

MINUTES OF CABINET

Tuesday, 22 March 2022
(7:00 - 8:29 pm)

Present: Cllr Darren Rodwell (Chair), Cllr Dominic Twomey (Deputy Chair), Cllr Sade Bright, Cllr Evelyn Carpenter, Cllr Cameron Geddes, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe, Cllr Margaret Mullane and Cllr Maureen Worby

Apologies: Cllr Saima Ashraf

90. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

91. Minutes (21 February 2022)

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2022 were confirmed as correct.

92. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 (Period 10, January 2022)

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services presented a report on the Council's revenue budget monitoring position for the 2021/22 financial year as at 31 January 2022 (period 10).

The Council's General Fund revenue budget for 2021/22 was £173.614m and the forecast outturn position at the end of January projected a net overspend of £4.051m once income had been taken into account, which represented a significant improvement of over £3m on the previous month's position.

The Cabinet Member also referred to a new, enhanced parking bay suspension service that was proposed in response to requests from utility contractors who carried out works in the Borough.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Note the projected revenue outturn forecast for the 2021/22 financial year as set out in sections 2 and 3 and Appendix A of the report;
- (ii) Note the update on savings proposals, as set out in section 4 of the report; and
- (iii) Agree the introduction of charges for an enhanced parking bay suspension service, as detailed in paragraph 5.1 of the report.

93. Foster Carer Rate and Benefits Uplift

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration introduced a report on proposals to increase the payment structure for foster carers in the Borough and other allowances associated with the service.

The Cabinet Member commented on the essential role of foster carers who provided stable and loving environments for the most vulnerable children in society and commended the high-quality provision given by the Borough's 'in-house' carers. The Cabinet Member pointed out that the payment structure had last been fully reviewed in 2008 which reinforced the urgent need to reassess the local rates, not only to properly recognise the role of current foster carers but to also attract new carers.

The review had been conducted in consultation with foster carers and had resulted in the development of a five-tier payment structure across three age groups (0-4, 5-10 and 11+) which reflected the differing needs of those in care. In addition, the allowances for children's holidays, birthday and religious festivals had been revised, with some increasing by 150%, and foster carers would be eligible for free access to the Borough's leisure centres operated by Everyone Active, mirroring the arrangements for foster children who already qualified for free access.

Cabinet Members spoke in full support of the uplift proposals and supported the intention for the allowances to be reviewed annually going forward.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Agree the increase of foster carer rates for Children's Care and Support as detailed in Appendix 4 to the report, effective from 1 April 2022;
- (ii) Agree the increase of foster children's holiday, birthday and festival allowances for Children's Care and Support as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report, effective from 1 April 2022;
- (iii) Agree that complimentary access to the Borough's leisure centres be given for in-house carers, effective from 1 April 2022; and
- (iv) Delegate authority to the Operational Director, Children's Care and Support, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration, to approve the fostering rates on an annual basis, which shall be published via the Council's annual 'Provider Uplift Policy' prior to the start of each fiscal year.

94. Covid-19 Additional Business Rates Relief Fund

The Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Aspiration presented a joint report on the proposed local arrangements for the allocation of Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) grant for 2021/22, following the publication in December 2021 of the Government's guidance for allocating the grant.

The Council had been allocated £4.59m funding with the expectation that it would be targeted at local businesses that had not received Business Rates relief through previous relief schemes during 2020/21 and 2021/22, such as those in the retail, hospitality, leisure and nursery sectors.

In order to ensure that the funding was allocated to small / medium size businesses that had received limited Government support to date, it was proposed that only those local businesses with a rateable value of up to £51,000 would be

eligible under the local scheme. That would enable an estimated 791 businesses to benefit from 90% Business Rates relief, representing an average 'saving' of £5,747 for each business. The Cabinet Member also spoke on a range of other initiatives that the Council had introduced since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the Barking and Dagenham Recovery Programme, developed in partnership with the Barking Enterprise Centre, which offered a targeted programme of tailored business support for local businesses most impacted by the pandemic. The main aim of the project was to increase businesses' long-term resilience and sustainability and it was anticipated that up to 200 businesses would receive dedicated 1-2-1 support and mentoring as well as a grant of up to £5,000, thereby helping to safeguard local jobs.

