

MINUTES

of the proceedings of the Ordinary Council Meeting of the London Borough of Waltham Forest held at Walthamstow Town Hall, Forest Road, London E17 on Thursday, 14 December 2023.

PRESENT:

Mayor: Cllr Roy Berg

Councillors: Afzal Akram, Shumon Ali-Rahman, Raja Anwar, Naheed Asghar, Vicky Ashworth, Elizabeth Baptiste, Tony Bell, Kastriot Berberi, Marsela Berberi, Roy Berg, Emma Best, Tom Connor, Andrew Dixon, Rosalind Doré, Paul Douglas, Shabana Dhedhi, Rhiannon Eglin, Marion Fitzgerald, Kizzy Gardiner, Jenny Gray, Kisha Green, Justin Halabi, Crystal Ihenachor, Whitney Ihenachor, Sazimet Palta Imre, Kay Isa, Tim James, Ahsan Khan, Johar Khan, Kira Lewis, Khevyn Limbajee, Sally Littlejohn, Clyde Loakes, Gerry Lyons, Zafran Malik, Anna Mbachu, Miriam Mirwitch, Louise Mitchell, John Moss, Sam O'Connell, Jonathan O'Dea, Yusuf Patel, Jack Phipps, Marie Pye, Caramel Quin, Uzma Rasool, Keith Rayner, Catherine Saumarez, Sebastian Salek, Richard Sweden, Steve Terry, Katy Thompson, Sharon Waldron, Terry Wheeler, Grace Williams and Jennifer Whilby

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Karen Bellamy, Catherine Deakin, Mitchell Goldie and Jemma Hemsted.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 19TH OCTOBER 2023

Council approved the minutes of the Ordinary Council Meeting of 19th October 2023.

46. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR, COUNCIL LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Mayor thanked councillors and officers who had donated to the Mayor's Charity as part of the Christmas Jumper day.

The Mayor spoke of the engagements that he had attended including the Jack Petchey Speech Competitions, the flag raising for the independence days for Antigua Barbuda and Dominica, Diwali, the Lord Mayor's Show, the Remembrance Day

service and the civic Christmas Carol service. He noted that it was the last Council meeting of 2023 and wished all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year.

Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council, updated that the council had now met the requirements to become a Borough of Sanctuary. She noted that a wide number of people sought sanctuary within Waltham Forest and said that the council took its statutory duties seriously to provide support services for refugees and those seeking asylum. A Welcome Hub had been opened to help support this. Councillor Williams thanked members for passing the motion to being the process and for the work that had been contributed, and the Community Sector for supporting this.

Councillor Ashworth, Portfolio Lead Member for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities, updated Council that a Winter Support booklet was now in circulation for residents to inform them of the range of support provided across the borough. She noted that Community Living Rooms had seen 11,000 visits, provided 2000 hot meals, advice on debt, jobs and energy saving. Councillor Ashworth also updated Council that the council had recommitted to the Armed Forces Covenant to provide space and support for health and wellbeing, housing, education and community building. A steering group had been set up to support this. She thanked the Mayor for his involvement with this.

Councillor Limbajee, Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety, updated the Council of the work that had taken place to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG). The council had hosted events to raise awareness such as the 'Stand By Her' programme, courses run by Ashiana Network and raising awareness around incel behaviour. The Deputy Mayor of London and other VAWG experts had been attending events to promote the 'Safer Together' model. Councillor Limbajee said that a celebration event had taken place at Leyton Great Hall and thanked Councillor Bellamy for speaking on what it meant to disrupt misogyny. Since 2022 the council had trained support teams to help survivors, hosted drop-in events at hubs, created an app to report issues and had invited all male staff to become allies. Councillor Limbajee thanked the VAWG team for their work.

47. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

The Mayor proposed to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11 to allow for the time for public statements to be extended.

Council unanimously **agreed** this.

The following local residents addressed the Council:

Naila Mir	On the number of businesses leaving Chingford and the approach to policy taken councillors.
Alan Kelly	On the Ainslie Wood Road consultation and the proposals being made by residents that they wished to present to council.
J Grange	On raising awareness for neurodivergent

residents, seeking to improve life chances and employment opportunities for the neurodiverse within the borough.

Brendan Julienne

On his work as the Corporate Parenting Board Co-Chair, the importance of engaging young people in decision making, and suggestions for how to further improve access to meeting for young people.

Shafraz Thajudeen
(Statement read out by Averil Watan)

Thanking the council for the work to establish the Borough of Sanctuary and presented councillors with a framed garment.

Peter Heatherley

On the impact that speed humps were having on the health and wellbeing of residents.

Councillor Williams confirmed that full responses would be provided to all the public speakers.

48. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Council noted the six questions from Members and received replies as set out in the Order Paper in Appendix A.

The following supplementary questions were put to the Portfolio Holders:

Question 1: Councillor Moss to Councillor Khan, Deputy Leader, Housing and Regeneration Portfolio Holder

Councillor Moss asked for an explanation why the process was not keeping to the original programme.

