

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

# The Economy, Arts, Sports, and Public Realm Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Monday 5 February 2024

## **PRESENT**

**Committee members:** Councillors Rory Vaughan (Chair), Liz Collins, Adam Peter Lang, Ashok Patel and Jackie Borland

### **Other Councillors:**

Councillor Sharon Holder (Cabinet Member for Public Realm)

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

### **Officers:**

Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance Environment)

Danny Rochford (Head of Finance, Economy and Housing Revenue Account)

James Newman (Assistant Director Finance)

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment)

Jon Pickstone (Strategic Director of Economy)

Mark Raisbeck (Director of Public Realm)

Val Birchall (Artistic Director and Civic Campus Curator) - online

Charles Francis (Committee Coordinator)

## 1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrew Jones (Cabinet Member for the Economy).

## 2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. MINUTES**

The Open and Exempt minutes of the Economy, Arts, Sports and Public Realm Policy and Accountability Committee meeting held on 20 November 2023 were agreed.

### **4. 2024 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)**

Councillor Rowan Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform, introduced the item that provided details on the 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 challenging time for local government, with central government grant reductions and high inflation, but despite the conditions, 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 explained this had been achieved through ruthless financial efficiency and reforming how services were delivered.

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

- The difficulties 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, ensure people's safety, and be a modern and innovative Council with strong financial governance and resilience.
- That council tax would increase by 2.99% (with a 2% Social Care uplift.), but a significant number of households in the borough would not pay the full amount due to discounts and exemptions.

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment) gave a presentation of the budget for the Environment Directorate. The following points were noted:

Key budget changes that were highlighted included:

- Additional investment for inflationary increases on both major contracts (minimum 4%) and council staff pay (3%)
- Plus additional investment in services of £488k:
  1. new waste collection service (£278k) for garden waste
  2. continuation of the community and cultural events programme (£150k)
  3. ongoing contribution to the new H&F Black History Cultural Centre (£60k)
- Savings of £1.55m for the whole Environment department
- £1.35m savings relevant to EASP PAC:
  1. Thorough review of fees and charges (£200k).

2. Service transformation and commissioning savings (£250k)
3. Garden waste collection subscription service (£650k)
4. Further efficiencies through roll out of wheeled bins (£250k)

Daniel Rochford (Head of Finance) gave a presentation of the budget for the Economy Directorate highlighting the following:

- A Net Budget of £0.6m, balanced over last 4 years
- £0.8m savings completed for 2022/2023
- Officers had negotiated £98m Section 106 monies and there was excellent planning performance, including Planning consent for 134 homes
- A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for small business workspace
- Co-produced housing with carbon down a significant 80%
- Officers working in partnership had leveraged £85m for affordable housing
- The Industrial Strategy had created 8,100 jobs and £6.1bn investment
- The Authority continued to provide excellence in adult-learning

Councillor Adam Peter Lang asked if he was correct in assuming that Hammersmith and Fulham had a relatively young population compared to other London Boroughs. And he commented on how this shaped priorities. He asked what demographic change if any there was. In response, Councillor Rowan Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform confirmed that the Borough was ageing and provided details on the ramifications this had for the budget, grant funding opportunities and future budget planning.

Councillor Adam Peter Lang highlighted the savings that were being made through the new waste management collection service. He confirmed he supported the additional investment in services including the garden waste, community and cultural events programme and the ongoing contribution to the new H&F Black History Cultural Centre. He suggested that officers might make how the Council used Section 106 money more prominent on the website.

In relation to the compensation for lost business rates, Councillor Ashok Patel asked for more detail to be provided and in particular what the enforcement policy was for collection. In relation to Appendix 4 of the report, he asked about parks usage and the distinction between state and private schools and also the difference in costs between burial and cremation.

In response, Councillor Rowan Ree confirmed it was a £60k contribution to the Black History Culture Centre and the Council was working in partnership with third sector providers to move the initiative forwards. In relation to business rates, he explained the differences between small and larger businesses and their rates. As smaller businesses paid less for their rates, these needed to be topped by central government. He assured the committee that the Council was using big data and analytics to improve collection rates and in relation to the cost of living, it was noted that the Council had frozen all charges in children's, adult social care and housing services while other charges had risen with inflation. It was noted that the disparity between funeral costs related to burial plot / land ownership.

Bram Kainth, Strategic Director of Environment, confirmed that pitch usage within parks was very popular and so the council was having to prioritise these services to

schools, and use a charge to control the amount of time pitches were available to non-state schools to use. With regards to burial fees and charges, Bram Kainth confirmed Hammersmith and Fulham's charges were comparable to neighbouring Boroughs.

