

# Policy and Oversight Board Agenda

Monday 29 April 2024 at 7.00 pm

145 King Street (Ground Floor), Hammersmith, W6 9XY

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## MEMBERSHIP

Administration	Opposition
Councillor Lisa Homan (Chair) Councillor Jacolyn Daly Councillor Natalia Perez Councillor Helen Rowbottom Councillor Nikos Souslous Councillor Nicole Trehy Councillor Rory Vaughan	Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler

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Members of the public are welcome to attend but spaces are limited. To register for a place please contact [David.Abbott@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:David.Abbott@lbhf.gov.uk). The building has disabled access.

Date Issued: 19 April 2024

# Policy and Oversight Board Agenda

If you would like to ask a question about any of the items on the agenda please email [David.Abbott@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:David.Abbott@lbhf.gov.uk) by: 26 April at 12 noon

<u>Item</u>	<u>Pages</u>
<b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	
<b>2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS</b> <p>If a Councillor has a disclosable pecuniary interest in a particular item, whether or not it is entered in the Authority's register of interests, or any other significant interest which they consider should be declared in the public interest, they should declare the existence and, unless it is a sensitive interest as defined in the Member Code of Conduct, the nature of the interest at the commencement of the consideration of that item or as soon as it becomes apparent.</p> <p>At meetings where members of the public are allowed to be in attendance and speak, any Councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest or other significant interest may also make representations, give evidence or answer questions about the matter. The Councillor must then withdraw immediately from the meeting before the matter is discussed and any vote taken.</p> <p>Where Members of the public are not allowed to be in attendance and speak, then the Councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest should withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is under consideration. Councillors who have declared other significant interests should also withdraw from the meeting if they consider their continued participation in the matter would not be reasonable in the circumstances and may give rise to a perception of a conflict of interest.</p> <p>Councillors are not obliged to withdraw from the meeting where a dispensation to that effect has been obtained from the Standards Committee.</p>	
<b>3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING</b>	4 - 19
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as an accurate record and note any outstanding actions.	
<b>4. GENERATIVE AI: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND RISKS</b>	20 - 27
This report provides a brief overview of the current state and future implications of generative AI technologies.	
<b>5. COST OF LIVING UPDATE</b>	28 - 35
This report provides an update on the Council's Cost of Living response programme and work underway to develop a strategy for 2024/25, given the government's late decision to extend the Household Support Fund.	

## **6. WORK PROGRAMME**

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For the Board to discuss items for inclusion in the work programme.

## **7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

To note the following dates of future meetings:

- 1 July 2024
- 9 September 2024
- 25 November 2024
- 5 February 2025
- 6 May 2025

# Agenda Item 3

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham  
**Policy and Oversight Board**  
**Minutes**



**Tuesday 23 January 2024**

**PRESENT**

**Committee members:** Councillors Lisa Homan (Chair), Jacolyn Daly, Natalia Perez, Helen Rowbottom, Nicole Trehy, Rory Vaughan, and Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler

**Other Councillors**

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

**Officers**

Sukvinder Kalsi (Strategic Director of Finance)

Jo McCormick (Assistant Director of Procurement and Commercial – covering for Nicola Ellis, Strategic Director, Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Services)

James Newman (Assistant Director, Finance)

Alex Pygram (Head of Finance – Corporate Services and Finance)

Andre Mark (Head of Finance – Strategic Planning and Investment)

Zoe Wilkins (Electoral Services Manager)

Kayode Adewumi (Assistant Director – Democratic, Registration and Coroner's Services)

Matthew Sales (Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics)

David Abbott (Head of Governance)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nikos Souslous.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **4. 2024 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

##### **Corporate Budget**

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

Councillor 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 the 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 Sukvinder Kalsi, the finance team, officers across departments, and his Cabinet colleagues for making that possible.

Sukvinder Kalsi (Strategic Director of Finance) gave a short presentation on the corporate budget. He highlighted the following:

- The difficulties of the operating environment including high 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, ensure people's safety, promote prosperity, and 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.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked how great the risk of the unexpected increase in inflation reported in December was to the budget proposals. Councillor Ree said high inflation had made setting the budget more difficult, but contingencies had been built into the budget to mitigate its impacts – including funding for 3% pay inflation and 5% price inflation.

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler asked for reassurance around the Council's reserves. She also asked how much reserves were being used to support revenue budgets. Councillor Ree said reserves were used to smooth out spending over longer periods and acted as a 'rainy day' fund. He noted that the Council had topped up general reserves last year.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked about the impact of the Government's Household Support Fund ending in March and if a replacement had been announced. Councillor Ree said this was indicative of the chaotic way the Government dealt with council finances. He explained that Councils had been told there may be some money in the Spring Budget, but no further information would be available until 6 March, which made it impossible to plan ahead.

The Chair asked for more information about how the Government's approach to council finances hindered financial planning. Councillor Ree explained that the

Council only received the final financial settlement from Central Government on 18 December. He noted that it used to be provided in November and it covered multiple years, but for the last six years they had only provided one-year settlements. The Council started planning its budget four years in advance but had to use projections and worst-case scenarios in lieu of any certainty from Central Government. He said it would be far easier if settlements were agreed earlier and covered multiple years.

The Chair added that when grant funding was provided it was often at short notice and had to be spent within a short period of time. She asked how the Council tried to make the most of grant funding. Councillor Ree said the Council was good at horizon scanning and had increased the amount of money coming in from grants. He noted there had been a trend for Central Government grants to be ring-fenced for very specific purposes which limited local choice.

Councillor Rory Vaughan said he was very encouraged to see more money being invested in services for young people transitioning to Adult Social Care, noting how important it was to avoid a 'cliff edge' of service provision. Councillor Ree agreed and said it was important to have as seamless a transition process as possible. He noted it was part of a wider project to ensure departments weren't working in silos.

Councillor Vaughan said he was encouraged to see the generous council tax support scheme continue and asked how it was being funded. Councillor Ree said he was proud to have one of the most progressive council tax support schemes in the country and noted Hammersmith & Fulham was one of only 36 councils that had no minimum charge. He said council tax was a regressive tax and it was right that those least able to pay should pay the least. He went on to say that the way the support scheme was funded has changed. In previous years it was funded entirely by the Government, but it had since been rolled into the general fund and funding for it had been cut by 55%.

