



## Agenda Items 7, 8 and 9

Councillor Kairul Kareema Marikar declared non-pecuniary interests in that she was a director in a care company, and those items dealt with care agencies.

### **74. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2021, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

### **75. Public Questions**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were received at the meeting.

### **76. Petitions**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions were received.

### **77. References from Council and Other Committees/Panels**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were none.

## **Resolved Items**

### **78. Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2020/21 - Final Outturn, Draft Revenue Budget 2022/23, Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, and Draft Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2024/25**

Members received the Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2020/21 – Final Outturn, the Draft Revenue Budget 2022/23 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, and the Draft Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2024/25, which were presented by the Director of Finance and Assurance.

Members were informed that the purpose of the draft Capital Programme report was to set out the Council's additional capital proposals for investment over the years 2022/23 to 2024/25 which had been proposed as part of the Annual budget setting process. The proposals were over and above the existing Capital Programme agreed by Council in February 2021. The final Capital programme report, which would contain new proposals as well as the existing Capital Programme would be presented to Cabinet in February 2022.

The revenue budget in 2021/22 was £179.442m which was net of central Government and other specific grants. A list of external grants was shown at Appendix 3 of the report. The general fund capital programme budget in 2021/22 was £113.027m. The net forecast position on the capital budget at Q2 was £88.826m, which represented 79% of the total capital programme budget. The variance of £24.201m was made up of proposed slippage of £19.721m and an underspend of £4.480m.

A Member was concerned that there was no breakdown on a line-by-line basis on how the grants from the Government were spent, arising from coronavirus (Covid-19) disbursements.

It was advised that grants were spent across Council directorates, with the larger proportion going towards grants to businesses, and other monies being spent on the NHS “test-and-trace” and other programmes within the Council.

The Member asked about wage costs, and whether each directorate accounted for their employees, as reflected in the outturn figure. It was advised that each directorate did account for their staff, and the purpose of the outturn was also for monitoring.

The Member also asked how slippages were managed in the Capital Programme, and what lessons had been learned from that. It was advised that there had been deviations from the Capital Programme, such as funds for commercial investments, which had not been spent or completed. A number of the larger programmes have since been removed from the programme which has reduced reported slippages. The details had been covered in the report for the reasons of the slippages.

A member was asked about Appendix 3 of the Draft Revenue Budget 2022/23 and draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, paragraph 26-27, which showed a high needs need budget deficit of £5m. Given that the recovery plan would not clear it, what options were there for Harrow Council, as the Government would not give money for that.

It was advised that there was money to fund the high needs block, and the Council could move money between the various blocks. The deficit was not expected to build up. The Department of Education would send a spending plan. It was envisaged that the deficit would be brought under control. The Council was still lobbying for extra cash, however, that may not be enough to clear the deficit.

The member also asked if the amount of £750 00 allocated for SEN transport was adequate.

It was advised that it was, and that there was need to control demand.

The member queried whether the 2% inflation pay award was sufficient, and what whether the unions were content with that.

It was advised that there was a pay award coming through during the financial year, with 2% having been budgeted for. It was not known whether the unions would accept it as they were balloting their members. Furthermore, there was 2.75% budgeted for non-pay award.

The member also wanted to find out about any LIBOR (London Interbank Offered Rate) debt owed by Harrow Council. Was the Council engaging with its lenders about swapping this for PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) loans?

It was advised that Harrow Council had one LIBOR loan of £20m and could swap for lower rated PWLB loans if it was cost-efficient. However, the Council's exposure to LIBOR loans was limited, and the situation was kept under constant review.

The member further asked how concerned the Council was about having a financial deficit, and was whether this would be sustainable going forward. Was the Council apprehensive about taking money out of reserves?

It was advised that it was not an ideal situation to have a deficit and having to use money in reserve to cover it. However, there was money in reserves, which could be used to cover any deficit. This would mean the Council did not have to borrow. There was sufficient money in reserves to keep the council going for the next 3-4 years. Most of the Council's spending was on social care.

Members thanked the Director of Finance and Assurance for the reports and the clarification to their questions.

**RESOLVED:** That the reports be noted.

## **79. Children and Families Services Complaints Annual Report 2020/21**

Members received the Children and Families Services Complaints Annual Report 2020/21, which was presented by the Complaints Manager (Adults and Children's Complaints).

