

LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST MINUTES OF THE CABINET

7 December 2023 at 10.00 am

PRESENT:

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| Chair: | Councillor Grace Williams | Leader of the Council |
| Cabinet Members: | Councillor Clyde Loakes | Deputy Leader (Climate and Air Quality) |
| | Councillor Naheed Asghar | Portfolio Lead Member - Health and Wellbeing |
| | Councillor Vicky Ashworth | Portfolio Lead Member - Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities |
| | Councillor Paul Douglas | Portfolio Lead Member - Finance and Resources |
| | Councillor Kizzy Gardiner | Portfolio Lead Member - Children and Young People |
| | Councillor Khevyn Limbajee | Portfolio Lead Member - Community Safety |
| | Councillor Louise Mitchell | Portfolio Lead Member - Adults |
| | Councillor Rosalind Doré | Cabinet Commissioner - Destinations |
| | Councillor Sharon Waldron | Cabinet Commissioner - Housing Transformation |

(Cabinet Commissioners are appointed by the Leader to assist Cabinet in leading engagement with our community on four key priorities for the Council and to support our borough to recover from the pandemic. These Councillors are not Members of the Cabinet and do not have any voting rights nor decision-making powers.)

Officers in Attendance:

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| Linzi Roberts-Egan | Chief Executive |
| Ian Buckle | Head of Electoral and Democratic Services |
| Joe Garrod | Corporate Director of Housing |
| Shazia Hussain | Deputy Chief Executive |
| Anthony Jackson | Democratic Services Officer |
| Rob Manning | Strategic Director of Resources |
| Debbie Porter | Strategic Director of Neighbourhoods and Environment |
| Christopher Spencer | Interim Strategic Director of Families |
| Ian Buckle | Head of Electoral and Democratic Services |
| Kim Travis | Deputy Monitoring Officer |

53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahsan Khan, Elizabeth Baptiste and Catherine Deakin.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

55. MINUTES OF CABINET

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 2 November 2023, were agreed as a correct record.

56. FINANCIAL MONITORING: MONTH 7 (OCTOBER)

Councillor Douglas introduced the report and, in doing so, confirmed that the Council was in the financial position it was, due to a deliberate policy from Central Government to defund Local Government along with other local partners and, as a result, there were some difficult decisions to be taken by the Council. He confirmed that the Council was working very hard to continue to provide for local residents.

The Leader agreed and pointed out that Central Government's position on the worsening financial situation was not commensurate with the financial position that local government and wider public services were currently in. She said that there was no recognition of the gap in public services and the need for decent investment into local government. The Leader highlighted the impact that the current financial situation was having on local residents, which included poorer outcomes and rising inequality. She then gave thanks to the senior leadership team, particularly Rob Manning and Ursula Gamble – Director of Financial Services, for their hard work on the report. The Leader also thanked Councillor Douglas and other Portfolio Lead Members for looking at relevant budgets in an attempt to address the situation.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) approved the additional funding required for the Local Government Pay award (£3.065 million) to be funded from the Contingency budget; and
- (2) noted the transfer of £0.053 million from the Contingency budget to Member Allowances budget for the additional costs associated with the increase to member allowances agreed by Council in April.

57. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Douglas introduced the report and, in doing so, thanked the senior

leadership team, particularly Rob Manning, for their hard work. He added that he was confident that the Council would meet the financial challenges it faced and would have as minimal an impact on residents as was possible.

Councillor Loakes highlighted the forthcoming difficult decisions that needed to be taken in relation to fees and charges. He echoed Councillor Douglas' words in relation to Central Government failing public services and the fact that local authorities were experiencing additional pressures as a result. Councillor Loakes then referred to the impact of Central Government's minibudget in October 2022 and pointed out that, despite inflation now falling, the damage had already been done. He added that there was nothing that Central Government had said to indicate that they understood the pressures that Councils were now under.

The Leader stated that the Council was currently working hard to ensure that the difficult decisions that needed to be taken would help residents in a meaningful way. She confirmed that LBWF was lobbying against the removal of the Household Support Fund by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as it would have a massive and damaging impact on residents during a cost of living crisis. The Leader referred to the importance of ensuring that residents were aware as to why the Council was having to make such changes and to assure them that LBWF would make every effort to ensure that changes were made with residents, particularly the most vulnerable, in mind.