Councillor Vaughan noted that extra money was being invested in cybersecurity. Councillor Ree said it was a growing problem and highlighted the costly impacts of a recent cyber-attack on the British Library. He said the Council held data about residents and provided many important services that residents relied on, so it was important to ensure its defences were as strong as possible.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly noted the forecast annual budget gap of £10m and asked how it would impact residents if not addressed. Councillor Ree said finding £10m of savings per year was a significant challenge, but the Council had found efficiency savings of £118m since 2014/15 without affecting frontline services, and had invested money to provide free home care, and free breakfasts for school children.

Councillor Daly asked if there had been any new funding from Central Government to support councils. Councillor Ree said the base revenue support grant had not gone up in line with inflation and Councils' spending power only matched inflation if council tax and the social care precept were both put up by the maximum amount allowed.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom said it was shrewd for public services to invest in cybersecurity, but asked what Central Government was doing to protect people's

data. She felt it made more sense to be tackled at a national level. Councillor Ree said he would welcome more support from Central Government but there was not a lot being offered.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked how Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money was used. Sukvinder Kalsi said the figure of £100m in the report was the total current balance. The money was usually earmarked for specific purposes such as local projects and programmes.

The Chair noted that the Council had been rethinking its property needs following the Covid-19 pandemic and more staff working from home. She added that she was looking forward to more reforms coming forward.

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked that, in future, financial risks included a range from best to worst case scenarios.

**ACTION: Sukvinder Kalsi**

### **Departmental Budget**

Jo McCormick (Assistant Director of Procurement and Commercial – covering for Nicola Ellis, Strategic Director, Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Services) introduced the Finance and Corporate Services budget. Alex Pygram (Head of Finance – Corporate Services and Finance) gave a presentation on the proposals and highlighted the following points:

- The Finance and Corporate Services departments were proposing £665k of savings in 2024/25
- Investment of £250k was proposed to enhance the Council's cyber security defences.
- Staff budgets had been inflated for the 2023/24 pay award and a corporately held contingency was available for the 2024/25 pay award. Contract budgets had also been increased to allow for expected inflation.

The Chair noted the savings proposals included £150k of additional income from digital advertising and asked how confident officers were of achieving that goal. Jo McCormick said they were on track to deliver.

Councillor Rowbottom asked if the Council had considered opportunities and efficiencies from generative artificial intelligence. Jo McCormick said the Council had clear policies and procedures in place and officers were exploring the opportunities and risks.

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked how much of the legal services budget was spent in-house and how much was external. Alex Pygram said the figure shown in the report was the internal legal services cost, departments held separate budgets for external legal costs. Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked for a breakdown of internal and external legal costs. Sukvinder Kalsi said the Council only used external legal services in exceptional cases or for specialisms not available in-house, and it was a small amount compared to the overall legal services budget.

**ACTION: Alex Pygram**

The Chair asked how much money was saved through fraud investigations. Councillor Ree said detail of the Council's anti-fraud activities were reported regularly to the Audit Committee. He said the Council took fraud very seriously and believed there was scope for identifying more using business intelligence tools.

The Chair brought the discussion to a close and thanked members and officers for their contributions.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the Policy and Oversight Board considered the budget proposals and made recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate.
2. That the Board considered the proposed changes to fees and charges and made recommendations as appropriate.

## **5. UPDATE ON VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS**

The Chair introduced the item, noting that with Mayoral and GLA elections in May and a General Election on the horizon the Board wanted to ensure the Council was doing everything possible to include and encourage people to take part in the democratic process.

Zoe Wilkins (Electoral Services Manager) presented the report that provided an update to the previous report to the Board on 20 June 2023 on the implementation of voter ID. The report set out the key findings from reports published by the Electoral Commission and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, and provided further details of activities undertaken to support residents to vote.

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler asked if the Council was prepared for the upcoming elections. She also noted that there would be a national voter ID advertising campaign and suggested putting local information in the Council Tax leaflet in April. Zoe Wilkins said the Council was prepared and noted that there would be a page in the Council Tax booklet explaining the new voting requirements.

The Chair asked about funding and what else the Council could do to make people aware of the new voting requirements. Zoe Wilkins said a national campaign run through the Electoral Commission started on 8 January. The GLA would also be doing their own advertising. The Council had received £19,747 for communications but could re-allocate small amounts if necessary.

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) said 14,000 people were denied the vote at the first election run under the new voter ID rules and £20k of funding for publicity was not adequate. He felt the Government needed to do a lot more to promote such a major change.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly noted the Electoral Commission reported at least 14,000 were stopped from voting and it was likely more were put off completely. There were also changes to postal voting from 2 May 2023. She said it was difficult to



communicate two separate complex changes. Zoe Wilkins added that there were also changes for overseas voters and agreed that there was a lot of complex information to get across to people. She said they were ensuring staff were well trained on the changes and were trying to communicate with residents via as many channels as possible.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom noted that John Pullinger, Chair of the Electoral Commission, had expressed concerns about the voter ID scheme, calling the rules 'very, very tight' and that the need for photo ID disproportionately impacted disabled people, unemployed people, and other under-represented groups- who were more likely to vote for the Labour party. She said nationally 2% of voters had no voter ID which would equate to 3,709 people in Hammersmith & Fulham. Councillor Ree said it was 'a solution in search of a problem'.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked what lessons had been learned at the local level to help engage people. She also asked about the role of the voluntary sector and community groups. Zoe Wilkins said leaflet had had gone out in the annual canvas letters, but it had not had a significant impact on registrations. The elections team were working with Action on Disability to engage people around accessibility. They were also working with the faith forum to ensure people were aware about privacy considerations in polling stations. And they were working with the Youth Council to help reach out to more young people.

Councillor Vaughan asked about the free voter ID councils could provide, including how it was applied for, how quickly it could be sent out, how much it cost the Council, and if the Council had enough capacity to process requests. Zoe Wilkins said people could apply for Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) online through the Council's own website or a national website. So far, they had only received 140 applications. They were quick to process. Applicants could choose to collect the certificate or have it posted out to them. The Council could reissue them locally if necessary.

Councillor Nicole Trehy asked how people who didn't have access to a computer or smart phone could get a VAC. Zoe Wilkins said they could call the helpline or make an appointment to visit the team in Cobbs Hall.

