

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

15 July 2025

Meeting held at



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chair), Peter Smallwood (Vice-Chair), Darran Davies, Ekta Gohil, Scott Farley (Opposition Lead), Elizabeth Garelick and Kamal Preet Kaur</p> <p>Others Present: Liz Penny (Democratic Services Officer), Daniel Ferrer (Licensing Team Manager), Steve Brown (Director of Environment), Ross Forsyth (Principal Licensing Officer) and Stephanie Waterford (Head of Public Protection and Enforcement)</p>
92.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
93.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
94.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Janet Gardner was thanked for all her hard work and significant contribution to the work of the Residents' Services Select Committee. Councillor Elizabeth Garelick was welcomed as her replacement.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 12 June 2025 be approved as an accurate record.</p>
95.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THOSE MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items of business were marked Part I and would be considered in public.</p>
96.	<p>ANIMAL WELFARE AND ANIMAL LICENSING (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Ross Forsyth (Principal Licensing Officer), Daniel Ferrer (Licensing Team Manager) and Stephanie Waterford (Head of Public Protection and Enforcement) were in attendance to respond to Members' questions and requests for clarification in respect of the Animal Welfare and Animal Licensing report included in the agenda pack.</p> <p>Members questioned what background actions were being taken to demonstrate preparedness as an authority. In response, officers confirmed that engagement had begun with the Resilience Forum in the London Borough of Hillingdon. The risk register was under review, including risks related to animal health</p>

and disease. Contingency plans were being examined, and officer time would be dedicated to ensure awareness of farms, smallholdings, and green spaces. Members heard that a register of poultry and animal keepers was maintained, and work was underway to access movement databases and initiate farm inspections.

Councillors asked why the gap in preparedness had only recently been identified and noted that the Borough had fewer farms than other authorities. It was explained that attendance at Chief Trading Standards Officers' meetings kept them informed about diseases such as blue tongue and avian influenza. Outbreaks in Europe were monitored, and vaccines were being developed. Due to departmental resourcing issues, full-time dedication to this area had not been possible.

Councillors welcomed the recruitment of Kate Morris, an experienced welfare officer from the police. Ross Forsyth was praised for managing the animal welfare area single-handedly and it was hoped that there would be improved focus with the new team member in post.

The Committee referred to specific horse welfare cases and asked what the first 48 hours looked like when a concern was raised. The Principal Licensing Officer stated that serious welfare issues were assessed within 24 hours. If animals were to be taken into possession, a vet's sign-off was required under the Animal Welfare Act. If the animal was on Council land, an abandonment notice could be served and resolved within days. If on private land, vet approval was needed before action could be taken.

Members raised concerns regarding a live court case involving animal mutilation and asked about the Council's role in tracing how the animals had been obtained. Officers were not familiar with the specific case but confirmed close collaboration with the police and the RSPCA. Widespread issues with unlicensed breeders and ongoing investigations were acknowledged. Members heard that, with new staff, the team aimed to increase enforcement and prosecution efforts.

Councillors asked about aquatic animal protection at Little Britain Lake and Cowley, noting recent attacks and the area's conservation status. It was explained that animal welfare was not a statutory function but was undertaken voluntarily. Wildlife crimes were typically handled by the Metropolitan Police's wildlife unit, with whom the Council had engaged previously.

In response to queries regarding fishing licences and the impact of discarded lines on wildlife, it was clarified that fishing licensing was not under the licensing team's remit, but officers would investigate and liaise with relevant teams. It was confirmed that fishing licences had previously been managed by Green Spaces and a review of the area's management was suggested.

The Director of Environment noted that a new Allotment and Fisheries Officer had been appointed and offered to provide a briefing note on their responsibilities.

Councillors sought further clarification regarding compliance inspections for one-year licences and whether they were announced or unannounced. It was explained that supplementary inspections for minor failings were announced due to legal limitations on entering residential properties.

In response to their requests for clarification regarding officer capacity and training,

Members heard that one officer was qualified and another, Kate Morris, was currently undergoing training. It was confirmed that, once completed, the team would have two appointed officers for licensing inspections.

Members enquired what “closely monitoring” meant in respect of businesses operating without renewed licences. Officers described the process of reminder letters, follow-up contact, and routine inspection visits including door knocks.

