

Decisions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23 January 2024

Members Present:-

Councillor Danny Rich (Chair)
Councillor Daniel Thomas (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Edith David	Councillor Paul Lemon
Councillor Dean Cohen	Councillor Arjun Mittra
Councillor Richard Cornelius	Councillor Ernest Ambe
Councillor Giulia Innocenti	Councillor David Longstaff (Substitute for
Councillor Emma Whysall	Councillor Alex Prager)

Also in attendance

Councillor Ross Houston
Councillor Ammar Naqvi
Councillor Barry Rawlings
Councillor Alan Schneiderman

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Alex Prager

COUNCILLOR DANNY RICH, CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE, WELCOMED ALL ATTENDEES TO THE MEETING.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

In relation to the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2023, a committee member questioned the accuracy of the minutes in relation to item 6 (Brent Cross Plot 1) the Chair noted that in response to a question on the whether the scheme could proceed without the loan, the Cabinet Member had confirmed the scheme would not progress without the loan. It was agreed that the minutes would be amended to reflect this.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2023 be approved as a correct record subject to amendment detailed above.

In relation to the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2023, the following corrections were agreed:

- To delete Councillor Zinkin's double attendance
- To amend item 3 to read: "Councillor Danny Rich and Councillor Anne Hutton declared a non-pecuniary interest as they were trustees of Barnet Carers, and Barnet Carers received money from the London Borough of Barnet.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2023 be approved as a correct record subject to the amendments detailed above.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS (IF ANY)

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Alex Prager who had been substituted for by Councillor David Longstaff.

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS (IF ANY)

Councillor Arjun Mitra declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 7, as his family are tenants of Barnet Homes and that one of the families receiving retrofitting are known to him.

Councillor David Longstaff declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 7, as a governor at Foulds Primary School which is part of the current retrofitting programme.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

None.

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

7. TOWARDS NET ZERO - DECARBONISATION OF THE CORPORATE ESTATE

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change introduced the report stating that the decarbonisation of council buildings and properties was a key part of the Council's commitment to reach Net Zero by 2030. There are ambitions to go further but will depend on future funding opportunities.

The Assistant Director for Estates and Decarbonisation gave an overview of the report stating that the decarbonisation journey from 2018 led to applications for grant funding which had pushed programme forward. The project was building business cases for additional borrowing to keep the programme going in context of financial constraints.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was reported that the retrofit programme could save money as schools benefit from cheaper utility bills and avoid provider costs. Officers also confirmed that they could calculate both financial and carbon savings.

A Committee Member asked if the programme could be halted if it is found to be unsuccessful and if the schools will be required to fund running costs of the new retrofit systems are found to be more expensive.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Council would use the latest technology and would adapt as technology changes. It was noted that so far, the retrofit programme had

been working well, but this would be continually reviewed. Officers confirmed that the schools were responsible for their own utility bills and any savings would go to the school. It was noted that Council had funded the installation costs.

Councillor David Longstaff reported he was on the Finance Committee in the Foulds School and understood there was provision in the contract to cover any additional costs for utilities.

Officers noted that early calculations show savings in schools. Technology such as air source heat pumps were keeping costs down and more data would be available in winter 2024/25. Officers confirmed that schools would be revisited to do insulation where possible to keep costs down further.

A Committee Member queried the scale of the project to retrofit all council buildings by 2030, with the reported delay in early phases. It was questioned how many buildings would need to be completed per annum to reach the 2030 goal. Officers confirmed that delays had been caused by UK Power Networks capacity to cope with additional demand. There was a Net Zero team to support the catchment area and respond quickly which should lead to fewer delays going forward. The project was completing higher emission buildings first such as schools. It was noted that the Council needed to spend £10m per year to reach 2030 deadline. There were 90 assets in the Managed Estate, but not all need same amount of work.

In response to questions from the Committee about the involvement of local organisations and the private sector, officers confirmed that there was a re-procurement process taking place which would allow greater involvement of public sector partners. There had been interest from the RAF Museum and Barnet College to have access to the contract. It was not open to private sector partners at this stage.

A Committee Member asked if the Council had undertaken any comparisons with other boroughs with progress on retrofitting and decarbonisation. Officers confirmed that this information could be obtained from Retrofit for London and shared with the Committee.

Action: Assistant Director, Estates and Decarbonisation

In response to a question about the temperature of the buildings during the summer and impact of use of air conditioning, officers confirmed that they would monitor the impact in the caretaker's home as an example. Retrofitting should balance the heat and cold in the buildings, but the impact will be monitored.