Councillor Daly noted that an all-party parliamentary group report stated people checking photo ID were more likely to accept someone of the same ethnicity, and more likely to reject those of different ethnicities. She asked what data the Council would be capturing on this and what learning could come from it. Zoe Wilkins said polling stations had to complete a standard form to record anyone who was turned away, though it had to be sealed. She said officers would investigate ways to capture data, but it raised data protection issues. She added that training was very important to ensure people were treated fairly and noted that staff were quite representative of the borough.

The Chair asked if officers had a sense of the additional resources required for a General Election, given the higher expected turnout. Zoe Wilkins said the Council had funding for an additional clerk in every station and would be looking again at the numbers after the May elections. They would also consider feedback from voters and political parties and adjust accordingly.

The Chair brought the discussion to a close and noted the following actions:

- Zoe Wilkins to provide guidance for members about how to support people to vote.
- Zoe Wilkins to provide an update on how the Council is reaching out to community groups.
- The Chair noted the 'register to vote' cards with QR codes that led to the Government's voter registration website. She suggested something similar could be produced for Voter Authority Certificates.

**ACTIONS: Zoe Wilkins**

The Chair thanked members and officers for their time and contributions. She said she welcomed a further report on findings after the May elections.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the Board noted and commented on the report.

## **6. WORK PROGRAMME**

The draft work programme for 2024 was presented for discussion and noting. Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked that an item on generative artificial intelligence be scheduled for the next meeting.

Members requested an update on Voter ID at the July meeting, incorporating feedback from the May elections.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the Board noted the draft work programme for 2024 and suggested any additions or amendments.

## **7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The date of the next meeting, scheduled for 29 April 2024, was noted.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm  
Meeting ended: 9.15 pm

Chair .....

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## Policy and Oversight Board Action Sheet 2023/24

20 June 2023

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
1.	Item 4 – Update on Co-production	Jane Wilmot said the Council wrote a statement for every (Civic Campus) contractor that set out its expectations around inclusivity. The Chair suggested these elements could be written into a range of contracts and activities undertaken by the Council. She asked officers to investigate potential areas where this could be done.	<p>Response from the procurement team:</p> <p>When we seek to buy goods, works and services, the specification identifies the context and requirements. Co-production allows for joint development of the specification. Engagement supports understanding of requirements and formal consultation may also be involved for some regulated areas.</p> <p>Any contractual requirements will be derived from the specification and align with H&amp;F contractual clauses regarding equalities.</p> <p>Based on the specification, our procurements can then include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific questions relating to inclusion in the evaluation of tenders for goods, works or services we are buying.</li> <li>• social/added value for contracts over £100k, where some measures are aimed</li> </ul>	Julian Eccles	Done

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
			at enhancing inclusion e.g. care experienced residents, lone parents, those with poor mental health etc.		
2.	Item 4 – Update on Co-production	Cllr Nikos Souslous asked if there were lessons from working with organisations like the police. The Chair suggested inviting the police and the co-production team to a future meeting.	Item added to the Social Inclusion and Community Safety PAC long list for consideration.	David Abbott	Done
3.	Item 4 – Update on Co-production	Cllr Nicole Trehy noted that the Met Police wouldn't be responding to mental health calls beyond September 2023 and raised concerns about the impact on neurodiverse people. The Chair suggested this could be considered at a future meeting.	Item added to the Social Inclusion and Community Safety long list for consideration.	David Abbott	Done
4.	Item 4 – Update on Co-production	It was agreed that each PAC receive a quarterly update on previous and planned co-production activity. And the Board would consider a summary of such reports biannually.	The first updates have been scheduled for the November PAC meetings.	Julian Eccles	Done
5.	Item 5 – Introduction of Voter ID Requirements	Re producing elections materials in different languages - Kayode Adewumi said if members were aware of community organisations the team	Cllr Perez emailed the Elections team with community group contacts.	Committee Members / Kayode Adewumi	Done

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
		could work with, they could send him the details.			
6.	Item 5 – Introduction of Voter ID Requirements	Cllr Jacolyn Daly thought Voter ID awareness needed a Council-wide approach and asked PAC Chairs to think about how different departments could respond.	PAC Chairs have been contacted to think about how different areas of the Council could respond.	PAC Chairs	Done
7.	Item 5 – Introduction of Voter ID Requirements	Elections officers to work with the co-production team to ensure all materials being sent out were accessible.	Actioned. Elections send all public materials to the co-production team for comment prior to circulation.	Zoe Wilkins	Done
8.	Item 5 – Introduction of Voter ID Requirements	Officers to circulate the Electoral Commission's report to members.	The EC's interim analysis report was circulated by email on 26/03/2023. The full report was circulated on 23/11/2023.	Zoe Wilkins	Done

**18 September 2023**

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
9.	Item 4 – Intergenerational Practice	Officers to investigate London-based charity that matched young people looking for somewhere to stay with older people who had a spare room. Suggested the Council could promote.	In Adult Social Care a scheme that is similar to this is Shared Lives Plus ( <a href="http://sharedlivesplus.org.uk">sharedlivesplus.org.uk</a> ) and officers are in the process of developing a business case for starting this in H&F. Shared Lives is a care and support service which is for people aged 16+ (in England and Scotland) and 18+ (in Wales and Northern Ireland) who want to live independently in their community, with the support of a family and community network. It's an alternative to supported living or residential care. Shared Lives carers use their own home and family life to share it with someone who needs support around the UK.	Julius Olu	Done
	Item 4 – Intergenerational Practice	Officers to explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how the Council could highlight services available to charities and other groups.</li> <li>• programmes where students helped out in care homes (see Hammersmith Academy and the Elgin Centre).</li> </ul>	Officers are working on the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infusing intergenerational practice into relevant developing strategies or strategies under review – e.g. the draft 3SIF strategy.</li> <li>• Turn the policy team's research briefing into a</li> </ul>	Julius Olu	Done

