

**London Borough of Waltham Forest
Minutes of the Cabinet**

22 February 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present:

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 Ahsan Khan	Deputy Leader (Housing and Regeneration)
	Councillor Khevyn Limbajee	Portfolio Lead Member - Community Safety
	Councillor Louise Mitchell	Portfolio Lead Member - Adults

(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.)

Councillor Elizabeth Baptiste	Cabinet Commissioner - Renters
Councillor Catherine Deakin	Cabinet Commissioner - Health Equity
Councillor Rosalind Doré	Cabinet Commissioner - Destinations
Councillor Sharon Waldron	Cabinet Commissioner - Housing Transformation

Officers in Attendance:

Linzi Roberts-Egan	Chief Executive
Ian Buckle	Head of Electoral and Democratic Services
Laura Butterworth	Director of Early Help and Prevention
Ursula Gamble	Director of Financial Services
Joe Garrod	Acting Strategic Director, Place
Anthony Jackson	Democratic Services Officer

Debbie Porter	Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods and Environment
Lisa Redfern	Interim Strategic Director, Adult Services
Chris Spencer	Interim Strategic Director, Children Services
Kim Travis	Deputy Monitoring Officer

74. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

75. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

76. Minutes of Cabinet

The minutes of the meeting, held on 11 January 2024, were approved and signed as a correct record.

77. Financial Monitoring Month 9 (December)

Councillor Douglas introduced the report.

Decision

Cabinet approved the transfer of £0.078 million from the contingency fund to Housing for the Housing Transformation Project as detailed in paragraph 3.43 of the report.

78. Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024/25

The Leader invited Ms Sonia McKenzie to address Cabinet, on behalf of Tenants and Residents Association representing Fred Wigg & John Walsh Towers who, in summary, made the following points:

- The fact that the content of the report, particularly the Capital Programme, would have an impact on over 500 people who lived in Fred Wigg & John Walsh Towers, Montague Road Estate, Leytonstone.
- The Council had misled tenants in its letter, dated February 2024, by suggesting that the removal of the insulation was an urgent requirement following receipt of an enforcement notice from the London Fire Brigade (LFB) which was not the case.
- The Council seemed to be planning to take away the insulation without having the money to replace it. This could bring about instances of damp and mould and leave tenants subject to cold.

- Funding for planned works on the Towers, previously agreed by Cabinet, was no longer available which meant there was no funding for new kitchens and bathrooms which was a priority for tenants.
- The Council had spent a significant amount of money and living conditions for tenants were worse.

Ms McKenzie confirmed that tenants would like:

- a second opinion on what works should be undertaken;
- fire detection systems installed in communal areas and to stop wasting money on Waking Watch;
- the ventilation improved by rolling back the shutters as tenants had been requesting for a number of years;
- to object to the Council removing security doors; and
- to be consulted on any proposed works.

The Leader thanked Ms McKenzie for her points and confirmed that Councillor Khan would respond to her points later in the meeting.

Councillor Paul Douglas introduced the report and, in doing so, gave thanks to Rob Manning – Strategic Director of Resources; Ursula Gamble, the finance team and to wider Council officers for the hard work put into the report. He said there was recognition by the Council that change was needed for the betterment of residents. Councillor Douglas stated that, in order to continue to provide for residents, Council Tax had had to be increased which allowed the provision of much needed services to continue. He pointed out that prices were not falling and that the cost of living crisis was expected to last for a few more years. Councillor Douglas highlighted the fact that funding from Central Government had decreased by more than a third (since the Conservative administration came into power) and that local authorities were paying the price for Central Government's incompetence. He said that LBWF was a well ran Council with good intention for residents and confirmed that it was a challenge to continue to provide for them in the same way. Councillor Douglas stated that the current budget setting process was the most effective in which he had been involved during his time at LBWF. Councillor Douglas went on to say that he endorsed the recommendations from the Budget and Performance Scrutiny Committee. He pointed out that, unlike the private sector, local authorities needed to get things right first time as they did not have the money to fail and try another approach as many private sector companies could. Councillor Douglas concluding by confirming that a very good and balanced budget was being presented and that it underpinned the Medium Term Financial Strategy. He acknowledged that there was still a lot of work to do and that it was Members' responsibility to ensure that money was being spent appropriately and for the benefit of residents.

