

MINUTES OF CABINET

Tuesday, 21 May 2024
(7:02 - 7:38 pm)

Present: Cllr Dominic Twomey (Deputy Chair in the Chair), Cllr Saima Ashraf (Deputy Chair), Cllr Sade Bright, Cllr Cameron Geddes, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Kashif Haroon, Cllr Jane Jones, Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe and Cllr Maureen Worby; Cllr John Dulwich and Cllr Simon Perry

Apologies: Cllr Darren Rodwell

1. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes (16 April 2024)

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2024 were confirmed as correct.

3. Local Hardship Scheme Policy 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Core Services reported on the extension of the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme to 30 September 2024.

By Minute 96 (21 March 2023), the Cabinet had approved a single Local Hardship Schemes policy that encompassed the HSF and the Council's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), Individual Assistance Payment (IAP) and Discretionary Council Tax Relief (DCTR) schemes. The new policy was also accompanied by a single application process in order to simplify the resident's journey and align policies and processes. The expectation at that time was that the HSF would close from 31 March 2024.

In light of the six-month extension of the HSF, the Cabinet Member presented updated DHP, HSF and DCTR scheme arrangements that would ensure that those most affected by the rising cost-of-living continued to receive financial hardship support. The Cabinet Member also referred to other cost-of-living support arrangements implemented by the Council and the impending difficulties that many were expected to face when migrated from legacy benefits to Universal Credit (UC) over the coming months, particularly as UC would be paid monthly as opposed to fortnightly.

Although welcoming any additional funding that would support local residents, Cabinet Members expressed their dismay that the Government had only chosen to extend the HSF for six months and were suggesting that the difficult times were over, despite the financial challenges that many would continue to experience.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Approve the Council's updated Discretionary Housing Payment, Household Support Fund and Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Scheme policy for 2024/25, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- (ii) Delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Core Services, to vary the allocation of funding and scheme criteria where appropriate to reflect future demand.

4. Contract for Provision of SEND and Children's Social Care Transport

The Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Disabilities presented a report on the proposed procurement of a new contract to provide home to school travel assistance for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), post-16 travel assistance and travel support for young people in the Council's care.

The Cabinet Member explained that there had been a significant increase in demand and complexity of requests for those services over the past year in particular. As a consequence, it was necessary to expand the number of service providers needed to support the Council's in-house Passenger Transport Service provision and, with that in mind, the new procurement would be let in separate lots covering:

- Taxi services for home to school transport for SEND children, young people and post-16 students;
- Additional transport requests for the support of Children's Social Care;
- Moving home services; and
- Secure transport.

As part of the preparations for the new contracts, the Cabinet Member advised that the Council's statutory policies in respect of home to school SEND assistance and post-16 travel assistance had been reviewed. Whilst the former remained unchanged, the latter had been updated to include a 12-week training programme for clients aimed at helping them travel unaided and gain more independence.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Approve the procurement of a four-year framework contract for the provision of SEND and Children's Social Care Transport services to ensure that the Council met its statutory responsibilities under the Education Act 1996 and Care Act 2014, in accordance with the strategy set out in the report; and
- (ii) Authorise the Strategic Director, Children and Adults, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Disabilities, the Strategic Director, Resources and the Head of Legal, to conduct the procurement and award and enter into the contract(s) and all other necessary or ancillary agreements to fully implement and effect the proposals.

5. Procurement of an Enforcement and Regulatory IT System

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety introduced a report on the proposed procurement of a new contract for the provision of Enforcement and Regulatory IT System services.

The current system supporting the Enforcement and Regulatory IT systems had been in use for approximately 30 years. The Cabinet Member outlined the range of services that would be encompassed within the new, maximum seven-year contract and the benefits that were expected to be achieved, which included improved processing efficiency, reduced administration via process automation and an improved customer experience.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Agree that the Council proceeds with the procurement of a contract for an Enforcement and Regulatory IT System in accordance with the strategy set out in the report; and
- (ii) Authorise the Operational Director of Enforcement, Regulatory Services and Community Safety, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety, the Strategic Director, Resources and the Head of Legal, to conduct the procurement and award and enter into the contract and all other necessary or ancillary agreements to fully implement and effect the proposals.

6. Disposal of Redundant Vehicle Stock

The Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Climate Change introduced a report on plans to dispose of 89 vehicles within the Council's fleet, used by the WeFix and Caretaking services, which were deemed to be beyond economic repair.

The intention was to dispose of the redundant stock via a phased approach at multiple auctions and the Cabinet Member outlined the benefits of that approach and the alternative options that had been considered.

Cabinet **resolved** to approve the disposal of 89 vans via a phased auction approach (option 5) as detailed in the report.

7. BDTP Contract Extensions

The Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement presented a report on the proposed extension of a number of contracts with Barking and Dagenham Trading Partnership (BDTP) Limited.

The services in question related to housing repairs and maintenance element undertaken by Barking and Dagenham Management Services (BDMS) Limited, corporate cleaning undertaken by Barking and Dagenham Corporate Cleaning (BDCC) and staff management via WeFix, all subsidiaries of BDTP. The Cabinet Member advised that the initial five-year contract for those services had expired on 31 March 2023. Due to a number of concerns with the housing repairs and maintenance service from BDMS, contracts were extended for 12 months in order

to address productivity and value for money issues while also allowing the new leadership within BDMS to implement improvements.

Improvements were achieved during the extension period in terms of service delivery, customer satisfaction and reduced repair backlogs; however, it remained the case that further improvements were necessary for BDMS to meet the Council's expectations for high-quality services to residents. Notwithstanding those challenges within BDMS and following an assessment of options, the Cabinet Member reported that the preferred approach was to further extend the contracts, from April 2024 to March 2026, with the primary aim of maintaining service continuity while investigating alternative options for the provision of a housing repairs and maintenance service and progressing the projected 18-month procurement timetable. The Cabinet Member also commented on the Housing Revenue Account charges that had been agreed with BDMS for 2024/25, which reflected a reduction of £5.712m, to £22.089m, on the charge for 2023/24 and the intention to pay the reduced fees quarterly in advance to support BDMS with management of its financial liquidity.

Cabinet Members commented on the challenges faced by BDMS and the important role of the Council's Shareholder Panel in holding the company to account for improved service delivery.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Agree the extension of contracts with Barking and Dagenham Management Services Limited (BDMS) for repairs and maintenance, BDCC for corporate cleaning and the management of the Council's DLO staff (WeFix) for an additional two-year period ending 31 March 2026;
- (ii) Agree that the Council pay the fees due to BDMS quarterly in advance to support with management of its financial liquidity, subject to compliance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022;
- (iii) Authorise that the Strategic Director of MyPlace, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Community Leadership & Engagement and Finance, Growth & Core Services, the Strategic Director, Resources and the Head of Legal, to conduct negotiations and finalise the terms of the contract extension with BDTP; and
- (iv) Note the Council's intention to explore alternative options for the provision of repairs and maintenance services, currently managed by BDMS, in order to optimise future service delivery in line with evolving needs, industry standards and value for money considerations.