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
			<p>guidance document for third sector organisations to consider as part of the future 3SIF investment programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Sobus about actions following their meeting with the Youth Council.</li> </ul>		
11.	Item 4 – Intergenerational Practice	Chair to develop idea around engaging young people in voluntary work.	Made links between the Youth Council and Nubian Life. Third sector programme lead tasked with exploring how to better promote young people volunteering through discussion with The Volunteer Centre and linking them to the Youth Council.	Cllr Homan	Done
12.	Item 5 – Digital Inclusion Strategy for H&F	Officers to circulate list of sheltered housing schemes with free Wi-Fi.	List circulated on 25 Oct 2023.	Tina Akpogheneta / Darren Persaud	Done
13.	Item 5 – Digital Inclusion Strategy for H&F	Officers to provide clear measures to track progress and include member involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers have contacted key internal stakeholders to pull together their specific key metrics.</li> <li>Digital Accessibility Group workshop 18/10/23 – to get views on key measurements.</li> </ul>	Tina Akpogheneta / Darren Persaud	In progress

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third Sector workshop on 22/11/23 at Shortlands with 15 orgs attending to review work to date, and firm up key measurements. There will also be a stakeholder workshop with internal colleagues on 30/11/23.</li> <li>• The final strategy with key measurements will then go through internal governance before Cabinet approval in 2024. One of the recommendations is a delivery group to be chaired by Cllr Chevoppe-Verdier.</li> </ul>		
14.	Item 5 – Digital Inclusion Strategy for H&F	Item for Health PAC – Connectivity and assistive technologies in day centres.	Item sent to Health PAC Chair / added to work programme long list for consideration.	David Abbott	Done



**11 December 2023**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Item / Action</b>	<b>Response / Update</b>	<b>Officer</b>	<b>Status</b>
15.	Item 4 – Update on Youth Voice	Item for Health PAC - Healthy relationships and health and wellbeing to be given more consideration when procuring health services	Item was added to the Health and Adult Social Care PAC long list for consideration.	David Abbott	Done
16.	Item 4 – Update on Youth Voice	Housing and homelessness suggested as priority for the Youth Council.	Item added to list for consideration as part of the 2024 priorities.	Brenda Whinnett	Done
17.	Item 4 – Update on Youth Voice	Members requested input from the Youth Council on PAC work programmes.	Strategic leads have been tasked with taking the areas discussed forward and will refer items to the relevant PACs / PAC Chairs.	Strategic leads	Done
18.	Item 4 – Update on Youth Voice	The Chair asked that PAC reports include a section to record whether the Youth Council have been involved.	The PAC report template has been updated.	David Abbott	Done
19.	Item 5 - Continuing Response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis	Cllr Brocklebank-Fowler asked if the ethical debt policy had affected the Council Tax collection rate.	In common with other local authorities, a number of factors have affected council tax collection since early 2020 with the chief contributing factors being the cost of living crisis and the operational difficulties during covid. It is not possible to fully isolate these impacts but we do not believe there has been a significant impact on council tax collection rates from the council's Ethical Debt Collection policy as the proportion of debt referred to enforcement agents is	Sukvinder Kalsi	Done

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
			<p>less than 1% of the amounts due.</p> <p>The Council Tax Team has been working strongly on this matter including supporting residents with benefit entitlement claims and early conversations with residents with arrears. As a consequence, collection rates have improved during 2023/24 (and arrears have reduced by £6m in total for LBHF/GLA). This trend is expected to continue in the future.</p>		
20.	Item 5 - Continuing Response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis	The Chair asked for further update once Government funding decision had been made.	The update was added to the Board's forward.	Matthew Sales	Done

**23 January 2024**

No.	Item	Item / Action	Response / Update	Officer	Status
21.	Item 4 – 2024 MTFS	Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked that, in future, financial risks included a range from best to worst case scenarios.		Sukvinder Kalsi	Pending
22.	Item 4 – 2024 MTFS	Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler asked for a breakdown of internal and external legal costs.		Alex Pygram	Pending
23.	Item 5 – Update on Voter ID Requirements	Zoe Wilkins to provide guidance for members about how to support people to vote.		Zoe Wilkins	Pending
24.	Item 5 – Update on Voter ID Requirements	Zoe Wilkins to provide an update on how the Council is reaching out to community groups.		Zoe Wilkins	Pending
25.	Item 5 – Update on Voter ID Requirements	The Chair noted the ‘register to vote’ cards with QR codes that led to the Government’s voter registration website. She suggested something similar could be produced for Voter Authority Certificates.		Zoe Wilkins	Pending

# Agenda Item 4

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Policy and Oversight Board

**Date:** 29/04/2024

**Subject:** Generative AI: Opportunities, Challenges and Risks

**Report author:** Anthony King, Enterprise Architect

**Responsible Director:** Nicola Ellis, Strategic Director Corporate Services

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## SUMMARY

This report provides a brief overview of the current state and future implications of generative AI technologies.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the Policy and Oversight Board to note and comment on the report.
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**Wards Affected:** None

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<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the H&amp;F Values</b>
Building shared prosperity	
Creating a compassionate council	Generative AI can help to improve and widen the accessibility of our digital and information services to residents
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Resident-facing digital and information products, including those employing Generative AI, are co-produced with Residents via the Digital Accessibility Group (DAG)
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Generative AI, if implemented as part of business efficiency and improvement initiatives, could help us to achieve significant savings
Taking pride in H&F	Progressing our work in this area will help to ensure that H&F is not left behind in this significant shift which will have major impacts on our society.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	

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## Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

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### Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionising how we approach various tasks and challenges. In the context of H&F, it presents opportunities to enhance service delivery, streamline operations, and improve decision-making.

### What is generative AI?

Generative AI is a branch of artificial intelligence that focuses on creating new content or data from existing data. Generative AI can produce realistic images, texts, sounds, videos, and other types of media that are indistinguishable from human-made ones. Generative AI can also generate novel and creative content that does not exist in the real world, such as faces, landscapes, artwork, music, and stories.

### The distinction between classic AI and the large language model (LLM)<sup>1</sup> – Generative AI

It is important to draw a clear distinction in the evolution of AI technology. Using the example of waste collection within a local authority such as H&F, in the classic AI approach, imagine a virtual assistant or chatbot designed to handle queries about waste collection. This chatbot relies on a predefined set of questions and answers, much like a table. Below is a simplified representation of what this table might look like, when representing how classic AI works:

User's Question	Chatbot Response (Classic AI)
"What day is my pickup"	"Your pickup is scheduled for Thursday 9am"
"How do I recycle"	"To recycle glass, place it in the blue bin"

Note that if a resident asks a question not explicitly listed in this table – for instance or goes off topic, the chatbot will struggle to understand the query and therefore Classic AI is only as effective as predefined rules, scripts and prepopulated tables to make decisions or perform tasks. The classic AI approach is like having a predetermined script that the chatbot must strictly follow.