Councillor Mitchell stated that the adult social care accounted for approximately 14% of the Council's total spend and pointed out that the numbers who needed such support had increased by over a thousand. She highlighted the Early Help service as being vital for residents however said there was no funding received for it. Councillor Mitchell also said that cost of living crisis was affecting the Council and care providers significantly and referred to the importance of ensuring that Central Government provided support for adult social care which she pointed out had been underfunded for decades, worsened by the cost of living crisis. She said that adult social care was supported by Councils and unpaid carers. Councillor Mitchell referred to the recent immigration regulations that had been passed by Central Government which would make it increasingly more difficult to recruit and retain a workforce for adult social care.

The Leader thanked relevant officers and portfolio leads for their hard work in this area.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) noted the potential funding gap of £27.912 million for the 3-year period 2024/25 to 2026/27 with £12.242 million in 2024/25, assuming all service-related pressures are resolved. The final position will not be known until the provisional local government finance settlement and final settlement are released. The provision settlement is expected in late December;
- (2) noted the requirement to achieve savings from management actions, efficiencies and a transformation programme, to mitigate the in-year baseline pressure reported in the month 7 monitor of £15.882 million, the £3.065m staff

pay deal (funded from contingency), the potential funding gap for 2024/25 million of £12.242 million and £15.670 million for 2025/26 and 2026/27;

- (3) noted the MTFFS refresh assumes a council tax increase of 4.99% in 2024/25 which is subject to Council approval;
- (4) noted the continuing uncertainty resulting from likely delays to the spending review, Fair Funding Review and proposed changes to the Business Rates Retention scheme;
- (5) noted the outline timetable for the budget process as set out in paragraph 3.29 of the report; and
- (6) delegated, to the Strategic Director of Resources, the authority to distribute any contingency budgets and/or reserves as per the Council's financial ground rules which were reaffirmed within the Month 2 Finance Monitor.

58. BUDGET REVIEW - FEES AND CHARGES

Councillor Douglas introduced the report and, in doing so, drew Members attention to an additional recommendation to that in the covering report which allowed fees and charges to be uplifted between 1 February 2024 and 1 April 2024 to enable the in-year overspend to be reduced. He stated that local authorities across the country were calling on Central Government for additional support and funding. Councillor Douglas went on to say that the calls had gone unanswered and, together with the current austerity crisis, had left LBWF with no alternative but to review fees and charges following years of those charges being frozen. He added that officers were looking at how costs could be reduced to enable the Council to continue to provide value for money and to reduce the in-year spend. Councillor Douglas confirmed that the Council would continue to lobby Central Government to provide the funding that LBWF and local residents needed.

The Leader stated that, as a borough, LBWF had worked very hard to ensure that fees and charges were kept at a manageable level for residents, however she pointed out that the services that the Council provided needed to continue and that they must be funded. The Leader said that LBWF would ensure that a communications plan was available to residents to enable them to understand why such increases were necessary.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed the schedule of Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 1(iii), so far as they relate to fees and charges that are not reserved for Council decision by the provisions of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations 2000 (as amended); and
- (2) agreed the proposal that the Fees and Charges can be uplifted as early as 1st February 2024 and no later than 1st April 2024.

59. BOROUGH OF SANCTUARY FRAMEWORK

Councillor Ashworth introduced the report and, in doing so, confirmed that she was very proud of the work undertaken in this area and gave thanks to relevant officers for their hard work. She said that it had been very moving listening to people and hearing of the various challenges they had faced.

The Leader added that it was often those that had come to the UK seeking help and escape from persecution who were often ended up becoming leaders or implementing meaningful change. She also explained that being a borough of sanctuary was about how the Council worked with those people arriving in the borough needing support. The Leader added that it was good to see meaningful actions coming out of the report and referred to the purchase of 120 properties for refugees as a discharged action from the borough of sanctuary framework. She then gave thanks to Councillor Ashworth and officers who had worked on the report.