Cabinet **resolved** to approve the local policy for the award of Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund grant, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

95. Amendment of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for Children

Further to Minute 15 (18 June 2019), the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration introduced a report on the intention to dissolve the formal arrangement whereby the statutory responsibility for children's safeguarding rested with the Barking, Havering, and Redbridge (BHR) Safeguarding Partnership and return that responsibility to a local level, via the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Partnership (BDSCP).

The Cabinet Member explained that whilst the BHR Safeguarding Partnership had brought a number of benefits, it was now acknowledged by all partners that greater attention needed to be given at a local level to the specific safeguarding issues that each Council was faced with, due to the sheer number of cases being presented. There would continue to be an informal strategic overview arrangement whereby the three Councils would meet to discuss common and/or cross-cutting safeguarding issues; however, the statutory responsibility for children's safeguarding would return to a Borough-based approach as soon as possible.

Cabinet **resolved** to agree that the governance of the statutory responsibility for multi-agency safeguarding children revert to being at the local level with effect from April 2022, led by the statutory safeguarding partners through the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Partnership.

96. Be First Business Plan 2022-27

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services presented the five-year rolling Business Plan of Be First, the Council-owned company launched on 1 October 2017 with the key objective of driving forward the delivery of the Council's regeneration and place-making agenda.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Business Plan had been scrutinised and endorsed by Be First's Board and the Council's Shareholder Panel prior to being presented to Cabinet. The Business Plan included a review of the last 12 months' activities, the plans for the year ahead and the ongoing challenges relating to increased labour and materials costs associated with trading in a pandemic environment, Brexit, the situation in Ukraine, new fire safety regulations and

inflationary and interest rate concerns.

Despite those issues, the Cabinet Member advised that Be First expected to deliver 408 new homes in the Borough by the end of the current financial year and had made significant progress with a number of place-shaping projects, such as the new film studios, the relocation of London's main food markets to the Borough and the development of the Borough Local Plan, which was now with the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination. The Cabinet was also particularly pleased to learn that Be First had achieved a range of socio-economic outcomes during the year, which included:

- 140 new Barking and Dagenham jobs;
- 56 apprentices employed across sites;
- 244 work experience weeks delivered;
- 1,365 volunteering days; and
- circa £68m invested locally in the supply chain.

The commitments in the Business Plan for 2022/23 included the delivery of a further 480 new homes, undertaking a business effectiveness review to ensure that the company was "fit for the future" and maximising opportunities that would enable Be First to achieve, and potentially exceed, the annual £10.3m target return to the Council.

Cabinet Members welcomed the Business Plan and praised the partnership arrangements between the Council and Be First. The Chair also called on the Government to better support London local authorities with their regeneration proposals in the face of spiralling costs through enhanced subsidies.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Approve the Be First Business Plan 2022-27, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report;
- (ii) Authorise the Finance Director, in consultation with and on the advice of the Investment Panel, to take all necessary action to enable Be First to carry out its proposals under the Business Plan and to agree any minor variations to the Business Plan subject to the conditions in these recommendations;
- (iii) Authorise Be First and/or the Finance Director to enter into any procurement related agreement or commitment, including procuring the new Development Framework, required to enable the delivery of the Business Plan, subject to compliance with Subsidy rules, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (or any replacement thereof) and the Council's Constitution; and
- (iv) Authorise the Finance Director, in consultation with and on the advice of the Investment Panel, to grant loans and complete all necessary documents and negotiations to complete the projects set out in the Business Plans subject to all necessary due diligence and compliance with Subsidy rules, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (or any replacement thereof) and the Council's Constitution.