Councillors asked about responsibilities in respect of wild animals in green spaces. In response it was stated that the licensing team responded to welfare reports, but environmental disturbance fell under other departments, likely Green Spaces.

The Committee sought clarification regarding microchipping compliance and trends. The process of issuing cautionary letters and follow-ups, with potential prosecution for non-compliance, was explained. Members heard that the Council had access to stray dog data and was monitoring trends. It was noted that the local authority was responsible for enforcing microchipping.

In response to further requests for clarification from the Committee Members, it was confirmed that no Community Protection Notices (CPNs) had been issued for barking dogs. The business in question had applied for a licence which had been refused, and they were believed to be no longer operating.

With regard to training delivery to other departments, Members were informed that officers were interested in delivering training – a successful case involving CPN enforcement and prosecution was shared with the Committee.

Members sought reassurance regarding horse welfare during heatwaves and enquired whether vet approval was needed in all cases. Officers stated that immediate measures could be taken in extreme cases, but veterinary assessment was preferred. The Council had good relationships with vets and could arrange inspections within 24 hours.

Regarding animal exhibitions at schools and public events, it was confirmed that exhibitions were covered under the same licensing regulations and were subject to financial thresholds and licensing requirements.

In response to further questions from the Committee regarding external funding opportunities and previous success in grant applications, officers confirmed engagement with DEFRA and receipt of funding. Members were advised that grants were discussed in forums, and the team was open to exploring additional sources.

Members wondered how funding opportunities were communicated and whether officers received notification of these. It was explained that funding notices were posted on the Knowledge Hub, which officers had to monitor. It was not a public website and required role-specific access.

RESOLVED: That the Residents’ Services Select Committee:

1. Noted the content of the report.

97. **ALLOTMENTS** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Steve Brown, Director of Environment, was in attendance to respond to Members' questions regarding the Allotments report included in the agenda pack.

Members asked when the Allotment and Fisheries Officer had been employed, as the report did not specify. They also enquired over what period the 245 allotments had been allocated. **The Director of Environment responded that he had only been in his own post for approximately six weeks and would provide clarification in respect of these points after the meeting.**

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was explained that the report indicated a £20K loss and that improvements were underway to reduce this through better allocation and quicker turnover of vacant plots. A follow-up report was suggested.

Councillors asked how often officers were expected to inspect allotment sites. In response, the Officer estimated quarterly visits, noting that inspection frequency would become clearer as the service matured.

Members sought further clarification as to why there was a waiting list despite the apparent availability of vacant plots. In response, it was explained that some plots required significant rectification, which could deter applicants. The importance of aligning allotment provision with public health initiatives was highlighted.

The Committee raised concerns about self-managed sites, including issues of anti-social behaviour and drug abuse. It was confirmed that the new Officer's role included managing relationships with self-managed sites and providing support and guidance.

Members highlighted high allotment vacancy rates and questioned management oversight and software systems. In response, it was acknowledged that there was a need for policy reviews and better utilisation, and it was suggested that a future report would address these issues.

In response to suggestions from Councillors that residents without gardens could be allowed to use plots as green spaces, it was agreed this could be considered during policy reviews and it was noted that similar successful initiatives existed in other authorities.

Councillors recommended reorganising the Terms and Conditions for clarity and suggested cross-departmental collaboration on composting and food waste. In reply, the Director of Environment agreed that Terms and Conditions needed to be more user-friendly, and it was confirmed that interdepartmental initiatives would be explored further.

Members sought further clarification as to which allotment sites were targeted for overhaul and what criteria were used. It was explained that current criteria focused on utilisation and adherence to terms, with future enhancements planned.

Regarding Councillors' concerns about wasteful spending and unused cultivated plots, the Director of Environment assured the Committee that oversight had improved and that management challenges were being addressed. Members heard that work had begun to contact all tenants and provide them with updated tenancy agreements.