Councillor Khan thanked Ms McKenzie for addressing Cabinet and explained that in relation to the Montague Road Estate there were no easy choices. He said that the intention was to offer a ballot process to tenants presenting options around estate regeneration or the pursual of a maintenance programme. Councillor Khan stated that there was a planned maintenance programme on the estate which was focussed on fire and building safety and decent homes which included new kitchens and bathrooms. He explained that as part of developing wider options, the decent homes

works was paused to focus on fire and building safety works. Councillor Khan went on to explain that the Council had not been able to reach a position to ballot residents as the project was not viable due to market conditions. He said that it was appropriate to be transparent with residents and set out the reasons why the ballot would need to be pushed back and allow the Council to work with the Greater London Authority and Central Government to find a way of closing the current viability gap in relation to the estate. Councillor Khan stated that he hoped to be able to go to residents in the near future with a ballot for viable schemes. He then referred to the enforcement notice from the LFB and confirmed that the Council would work to respond to all recommendations that they had made. Councillor Khan then confirmed that Council officers would ensure that residents' safety would not be compromised, despite the depletion of the Housing Revenue Account reserves. He stated that decent homes on all estates across the borough would be prioritised in the capital works programme and confirmed that a drop in centre for residents to meet with officers was available on a weekly basis to enable them to speak about their individual needs. Councillor Khan committed to responding to Ms McKenzie in writing in relation to her point about the shutters, ventilation and removal of the security doors. He added that he appreciated that there were now issues around trust between residents of the estate and the Council, however, confirmed that the Council wanted to work collaboratively with residents and would look at how communications could be strengthened, alongside available drop-ins, as the Council recognised that residents needed to be kept up to date as the next stage of the programme approached.

Councillor Loakes referred to the many changes that had come from Central Government that had cut public services over a sustained period of 14 years. He said that the Council had protected many areas including the most vulnerable and the statutory services the Council was required to deliver. Councillor Loakes spoke of the deliberate political attempt to undermine public services and pointed out that the NHS, the Police and Schools were deeply underfunded and confirmed that the Council would endeavour to apply pressure to Central Government where it could. He stated that the majority of Councils, of all political complexities, were in difficult situations, many in worse states than LBWF. Councillor Loakes went on to say that Central Government did not value local government and that their actions was having very real impacts on residents. He said that, as a result, the Council needed to make very difficult decisions, to be imaginative to enable frontline services to continue to be delivered. Councillor Loakes then paid tribute to Councillor Douglas and finance officers for their work on a very difficult budget.

Councillor Mitchell said that approximately a third of the Council's total spend was attributed to adult services. She paid tribute to Councillor Douglas and relevant officers for their work on the budget report, as well as to staff in adults' and children's services who had a very difficult job with decreasing resources. Councillor Mitchell then said she was grateful to those in LBWF who paid the council tax including the 2.99% precept which was specifically reserved for adult social care. She confirmed that the amount allowed the service to be maintained. Councillor Mitchell highlighted that the precept was reserved for this year and that there was no indication from Central Government that it would continue and, as a result, there was no way to know what the budget for adult services would be next year or for residents to plan for their care. She pointed out that previous Prime Minister Boris Johnson had said

that he had a plan to fix adult social care, however, that plan had never materialised. Councillor Mitchell went on to say that Central Government needed to step up, make plans and provide funding to enable local government to provide much needed services.

The Leader explained that Central Government had a social contract with all residents to provide services such as access to schools, GPs and other services. She stated that the Government was failing and pointed to some of the impacts that had been heard previously from Ms McKenzie. The Leader said that the threat to public services was deliberate and highlighted the fact that there had been no financial input into a number of services for many years such as public health. She also pointed out that LBWF had not been considered an inner London borough for many years which impacted retention and recruitment. The Leader went on to say that complexity, demand and need was continuing to rise in the community and this was very evident during the pandemic. She said the Government had failed to address the housing crisis, the social care crisis and had allowed the situation to get worse. The Leader pointed out that some Councils had had to raise the council tax by 20% which indicated a failing system. She went on to say that although there were many tough decisions taken where the Council had no choice, there were also many areas where the Council could make choices, including how to prioritise and target the Council's services – such as supporting the most vulnerable of residents and supporting foodbanks. The Leader stated that the way the budget had been addressed was testament to the commitment of officers and she gave particular thanks to Councillor Douglas, the finance team for their hard work and attention to detail. The Leader also gave thanks to the Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet Members for their efforts. She confirmed that LBWF would continue to engage residents and would be as open and as transparent as possible.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) recommended to Full Council that the Waltham Forest basic amount of council tax, including the levying bodies, will be increased by 2.99% in 2024/25;
- (2) recommended to Full Council that the 2% permitted increase for Adult Social Care will be applied bringing the total increase to 4.99% and resulting in a council tax of £1,702.32 per Band D property in 2024/25;
- (3) noted that the element of council tax charged by the Greater London Authority will be £471.40 per Band D property in 2024/25 which reflects an increase of £37.26 (8.58%);
- (4) recommended to Full Council that the overall council tax to be set for 2024/25 will be £2,173.72 per Band D property, which represents an overall increase of 5.75%;
- (5) recommended to Full Council that the projected budget (as set out in Appendix 1 to the report) for 2024/25 of £474.969 million is approved;
- (6) considered and noted the whole of the Strategic Director of Resources report made under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 as set out in