In the discussion that ensued, the following were highlighted:

- the report followed the first national lockdown arising from the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in March 2020. Covid-19 had had a significant impact on how public services were provided and how organisations adapted to ensure the most vulnerable were adequately supported, together with their families;
- the priority of the directorate and the local authority was to ensure essential services continued to be delivered and as such resources were prioritised to deliver this objective;
- there were higher contacts (177) actioned by the Complaints Service in 2020/2021 than in 2019/2020 (156). There were some 177 "transactions<sup>1</sup>" within the complaints process during the year, that is, representations, formal complaints, members enquiries and referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman;
- during 2020/2021, of the 4,016 children open to Children's Social Care in the year, 53% were male and 46% were female and 1% were unborn/not known. The cohort's ethnic breakdown was predominantly black minority ethnic (BME) with a quarter being of white ethnicity;

- on the last day of the financial year (31 March 2021), a total of 1,720 children were receiving a service from Social Care with the rest having ceased throughout the year;
- a total of 2,605 referrals were received in 2020/2021 by Children's Social Care with the most common referral source being Police and Schools, both accounting for 59% of referrals received. The Service completed 2 569 assessments;
- a total of 1,280 child protection investigations were initiated in the period with 424 leading to an initial child protection conference. There were 657 Child Protection Plans (CPP) active at some point during 2020/2021, 384 new plans were started and 361 ceased during the year. As at 31 March 2021, 296 children were being supported and monitored through a Child Protection Plan;
- a total of 295 Children were Looked After (CLA) at some point during 2020/21, 117 children became newly looked after and 118 stopped being looked after. As at 31 March 2021, Harrow had 182 looked after children;
- as at 31 March 2021, Harrow had 76 approved fostering households offering 124 placements;
- during 2020-21, about 3,304 families accessed the Cedars and Hillview Early Support hubs and 160 young people accessed the Wealdstone Early Support hub;
- the overall Complaint Activity was that between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the Council received 100 representations, that is, potential statutory complaints that did not lead to a formal complaint investigation. The council processed 10 Stage 1 complaint investigations, 4 Stage, 2 complaint investigations, and no (zero) Stage 3 complaint were received (no panel hearings); and there was one Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) complaint; and
- additionally, there were 62 MP and Councillor enquiries managed by the Complaints Service. In comparison, 43 enquiries were received last year. This increase had likely come with the trend noted across Adult Social Care, as well as more reliance on members for raising concerns throughout the Covid-19 period.

Members thanked the Complaints Manager for the presentation, and noted the details in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## 80. Adults Services Complaints Annual Report (social care only) 2020/21

Members received the Adults Services Complaints Annual Report (social care only) 2020/21, which was presented by the Complaints Manager (Adults and Children's Complaints).

During the discussion that ensued, the following were highlighted:

- the report followed the first national lockdown arising from the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, which had had a significant impact on how public services were provided and how organisations adapted to ensure the most vulnerable were adequately supported as well as their families;
- the priority of the directorate and the local authority was to ensure essential services continued to be delivered and as such resources were prioritised to ensure this;
- there were slightly higher contacts (207) actioned by the Complaints Service in 2020/2021 than in 2019/2020 (200). The 207 “transactions<sup>1</sup>” were made up of representations, formal complaints, member enquiries and referrals from the Local Government Ombudsman;
- during 2020/21, the number of clients that received Long Term services was 4, 238; whilst 407 clients received Short Term Reablement service, and 2,337 clients received either Short Term (other) or on-going Low-Level services;
- during 2020/21 Adults Social Care Services received 7,985 requests for social care support from potential service users and provided information and advice (including referrals to other organisations that could assist) to 755 clients;
- a total of 407 clients received home based short term Reablement services, and an additional 2,337 clients received other forms of short-term support in response to their request, this included support like mental health counselling;
- a total of 4,238 clients received some form of long- term support, which included personal budgets, direct payments, residential and nursing care during the year. 2,991 of those clients were actively in receipt of such services on 31 March 2021;
- a total of 539 carers were assisted during the year. This included 135 instances of information and advice, 324 direct payments to the carer and 81 temporary support packages delivered to the cared-for person (for example, to give the carer a break from their caring responsibilities);

- there was high level of representations (101) which were received as potential complaints but are attempted to be resolved informally. This made up most of the contacts and was not all negative in nature (some were service or information requests). This was significant in showing that the Council could listen to concerns expressed and practically work to internally resolve them;
- between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the Service dealt with 101 representations, that is, potential complaints that did not lead to a formal complaint investigation. The Council processed 6 Stage 1 complaints, 4 complaints progressed to the second stage; and the Ombudsman made decisions on 4 formal cases during the period; and
- additionally, there were 91 MP and Councillor enquiries managed by the Complaints Team (in comparison to 70 from the year before and 52 the year before that).

Members thanked the Complaints Manager for the presentation, and noted the details in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 7.54 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Kiran Ramchandani  
Chair