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<sup>1</sup> Describes the ability of artificial intelligence applications or machines to understand and interpret natural language akin to a human being, and also includes the process of ingesting a large amount of data for training of these tools.

## Generative AI – illustrative example

Now, let us imagine generative AI as the subject matter expert (SME) that has read every book, manual, and article in the organisation about a topic, so much so that it can now create new, helpful advice on the spot and is not encumbered by a pre-populated script of questions and answers.

This SME can dynamically reference data for the latest information as it is updated at source and handle unrelated questions.

## Classic AI in the new era: navigating its crucial role in achieving business excellence.

It is essential to recognise that classic AI continues to play a major role in supporting business outcomes in organisations with diverse and complex business processes and systems.

The decision to leverage any kind of AI capability will be intricately tied to specific use cases. AI is like having a toolbox with a variety of tools – choosing the most optimal one depends on the task at hand. By acknowledging the strengths of classic AI, we ensure a strategic and nuanced approach, applying appropriate solutions to deliver the desired outcomes in the most optimal and efficient ways.

## Navigating risks in the era of generative AI and large language models (LLMs): A heightened awareness

The advent of generative AI has amplified public awareness regarding the risks and challenges linked to deploying such capabilities in the pursuit of business outcomes. Concerns arise when considering the integration of generative AI, especially LLM's, into decision-making processes. These concerns span critical areas such as information security, privacy, accuracy, ethics, bias, and the potential for hallucinations,<sup>2</sup> heightening the need for a thorough understanding and a strategic approach to adoption.

Item	Risks, challenges and concerns	Description
1	Information Security	If not securely implemented, sensitive information might be inadvertently disclosed during interactions potentially leading to unauthorised access or data breaches.
2	Privacy concerns	The ability of generative AI to generate contextually relevant responses raises concerns about user privacy, as personal or sensitive information might be inferred or unintentionally shared.
3	Accuracy challenges	Despite advanced capabilities, (we are now on GPT-4), generative AI can still produce inaccurate or misleading responses, especially in complex and ambiguous situations,

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<sup>2</sup> A 'hallucination' is when a Generative AI tool produces results or outputs that are deemed to be beyond a reasonable level of expectations. These are due to a variety of reasons such as a misunderstanding of the prompt or request from the user, misinterpretation of the data, incomplete data, or the intricacies of the underlying algorithm.

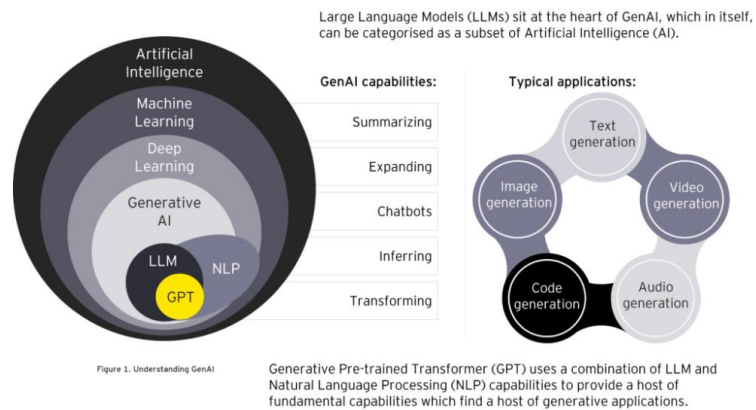
		impacting decision-making processes.
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Item	Risks, challenges and concerns, continued	Description
4	Biased outputs	Large language models (LLM's) learn from vast datasets, which may unintentionally include biases present in the data. This can result in AI systems generating responses that reflect or amplify existing biases in society.
5	Hallucinations and unintended creativity	LLM's have been known to generate creative content whose sources cannot be verified, nor do they align with factual information.
6	Ethical Concerns	The ethical implications of AI decision-making, such as bias or unfair treatment, may arise, sparking debates about ethical responsibility around the deployment and utilisation of generative AI capabilities.
7	Lack of explainability	LLMs often operate as complex "black box" systems that are opaque to the end user, making it challenging to explain how they arrived at a particular decision or generated a specific response. This lack of transparency raises concerns about accountability and trust.

## Unlocking the Power of Generative AI: capabilities and applications

Before we navigate the landscape of risks and challenges in Generative AI, let us begin by exploring its high-level capabilities and applications in a bit more detail. The following diagram vividly illustrates how Generative AI unleashes its transformative powers – summarising, expanding, creating intelligent chatbots, inferring insights, transforming developing content and much more – and provides a solid foundation for understanding the breadth of Generative AI's potential applications. The adoption of Generative AI could be transformative, and is akin to the industrial revolution, or the dawn of the computer age.

### Generative AI: overview of capabilities and applications



Source – The GenAI Framework for HMG

## Generative AI in Action: potential H&F organisational initiatives

Below are examples of how this transformative technology could be harnessed in a local authority context in the short term, and examples use cases we are actively exploring:

- content generation and/or productivity support
- contact centre support/automation.
- code generation.

There are a range of adoption and implementation challenges facing any adoption:

Item	Challenges	Description
1	Ensuring data is AI ready.	<p>Data Fragmentation held across multiple areas.</p> <p>Implications and Impact: Difficulties in creating a centralised and comprehensive dataset for training generative AI models (single source of truth), hindering the ability of the tool to generate contextually relevant responses.</p> <p>Mitigations: Adoption a data governance framework and practices The establishment of a robust data governance framework to ensure standardisation and consistency, including data quality and control measures (e.g. master data management, data stewardship).</p> <p>Digital and Data Adoption: Investment in support for staff to help them develop the digital and data skills to become not just 'AI ready' but also 'digital, data and technology ready.'</p>
2	Developing our AI capabilities	<p>Manifestation: The field of Generative AI and the attendant opportunities in deriving business outcomes are still very new. Therefore, there will always be a gap in ensuring that an organisation's people, processes, and technologies are leveraged</p>



Item	Challenges	Description
		<p>to exploit these capabilities in an optimal manner. One such gap is in prompt writing,<sup>3</sup> in the era of Generative AI and its transformative nature, this a critical skillset.</p> <p>Training on prompt writing and other AI capabilities are core to any adoption or implementation programme.</p>

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<sup>3</sup> Prompt writing refers to the ability of users to engage with large language models (LLM's) such as Microsoft co -pilot, ChatGPT and any other Generative AI tools, it involves formulating specific instructions using appropriate syntax, natural language, and sentences to elicit accurate and effective responses from the Generative AI tools.