Appendix 2 to the report and, in particular, their determination in the Financial Implications of this report on “the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations, and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves”;

(7) noted the amount of 81,322 (an increase of 1,201 over the previous year), as the Council Tax Base for the Council for 2024/25, in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended);

(8) recommended to Full Council that the following amounts be approved for 2024/25 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Act 1992, as amended (the Act):

(a) Gross Expenditure

£1,043.416 million – being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items in Sections 31A (2) of the Act;

(b) Gross Income

£904.980 million – being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items in Sections 31A (3) of the Act;

(c) Net Expenditure

£138.436 million – being the amounts by which the aggregate at (a), exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year;

(d) LBWF Basic Amount of Council Tax including the Adult Social Care Precept

£1,702.32 – being the amount at (c) above, divided by 81,322 (the Council Tax Base), calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year and includes the Adult Social Care Precept of £246.00.

(e) Valuation Bands

Band		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Basic	£	970.88	1,132.70	1,294.51	1,456.32	1,779.94	2,103.58	2,427.20	2,912.64
Social Care	£	164.00	191.33	218.67	246.00	300.67	355.33	410.00	492.00
Total LBWF	£	1,134.88	1,324.03	1,513.18	1,702.32	2,080.61	2,458.91	2,837.20	3,404.64

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (d) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the 1992 Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band, divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in Valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the 1992 Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

(f) noted that’s for 2024/25 the Greater London Assembly (GLA) has stated that (with formal ratification on 22 February 2024) that the following amounts in precepts be issued to the Council in accordance

with Section 40 of the Local Government Act 1992 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below;

Band		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Total	£	314.27	366.64	419.02	471.40	576.16	680.91	785.67	942.80

- (g) recommended to Full Council, that, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (e) and (f) above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 sets the following amounts of council tax for 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwellings shown:

Band		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Total	£	1,449.15	1,690.67	1,932.20	2,173.72	2,656.77	3,139.82	3,622.87	4,347.44

- (h) noted that the relevant basic amount of council tax for a Band D property (excluding precepts but now including levies) for the financial year 2024/25 be £1,702.32, which reflects a 2.99% increase, plus 2% Adult Social Care precept permitted increase for 2024/25 and therefore does not require a referendum;
- (9) agreed that the Strategic Director of Resources and the officers nominated by him be authorised to finalise the necessary publicity as required by Section 38 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to promote the first day of the month instalment dates, and the six date options within each month for Direct Debit payers, as previously agreed;
- (10) noted that in order to ensure the required period of notice is given, council taxpayers will be requested to pay their instalments on the first of each month commencing on 1 April 2024;
- (11) agreed, in accordance with the Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, to continue to maintain the maximum percentage allowed by current legislation for the empty home's premium from 1 April 2024;
- (12) agreed in accordance with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Clause 76) to charge a premium of 100% on dwellings that have been empty for one year from 1 April 2024;
- (13) agreed in accordance with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Clause 77) to give notice of the intention to charge a premium of 100% on dwellings which are "substantially furnished" but have no "resident" (e.g., second homes) from 1 April 2025;
- (14) agreed for the purposes of calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit, any war disablement pension, war widow's or war widower's pension which would otherwise be treated as income for the purposes of calculating entitlement to housing benefit should be disregarded in its entirety.
- (15) agreed to the inclusion of collection fund surpluses and deficits (as per paragraphs 6.21 and 6.22 of the report) within the budget from 1st April 2024 which have previously been transferred to the taxation fluctuation reserve;
- (16) agreed the Capital Programme for 2023-2034 as set out in Appendix 9 of the report;