Decision

Cabinet endorsed the policy framework and principles of a Borough of Sanctuary Framework attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

60. INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT

The Leader introduced the report and, in doing so, confirmed that a lot of work had been done to revitalise the Council's approach in relation to infrastructure funding. She gave thanks to officers for their work on the report and to Councillor Khan for his leadership in this area which had included looking at how the Council could work more strategically with local neighbourhoods to deliver for residents.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) approved the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) (2022/23) and the incorporated Infrastructure List at Appendix 1 to the report and agreed to the publication of the IFS on the Council website as required under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended); and
- (2) delegated authority to make any minor amendments necessary to the IFS (2022/23) before it is published, to the Corporate Director – Regeneration, Planning & Delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regeneration and the Strategic Director of Resources.

61. LEYTON UNDERGROUND STATION - FUNDING AGREEMENT

Councillor Loakes introduced the report and, in doing so, thanked relevant Cabinet Members for bringing the project forward after many years of hard work, including Councillor Khan, Councillor Simon Miller (who had left the Council) and all other Cabinet Members who had worked on the project. He explained that Leyton station was a major gateway into the south of the borough and said that the redevelopment was long overdue. Councillor Loakes stated that he was grateful to officers and the political leadership at LBWF for submitting a levelling up bid and ensuring that Transport for London (TfL) were made aware that the station was not fit for purpose. He gave special thanks to Ian Rae – Corporate Director of Regeneration, Planning and Delivery, Will Teasdale - Director of Area Regeneration Delivery and their teams for their support in bringing forward the project.

The Leader echoed Councillor Loakes words of thanks to relevant officers and Portfolio Lead Members. She also referred to strategic projects that were currently in their infancy such as Leyton Mills and the increased connectivity for the south of the borough as a result.

Councillor Limbajee also gave thanks to relevant officers and Cabinet Members. He said that he looked forward to seeing the new infrastructure in the area as a result and the newly developed, modern station.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) noted progress with the project;
- (2) approved the terms of the Council's funding agreement with Transport for London as detailed in paragraph 3.21 of the report; and
- (3) delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Strategic Director of Resources and Deputy Leaders, to finalise and enter into the funding agreement with Transport for London in line with the principles set out in the report.

62. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Cabinet agreed not to discuss the content of the exempt appendices and, as a result, did not exclude the press and public from the meeting.

63. LEYTON GREEN ROAD - HRA ACQUISITION OF HOMES

The Leader introduced the report and, in doing so, pointed out that a number of previous delivery schemes had demonstrated that the local residents had benefitted from the Council being able to switch from private sales to shared ownership, for example Eastfield House at Central Parade, where available units were all sold.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed the purchase by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) of 17 private sale homes on the 92 Leyton Green Project at a purchase price of £6.755m;
- (2) agreed the change in tenure of 17 of the 30 remaining flats made up of a mix of 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom flats from private sale to shared ownership;
- (3) delegated authority to the Commercial Director of Property and Delivery to dispose of the 17 shared ownership units on the open market; and
- (4) noted the impact on the business case and the impact of voids on the Children's service revenue budget.

64. SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Councillor Kizzy Gardiner introduced the report.

The Leader stated that LBWF had been very proactive in relation to supporting school improvement and maintaining school buildings and she commended the partnership between regeneration and school delivery teams within the Council. The Leader also gave thanks to Councillor Gardiner and Rob Miller – Head of Schools Delivery, for their hard work. She also commended Rob Miller for his nomination for the Pride of Waltham Forest Award.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) approved the allocation of the available resources of £60.61m to the Schools Capital Programme to financial year end 2026/27, as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report, and for this funding to be made available to deliver the projects identified in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 to the report;
- (2) noted the total resource of £43.79m currently committed against projects previously approved by Cabinet and by delegated authority, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (3) delegated authority to finalise this programme, within identified financial resources, to the Strategic Director of People, in consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member for Children and Young People and the Strategic Director of Resources; and

- (4) delegated authority to the Corporate Director – Property and Delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member for Children and Young People and Strategic Director of Resources:
- to proceed with the procurement of projects and maintenance and improvement works included in the programme, subject to Strategic Commissioning Board approval; and
 - to award contracts provided they are within the resources available in the Schools Capital Programme to meet such commitments.

The meeting closed at 10.39 am

Chair's Signature _____

Date _____