

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Climate Change and Ecology Policy and Accountability Committee

Minutes



Tuesday 6 February 2024

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Nicole Trehy (Chair), Stala Antoniadou, Ross Melton, Laura Janes and Jose Afonso

Other Councillors: Councillors Wesley Harcourt (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Ecology) and Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

Officers:

Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance Environment)
James Newman (Assistant Director of Finance)
Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment)
Jim Cunningham (Climate Change Strategy and Policy Lead)
Jessica Bastock (Service Manager Healthy Streets)
Ian Hawthorn (Assistant Director Highways)
Mark Raisbeck (Director of Public Realm)
Amrita White (Committee Coordinator)

External Guests:

Michael Benke and Graeme Kasselmann (Thames Water)
Cara Marie O'keeffe and Francis Heil (Atkins Realis)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 Flood Risk and Adapting to Climate Change, as her basement kitchen was flooded in July 2021.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. 2024 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)**Corporate Budget**

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) introduced the item that detailed the proposals for the 2024/25 revenue budget – including the risks, financial resilience, and impact of those proposals.

Councillor Rowan Ree noted that it had been a difficult time for local government, with central government grant reductions and high inflation, but despite the constraints, the Council had delivered a balanced budget that protected core services and continued funding for the areas that were unique to borough such as free home care, universal free school breakfasts, and the Law Enforcement Team. He said this had been achieved through ruthless financial efficiency and reforming how services were delivered. He thanked James Newman, and the finance team, officers across departments, and his Cabinet colleagues for making that possible.

James Newman (Assistant Director of Finance) gave a presentation on the corporate budget, highlighting the following:

- The challenges of the operating environment including inflation, pressures on household budgets, new legislative burdens, and uncertainty around local government funding.
- The key objectives of the financial plan were to protect statutory services, deliver services valued by residents, ensuring people's safety, and to be a modern and innovative Council with strong financial governance and resilience.
- That council tax would increase by 4.99%, but an estimated 93,000 households in the borough would not pay the full amount due to discounts and exemptions.

Departmental Budget

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment) gave a presentation on the department's revenue budget 2024/25. This covered the recent achievements and budget implications relevant to this Committee. He also updated members on the future strategic budget issues. This included significant funding requirements for addressing the climate and ecological emergency.

Councillor Ross Melton thanked Councillor Rowan Ree and officers for a comprehensive report and update. He asked for further information to be provided on the timeline for the Council's green investment scheme, including any planned projects to be funded as part of the scheme. Councillor Rowan Ree noted that he was proud of the Council's green investment scheme which stood out as the largest of its kind. The Council was looking to raise up to £5 million to fund climate change projects across the borough. The first tranche of the investment had been distributed and the deadline for this was 13th February 2024. This scheme offered a low-risk

investment at 4.85% to residents and helped put measures in place to combat and mitigate climate change. This would include a range of issues such as renewable energy and measures to promote active transport.

The Chair enquired about the Council's success rate in securing grants for climate change related initiatives. In response Bram Kainth noted that officers were committed to pursuing all available grants and regularly sought new opportunities. He noted that additional feasibility work at risk could be carried out to enhance effectiveness.

Referring to the parking services review on page 17 of the agenda pack, Councillor Jose Afonso asked about the portion of the budget revenue derived from cleaner neighbourhood fines. Councillor Wesley Harcourt (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Ecology) explained that any income for parking was designated for specific use and could not be included in the general fund. Bram Kainth noted that the parking account figures were published annually and would be shared with the Committee upon their release.

Action: Bram Kainth

RESOLVED:

1. That the Climate Change and Ecology Policy and Accountability Committee (PAC) considered the budget proposals and made recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate.
2. That the PAC considered the proposed changes to fees and charges and made recommendations as appropriate.

