

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Policy and Oversight Board Minutes



Wednesday 17 September 2025

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Lisa Homan (Chair), Natalia Perez, Helen Rowbottom, Nicole Trehy, Rory Vaughan and Jose Afonso

Other Councillors

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

Officers

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

James Newman (Assistant Director of Finance)

Mia Peters (REAP Project Manager)

Sarah Bright (Director of People's Commissioning)

Jo Woodward (Director of Planning and Property)

Jo McCormick (Director of Procurement, Commercial, and Digital)

Mary Lamont (Assistant Director, People & Talent)

David Abbott (Head of Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stala Antoniades and Jacolyn Daly.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMMES OVERVIEW REPORT

Councillor Lisa Homan (Chair) gave a brief introduction to the item which provided an overview of the Council's corporate and service transformation programmes which form part of the Council's strategy to ensure the continued strong medium term financial governance of the Council.

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) gave an introduction to the item and set out the context for the transformation programmes. He noted that Local Government had experienced a 54% cut in real terms funding since 2010 while also seeing increasing demand pressures and constraints. However, he noted that Hammersmith & Fulham Council had successfully navigated those challenges and found savings while protecting frontline services. He explained that the transformation programmes in the report were strategic programmes to save larger amounts over the medium to long term. He noted that the Finance Peer Challenge Review earlier in the year had recommended the Council formalise its transformation programmes and report on them regularly, and this was the first of those reports. Councillor Ree said it was important to manage public money as carefully as possible and it was right to look at key areas such as staffing, the Council's property portfolio, the use of data and technology, to ensure services were provided as efficiently as possible.

James Newman (Assistant Director of Finance) added that in addition to the five cross-cutting programmes discussed in the report, the Council was also continually looking at driving savings in all other areas.

Corporate Property Transformation Programme

Jo Woodward (Director of Planning and Property) presented the corporate property transformation programme. She noted that the Council had a relatively small corporate property portfolio at present, as much of the marketable stock had been sold off in previous years as part of cost cutting measures. However, 748 non-domestic assets remained in the portfolio, with 45% of them in the general fund. These included parks, business units, leisure facilities, and sub-stations. They were currently managed in a hybrid way – mostly devolved to the responsible service, but with central functions for compliance and facilities management. The Council was exploring a corporate landlord model – bringing functions into a single corporate strategic centre. Officers anticipated that would bring efficiencies and mean they were more aligned to the Council's priorities.

Jo Woodward noted that the occupation levels in the portfolio were high at over 90%. The majority were subject to market rents, though some had restrictive covenants on them. She said the biggest issue driving the timeline for this project was the nearing competition of the Civic Campus. As services moved into the Civic Campus officers could look again at the operational estate and their requirements.

Digitalisation Transformation Programme

Jo McCormick (Director of Procurement, Commercial, and Digital) presented the digitalisation transformation programme. She highlighted that digitalisation was about improving work and service delivery across the Council – including taking advantage of automation and artificial intelligence. The workstreams included smart and

connected city development, data driven service delivery, and service digitalisation. The Council's Business Intelligence team was being used to find further savings opportunities.

Digital Services was carefully reviewing contracts and licensing – and consolidating where possible. There was also a digitalisation working group with representatives from across the Council looking at new ways of working and cashable savings.

REAP Accelerate Transformation Programme

Mia Peters (REAP Project Manager) presented the REAP Accelerate Transformation Programme. She noted the goal of the programme was to have a single digital pathway for all resident contacts so advisors, staff, and residents themselves were all working from a single source of truth. Whether a resident called, or used the website, or spoke to a member of staff in the office – all of those interactions would be recorded in one system. She said the programme was also about a culture of putting resident needs first. The system was designed around user needs and ensured consistency and quality of customer service.

Mia Peters highlighted the work of the Digital Accessibility Group, a mix of officers and residents who worked together to improve digital inclusion. She noted they had co-produced a digital form centre of excellence with guidance for officers to ensure services had the knowledge to build high quality, accessible forms on the website. She also noted that the Council had bought new technology to re-engineer processes, including a new customer relationship management system and corporate case management system.

Revenue Raising Transformation Programme

Jo McCormick (Director of Procurement, Commercial, and Digital) presented the Revenue Raising Transformation Programme. She noted that the programme aimed to increase income generation in existing current commercial activities, explore new income generation opportunities, and provide training and development to make better commercial decisions.