Councillor Jackie Borland asked why bulky household waste collection charges had increased from £30 to £45 for 10 items and was concerned that the rising costs might be prohibitive to some residents. In response, Bram Kainth explained that Hammersmith and Fulham's allowance of up to 10 items for a set charge was generous compared to neighbouring boroughs, where the charges were comparable but for far fewer items. These costs also had to take account of the waste disposal costs.

Councillor Jackie Borland suggested that in future, perhaps officers could look at a sliding scale where costs would be less, if for example there were only five items. In response, Bram Kainth explained that in his experience, when waste disposal charges had risen, this had not resulted in increased fly-tipping. He also commented that most of the costs derived from the journey required to collect the waste, and so a sliding scale would not enable the Council to recoup its costs. He assured the Committee that waste collection costs would be closely monitored and kept under review.

Adding a supplementary question, in relation to Section 106 money, the £98 million was exceptional. She asked if this was guaranteed money which was already being spent, as some developments did not go ahead, and so asked where this money was in the pipeline. In response, Danny Rochford confirmed that S106 money was paid in instalments over a period of time and these were linked to a series of milestones within any such development. There was always a risk that some developments might not proceed as planned, so this could affect what monies came forward.

Councillor Jackie Borland enquired about £85 million which had been leveraged for affordable housing and asked how this had been achieved. In response, Danny Rochford provided details of how the relationships worked between the external bodies and the Economy Team to achieve grant funded schemes and confirmed that most of the £85 million was grant funded money.

Councillor Liz Collins asked about events, encouraging visitors to the borough and in particular the economic value of the "grey pound". She asked how this demographic was factored into future budget planning. In response, Councillor Sharon Holder suggested this could be addressed in the next item.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan, welcomed the contribution to the new Black History Museum which reinforced one of the outcomes of the Cultural Strategy and he asked for the Committee to be kept informed of future developments. In terms of sports pitch hire, and specifically the tennis courts in Ravenscourt Park, he asked about block bookings, how this was monitored, and to ensure residents had an opportunity to use these facilities.

The Chair mentioned the charge for garden waste and highlighted this was a topic which would require further information in the future. He noted the prevalence of garden bonfires / fly tipping and reiterated that the Council needed to reinforce its messaging about disposing of garden waste responsibly.

In response, Bram Kaith, Strategic Director of Environment, confirmed that the Council wished to prevent bonfires, given all the hard work which was being done to improve air quality. In relation to fly-tipping, Bram commented that other boroughs which had introduced a garden waste service had not seen fly-tipping levels increase. With regards to tennis courts and block bookings, it was noted that this was a balancing act and officers were looking at ways to improve accessibility so that all parties had an opportunity to use them.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan asked officers to provide further details on the savings for corporate accommodation and how these would be reviewed and monitored over the course of the year. In response, Danny Rochford explained there were a number of pipeline opportunities that had already been identified, such as repurposing the fourth floor of 145 King Street to residential, renegotiating the Council's property database contract, reviewing the repairs and maintenance budget for the entire corporate property portfolio and potentially making some amendments to the way in which rental income was set. He confirmed that, as April approached, the Property and Asset Management Team were compiling an Asset Strategy which would enable that target to be delivered.

Jon Pickstone, Strategic Director of Economy, confirmed that this would need monitoring in the short term and a variety of other areas such as being more energy efficient and relinquishing office space where the Council could, were part of the plan to save the Council money in the medium term.

In relation to Table 6 in the report - Summary of Savings, Councillor Ashok Patel noted £200k saved on a review of fees and charges which he felt was surprising given spending cuts over the last 14 years. He asked why this had taken so long. In response, Councillor Rowan Ree explained that fees and charges were reviewed every year, and the priority was to ensure the fees for core services, such as Adult Care, Children's and Housing Services were frozen to assist resident residents during the cost-of-living crisis. It was noted that most other charges tended to fluctuate with inflation or where there was a commercial element, charges reflected market changes.

The Chair thanked Councillors Rowan Ree, Sharon Holder and all the officers present for their hard work in a very challenging environment to balance the budget. Officers were also commended for their clear presentations.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the Policy and Accountability Committee (PAC) considers the budget proposals and makes recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate.