5. FLOOD RISK AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Jim Cunningham (Climate Change Strategy and Policy Lead) introduced the item and noted that flooding, along with other extreme weather including heatwaves and droughts, was becoming more frequent and severe as the climate heats up. It was noted that a climate risk assessment was currently being undertaken to identify residents, services, buildings, and infrastructure that were most at risk. This would be followed by an adaptation strategy which would examine the business case for implementing adaptation measures and identify the priority areas to focus these.

Cara Marie O'Keeffe and Francis Heil (Atkins Realis) provided a presentation which covered the climate risk assessment and adaptation strategy. They showed slides that outlined the following key points:

- Project overview of the two stages of implementation.
- Preliminary findings of January 2024
- Historical climate events in the London Borough of Hammersmith (LBHF)
- Current surface flood and heat risk mapping, including Council estate areas.
- Climate change projections for LBHF
- Preliminary findings for selected sectors
- The next steps:
 - Draft climate risk assessment for review in February 2024
 - Draft adaptation strategy for review in April/May 2024

Concerning the impact of heat, the Chair highlighted that the Council's social housing sector appeared to be most at risk, implying a disproportionate effect on lower-income residents. She asked for clarification to be provided on why the Council's estates within the borough were particularly affected by heat and flood risks. In response Francis Heil outlined the contributing factors that made the estates more susceptible to heat impact. These included high rise buildings and properties that only had windows to one side of the buildings. It was noted that there was often a high proportion of older and disabled residents, residing in social housing, making them vulnerable due to health conditions that could be exacerbated during heatwaves.

The Chair asked if there were any plans to explore mitigating factors from places such as Europe, which have encountered similar challenges with heatwaves. Francis Heil explained that there was a lot to learn from other cities who had been dealing with issues relating to heat for a long period of time. It was noted that the UK Government Environmental Audit Committee recently published its review on heat resilience and some of the evidence from this would be integrated as part of the adaptation strategy.

Councillor Laura Janes enquired about the possibility of collaborating with public health to address some of the challenges related to sleep hygiene. Jim Cunningham noted that officers were closely working with public health colleagues on the climate risk assessment to identify residents who are more at risk across the borough. This included identifying opportunities for greater alignment with public health strategies and plans.

Councillor Stala Antoniadis asked if there was a common theme among the flats in terms of susceptibility to flood risk. Francis Heil outlined the commonalities contributing to surface water flooding. These included areas lacking green space, which reduced the ability to absorb and facilitate the permeation of surface water. In addition, one of the main risk hot spots across the borough was identified within basement properties.

Councillor Ross Melton enquired whether as part of strategy planning, any assessment had been made of the costs associated with historic climate events that had been highlighted. Specifically, regarding the un forecasted use of Council services and reduced economic activity. Francis Heil explained that detailed assessments regarding the costs associated with previous events and their impact on Council services would be conducted and form a key part of the assessment.

Councillor Wesley Harcourt (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Ecology) noted that the report on adaptation was particularly timely and felt that it's one of the most pressing issues needing consideration. He expressed confidence in the evidence suggesting that blue/green systems could help lower temperatures. Additionally, he emphasised the essential nature of the work being carried out by the Council.

A resident pointed out that evidence indicated that air pollution increased during heatwaves and enquired whether health impacts were included in the risk assessment. He followed up by asking if there were any strategies the Council could

implement to reduce emissions sources during heatwaves. In response Francis Heil noted that Atkins, in their assessments across sectors, considered the impacts of heatwaves on health, including air quality effects. He suggested that this aspect could be reinforced in the plans and policies already in place by the Council.

Referring to the report, a resident observed that Fulham appeared to have higher heat density compared to the North of the borough. He expressed concern that Fulham was experiencing gradual deforestation on private residence based on anecdotal evidence. He asked if an approach could be established to address tree loss on private property. Jim Cunningham noted that the areas with high heat readings were typically those with less green space. He mentioned that recent research commissioned on private spaces revealed that almost half of the private gardens in the borough were completely paved. Addressing this was challenging as the Council had little control over activities on private land. However, the Council was encouraging residents to plant trees in their back gardens by providing free tree giveaways, aiming to incentivise people to plant in their own gardens.