Workforce Transformation Programme

Mary Lamont (Assistant Director, People & Talent) presented the Workforce Transformation Programme. She noted that the goal of the programme was to reshape the services delivered by the People and Talent function to meet future organisational demands. A key component of the programme was the proposed establishment of a Joint Venture for the delivery of agency and interim staffing services across all council departments.

Adult Social Care Transformation Programme

Sarah Bright (Director of People's Commissioning) presented the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme. She noted that in May 2024, Children's Services, Adult Social Care, and Public Health were combined to form the People department. During that process, internal and external assessments and engagement showed that Adult Social Care required improvement, which led to the establishment of the transformation programme.

The key priorities of the programme included:

- Strategic commissioning to ensure the right provision at the right time.
- Co-production which reflects a wide range of stakeholders and results in delivery.
- High quality data, performance, and intelligence insights.
- Stronger outcomes for residents which promote their strengths and independence.
- Robust partnership working with health and the community and third sector to improve pathways.
- Timely access to services which are clear and easy to navigate.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and said it was positive that the Council was being proactive to drive improvement. She said it was a credit to the Cabinet Members and officers who were always thinking about how to do things better.

In reference to the Corporate Property programme, the Chair asked how officers were planning to maximise income from commercial properties such as shops under Council owned blocks of flats, noting that it had been a challenge in the past. Jo Woodward said it was still early in the process. Officers were working to understand the assets, lease arrangements, and who was responsible for managing the properties. She added that Housing Revenue Account properties were part of programme.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked what systems were in place to ensure consistency of service quality during the transformation process. James Newman said each programme had its own governance structure in place, with a board where quality will be monitored.

In reference to the Corporate Property programme, Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked if the programme was plugged into the work on the Industrial Strategy – particularly the need for student housing and lab space. Jo Woodward said it was, noting that there were a range of priorities the Council wanted to meet and the Industrial Strategy was a key priority and the teams worked closely together.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom highlighted the danger of short-sighted decisions to cut costs by reducing service provision – noting Kensington & Chelsea Council had closed Family Hubs and was cutting their Council Tax Support Scheme. Councillor Rowan Ree said Family Hubs were a good example of this as they brought a range of services together under one roof and should be expanded where possible, not closed down. Regarding the Council Tax Support Scheme, he said H&F kept council tax low through prudent financial management. Who paid was as important as how much they paid as it was a regressive tax. The support scheme ensured those who were least able to pay, paid the least. He noted that H&F was one of the few councils in the country that maintained a zero minimum for those least able to pay.

Councillor Jose Afonso thanked officers for the report. Regarding the disposal of corporate assets, he asked for more details around changing the performance indicators in that area. Jo Woodward said they had not got to that level of detail yet. The first stage was to ensure the Council was getting the basics right in terms of leases and arrangements and had clarity over concessions. Then they would look at the financial key performance indicators to ensure commercial efficiency.

Councillor Jose Afonso asked how digital accessibility was being looked at and promoted. Mia Peters said they had the Digital Accessibility Group, comprised of disabled and non-disabled residents and officers, which they were looking at expanding. Officers also carried out user research sessions. The Council was currently refreshing its digital strategy and officers were organising in-depth sessions with people to inform them of the changes.

Councillor Jose Afonso noted the goal of merging case management systems and asked how many were currently used across the Council. Jo McCormick said there were eight main case management systems, as well as some other smaller ones. They were targeting the smaller ones first as the larger systems tended to be tailored to services with specific requirements.

The Chair, in reference to an earlier comment about testing and improving web forms, noted she had a 'terrible' experience with another organisation's website recently. Given the range of services offered, she raised concerns about the Council's ability to thoroughly test every online form and service. Mia Peters said there were several mechanisms in place to tackle this issue including Co-production and principles of good design and accessibility. They also had analytics available that could notice patterns if users were dropping off at certain points in their journey. There was a team in place to review and refine forms to ensure usability. The Chair suggested that artificial intelligence could be used to support this process.

Councillor Rowan Ree emphasised how important digital accessibility was as so many services across society had moved online. He said the Council wanted to ensure that as many residents as possible could access services online and the Digital Inclusion Strategy launching in October would support that. He said members were welcome to attend the launch event to learn more.

Councillor Rory Vaughan asked if there was an overarching narrative or theme to the transformation programmes. James Newman said they all involved modernising and future proofing services, with greater corporate oversight, efficiency, and value for money.