Item	Challenges, continued	Description
3	Securing the necessary investment	<p>Leveraging generative (and other forms of) AI at scale will take significant investment – not just financially, but also in terms of time to safely realise a return on investment without unintended consequences.</p> <p>Mitigations: Define a clear (generative) AI ambition with dedicated funding and a realistic understanding of the timescales to see a return on investment and realise benefits. Be clear that this involves investment in significant culture change, and that not every investment will realise a measurable return or benefit.</p>
4	Safeguarding privacy and confidential information	Where AI systems utilise data from across the council, safeguards will need to be installed to ensure that confidential information, and information relating to individuals, is protected. It is important to note that as we embark on this journey, human led decision making and final decisions will continue to be core to the use of AI, to ensure accountability and ethical oversight.

### Embracing Generative AI at H&F

Our Generative AI journey has involved several steps to date.

- We organised envisioning sessions with Microsoft and other strategic partners which included representatives from Digital services, REAP and other services, to equip ourselves with essential knowledge on generative AI. We also sought insights from Gartner and other thought leaders on the topic.
- A cross departmental working group was established to coordinate the adoption of generative AI across H&F and includes technical oversight, governance (privacy and security), adoption, delivery, etc.
- We have also aligned ourselves with the Generative AI Collaboration Forum established by Microsoft for Local Authorities, and with LOTI.
- We engaged with services across the council to elicit potential use cases that could leverage Generative AI capabilities to support business outcomes.

### Navigating the new world: recommendations for H&F's preparedness

1. Develop a policy and governance framework for the ethical adoption of AI.
2. Continuous Monitoring and evaluation of the fast-changing GenAI landscape.
3. Skills development initiatives, including career transition support for creative industries and other areas that will be disrupted by LLM's.
4. Continued co-production of AI developments across the council.

5. Strategic partnerships with industry, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.

In conclusion, it is important to recognise that realising the greatest benefits from AI necessitates adopting hybrid approach that combines classic AI and generative AI to support business outcomes effectively.

There is a sense of inevitability in the adoption of Generative AI capabilities, given that over 80% of our line of business applications are vendor managed and are provided as Software as a Service (SaaS) and, as outlined earlier, majority of these vendors will start embedding GenAI capabilities within their applications. We therefore need to anticipate these and be prepared for these integrations.

As a forward-looking organisation, it is important to that we explore opportunities associated with this capability, positioning ourselves perhaps not at the bleeding edge of innovation, but at the leading edge, and therefore, working closely with other local authorities and the wider public sector on the adoption of Generative AI capabilities.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Link to a short explanatory video on Generative AI and what it is:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwF-X5STYks>

# Agenda Item 5

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Policy and Oversight Board

**Date:** 29/04/2024

**Subject:** Cost of Living Update

**Report author:** Charlotte Wylde, Policy and PMO Graduate  
Bathsheba Mall, Programme Lead  
Stefan Robinson, Head of Policy and PMO  
Matthew Sales, Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics

**Responsible Director:** Sukvinder Kalsi, Strategic Director of Finance

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### SUMMARY

This report provides an update on our Cost of Living (COL) response programme and work underway to develop our strategy for 2024/25 given the government's very late decision to extend the Household Support Fund (HSF). This follows previous reports to the Policy and Oversight Board, the last being in December 2023.

The report shows how the COL programme has continued to provide a comprehensive package of support to residents and how we have made the best use of resources to work flexibly across the organisation and respond to the needs of residents with compassion and efficiency.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Policy and Oversight Board note the report and provide comments and feedback on H&F's response to the Cost of Living crisis.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the H&amp;F Values</b>
Building shared prosperity	The COL Response Programme features a strategic ambition to build economic resilience and inclusion and draws on a wide range of activities to progress this.
Creating a compassionate council	Our COL funding strategy for 2023/24 was developed to target our resources to residents and families most in need, informed by H&F's Businesses Intelligence analysis, policy research and engagement with partners.
Doing things with residents, not to them	We have built the COL Alliance with voluntary and community sector organisations and other local

	partners to help guide priorities as part of our response, share resources and knowledge and place residents' voices at the centre of the work.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	We have taken a ruthlessly financially efficient approach to the management and delivery of support, through making best use of existing resources to work flexibly across the organisation, so more resources reach those that need it.
Taking pride in H&F	The COL Response Programme focuses on helping residents most in need and strengthening partnerships locally through the COL Alliance.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Support to residents with energy bills and with energy efficiency improvements have formed a key part of the programme.

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## Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

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## DETAILED ANALYSIS

1. The COL programme has reacted quickly to the economic climate and implemented a comprehensive programme of support to residents, despite an absence of long-term funding certainty from central government. We have built on our successful track record of compassionate local government and keeping council tax low for residents, making the best use of resources to respond to the needs of residents with compassion and efficiency. We have continued to work closely with the COL Alliance of voluntary and community sector organisations, resident groups, business representative organisations and public sector partners to work together as part of our response.
2. Local authorities were allocated limited central government funding delivered through the HSF. H&F has enhanced this provision with an allocation of £1 million to be used flexibly in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The COL Programme has effectively used business intelligence (BI) and data insights to target resources at those most in need. By tracking key indicators, the programme has responded to specific needs within the borough, including targeting low-income households, and anticipating the impact on service demand.
3. This report sets out the key activities that have taken place under the COL response programme through our Six Point Plan. It considers the impact of our schemes, the outcomes achieved and key successes. The report concludes with reflections on future challenges and opportunities, to inform work which is underway to develop our strategy for 2024/25.

### **POINT 1: We've delivered a funded package of support and kept costs down**

4. The Council has a very generous Council Tax Support Reduction Scheme (CTRS) that provides 100% relief for residents on the lowest income and with additional support needs. The COL programme has extended this to support

residents in reducing arrears. As of the end of March 2024, this scheme had supported 683 households struggling with the essential Council Tax cost, totalling payments of £430,000.