Councillor Emma Whysall moved a recommendation that was duly seconded for the Cabinet Member to explore ways of leveraging private sector investment in this programme, to provide actions taken to date, what else can be done to enable the private sector in Barnet to also benefit from accessing technology. This was unanimously agreed. **Action: Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change**

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Note the progress with the Towards Net Zero (TNZ) Programme of works, and the ongoing determination to continue programmes of work over the next two years, within a defined budget to be agreed by Cabinet by March 2024.**
- 2. Request that the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change explore ways of leveraging private sector investment in this programme, to provide actions taken to date, what else can be done to enable the private sector in**

Barnet to also benefit from accessing technology and provide feedback to the Committee.

8. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS (RPS)

Councillor Ross Houston, Cabinet Member for Homes & Regeneration, and Cath Shaw, Deputy Chief Executive, presented an overview of the report stating that it provided performance data from the main registered providers in the Borough. It was noted that this was a detailed report and some of data was from borough level and some London wide.

The Committee asked how the ratings were determined as Ward Councillors had found high levels of dissatisfaction with the repair work and timeliness of their responses, particularly in relation to Notting Hill Genesis. Officers confirmed that the data had been gathered via a questionnaire sent to all housing associations who provided feedback on how they were performing.

The Committee said we needed to reconsider this approach and have direct engagement with residents to obtain true satisfaction data as Ward Councillors had not seen improvements in quality of service via their case work. The Committee further queried the methodology of data collection and if comparison data was available or independent data as the data available makes it difficult to draw out meaningful conclusions, without a uniform methodology for data collection.

The Cabinet Member for Homes and Regeneration said there is a new regulatory regime on how repairs and other information is recorded, and it would lead to better standardisation of data. The department are also working with regulators to get better comparable data.

Officers confirmed that the Committee could influence what data is reported in future. Future data collection can be done differently and presented in the performance review for next year. **Action: Scrutiny Officers to work with Customer & Place officers on alternative formats to present information in future years reports.**

A committee member said whilst they recognise that housing providers are under pressure, there has been a lack of engagement with residents, we need to get feedback from resident's associations, not just the providers.

A Committee Member also raised concerns about Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association speed of repairs. In addition, it was questioned what was being to address anti-social behaviour on the Grahame Park Estate.

The Deputy Chief Executive said standardisation of data would help and give us confidence that the data provided by the registered providers was reliable. The Housing team were also committed to community engagement and would be holding community listening events, but noted that there were resource implications of conducting a direct resident's survey. It was suggested that when we had an understanding of the new regime, the Council could determine our approach and any supplementary work which needed to be undertaken.

The Chair suggested that the Committee could invite the registered providers to attend a future meeting to respond to questions about the concerns raised.

A Committee Member sought clarification on social rents for different size accommodation as there was a lot of variation including a three bed being cheaper than one bed home. Officers confirmed that the rents took into account the benefits cap and made some of the large units affordable, and there were on-going discussions on the cost of rents in some particular developments.

A Committee Member asked if any performance data was available from the registered providers regarding tackling damp and mould. The Cabinet Member said reporting was not standard, and there were varying levels of knowledge in registered providers and different reporting levels. It was being taken seriously and was a challenge. Regulators would look at it as part of the standardisation process. It was reported that Barnet Homes has a damp and mould action plan.

Councillor Emma Whysall moved recommendations below which were duly seconded and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Note the Barnet Annual Performance Review of Registered Providers.**
- 2. Request that the Cabinet Member for Homes & Regeneration and officers explore amending the format of the registered providers report which is due in September/October 2024, with a revised approach on the presentation of the data based on the new regulatory regime. The report to this committee is to include the detailed data to provide the committee with context to scrutinise the information.**
- 3. The Committee request that officer facilitate a meeting with tenants and registered providers in advance of the next committee meeting where registered provider performance is considered to explore issues around disrepair and satisfaction ratings and report its findings.**
- 4. Request feedback on what action had been taken by Notting Hill Genesis to address the anti-social behaviour on the Graeme Park Estate.**
- 5. Requested that the Cabinet Member for Homes & Regeneration and officers to explore the standard of reporting on damp and mould across the registered providers.**

9. CULTURE STRATEGY PROGRESS BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure, Arts and Sports gave an overview of the report and began by thanking officers for their contribution to developing the strategy. This was an opportunity for this Committee to undertake pre-decision scrutiny on the strategy before it is presented to Cabinet.

The Committee noted that the report didn't recognise the rich and diverse culture which already exists in Barnet and it was considered that we may not need to promote culture in an obvious way.