Councillor Rory Vaughan asked about the importance of workforce development and retaining staff. Mary Lamont said the Council's workforce was key to all of the programmes. The Council was focused on enhancing skills, and improving retention and recruitment in hard to fill areas. Talent and performance management also cut across all areas.

The Chair asked if there were lessons from other areas that could inform the Adult Social Care transformation programme. Sarah Bright said there were a number of lessons from Children's Services that applied to Adult Social Care too. They had some difficult areas to recruit to. Officers wanted to address the reliance on agency staff and ensure they could attract the right people to fill those roles permanently.

The Chair asked for more information on the proposed recruitment agency. Mary Lamont said the proposed Joint Venture would better support the Council's recruitment needs by reducing the admin burden on managers, the cost to the

authority, and improve consistency – and would enable the Council to better prioritise local employment and opportunities for young people. James Newman added that this was a proven approach which other London boroughs had already taken.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked if there were systems in place to allow residents to input into the Adult Social Care transformation programme. Sarah Bright said Co-production was an ongoing process for the department and they had involvement from a range of residents throughout the commissioning and mobilisation process to ensure their feedback led to service improvement.

Councillor Nicole Trehy asked for assurances around whether there was too much of a focus on savings, and the impact on the third sector and vulnerable people. Councillor Rowan Ree said the purpose of the programmes was to improve services not cut services. He said all of the work was co-produced to ensure services worked well for users.

The Chair asked for more information on the Commercial Board mentioned in the report. Jo McCormick said the Commercial Board considered business cases for new ventures, reviewed the work of LBHF companies and joint ventures, and carried out deep-dives of areas where the commercial potential and outcomes were not being met. She noted some recent successes including £1m of additional income from digital advertising, enhancing registrar's service usage, improving property usage, and improving leisure facility bookings. In the future they would be looking at electric vehicle charging and joint CCTV work with other boroughs.

The Chair summarised the discussion and thanked officers for the report and their contributions. She noted that the Board and the Policy and Accountability Committees would monitor the transformation programmes and track their progress, delivery, and outcomes.

RESOLVED

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

5. DISABILITY CONFIDENT LEADER

Mary Lamont (Assistant Director, People & Talent) introduced the item that covered Hammersmith & Fulham Council being recognised as a Disability Confident Leader – the highest level of accreditation within the UK Government's Disability Confident scheme. She noted that Hammersmith & Fulham was one of only five boroughs in London to achieve the accreditation.

The Chair asked how the accreditation was measured. Mary Lamont explained that it had been externally assessed through Disability Confident. The Council submitted information and supporting evidence with support from the Disability Equity Network.

Councillor Natalia Perez congratulated the Council for achieving the accreditation. She then asked if there was a system of regular monitoring in place to ensure the

standard remained high. Mary Lamont said there would be further assessments. She also recognised there was always more to do in this area. She said the Council had a lot to be proud of, but officers were very keen to work with the Disability Equality Network and residents' groups to keep improving.

Councillor Rory Vaughan commented that it was good to see the Council's strategic commitment in this area being recognised. He highlighted the Disabled People's Commission and the co-production work that stemmed from it which had now been embedded in Council services.

Councillor Nicole Trehy also gave her congratulations to all those involved and welcomed the benefits of this work for all residents.

The Chair also welcomed the report. She said it demonstrated how people can shape how services look and work for residents. And she hoped the Policy and Accountability Committees and the Board could also help shape services through transformation work. She then asked how long the accreditation lasted. Mary Lamont said it was assessed and re-evaluated every three years.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED

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

6. POLICY AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEES' UPDATE REPORT

The Chair introduced the report which provided an update on the meetings of the Council's six Policy and Accountability Committees (PACs) in June and July 2025 and the draft work programmes for September and November 2025.

The Chair highlighted the Co-production reviews that had been to meetings of Children and Education PAC and Health and Adult Social Care PAC recently. She noted a Council-wide overview of Co-production activity was scheduled for the next meeting.

The Chair noted the Board's suggestion of taking Council strategies to the relevant PACs for consideration. She felt it would be a useful exercise to look at whether the Council was delivering on what had been set out in the strategies. She asked officers to provide a list of strategies and whether they had been to PAC recently.

ACTION: David Abbott

RESOLVED

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

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board's draft work programme was presented for discussion and noting.

RESOLVED

1. The Board noted the draft work programme.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted:

- 24 November 2025
- 4 February 2026
- 29 April 2026

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 8.23 pm

Chair

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