2. That the PAC considers the proposed changes to fees and charges and makes recommendations as appropriate

## **5. HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM CULTURAL COMPACT**

Mark Raisbeck, Director of Public Realm, gave a presentation which provided the Committee details of the proposed terms of reference for the new strategic partnership for culture (the Cultural Compact), including its proposed membership structure.

The presentation covered the following points:

- The outcomes of the Cultural Strategy and background to the Cultural Compact (Compact).
- What the Cultural Compact was.
- The scope and purpose of the Cultural Compact.
- The proposed membership of the Cultural Compact.
- Role of the Cultural Compact should the London Borough of Culture Bid be successful.

Councillor Ashok Patel noted that the London Borough of Culture Bid interviews were taking place on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and asked how the Council would be responding to the “making an impact” category. In response, Jon Pickstone confirmed the Council’s position was well thought through, and in terms of finance, governance and deliverability, expert advice had been sought and the bid was well tailored to Hammersmith and Fulham and reflected the Council’s assets, goals and communities.

Councillor Adam Peter Lang confirmed that he had attended the London Borough of Culture Bid event and this had gone well. He asked about the membership structure of the Culture Compact and whether the template had been borrowed from The Arts Federation. He stated that in his view, the number of proposed members of the Compact was about right and he was pleased that this included representatives for young people. In response, Mark Raisbeck confirmed that a loose framework, geared towards Hammersmith and Fulham had been used, and 16 members was probably about the maximum number to achieve the desired breadth of experience for the Compact. Mark Raisbeck also confirmed there would be a Cultural Forum so that those groups that were not members of the Compact would have a vehicle for their views.

Councillor Jackie Borland commented on the importance of culture to residents living in the borough and asked about the relationship between the Cultural Strategy and the Compact. In response, Mark Raisbeck confirmed the Compact would oversee

the delivery and governance of the Cultural Strategy. Val Birchall, Artistic Director and Civic Campus Curator, added that the difference between the Compact and the Arts Commission was that the Compact was intended to be more of a strategic partnership looking at how the outcomes of the health, economy or private sector could be met, to draw in additional resources and how the Council might then jointly resource the delivery of the Cultural Strategy. Whereas the Arts Commission was the mechanism for consulting and developing the themes for the Cultural Strategy work. Val confirmed that in terms of the models, nationally, there were over 20 places with cultural compacts which were very specific to particular places.

Councillor Jackie Borland asked for details to be provided about how the Compact would work and whether there were any set timeframes in mind, and what steps were being taken to ensure the Compact / Forum was inclusive and representative. In response, Mark Raisbeck confirmed that further to discussion with Councillor Holder and the Chair, it was envisaged that the membership of the Compact would be reviewed every 12 months and that the Compact would meet every two to three months depending on its workload. He confirmed that the details for the governance of the Compact would be developed with Councillor Holder and the Chair (after they had been appointed).

Councillor Liz Collins commented that a considerable amount of culture was unspoken and that the dominant culture would have the loudest voice. She suggested that if the borough was unsuccessful in its London Borough of Culture bid, then the strengths and weaknesses of the winning bid should be assessed as a good learning experience. She stressed that ensuring a legacy stemmed from a winning bid was also very important. In response, Mark Raisbeck assured the Committee that these particular points were captured within the Cultural Strategy.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan, commended the use of the Compact to deliver the Cultural Strategy more broadly and the use of the Compact to deliver the ideas which had been generated through the bid. The Chair asked for disabled people to be represented on the Cultural Compact, especially given their important input formulating the bid.

Mark Raisbeck confirmed that the Cultural strategy was developed in partnership with over 70 of the boroughs' cultural organisations and there was a need for them to work strategically together to drive the delivery of the overall (cultural) vision. Jon Pickstone, Strategic Director of Economy explained that the Cultural Strategy sat within the Environment Department but was inter-twined with the Visitor Economy / Economy Department. It was noted the borough was perceived as one of the principal centres of culture in West London and due to its strong transport links and connectivity it had a bright future.

The Chair confirmed the Committee welcomed the Cultural Compact and looked forward to its confirmed membership and the agenda that would be pursued in the future. The Chair welcomed that a disabled representative would be integral to the Cultural Compact and looked forward to the Cultural Strategy (rather than the Hammersmith and Fulham Council Cultural Strategy) being driven forwards.

**RESOLVED**

1. For the Committee to comment on the draft terms of reference for the Hammersmith & Fulham Cultural Compact and proposed membership structure (Appendix One).

Meeting started: 7.00 pm  
Meeting ended: 8.45 pm

Chair .....

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