

MINUTES OF THE CULTURE, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON Thursday 13th November 2025, 6.30pm

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors Makbule Gunes (Chair), Luke Cawley-Harrison, Sue Jameson

Councillor Emily Arkell, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Councillor Seema Chandwani, Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality

Councillor Ajda Ovat, Cabinet Member for Communities

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Ann Cunningham, Head of Highways & Parking

Eubert Malcolm, Director of Environment

John O'Keefe, Head of Finance (Capital, Place & Economy)

Zoe Robertson, Programme Director Wellbeing & Climate

Fola Irikefe, Principal Scrutiny Officer

Attendance Online

Councillor Mark Grosskopf

Councillor Mike Hakata, Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Environment, and Transport

Jess Crowe, Corporate Director of Culture, Strategy and Communities

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Liam Carroll and Barry Francis.

The minutes of the meeting on 15th of September were approved.

The Chair opened the meeting explaining that the main purpose of the meeting was to scrutinise the proposed budget and the financial strategy in respect of the remit of the Panel which included culture, community safety and environment, she invited council officers and the Cabinet members to brief the Scrutiny Panel.

The Head of Finance, Capital, Place & Economy informed the Scrutiny Panel that the Council's financial position continued to be challenging and was driven by increasing demand and the price of services with challenges around social care, temporary accommodation, inflation, housing benefit and our property estate. The Council was forecasting that an additional £30 million would be needed, mainly across social care and temporary accommodation for 2026/27. Work had been carried out over the summer period identifying new proposals to reduce costs and increase income, resulting in £7 million worth of savings that had been put forward of which £2.3 million would be subject to consultation. There were £14.9 million previously approved savings for next year so in total savings could amount to around about £22 million. In year monitoring had shown that some of the budgets were at risk but were being monitored closely. As part of the budget preparation process it had been assumed, in line with the statute, to set a balanced budget the council would need to apply to the Government for £57 million of new exceptional financial support.

It was reported that the Council was doing everything possible to reduce spending on non-statutory services through various means including controls on all spending over £1, 000, a hold on new recruitment and also controls on commissioning and contracts. There was only one round of savings for 2026/27 unlike there was last year as the objective was to focus capacity and resources on the delivery of the existing savings programme. In respect of the five-year position, demand was forecasted to continue to increase and the aim was to minimise the use of EFS so the Council would continue to lobby the Government on the current funding system not being sustainable to meet statutory requirements.

Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired about how the EFS interest rate was tracked since it was first in use and whether the Council would get a fixed rate for the 20-year term. The Head of Finance explained that the Council were required to repay EFS over a maximum period of twenty years and for the purpose of evaluation and budget monitoring, the Council make a certain set of assumptions around interest rates. It was noted that this depended on cash flows and interest rates and it was not easy to say a set figure. In response to Councillor Cawley-Harrison seeking clarity on whether it can be deemed a variable rate, the Head of Finance explained that the Treasury Management Strategy statement report explained the structure and so it couldn't be deemed a variable rate.

Councillor Jameson enquired if the budget has taken on the approach of the worst-case scenario when putting the projections forward. The Head of Finance explained the projections were realistic based on evidence of demand and cost pressures that the Council were aware of.

Library Staffing Budget

The Corporate Director for Culture, Strategy and Communications reported a pressure in the library staffing budget following previous achievement of the savings as the Council had reviewed its policy on weekend pay supplements for staff to be inline with other areas in the authority. Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired if the new approach to payment of weekend work had led to pressures across the authority in other areas aside from libraries. The Corporate Director for Culture, Strategy and Communications explained that adopting the change was bringing library staff into alignment with other areas such as leisure services, the aim was to standardise the offer for staff.

The Programme Director, Wellbeing and Climate explained that they have had the same issue with some leisure staff who work weekends, and they were standardising the offer including the one for some ex-Fusion workforce onto Haringey's terms and conditions.

Capital Programme

The Chair enquired about the loan to Alexandra Palace and the implications to the Council in the event that they have problems acquiring the income to pay back. The Head of Finance explained that they were approached by Alexandra Palace for a loan of £3.5 million to renovate the Panorama Room. The Panel heard that the full terms had yet to be agreed and the business case that has been presented thus far supported the investment and the ability for the investment to generate additional revenue to pay the loan back. Following a formal proposal, this would be reviewed further.