5. For winter 2023/24, we launched Winter Ready Homes, a new pilot microgrant scheme that offered residents small energy efficient measures to help them stay warm and save money. H&F has been one of the few local authorities in the UK offering such a scheme as part of our broader fuel poverty strategy and strategy to tackle the climate and ecological emergency. The scheme supported 2,050 residents over the winter months. This was a mixture of almost 150 residents applying to the scheme for energy efficient measures they could make to their home; and the distribution of 1,900 standardised packages of simple measures such as draft excluder tape and radiator foil to residents in fuel poverty via community organisations and outreach. In addition, the Climate Change Unit have attended engagements across the borough to talk about energy action including at the Livat Centre, Dementia Action Alliance, Our Place of Sanctuary and at Warm Welcome spaces such as The Nourish Hub and Age UK H&F.
6. We have also helped residents on pre-payment meters at immediate risk of having their energy cut off through the issuing of fuel vouchers through the Fuel Bank Foundation. The COL Advice Team, other Council services and the Foodbank issued 2,342 vouchers across the year which were redeemed by residents. This supported 3,180 adults and 1,067 children, with the Council funding £110k and the Fuel Bank Foundation funding an additional £58k through donations they received.
7. The number of vouchers awarded in the year increased dramatically compared to previous years, reflecting the high cost of energy over 2023/24, and the absence (when compared with 2022/23) of the government's £400 energy support scheme, which most residents received. However, the rise in 2023/24 also reflects residents in need knowing they can receive help from the Council and strengthened referral of residents to the scheme.

## **POINT 2: We've built alliances across the borough to help tackle this crisis, together**

8. To effectively respond to the COL crisis, we have co-produced a response with our COL Alliance, with a regular programme of Alliance Steering Group meetings as well as workshops, and conferences. The views of our Alliance partners have helped shape the delivery of the programme, utilising knowledge and expertise garnered from working directly with residents, understanding their needs, and identifying essential support and advice that can help.
9. Towards the end of 2023, we launched the Winter Support Fund, in partnership with Alliance partner H&F Giving. This fund has seen 35 local community organisations receive funding to the total value of £340,000, to directly support residents that are facing hardship. We responded to the huge demand and quality of the applications received for the fund, increasing the budget available so more residents could be assisted.

10. H&F Giving are currently compiling monitoring returns from each of the projects, but we know they helped thousands of residents, providing a range of help including the provision of food support, warm clothing, essential goods, support with utility costs and advice. The fund has also provided an important resource for staff and volunteers of the community projects. It has helped residents across the borough and from a range of demographic groups including families, young people, older residents, refugees/asylum seekers and socially isolated individuals. Some of the positive stories include the following:

***“I can’t keep up with this cost-of-living crisis – I have 4 children, 2 with SEN and I am caring for my sister, this helps so much”*** Parent supported by SEAPIA

***“It was fantastic experience with such lovely people and I’m very thankful for...getting essential shopping to provide for my 2 children in these hard times with a very low income”*** Single Mother of 2 (aged 7-13) supported by Bassuah Legacy Foundation

11. We have also been able to work closely with the Alliance Steering Group on the development of a resident-facing signposting tool. This was identified early on as a priority of the Alliance. The tool will provide a directory of services and support available across our rich VCS, enhancing resident access to the support on offer. Advice services will become more accessible for residents allowing them to make better informed choices. We are currently implementing the new signposting tool so it will be ready in the summer.

### **POINT 3: We’re targeting our resources to residents and families most in need**

12. We launched a Crisis Prevention Fund (CPF) in 2023/24. This new initiative has offered emergency payments of up to £900 to residents in crisis to prevent further escalation of problems. We successfully helped 360 residents who had insufficient funds for basics like food, gas, or electricity, with an average award of around £600. Residents with large arrears were referred to Crosslight for debt and financial literacy advice. This can help residents improve money management skills and access other debt management support such as debt relief orders.
13. The CPF operated alongside our long-standing Local Support Payments (LSP). This provides support to residents experiencing financial difficulties because of an unexpected event. COL provided additional funding to supplement the Council’s existing budget, and together this made 1,061 awards of support across the year.
14. Homelessness has been a rising issue in the borough during the COL crisis. This has resulted from fast growing private rents, more residents falling into arrears as well as family break-down. Through our COL programme, we have funded help and support to prevent homelessness, making 1,100 awards to 642 households at a cost of £350k. This has supported almost 340 households with children, 252 single person households or couples, 44 households with Disabled residents and 10 households of pension age. We helped with service charges and rent and energy arrears, with food costs, and home set-up costs

such as furniture and/or flooring, including for care leavers living independently in new permanent homes.

15. Uniquely in H&F, we have also provided direct financial assistance to key groups that we knew would be most impacted by the crisis. The payments have provided financial assistance with rising bills including energy costs. To date, we have made:
  - 940 awards to low-income Housing Benefit claiming households
  - 885 awards to low-income households with a Disabled resident or to families or carers of a Disabled children
  - 120 awards to care experienced young people living independently, with food support also provided at our Care Leavers Hub and in-borough supported accommodation provider and financial assistance with utilities service charges, which collectively has reached 645 households
  - 180 social housing households assisted with range of welfare assistance including budgeting
  - Awards to support the safeguarding of children.

**POINT 4: We've ensured residents can access help to maximise their income and keep costs down**

16. H&F established the dedicated COL Advice Team from the start of the crisis. The team supports residents to maximise income, processes requests for emergency food parcels or fuel vouchers, assists residents with applying for help from the COL programme, signposts residents to external organisations or internal services for support, and has assisted with community outreach. The team have provided a presence at 145 King Street for face-to-face support, as well as offering telephone and digital assistance.
17. Across 2023/24, the team received almost 18k calls, helping 5,700 people. The team also handled 1,600 emails. The team completed over 500 'triage' assessments with residents to understand their circumstances and what support they need, assisting 440 residents. Over 90% of the residents helped were in receipt of benefits, showing how our help has been targeted to those most in need.
18. We have communicated and promoted our COL support widely across the year. Our COL webpages, which can be translated into over 100 languages, have continued to provide advice and guidance to residents and details on our support schemes. The pages had 19,000 page views across the year, seen by 15,000 individuals. In winter 2023/24, we produced again a COL booklet packed with advice and information, building on the successful booklet from the previous year. Over 10,000 physical copies were delivered across the borough through schools, GP surgeries, libraries, and VCS partners.
19. Our successful community outreach Warm Welcomes and Pop-Ups continued over the winter months. This year we offered grants to local community organisations to provide Warm Welcomes across 15 venues in the borough. The Warm Welcomes have offered food, activities, information and advice (e.g. on the Winter Ready Homes scheme) and a friendly place for residents to go. Feedback has been positive, and venues have seen attendance of up 40



residents per activity, most are women from a range of ethnicities, aged 40-60+. Ninety-one percent of residents that attended said that they are likely to take part in other H&F support schemes.