Councillor Khan stated that the examination process, led by a national inspector was taking longer than expected and the council did not have control of timescales.

Recommendations from LP1 made by the inspector, such as flood mitigation and retrofitting, were being fed into LP2.

Question 5: Councillor Best to Councillor Loakes, Deputy Leader, Climate and Air Quality Portfolio Holder

Councillor Best asked how car free developments would be advertised more clearly to prospective tenants and home owners.

Councillor Loakes responded that he would speak with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regeneration to see what could be done additionally.

Question 6: Councillor Moss to Councillor Khan, Deputy Leader, Housing and Regeneration Portfolio Holder

Councillor Moss asked what percentage of socially rented developments had been funded by 'Right to Buy' receipts.

Councillor Khan agreed to respond in writing.

Councillor Moss then asked an additional oral question without notice under rule 12.3 of the Council Procedure Rules.

Question from Councillor Moss to Councillor Loakes, Deputy Leader, Climate and Air Quality Portfolio Holder

Councillor Moss asked if it was reasonable to open a consultation to residents on a Friday when only informing councillors of this on a Thursday evening.

Councillor Loakes said that councillors received correspondence and had opportunities to feed into consultations. He added that the consultation that was being referenced had already begun receiving attendance and feedback.

49. NOTICES OF MOTION

50. LABOUR GROUP MOTION – A FAIR DEAL FOR WALTHAM FOREST

It was moved by Councillor Douglas and seconded by Councillor Asghar that:

- Councils up and down the country are in financial crisis. Six councils of varying political leadership have issued section 114 notices since 2021.
- The Local Government Association are clear that if nothing changes, councils are facing a funding gap of £4 billion over the next two years, with at least 26 councils facing bankruptcy in the near future according to SIGOMA.
- Since 2010, the real terms funding from government to Waltham Forest Council has reduced by 37% (adjusted for inflation).
- The government has made a deliberate plan for councils to raise funds locally through council tax increases as it now accounts for more than half of our total funding, 54% in 2023/24 compared to 30% in 2010.
- The Council is facing structural pressures that have built up since 2010 – a period in which we have had to find £120 million in savings and during which our residents have struggled with Covid-19 and a cost-of-living crisis, against a backdrop of crumbling public services.
- We are looking after 1,000 more people with complex needs since 2018/19. The 2% Council Tax rise ringfenced for adult social care is not keeping pace with demand which has risen 13% in the past year alone.
- At the same time, the average cost of adult social care packages has risen 13% in the past year alone.
- London is at the epicentre of the national homelessness crisis. We are seeing over eighty families a week present to us in housing need in Waltham Forest

and this is increasing every month.

- Although we welcome the Chancellor's recent commitment to unfreeze the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, we note that rents rose in London by 16% last year, much higher than the LHA increase of 6.7%.
- Since 2020 we are Corporate Parents to an additional 39 children and another 1,200 children are receiving an Education, Health, and Care Plan, an increase from 1,800 in 2018/19 to 3,000 now.
- Austerity, coupled with the effects of rampant inflation and the dramatic rise in demand for social care, means councils have been forced to use reserves to pay for essential services. This is compounded by only receiving one-year funding settlements for the past eight years, which has prevented us from effectively planning for the long-term.
- The Household Support Fund has supported thousands of families in our borough and provided £4.6m of funding in the last round. The fund is due to end in March 2024 which means reduced support for our most vulnerable residents.
- For decades, Waltham Forest along with other outer London boroughs, has been disadvantaged by our funding settlement. The funding formula does not reflect deprivation levels that drive our spending. Inner London boroughs like Kensington & Chelsea have less deprivation but receive almost 1.5 times our council funding per person.
- Kensington & Chelsea have less deprivation but receive over 2.5 times our public health funding per person, because funding is based on an outdated formula from 2011. For example, Waltham Forest's funding for Local Outbreak Plans was less than half of Hackney's and over £1m less than Islington, despite having a larger population than both.
- The Government's Office for Budget Responsibility has downgraded predictions for growth and drawn attention to the £19 billion gap in public finances by 2028/29 created by the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. Many residents are still suffering the impacts of Liz Truss's disastrous budget, with the average monthly mortgage payment up £220 since September 2022.

The Council believes that:

- Well-funded public services are the backbone of our economy and democracy

and are essential for meeting the needs of every member of our society.

- The Coalition government of 2010-2015 and successive Conservative governments have overseen the intentional decline of public services and as a consequence, our public services are struggling to serve the immediate needs of our residents and communities.
- The chronic underfunding of other public services, such as the NHS and police, is increasing the burden on the council and is causing even greater strain on our ability to support residents.
- The current system of bidding for pots of money undermines long term planning and is a waste of public money.
- This Government has shown its contempt for communities by moving responsibility for funding local service onto residents – using Council Tax, a tax aimed not at the wealth of the occupants but based on their property values as rated in 1991.