Councillor Jameson enquired about the interest rate that will be placed on the loan to Alexandra Palace? The Head of Finance explained that historically a margin has been applied to lending to Alexandra Palace. The aim was to cover administrative and monitoring costs associated with the loan.

The Corporate Director for Culture, Strategy and Communications further added that the Panorama Room was very much in need of an upgrade and hosted a number of events. The

Chair expressed the need to ensure that the funds would be re-paid and that the business case was sound. The Chair emphasised that the Scrutiny Panel was keen to have further assurance. The Corporate Director for Culture, Strategy and Communications explained that a full business case has been developed using treasury standards and it was expected that the loan would be funded by the income that they would generate following the refurbishment. It was further emphasised that the Council own Alexandra Palace and any further shortfall on income and deficit will come back to the Council. Due diligence would be carried out on the final proposal to ensure they were able to pay back the loan.

Councillor Cawley Harrison enquired if there was any incentive for early repayments, in response the Head of Finance explained that Alexandra Palace has had existing loans with the Council and early repayment was unlikely, but the loan would have a break clause. Councillor Jameson enquired why Alexandra Palace was preferred for the elections as opposed to Tottenham Hotspur Stadium given also that Alexandra Palace was more expensive? It was explained that the space that was hired for the 2022 election at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium was not ideal, in terms of visibility during the count and the need for a clear and secure line of sight. The Chair enquired about the invest to earn figure and it was reported that it was part of a previous proposal to develop the restaurant, however, due to cash flow management challenges they were unable to progress with the proposal.

Councillor Jameson enquired how noticeable the savings would be to residents? The Chair further added that the remit of the Panel covers front facing services and how confident were Cabinet Members that the allocated budgets could meet their service objectives. The Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality explained that in an ideal world, a bigger budget would be welcome, the Cabinet Member briefed that in terms of going out to re- tender a lot of co -production with residents was carried out and almost 9,000 people participated in the consultation.

Leisure Commercialisation - Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired whether the figures were aspirational figures or whether they were projected figures based on a clear plan of action and it was now increasing profitability. Profitability was projected for 2028/29, and Councillor Cawley-Harrison was keen to know what was happening in terms of the years prior. He enquired further about the details behind the figures presented. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure explained that the budget figures were projected, and they were based on an externally validated report that the authority commissioned to identify new and different revenue streams and income streams to come into the leisure service. She explained that its presently subsidised and the investment that has gone in over the last 12 months has been about stabilising the service. The commercialisation plan over the next 12 to 18, then 24 months would look at areas to increase service users and get more people utilising the services through the gym, pool etc. There was a range of surveys carried out that have identified different needs including a lot of unmet demand with residents that have disabilities and impairments. So work was underway to implement those improvements.

In response to a question, the Programme Director Wellbeing & Climate added that the £7.5 million figure was a rounded figure, and this was because it was a projection for the future from a wide range of services and the plan was to raise income. The income, trends and seasonality were reviewed on a monthly basis, and this was the first year of trading and it would take a while before the services were financially stable in order to provide additional savings for the Council.

Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired further about why it would take up to three years to get to the point of income generation and queried if more needs to be done in terms of this ambition. He further enquired about the business case in terms of profitability in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure expressed that they have received positive feedback regarding the improvement of the services from members of the public and that the commercialisation report was important in setting out a clear plan regarding the next steps.

The Programme Director Wellbeing & Climate added that when leisure services came back in house from Fusion, it was not in a good staffing situation with a very small workforce which required investment and improvements to the buildings and the plan was to ensure the investment pays off with an increase in income generation over time. Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired further about what stage the commercialisation plan would come into force. The Programme Director Wellbeing & Climate explained that the financial plan for the service was part of the insourcing decision, and they have monthly management actions with finance to monitor the budget. It was noted that income and growth was part of the commercialisation.