97. Air Quality Action Plan Delivery Update

Further to Minute 83 (15 February 2021), the Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety introduced an update report on the delivery of the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

The AQAP contained 49 actions and interventions that the Council had committed to delivering between 2021 and 2025 to improve air quality and reduce harmful emissions which impacted on public health and blighted local communities. The Cabinet Member highlighted several of the areas of progress that had been achieved in the first year of the AQAP's implementation, which included improvements to cycling and walking networks to encourage active travel, a major tree-planting programme, the introduction of free parking for electric and low emission vehicles, the Council's 'Cosy Homes' programme aimed at reducing emissions from buildings and the transition of the Council's vehicle fleet to electric.

An additional proposal related to introduction of new arrangements to discourage vehicle engine idling and raise driver awareness through positive engagement and targeted communications. The Cabinet Member confirmed that enforcement, via Fixed Penalty Notices, would only be used against those that refused to engage and comply.

The Cabinet Member also paid tribute to the work and support of the Council's Member Champion for Climate Change, who had been particularly helpful in identifying sources of external funding and best practice to support the implementation of the AQAP.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Note progress on the delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan;
- (ii) Agree that to promote the use of electric and low emission vehicles with between 0 – 50 emissions (CO₂) g/km, free parking concessions in respect of parking permits and Council on-street bays and car parks shall apply, as detailed in paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9 of the report; and
- (iii) Agree the introduction of new arrangements to discourage vehicle engine idling and raise driver awareness through positive engagement and targeted communications, including enforcement by means of the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices in cases where drivers refuse to comply, as detailed in paragraphs 2.21 - 2.23 of the report.

98. Procurement of a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced a report on the proposed procurement of a new Microsoft Enterprise Agreement via the CCS RM6068 Framework, which would provide the Council with all of its required Microsoft 365 licenses for the three-year period ending in May 2025.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Agree that the Council proceeds with the procurement of a contract for a

new Enterprise Agreement in accordance with the strategy set out in the report; and

- (ii) Delegate authority to the Finance Director, in consultation with the Strategic Director, Law and Governance, to award and enter into contract(s) / agreement(s) and any periods of extension with the chosen supplier(s) in accordance with the strategy set out in the report.

99. Debt Management Performance 2021/22 (Quarter 3)

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services introduced the performance report covering the third quarter of the 2021/22 financial year in respect of the Council's debt management functions.

The Cabinet Member referred to the plight of many residents who were experiencing severe financial problems due to a combination of COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis and the Government's welfare reforms, which was borne out by a 115% increase since March 2020 in the number of local residents now claiming Universal Credit. The Council had introduced a range of initiatives to support those in financial difficulty, including the Homes and Money Hub and the Council's discretionary Council Tax relief fund. In respect of the latter, the Cabinet Member pointed to a worrying increase in the number of residents citing their mental health as the main reason for requiring support via the relief fund, which for the first nine months of 2021/22 had already surpassed the total for the whole of 2020/21.

Cabinet **resolved** to note the performance of the debt management function carried out by the Council's Revenues service, including the improvement of collection rates and the continued recovery techniques applied to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

100. Claire Symonds, Interim Chief Executive and Managing Director

The Chair placed on record the Council's appreciation to Claire Symonds, Interim Chief Executive and Managing Director, who was attending her last meeting of the Cabinet before taking up the position of Chief Executive at the London Borough of Redbridge.

The Chair referred to Ms Symonds' significant contribution to the hugely successful transformation of the Council and its many achievements since she had joined the Council in 2015. The Chair referred in particular to Ms Symonds' leadership during her tenure as Interim Chief Executive over the past two years which coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, for which she was awarded the Freedom of the Borough on behalf of the entire workforce.

Several Cabinet Members expressed their appreciation to Ms Symonds for her commitment and support throughout the last 6½ years and the Chair extended the Council's very best wishes to Ms Symonds in her new role and for the future.