- (17) agreed the reserves strategy at Appendix 6 of the report and noted that the Strategic Director of Resources has delegated responsibility for the use of reserves throughout the year;
- (18) recommended to Full Council the amended fees and charges for 2024/25 as shown in Appendix 5 of the report;
- (19) agreed funding of £2.518 million, as the initial mobilisation investment, to drive forward work across the 12 identified transformation areas. The purpose of this investment is to; (1) begin to unlock any immediate savings opportunities related to each programme, (2) mobilise each programme through an initial discovery and design phase, including the development of robust business cases targeted at broader financial sustainability, and (3) ensure overall leadership and assurance across the programmes to enable monitoring and tracking of benefits and impact;
- (20) reconfirmed that on winding up of the Mears JV (More Homes Waltham Forest LLP) once any outstanding debt financing relating to the assets has been cleared the Balance of the Capital Return Allocation be transferred or paid to the London Borough of Waltham Forest Pension Fund. This is required to be reconfirmed annually within the budget report by the fund actuaries noting the original decision was made in February 2019 Council meeting; and
- (21) adopted the recommendations in the Budget and Performance Scrutiny Committee Cabinet referral.

79. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Including Tenants Rents and Service Charges 2024/25

Councillor Khan introduced the report and, in doing so, gave thanks to Natalie Gasper – Strategic Finance Advisor and relevant finance and housing officers for their hard work.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed a HRA dwelling rent increase of 7.7% (September CPI + 1%) in line with The Social Housing Regulator's Rent Standard and agreed that on average rents will increase by £9.10 from £118.19 to £127.29 per week, with effect from 1st April 2024;
- (2) agreed the level of tenant service charges, as set out in paragraph 3.9 of the report, to recover costs from tenants receiving the service;
- (3) agreed an increase in garage rents of 10% (£1.55) for residents and 20% (£3.10) for non-residents, from 1st April 2024;

- (4) noted the increase in shared ownership rents will be made in line with the provisions of the relevant lease;
- (5) reviewed and agreed the proposals for the HRA Budget for 2024/25, as set out in section 3.4 of the report;
- (6) agreed to increase the rent and service charges for sheltered accommodation by 7.7%, in line with rents for general needs council housing;
- (7) agreed to continue to link temporary accommodation rent charges to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels; and
- (8) agreed to increase charges for travellers' sites by 7.7%, in line with HRA dwelling rents.

80. Capital Investment Strategy 2023/24 - 2033/34

Councillor Khan introduced the report and, in doing so, gave thanks to Joe Garrod, Craig Egglestone – Director of Capital Strategy and Portfolio Management, his team and relevant finance officers for their hard work.

The Leader stated that it was a very ambitious strategy for investment which had a clear framework that focused on affordable housing and the need to prioritise legal and health and safety statutory obligations. She also pointed out that the process was fair as the projects that were paused, as set out in the report, were spread across the borough.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed the Capital Investment Strategy 2023/24 – 2033/34, attached as Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) noted that the Strategy will be reviewed and refreshed annually and reported to Cabinet for approval, supporting its overall Budget setting process;
- (3) agreed the Capital Prioritisation Framework within the Strategy and that the prioritisation process is managed by the officer-led Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group (CSAMG) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT), ahead of relevant approvals by Cabinet or Portfolio Lead Members;
- (4) agreed that no financing sources, unless stipulated in regulations or necessary agreements, are ringfenced; and
- (5) noted that the financing of the capital programme is delegated to the Strategic Director of Resources to provide sufficient flexibility to allow for the most effective use of Council resources.

81. Adoption of the Waltham Forest Local Plan (Part 1)

Councillor Khan introduced the report and, in doing so confirmed that he was very pleased with the ambition in the report and gave the view that it was one of the most ambitious Local Plans in London. He said that he was pleased that LBWF was one of the Councils that had progressed with the Local Plan despite Central Government removing national housing targets. Councillor Khan stated that the Council had performed above the national average and had delivered 93% of its housing targets which ensured that the borough's infrastructure kept pace with growth. He gave thanks to all officers involved in the report, including Joe Garrod, Sarah Parsons - Assistant Director - Place and Design, and Ian Rae – Director of Regeneration, Planning and Delivery.

