue going back to 2021. The Beck Theatre had supported charities and local initiatives which would be impacted by its closure in January 2025. The motion had requested an independent review to investigate the true cost of the decision and its impact and would offer an opportunity to pause, reflect and learn lessons.

Consultants had been appointed but it was queried whether their findings would be acted upon as the administration had been trying to sell off assets and kept letting Hillingdon residents down. There appeared to be no long-term strategy for arts and culture in the Borough despite the Council Strategy in November 2022 setting out a goal for all residents to enjoy culture and arts.

Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Bianco seconded, the following amendment (additional words in **bold** and deleted words ~~crossed through~~):

- i) *That this Council deeply regrets **that Trafalgar Theatres have declined the Council's offer to renew the lease of the Beck Theatre and recognises the** ~~entirely avoidable closure of the Beck Theatre in January 2025 and the significant negative impact this will may have on the commercial theatre arts and culture provision within our borough.~~ **Notwithstanding the promising progress being made by Blue Horizon, the Council's consultants to help identify a new theatre operator for the Beck, this Council** and calls on the Cabinet to:
 - a) ~~reopen the theatre~~ **agree terms** with an appropriate operator at the earliest opportunity, **without the requirement for ongoing financial subsidy from the Council in 2025,** that maintains the quality of programming and community engagement historically delivered at this wonderful venue. ~~and~~*
- ii) *delete the remainder of the motion.*

The amended motion then to read:

That this Council regrets that Trafalgar Theatres have declined the Council's offer to renew the lease of the Beck Theatre and recognises the significant negative impact this may have on the commercial theatre within our borough. Notwithstanding the promising progress being made by Blue Horizon, the Council's consultants, to help identify a new theatre operator for the Beck, this Council calls on the Cabinet to agree terms with an appropriate operator at the earliest opportunity, without the requirement for ongoing financial subsidy from the Council, that maintains the quality of programming and community engagement historically delivered at this wonderful venue.

Those speaking in support of the amendment noted that the original motion caused unnecessary concern for residents. Rumours had been circulated in relation to Barra Hall for political gain and Labour had been saying that the Council wanted to build

housing on the Beck Theatre site. Trafalgar had refused to run the Beck Theatre without the Council providing the company with a subsidy. The Council had observed Trafalgar's request for confidentiality in relation to negotiations but had been unable to agree to extend the lease based on the requirement for Trafalgar to receive a £20k subsidy each month, free rent and the Council being liable for any repairs. Trafalgar was a private profit-making company and the £648k subsidy demanded over 3½ years was not something that the Council could afford.

Conversations had been undertaken with a number of organisations that were interested in running the Beck Theatre and improving the local arts scene. It was anticipated that a new provider would be appointed in the new year.

Those speaking against the amendment suggested that it failed to address the real issue and had ignored the need for an independent review. The amendment had removed the key points and bore no resemblance to the original motion. Residents had placed their trust in the Council and deserved an answer but the amendment asked for something that was already happening.

The administration had stated that the Council could not afford to pay the subsidy to Trafalgar yet had then paid a private consultant to undertake the procurement of a new provider. There appeared to be conflicting reasons for this public debacle which ranged from issues around rent to lease to subsidy.

It had been worrying that the administration had avoided taking responsibility for the failed negotiations and continued to look at ways of selling off green spaces. Concern had also been expressed about the future of the staff currently employed at Beck Theatre. Residents had been disgusted by the way that this situation had been handled.

The amended motion was put to the vote and agreed. The substantive motion was put to the vote, and it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council regrets that Trafalgar Theatres have declined the Council's offer to renew the lease of the Beck Theatre and recognises the significant negative impact this may have on the commercial theatre within our borough. Notwithstanding the promising progress being made by Blue Horizon, the Council's consultants, to help identify a new theatre operator for the Beck, this Council calls on the Cabinet to agree terms with an appropriate operator at the earliest opportunity, without the requirement for ongoing financial subsidy from the Council, that maintains the quality of programming and community engagement historically delivered at this wonderful venue.

10.2 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR KAUR

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

That this Council recognises that Assets of Community Value (ACVs) such as theatres, community centres, libraries, pubs, and other spaces, provide vital services and activities for residents. This Council believes that it has a pivotal role in supporting and encouraging local communities to nominate ACVs, ensuring that valuable assets are protected for future generations. Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- *publicly identify and list ACVs*
- *actively promote the ACV nomination process and provide necessary support*

- *launch a targeted communication campaign to raise awareness of the ACV process among residents and community groups*

Those speaking in support of the motion noted that residents had had sleepless nights about ACVs and the failure to consult on issues such as Yiewsley recreation ground and Uxbridge Library. Residents had felt silenced, cheated and excluded from the decision-making process as they found out about plans when it was too late to have any influence. Inclusion had to be the foundation of the Council's approach. Concern was expressed that assets such as Winston Churchill Theatre and Uxbridge Golf Course would also be at risk.

It was noted that, although Hillingdon did not have any, neighbouring boroughs did have ACVs. Communities needed to be empowered and the Council was urged to work with residents to nominate ACVs, produce a communications plan and provide the tools for residents to save the assets that they loved. It was suggested that nominations be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Supporters of the motion stated that £75m of assets needed to be sold for the Council to avoid bankruptcy and asked which assets would be stripped to meet this. It was suggested that it would be valuable to compile a register of community assets

Initiatives such as Community Asset Transfers could also be considered. Communities were built on people and places and this motion would act as a promise to future generations. The motion asked that the Council supported assets for future use because, once they were sold off, they were lost forever.

The Council had a part to play in securing future assets and didn't need to spend money if it came up with innovative ways forward. The local authority was the custodian of Council assets and could transfer the ownership to community groups. If assets needed to be sold, the Council should put safeguards on the property's future use (similar to the action taken in relation to the sale of Barra Hall). The motion asked that the Council took the lead role in generating a list of assets and that it worked with the community to secure those assets for the future.

Those speaking against the motion valued the ACV process but stated that the motion was flawed and unnecessary and asked that the Council act unlawfully. The community needed to identify ACVs and the Council would then act as an arbiter if it met the requirements for inclusion on the list.

A page was available on the Council website which set out information about the ACV process and provided links. There would be no need to spend money launching a communications plan as information was already publicly available and Councillors should be fulfilling their community leadership role by helping residents.

It was important that, once a building had been appointed as an ACV, it fulfilled a use / purpose and had funds available to run it as this would not be something that the Council would be able to do.

The motion was put to the vote and lost.

The meeting, which commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.46 pm.

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.