Graeme Kasselmann (Thames Water) provided a presentation which covered the following aspects:

- Understanding the cause and impact of flooding in 2021
- The sewer flooding resilience programme (including statistics for the Council)
- Strategy for alleviating flood risk in counter's creek catchment
- London surface water strategic group
- Approach taken for sustainable drainage systems.

The Chair thanked Thames Water for their presentation. She highlighted that the Thames Water annual report up to March 2022 indicated a revenue of £2 billion. She questioned why only £10 million was being allocated to the resilience programme. Michael Benke (Thames Water) clarified that the majority of the profit figures provided in the annual report was due to gearing, noting that the cash profit was at a slight loss. He explained that spending allocation was determined within 5-year business cycles with the current cycle spanning from 2020-2025. As the storms occurred in 2021, the additional costs resulting from them were not initially accounted for. Funds were being reallocated from other areas to accommodate the resilience programme.

The Chair highlighted that a report early 2023 from Ofwat indicated that Thames water were not in compliance with their regulatory guidance. She expressed concerns that Thames Water had not been following standard practices. Michael Benke explained that this stemmed from legacy issues with the previous owners and management at Thames Water. He acknowledged that Thames Water was currently meeting the expectations of its customers as a business. The new ownership took over in 2017 and since then, £500 million had been invested in the company, with an additional £750 million yet to be contributed. Additionally, a new CEO had recently joined the company earlier this year.

Referring to the fines issued by Ofwat as a result of sewage dumping in the Thames, the Chair asked what actions were being taken by Thames Water to address these concerns. In response Michael Benke noted that by 2024 a Thames tideway tunnel would be in place to mitigate the sewage challenges and cut pollution into the tidal

Thames by 95%. He acknowledged that sewage discharges were unacceptable but provided reassurances to the Committee that appropriate action was being taken to tackle these.

In relation to the July 2021 flooding which resulted in over 600 flooded properties, the Chair enquired why Thames Water had only installed 10 non-return valves across the borough. She expressed concern about the minimal action taken to mitigate future flooding risk. Michael Benke explained that the level of rainfall after the storms in 2021 was extreme, exceeding the capacity of London's drainage systems. He noted that most households that contacted Thames Water for a cleanup assistance received it. Additionally, he mentioned that the flooding was not limited to this borough, and additional non-return valves were installed in Camden and Westminster.

Councillor Jose Afonso enquired when the survey programme for the 384 properties across the borough was due to be completed. Graeme Kasselmann noted that he didn't have this information to hand, however the implementation for the survey programme was due to be carried out within this calendar year. A second round of surveys would be completed for the less vulnerable properties. An accurate timeline would be circulated for the entire programme.

Action: Thames Water

Councillor Stala Antoniadis asked for further clarification to be provided on the completion date for the Thames tideway infrastructure. In response Graeme Kasselmann noted that the tideway tunnel would be delivered by a third-party organisation, with the deadline to start commissioning work set for October 2024. Full commissioning of the tunnel would occur in 2025 with the possibility of extending to 2026 depending on rainfall.

Councillor Laura Janes noted that Thames Water acknowledged that dumping sewage in the Thames was not acceptable and questioned if this practice would be stopped. Michael Benke provided an overview of the longer-term approach, highlighting that it was a national requirement to significantly reduce the amount of sewage being dumped in the Thames by 2050. In response to a follow-on question, Graeme Kasselmann noted that the short-term plan to reduce sewage within the borough was to introduce the full commissioning of the tideway tunnel which was expected to be 2025.