The Leader stated that the Local Plan development was an intense process and had been in development for a number of years. She echoed Councillor Khan's words of thanks to relevant officers and added her thanks to Stewart Murray – Strategic Director, Place who had done considerable work on this area over the years.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) noted the content of the Inspectors' Final Report into the soundness of the Waltham Forest Local Plan (Part 1) (LP1) (Appendix 2 to the report), including their conclusion that subject to Main Modifications (Appendix 3 to the report), the Plan is sound, legally compliant and capable of adoption and satisfies the requirements referred to in Section 20(5)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended);
- (2) endorsed and recommended that Full Council:
 - (a) adopt the Waltham Forest Local Plan (Part 1) (LP1) (Appendix 1 to the report) in accordance with Section 23 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended), which includes:
 - (i) the Main Modifications to the submission version of the Local Plan, as recommended in the Inspectors' Final Report and set out in Appendix 3 to the report; and
 - (ii) the additional modifications proposed by Officers, as set out in Appendix 4 to the report;
 - (b) from 12th April 2024 (the expiry of the statutory six week legal challenge period), revoke the Council's current adopted Core Strategy (2012), the Waltham Forest Development Management Policies (2013), the Walthamstow Town Centre Area Action Plan (2014) and the Blackhorse Lane Area Action Plan (2015) provided that no challenge has been lodged during the six week period;

- (c) authorise the Corporate Director – Regeneration, Planning & Delivery to make further typographical amendments necessary to the Plan prior to its publication;
- (d) authorise the Corporate Director – Regeneration, Planning & Delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration, to finalise and publish an Adoption Statement (draft at Appendix 6 to the report) and Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement (draft at Appendix 7 to the report) in accordance with Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012;
- (e) authorise the Corporate Director – Regeneration, Planning & Delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration, to finalise and publish an updated Policies Map, reflecting the adopted Plan, including Main Modifications set out in Appendix 3 to the report;
- (f) from 12th April 2024 (the expiry of the statutory six week legal challenge period) revoke the superseded Supplementary Planning Documents listed in paragraph 3.2 of the report provided that no challenge has been lodged during the six weeks; and
- (g) approve the Waltham Forest Local Development Scheme (LDS), at Appendix 8 to the report, to take effect immediately.

82. Mission Waltham Forest

The Leader introduced the report and, in doing so, stated that providing much needed services for residents had become much more difficult and that residents were facing a wider range of challenges such as climate change and community safety. She said that those challenges needed to be addressed with residents and that their voices were of paramount importance. The Leader gave the example of flooding as a result of climate change and stated that the Council did not necessarily have the funds to address such issues and as a result, there was a need for the Council to work closely with partners. She also explained that the Council needed to change the way it worked in terms of residents' experience as the Council could not be as responsive as it would like to be. The Leader pointed out that staff were the Council's greatest asset and highlighted the importance of having a strategy with staff at the heart. She then said that the Council were aware that it needed to change the way it operated and that that change would be a process in consultation with Members, staff, residents, and partners.

Councillor Douglas stated that the budget underpinned the report as the Council did not have much money and needed to be clever about how resources would be used and ensure that any changes made worked first time.

Councillor Limbajee referred to the Citizen’s Assembly which was an innovative way to engage residents and partners. He also pointed to the Safe Streets pilot which would take the best learning and build upon it to meet the aspirations of residents.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed Mission Waltham Forest: our plan for a more equal borough, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, and recommended it to Full Council for final adoption as part of the Council’s Policy Framework to replace 15-Minute Neighbourhoods: Our Corporate Framework; and
- (2) delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the authority to approve minor changes or corrections to the proposed Mission Waltham Forest: our plan for a more equal borough, in advance of recommending Mission Waltham Forest: our plan for a more equal borough to Full Council.

83. Senior Management Restructure

The Leader introduced the report.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed the new directorate ‘Stronger Communities’ within the Deputy Chief Executive’s portfolio as set out in the Appendix A to the report; and
- (2) agreed the following changes to the Council’s Senior Management Structure:
 - Deletion of the position Strategic Director People – DCS/DASS
 - Creation of Strategic Director Children Services (DCS)
 - Creation of Strategic Director Adult Services (DASS)
 - The post of Corporate Director of Strategy and Change report to the Chief Executive
 - The post of Corporate Director of Communications and Campaigns report to the Chief Executive
 - The post of Corporate Director of Culture & Workforce Development report to the Chief Executive

The meeting closed at 2.59 pm

Chair’s Signature _____

Date _____