The Council resolves to:

- Demand that the government urgently reverses the intentional decline of public services and presents a proper plan for investment and funding reform.
- Lobby the Government urgently to:
 - confirm that the Household Support Fund will be extended beyond April 2024.
 - Support the London Councils campaign for an increase to local government funding by at least the same level as last year (9%).
 - End one-year settlements which lead to financial uncertainty.
 - Fix the broken social care system so that it works for vulnerable Adults and Children
 - Increase the homelessness prevention grant.
- Call on the government to increase all its centrally set fees and charges by inflation, as per pensions and benefits rates increase. Fully fund the recent local government pay award and review all recent taxation and levy legislation that negatively impacts on local government initiatives and revenues. Fully fund all extra burdens.

There was debate, in which Councillors Mirwitch, Rayner, Best, James, Sweden, Ali-

Rahman and Moss spoke, following which, Councillor Douglas exercised his right to reply.

On being put to the vote, the motion in the names of Councillor P Douglas and Councillor N Asghar was **CARRIED**.

51. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

It was moved by Councillor Gardiner and seconded by Councillor James that the Council agree the Corporate Parenting Annual report 2022/23.

On being put to the vote, the motion was **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**.

52. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN

It was moved by Councillor Gardiner and seconded by Councillor Limbajee that Council approve the Youth Justice Plan 2023/24.

On being put to the vote, the motion was **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**.

53. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

It was moved by Councillor Douglas and seconded by Councillor Ashworth that the Council

- agree that the current Council Tax Support Scheme as outlined in 4 below continues; whereby the maximum award available to working aged people receiving support remain at 85% from 1 April 2024.
- note that like Housing Benefit the scheme will continue to fully disregard War Widows & War Widowers pensions for all applicants. Various other incomes, for example, Child Benefit, Disability related benefits such as Personal Independence Payments, will also continue to be ignored when calculating entitlement to Council Tax Support.
- note that the projected cost of the whole scheme is identified as £19.92 million which is £1.632 million more than the 2023/24 MTFs provision. This will be reflected in the calculation of the council tax base for 2024/25 and included within the next MTFs as part of the budget setting process. The additional £1.632 million needed to fund the scheme will come from dedicated earmarked reserve of recovered housing benefit overpayment debts.
- agree that the Council continue with a Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Scheme under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act

1992 (as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 2012), to offer additional help to those suffering the greatest financial hardship as defined in the Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Hardship Scheme as published on the Council's website. Current 2022-23 scheme attached (Appendix 2). This is subject to an aggregate of £750,000.

- Agree that the detailed provisions of the council's final scheme remains broadly similar to that currently published on the Council's website with the exception other amendments required to reflect continued changes to welfare benefits and Universal Credit.
- delegate responsibility to make any minor and consequential changes, including the correction of accidental errors, necessary to the detailed provision as a result of any changes in the regulations upon which the scheme is based to the Strategic Director of Resources following consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member for Finance and Resources.
- note that before any significant changes to the scheme reducing or removing support could be made that a statutory consultation would need to be carried out.

On being put to the vote, the motion was **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**.

54. FEES & CHARGES 2023/24

It was moved by Councillor Douglas and seconded by Councillor Rayner that the Council:

- agree the schedule of Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 3 of the report
- agree the proposal that Fees and Charges can be uplifted as early as 1st February 2024 and no later than 1st April 2024.
- note the increase in statutory planning application fees set by parliament from the 6th December 2023 outlined in 3.8.1. of the report.

On being put to the vote, the motion was **CARRIED**.

55. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

It was moved by Councillor Pye and seconded by Councillor Patel that the Council:

- note the Scrutiny Advisory Group Action Plan at Appendix 2, and, to take effect following the annual meeting in 2024:
- agree the proposed scrutiny structure and remits at appendix 1 to be appended to the general terms of reference for scrutiny committees,

- agree the creation of a Joint Health Scrutiny Lead Member with an SRA equivalent to that of a scrutiny Chair and note that a role profile will be developed for approval by the Council.
- agree the removal of the SRA for the Chair of the Public Transport Liaison Group and creation of a new Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Chair's SRA of £15,989.
- note that pending Council's decision to agree a new scrutiny committee structure, necessary amendments to the Scrutiny Procedure Rules will be considered by the Constitution Working Group for agreement by Council in early 2024.

There was debate in which Councillor Akram spoke, following which, Councillor Pye exercised her right of reply.

On being put to the vote, the motion was **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**.

56. HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

It was moved by Councillor Asghar and seconded by Councillor Mitchell that the Council:

- note the rationale for proposed updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board terms of reference.
- note that the core statutory functions and statutory membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board are unchanged.
- agree the updated Health and Wellbeing Board terms of reference.

On being put to the vote, the motion was **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**.

57. APPOINTMENTS

The Council **AGREED** the following appointments:

Committees:

Housing Scrutiny

Cllr Shumon Ali-Rahman to replace Cllr Kira Lewis

Corporate Parenting Board

Cllr Shumon Ali-Rahman to replace Cllr Sally Littlejohn

Pension Board

Natasha Brown – Employer Representative

The Council rose at 9.23 pm having completed its business.