20. In addition, 56 Pop Ups were delivered in 2023/24 in a range of venue including community centres, the Warm Welcomes and Livat and W12 shopping centres, with over 1,400 unique residents engaged. Officers were able to answer enquiries on the day and signpost residents to more specialised sources of help such as Citizens Advice, or H&F Law Centre. This was an excellent example of partnership working with Alliance partners.

### **POINT 5: We are building economic resilience and an inclusive economy**

21. H&F has continued to offer support to residents in accessing employment and improving skills via H&F Works and the Adult Learning service. A range of support schemes have been available to businesses throughout the year, including access to specialist business advisors.
22. We have built economic resilience by providing training to upskill and improve financial awareness for both residents and officers. Crosslight received a grant to increase their debt advice referral capacity, funding a full-time post which is helping to refer and steer residents towards Debt Relief Orders (DROs). Residents have also been referred to Crosslight for help to improve financial literacy and people's ability to maximise their income, helping to develop money management skills. We have also used Crosslight to develop the skills and knowledge of front-line officers support residents with the COL crisis.

### **Point 6: Building a strategic approach to tackling poverty**

23. H&F has a long history of tackling poverty and supporting residents with additional support needs, through trail-blazing policies such as offering free breakfasts to all primary-age children and food activity support in holidays; free Homecare for older residents, the only authority to do this; the Local Support Payments scheme; and a generous Council Tax Reduction Scheme that means 47% of households receive some form of discount on their Council Tax.
24. The COL crisis has shown the value of these policies and raised new pressures for residents facing hardship. Many of the levers over tackling poverty rest with central government, and much of the budget and decision-making power is held centrally. Repetitive cycles of short-notice, reactive HSF announcements provide a temporary fix, however, little has been done to mitigate the broader impact of social and economic conditions.
25. There is no statutory requirement on localities to establish tackling poverty as a priority. The Local Government Agency (LGA) and other industry groups express that national austerity measures have strained local resources to act in this area. The COL has placed significant pressures on the Council from rising inflation and need for temporary arrangements to respond to rising demand for help from residents. The temporary arrangements are increasingly hard to sustain as resources have been depleted following the cumulative impacts of austerity, a pandemic and the COL crisis.

26. The successful delivery of a COL programme has progressively laid a foundation for developing a longer-term strategic approach to the high cost of living. Supported by the Council's new Corporate Plan for 2023-26, which makes preventing poverty and its impacts a key priority, the implementation of the Council's Fuel Poverty, Food, Health and Wellbeing, Industrial Strategy and Financial Inclusion strategies can help to reinvigorate the next phase of COL support and long-term solutions.
27. Through the COL programme we have also seen the benefit of a strong network of third sector organisations, many aided by H&F grants, that deliver frontline support to residents suffering hardship, much as was the case during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their expertise and knowledge of the communities they work so closely with will be crucial to our long-term strategy to tackle poverty and its impacts.

### **What next for the Cost of Living programme**

28. Despite falls in inflation, prices are still rising, but at a slower rate, and will be experienced acutely in lower income households. 2022/23 remains the fiscal year with the largest year-on-year drop in living standards since the Office for National Statistics (ONS) records began in the 1950s. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) now forecasts that real household disposable income per person is to recover to pre-pandemic peak by 2025/26 – a more positive outlook than previously given.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, [Figures](#) from the Trussell Trust show that almost 13,000 emergency food parcels were provided to H&F residents between April and September 2023, more than double in the same period the year before. [The](#) UK's food poverty [rate](#) is now among the highest in Europe. Despite stabilising economic conditions, demand for support remains.
29. We therefore welcome the government's announcement in the Spring Budget for a further six-month extension of the HSF. But as the LGA has said, it is hugely disappointing that the government waited until the very last minute to announce the extension, when government officials had previously indicated it would end, and that the extension is only for a short six months, with all of the grant needing to be spent by 30 September 2024. We only received guidance and essential information on the next round of HSF on 26 March 2024, four days before the current programme of funding concluded. This is also the fourth six-month extension of the HSF, with the 2023/24 tranche the only one that has operated for a full year.
30. H&F has been allocated £1,414,374.97. The remit of the extended HSF is largely unchanged, providing immediate support for food, utilities, and wider essentials to households with additional support needs. The fund must be spent in its entirety with no option to carry forward funding into winter months. Despite being six months of funding, the formulation of delivery plans, monitoring and evaluation will be subject to the same level of rigour.
31. In parallel with preparing this report, we are developing our strategy for 2024/25, including the use of HSF until September 2024 and transition of COL

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<sup>1</sup> [Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2024 - Office for Budget Responsibility \(obr.uk\)](#)

support into longer-term arrangements. The short-term nature of the funding has several implications for the pace and agility of delivery. It requires consideration of the types of schemes that can be supported, together with understanding the impact on the organisations capacity to support this work.

32. Ongoing analysis of the current programme and how this can transition into the next tranche of funding will be reflected in the design of delivery plans which are being discussed with the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety and Cabinet colleagues.

#### **LIST OF APPENDICES**

None.

# Agenda Item 6

## **Policy and Oversight Board – Draft Work Programme 2024**

The Board is asked to note the draft work programme for 2024 and suggest any additions or amendments.

### **1 July 2024**

- Resident Experience

### **9 September 2024**

- Items TBC

### **25 November 2024**

- Items TBC

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### **Items to be scheduled**

- Voter ID update, incorporating feedback from the May elections
- Co-production update
- Affordable and flexible childcare in H&F
- Corporate performance
- Women's safety (possible standalone meeting)
- Green Corridors – cycling and walking infrastructure