In response to Members' requests for clarification in respect of notices of non-

	<p>cultivation and definitions of cultivation, it was admitted there was no standard definition at this time – officers committed to clarifying this in future policy work.</p> <p>Councillors suggested a portal for tenants to upload photos of their plots to reduce inspection costs. The Officer supported the idea and agreed it would be beneficial. Members also endorsed annual tenant updates similar to electoral roll submissions and the Director of Environment acknowledged the value of this suggestion.</p> <p>Members enquired whether the 1,300 plots mentioned in the report included self-managed sites. The Director of Environment clarified that self-managed sites were not included and agreed to provide an updated count.</p> <p>Further to questions regarding collaboration with schools and adult social care, Members heard that such partnerships were part of the broader agenda and would be developed.</p> <p>The Committee Members expressed concerns about poorly managed plots affecting neighbouring ones and requested clearer conservation definitions. In reply, the Director of Environment promised to investigate and report back.</p> <p>When asked about the Council’s role in mediation between tenants and committees, the officer reiterated the importance of providing guidance and professional support.</p> <p>Finally, in respect of the Council’s governance over committees managing Council-owned land, the Director of Environment committed to researching and reporting back on this issue.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Residents’ Services Select Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the information contained within the report and asked clarification questions as appropriate.
98.	<p>REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Members were invited to propose ideas for the next review item, following the conclusion of the Select Committee’s homelessness review. It was clarified that only one review—either minor or major—could be conducted at a time. Two initial suggestions were presented: a minor review on funfairs and a major review concerning the parking enforcement contract. Members were encouraged to submit additional ideas.</p> <p>It was agreed that a decision would not be made during the meeting. Instead, all suggestions would be collected and discussed with officers, and the committee leads, to shortlist feasible options. Regarding funfairs, concerns were raised about recurring issues such as fly-posting and inadequate responses from previous information items. It was proposed that a formal review could yield practical recommendations.</p> <p>The parking enforcement suggestion focused on suspended parking zones, some of which had been inactive for over 20 years, thereby preventing wardens from issuing tickets. This situation had led to increased parking issues near schools. A review was proposed to assess these zones and potentially implement a scheme to clearly demarcate parking permissions, enabling enforcement.</p>

Members highlighted the upcoming Borough elections in 296 days and suggested that any review should be realistically scoped to conclude by March or April 2026, considering the limited time and potential changes in Committee membership. It was noted that some reviews in other Committees had taken up to two years, and the current review should be manageable within the available timeframe.

Further suggestions included expanding the funfair review to encompass all corporate events on council land, addressing illegal street trading, and reviewing the limited issuance of Fixed Penalty Notices. It was also noted that information items could be used as an alternative to formal reviews, allowing scrutiny and suggestions without formal recommendations to Cabinet.

Members proposed a minor review on flooding and watercourses, citing seasonal relevance. Concerns were raised about the potential discontinuation of reviews post-election, but it was clarified that completed reports would still be submitted to Cabinet.

Councillors emphasised the tight timeframe, noting the absence of meetings in August and December. They expressed doubts about fitting comprehensive topics like parking enforcement into the schedule. He also raised concerns about persistent fly-posting and the lack of 24-hour parking enforcement.

The Committee suggested a review of private sector housing, particularly its integration with local authority structures and its impact on residents. Councillors supported the funfair review and proposed an additional review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) across the Borough. Councillor Davis suggested reviews on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and private business waste management, linking the latter to fly-tipping issues.

Democratic Services summarised the suggestions, which included funfairs and corporate events, illegal street trading, flooding, parking enforcement, private sector housing, PSPOs, HMOs, and private waste. It was decided that these ideas would be evaluated for feasibility, and a shortlist would be presented at the next meeting. The possibility of progressing the review via email before the September meeting was discussed, subject to constitutional constraints and consultation with Democratic Services. This would save time and enable the scoping report to be tabled at the September meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Select Committee:

- 1. Noted the guidance on undertaking policy reviews in Appendix 1;**
- 2. Sought to make use of the scorecard attached in Appendix 1 (Annex A) to assess any policy review topic ideas;**
- 3. Developed a shortlist of potential topic ideas over the coming months or year for officers to scope further and report back to the Committee on feasibility.**
- 4. Delegated to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chairman (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) any further agreement on review topic selection as required.**

	RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be noted.
100.	WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>) RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.
101.	FINANCIAL SCRUTINY TRAINING - VERBAL UPDATE (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>) Democratic Services confirmed that the financial scrutiny training session would be held on Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 18:00. All Select Committee Members were invited to attend.
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.35 pm.

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.