In response to a query if the Steering Group would be widened to include additional diversity from faith communities, the elderly, schools, and universities, it was reported that representation on the Group was based on those who responded to an invitation to join the Group rather than targeting specific communities.

It was noted that the Strategy should have outcomes and actions, and it was questioned how success would be measured. It was reported that the Steering Group would be vocal about what was being delivered, and external surveys could be used for comparison to see if a difference had been made. The Committee agreed that a recommendation should be added to request that this information be included in the Strategy.

In response to questions about how the Strategy would, be funded it was reported that if Barnet is successful as the Borough of Culture bid it would come with funding and resources. All work streams would be delivered directly by the council as there were opportunities to use leverage and enabling powers. The Cabinet Member confirmed that officers were involved in developing report and it delivery of the Strategy was financially viable.

Committee Members asked about representation from the local businesses. It was reported that Town Centre Teams had been engaged as part of the process and would feed into the work of the steering group.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. To note the contents of this report and the Culture Strategy Briefing Paper.**
- 2. The Cabinet Member is asked for the draft culture strategy report to Cabinet to include examples of what can be achieved and metrics to determine what has been achieved.**

10. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER REPORT – 2023/24 Q3 FINANCIAL FORECAST AND 2023/24 BUDGET MANAGEMENT

Councillor Barry Rawlings, Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources & Effective Council, and Anisa Darr, the Executive Director of Strategy & Resources (Section 151 Officer), gave an overview of the report highlighting that work has been undertaken to reduce the overspend which had now reduced significantly and work would continue to reduce it further.

The Committee asked about the increase in payment for residents parking permits and pay and display, and reduced payments for penalty charge notices (PCN). It was noted that this is not driven by the cost-of-living crisis. The Leader reported that PCN's income was higher, but less than budgeted, so there was a deficit in forecasted figures.

In response to a query about opportunities for shared services, officers confirmed that opportunities were being considered including with children's services, adult social care commissioning, and hospital discharge arrangements.

In response to concerns raised about debt from NHS, the Assistant Director of Resources reported that the original debt of £30 million had been reduced to £23m. There was a commitment from the NHS commitment to pay a further £14m. There was

around £3m–£4m which is disputed between the Council and NHS and it was reported that regulators would review this. It was also noted that some funds would be written off, but actual figures are not known at the moment.

The Executive Director of Strategy & Resources said she would circulate Council Tax debt collection comparison rates for London separately or will include it in the Budget report. When asked why the income parenting hubs has not been achieved. The Leader reported councils have service pressures and are using family centre in a different way.

Action: Executive Director of Strategy & Resources

In response to a question about the Brent Cross West project and if a delay would lead to an escalation of costs, officers confirmed that the project had been paused as the site was being explored with a Business Case being produced, which may cost more, but will have better outcomes.

A Committee Member asked about court costs awarded and why the Council only collected half, and if the delay in receiving income was having an impact. Officers confirmed that court costs are sometime paid back via payment plans, which can defer the income, but means that it would ultimately be received.

In response to a query about EV charging including advertising portals income and how what proportion the council will receive, the Leader reported it was shared income.

The following recommendations that were moved, duly seconded and unanimously agreed.

That the Cabinet explore options for a deep dive into the special parking account

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. To note the contents of Chief Finance Officer Report – 2023/24 Quarter 3 Financial Forecast and 2023/24 Budget Management report.**
- 2. To receive the council tax debt collection comparison rates for London separately or will include it in the Budget report.**
- 3. Follow up on issues with the mobilisation of the Parenting Hub**

That the Cabinet be requested to explore options for a deep dive into the special parking

11. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS UPDATES

The Committee considered the report that provided an update on progress made to date by the ongoing Task and Finish Groups established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Sub-Committees.

Following consideration of the item, the Chair moved to vote on the recommendations in the report which were unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the updates on all Task and Finish Groups in progress and future Task and Finish Groups.

12. CABINET FORWARD PLAN (KEY DECISION SCHEDULE)

The Committee considered the report that sets out the Cabinet Forward Plan (Key Decision Schedule) for 2023/24. The Committee noted that the Plan included items that could be included in the committees work programme for pre-decision scrutiny during 2023/24.

Following consideration of the item, the Chair moved to vote on the recommendations in the report which were unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the Cabinet Forward Plan (Key Decision Schedule).

13. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023- 2024 Work Programmes for Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2. Note the proposal for work programming planning for 2024/35**
- 3. Add a review of the Arts Depot funding and value for money to the list for topic selection.**

14. ANY ITEM(S) THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting finished at 9.00 pm