Councillor Laura Janes enquired about Thames Water's plans to allocate additional funding for the 2025-2030 funding cycle to cover emergency costs and fallout from the 2021 floods. In response Graeme Kasselmann noted that within their submission to Ofwat Thames Water had factored in sufficient funding to extend the resilience programme to cover mitigation measures on all the properties that had reported flooding in July 2021. In addition, it was noted that currently there were no short-term plans in place to cover future proofing.

Councillor Laura Janes requested for additional clarification regarding Thames Water's communication plans for disseminating the survey to residents. Michael Benke noted that when the resilience programme launched Thames Water had

written to every property that had formally reported flooding. In addition, local social media groups were contacted to reach out to residents. The Chair expressed concerns around Thames Water's communication strategy and urged for further improvements to be made to effectively engage with residents. She requested that an enhanced action plan be circulated to the Committee outlining how Thames Water intended to reach out to resident for the survey.

Action: Thames Water

In response to a question asked by the Committee, Michael Benke outlined Thames Water's contingency plans for addressing call centre enquiries in the event of a recurrence of the 2021 floods. He mentioned that an internal review had been conducted to identify areas of improvement in handling similar situations in the future to enhance its response to emergencies.

Councillor Ross Melton asked for further clarification on Thame's Water's process for forecasting adverse weather events, such as large storms and flooding and how this aligned with their investment programme. Graeme Kasselmann explained that the process was defined in the drainage and wastewater management plan. He outlined how this tool was utilised to assess the potential impacts of climate change on wastewater services and to implement measures aimed at mitigating future risks.

In response to a question asked by the Committee, Michael Benke noted that a written response would be circulated to the Committee regarding Thames Water's stance on the restrictions imposed by the regulator when implementing actions, including the change in regulatory funding allocation.

Action: Thames Water

A resident, directly affected by the 2021 floods, expressed dissatisfaction with Thames Water's inadequate response to the flooding. She made a series of comments. These included concerns about the company's ability to achieve its expected funding spend by 2050, noting that more emphasis needed to be placed on future proofing properties. She also mentioned the importance of Thame's Water collaborating with the Council on the adaptation strategy to address community concerns effectively. In response Graeme Kasselmann outlined the proposed solutions for the sewer systems within the borough, emphasising the various methods being explored including source control to mitigate the impact of future flooding events.

A resident requested further clarification on Thames Water's policy aspirations. In response Graeme Kasselmann noted that Thames Water had included their aspirations in a document called "2050 Vision". He highlighted the challenges faced by water companies, particularly the regulatory constraints on funding allocation. Additionally, an overview was provided on Thames Water's pathway document, detailing how they intended to achieve their objectives by 2050. A copy of the pathway document would be circulated to the Committee.

Action: Thames Water

A resident raised concerns about the serious issues of wet wipes and was pleased to hear of Thames Water's support for proposals to ban them. He enquired about the

plans Thames Water had in place to mitigate issues caused by wet wipes once they passed through the sewage system and accumulated in the Thames. Graeme Kasselmann acknowledged concern regarding wet wipes, highlighting that Thames Water were working closely with Thames21 to address the raised issues. He mentioned that survey work had been conducted, partly funded by Thames Water and depth monitors had been installed to pinpoint blockage locations. Assurances were provided that Thames Water remained committed to ongoing efforts to tackle this issue effectively.

Closing the item, the Chair thanked Thames Water for attending the meeting and summarised the following key points. She emphasised the necessity for Thames Water to allocate further funding to accommodate the resilience programme and tackle the issues raised effectively. In addition, she urged Thames Water to offer further clarity on their plans regarding their communication with residents and meeting regulatory requirements set by Ofwat.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted and commented on the paper and presentations.

6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will take place on 23rd April 2024. The Chair noted that at the next meeting an update would be provided on the Council's sustainable drainage systems.

Meeting started: 7:00pm
Meeting ended: 9:40pm

Chair

Contact officer: Amrita White
Committee Co-ordinator
Governance and Scrutiny
E-mail: Amrita.White@lbhf.gov.uk