In respect of CCTV income generation, Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired if it was a new initiative that the authority has developed. The Cabinet Member for Communities outlined that there were a few authorities such as Camden and Richmond that do this and the projections have been made against benchmarking with these authorities and as a result of the enquiries that come through. Councillor Jameson enquired further if the estimate was a realistic one and if was something that the Council could build on. The Director of Environment explained that it has been identified as a way to raise income. The Chair enquired about the target audience aside from Insurance companies and whether residents would have to pay the same rate as businesses? The Cabinet Member for Communities explained the focus was currently mainly for insurance companies and that should residents enquire as a result of possibly being the victim of a crime etc, they would not be charged.

Optimised environmental enforcement.

Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired if the increase was based on the fact that they had previously not issued as many FPN's and now with the Kingdom contract in place, an increase was being seen in picking up of fly tipping? The Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality explained to the Panel that she requested for this item to be removed as she felt targets around PCN's and FPN's were not ideal targets and she would rather see a target on reducing the cost to clear up fly tipping and the objectives around FPN's and PCN's was something she would like corrected in advance of it going to full Council. The Chair sought clarity on whether it would then be removed from the budget and Councillor Chandwani explained that it would appear as income that the Council acquires although not as a saving proposal.

In respect of Moselle Brooks the Chair enquired over why it wasn't budgeted for previously. The Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality explained that £1.1 million capital investment was being sought through borrowing to repair the culvert which had collapsed as it was over 100 years old so very much overdue repairs. The Council was currently in early conversation with the Environment Agency to look at future funding, so the £1.1 million figure was an emergency amount to carry out the initial repair, and it was phase 2 that was being discussed with the Environment Agency. Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired further if the land was under private land and together with a number of other culverts in the borough, it was part of the conversation related to exploring opportunities to offload the burden onto private investors rather than through our own capital investment programme. The Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality explained that the overall figure for repair was probably more in line with a figure of £2 million but the Council are working with staff to manage the situation and address the initial structural problems to make it safe. Once the emergency had been addressed then the long-term programme would be addressed. Councillor Jameson enquired if the Council had a full map of our culverts for Haringey? **ACTION: It was agreed that the map would be sent to the Scrutiny Panel.**

Waste Management Fleet Purchases

Councillor Cawley-Harrison re-iterated that they had not received the business case requested at the budget briefing meeting. The Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality explained that as part of the bidding process for the new contract, the successful party would be purchasing the fleet for the Council and had a budget envelope as part of their bidding process. The Council would be assessing contractors against who could procure the fleet cheaper amongst other requirements. The Director of Environment further added that as part of the procurement process the chosen operator would procure the fleet on the Council's behalf as they would have the expertise and will form part of the final contract awarded April 2026.

Councillor Cawley-Harrison further added that his enquiry was about the business case to purchase as opposed to the leasing arrangements. Councillor Chandwani clarified that the ask was for the business case to purchase as opposed to lease and that it should be able to be provided. The Head of Finance explained that there has been a detailed evaluation and appraisal of the various ownership options, and this was seen to be the most efficient and cost-effective option. The Head of Finance explained that he would need to check if the Scrutiny Panel were able to see the business case because of commercial confidentiality.

Councillor Cawley-Harrison re-iterated that it was very difficult to scrutinise policy decisions when Scrutiny were not privy to the information used to make the recommendations. He further added that there were always multiple factors when making such decisions which can be based on quality, costs and the best options. The Chair further asked if the Council were buying the vehicles in order to have a more cost-effective contract? Councillor Chandwani explained that the waste contract included the vehicles to be leased.

Tree Planting

The Chair acknowledged that a green environment is beneficial to everyone queried whether during this time of financial difficulty alternative means of resourcing the planting of trees could have been found. The Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Environment and Transport outlined that the authority pledged to plant 10,00 trees and was on course to achieve this having planted 6,000 aided by the partnership programme with residents for tree planting. It was noted that the authority was the most successful borough in the UK for tree planting. Councillor Hakata stressed that tree lined streets, and high canopy cover also equated to better health and well-being outcomes for residents, so it was a saving in the long run and was quantifiable by the NHS. The Cabinet Member also emphasised that tree planting also tackled the impacts of climate change as trees mitigate against the negative effects of many environmental concerns. The Scrutiny Panel also heard that the authority had been successful in applying for external grant funding which required match funding and the focus of this tree planting will be in lower income parts of the borough for much needed canopy cover.

Councillor Cawley-Harrison expressed that the business case for the tree planting was very light and did not marry up with the figures presented in the budget papers. Councillor Hakata apologised for the lack of clarity in the way the information was presented. The Programme Director Wellbeing & Climate expressed that she would go back and ensure the figures were accurate and explained that there was money set aside for maintaining the trees. It was noted that there was then match funding for sponsored trees and it was a complicated funding model. **ACTION: officers to double check the figures detailed in the business case.**

Councillor Cawley-Harrison emphasised that figure of £50,000 was not significant compared to the £1.1 in additional capital spend on trees, and there was a need to understand the detail of where the 1.1 million was coming from.

Cleaner Air School Zones - The Programme Director Wellbeing & Climate explained that the scheme to help with air quality around schools could not be launched because of the pressure on the capital programme and the project would come under other projects that were happening around air quality and particularly through active travel. Councillor Cawley-Harrison enquired whether there was a plan for this going forward and what were the implication on air quality plans?

The Cabinet Member for Climate Action, Environment and Transport explained that the Clean Air School zone was still being implemented under other projects, and the council had successfully bid to support a number of schools in the borough through the GLA Clean Air for Schools programme for air filtration systems.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members in attendance as well as offices and the Scrutiny Panel then convened to discuss recommendations/ follow up actions they would like to put forward.

FOLLOW UP/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Leisure Commercialisation

The Panel noted that the Leisure provision was brought in house last year and so the Council now had full control so there was potentially more opportunity to generate income by utilising assets and improving the Council offer to be competitive with other comparable service providers. It was noted that the Council was now in a good position to carry out an options appraisal to analyse this properly and have a fresh options appraisal.

Follow Up: The Panel asked for more details and information to be confident about the figures presented on Leisure Commercialisation and wanted to consider other options to make the commercialisation more viable. Details of social value would also be welcomed by the Panel. This would help the Panel recommend other options for increased commercialisation of the leisure services whether within the existing model or through other means.

RECOMMENDATION: The Panel also recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee further consider and comment on the budget allocation for Leisure Commercialisation as further confidence was needed on these figures.

Moselle Brook

The Panel recognised that repairing the culvert was a necessity and the budget cited that the £1.1 million allocation could potentially increase following the initial repairs.

RECOMMENDATION: The Scrutiny Panel recommended that following the initial repairs, a policy paper on the condition of the culvert and a survey regarding maintenance plans going forward with set timelines should be developed which could be reviewed on a 10-year basis. The Panel recommended robust systems for monitoring the state of the culvert be put in place.

Waste Management – Fleet Purchase

The Panel wanted further details regarding the rationale behind outright purchase as opposed to leasing the fleet. The Panel had requested the business case for purchase at their planning meeting, but it was deemed commercially sensitive.

RECOMMENDATION: That the business case on fleet management is presented at Overview and Scrutiny in their January meeting to understand if purchasing as opposed to

leasing will have significant implications on the waste procurement contract. The Scrutiny Panel felt they were unable to scrutinise this decision properly without the business case.

Tree Planting

The Scrutiny Panel accepted that tree planting will go towards addressing the imbalance in terms of accessibility to green spaces in parts of the borough, nevertheless the additional £1.1 million was a supplementary figure to what had already been allocated. The figures set out needed clarity and the business case did not seem to tally with the figures.

RECOMMEDATION: The case study presented should be more robust and accurate with details of what the implication of the allocation means to the existing tree planting budget and what other options have been considered as opposed to allocating further resources.

Clean Air School Zones

RECOMMENDATION: To provide information of how the £400,00 allocated to various schemes were being delivered through other means.

Pressure in libraries staffing budget

Follow Up: The Panel queried why there were not different pay scales with weekend opening hours planned ahead? And queried were the library hours re-considered once it was realised that the weekend hours would have an impact. The Panel asked if there is potential to appoint a member of staff that will be able to generate income in the libraries?

Alexandra Palace – Panorama Room

Follow Up: What financial safety nets were being put in place for recouping the investment in the Panorama Room at Alexandra Palace should the projected commercial benefits not come to fruition? There, was a question on the level of protections in place to recover the loan?

RECOMMENDATION: That information requested in advance of Scrutiny Panel meetings should be provided and the Panel would like to recommend that business cases related to savings should also be included in budget papers being considered by Scrutiny Panels.