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London Borough of Hackney  
Scrutiny Panel  
Municipal Year 2023/24  
Date of Meeting Monday 4 December 2023

Minutes of the proceedings of  
the Scrutiny Panel held at  
Hackney Town Hall, Mare  
Street, London E8 1EA

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<b>Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Margaret Gordon</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance</b>	<b>Cllr Soraya Adejare, Cllr Sophie Conway and Cllr Sharon PatrickC</b>
<b>Connected Virtually:</b>	<b>Cllr Ben Hayhurst.</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Polly Billington, Cllr Clare Joseph and Cllr Clare Potter</b>
<b>In Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Cllr Robert Chapman, Cabinet member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Service</b></li><li>• <b>Cllr Mete Coban, Cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport</b></li><li>• <b>Cllr Anna Lynch, Chair of Audit Committee</b></li><li>• <b>Jackie Moylan, Interim Director of Finance</b></li><li>• <b>Victoria Seriki, Project Manager Housing Transformation Team</b></li></ul>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	<b>None.</b>
<b>Meet recording</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2AHqvt4dO8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2AHqvt4dO8</a>
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### **Councillor Margaret Gordon in the Chair**

**3 members were present and the meeting was therefore inquorate. The meeting proceeded as an informal meeting.**

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

1.1 Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Joseph;
- Cllr Potter.

1.2 The following members attended online:

- Cllr Hayhurst.

## 2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 There were no late items and the agenda was as published.

## 3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

## 4 Hackney Council Complaints and Members Enquires Annual Report 2022-23

4.1 A key function of the Scrutiny Panel is to retain oversight of council performance and the delivery of quality services. To support this role, Scrutiny panel receives a report on Complaints and Member enquiries annually. The annual report of Complaints and Member Enquiries provides an analysis of the nature and volume of complaints received, the performance of the authority in responding to these complaints, and how the complaints service uses this data to develop and improve the quality of local service provision.

### Officer presentation

4.2 The Head of Business Intelligence & Member Services (HBISMS) presented the report to members, highlighting the following issues.

- Complaints and Member & MP Enquiries continued to record substantial increases in 2022/23, which were now running at almost double historical norms (pre-pandemic). It was anticipated that the current level of complaints would continue for the foreseeable future. Hackney was not an outlier in this respect, but was part of a wider regional and national trend.
- In 2022/23 there were over 5,400 Stage 1 complaints of which 344 progressed to Stage 2, an escalation rate of 6.4% which has been consistent for some time. This would suggest that there has not been an increase in escalation of complaints, just an increase in the volume of issues being raised. There were over 4,300 MP and Councillor Enquiries and these figures are now twice that of the historical norm.
- Despite the increase in the volume of complaints, the response time for dealing with Stage 1 complaints improved from 32.1 days in 2021/22 to 23.9 days in 2023/23, Stage 2 were dealt with on average in 22 days in 2022/23 compared to 23.5 in 2021/22.
- Housing repairs remains the service area with the highest level of complaints followed by Benefits and Revenues.
- The rise in the number of complaints resulted in a significant increase in workloads for those services handling these complaints, and whilst services were managing the volume of complaints there were significant pressures within these services.
- Complainants who are not happy with the Stage 2 response of the Council can take their case to the Ombudsman, and whilst there has been an increase in the numbers of these cases which were escalated these were not significantly higher and, there has been an improvement in the Ombudsman outcomes for the council. Again, this data is comparable to other similar authorities.

4.3 Cllr Chapman noted that, although Mayor Enquiries were not covered in the report, a new dedicated team of (5) caseworkers had been established to respond to Mayoral enquiries whose work was overseen by a newly appointed service manager. This should result in service improvements for members.

Questions from the Panel

4.4 (Chair) Whilst there are some encouraging signs within the complaints data, the fact remains that significant numbers of local residents are unhappy with local services that they have received. Given the volume of complaints and the resources needed to administer them, what is the council doing on a more strategic level to analyse and respond to the underlying factors which may be driving this dissatisfaction? Has there been any collaboration with neighbouring boroughs who may be experiencing similar issues within their complaints system?

- (HBISMS) noted that the drivers for each individual line of complaints were listed in the report. Thus for example in relation to housing repairs, the most numerous source of complaints, there were over 1,300 complaints, mostly as a result of delays doing something works and communicating (757), failure to deliver service/take action (298) or poor info, advice, communication (50). There was a lot of new activity in the Housing Repairs Service including the establishment of new systems and increased officer capacity to handle complaints. There has also been a focus on addressing the most complex cases, where progress had been outstanding for some period of time, so as to make sure the service achieved the right outcomes for these tenants/leaseholders. There is regular analysis of these cases to ensure that there is sufficient progress and that issues are addressed.

(7.15pm) Cllr Soraya Adejare joined the meeting and the meeting was therefore quorate.

4.5 (Chair) Whilst the cost of handling complaints is absorbed into the operational budgets of respective services, are legal fees also met by individual services or centrally within the Council? Are there any figures on the cost of complaint handling and administration across the council?

- (HBISMS) The total costs for complaint handling was not to hand, and could only be produced in consultation with all services and with corporate finance colleagues. Any costs related to a specific complaint will be picked up by the relevant service. Complaints about housing disrepair generally do not incur direct legal costs as such complaints are handled through a separate statutory process. As a general rule, except for when legal opinion might be needed, complaints do not incur legal costs.

4.6 (Chair) Given the volume of complaints received, has the Council set any targets to help reduce them or is there a strategy to try and address some of the underlying issues? Is there any general learning in the way that complaints have been handled which can be used to inform a strategic response to complaint handling (e.g. communications)?

- (HBISMS) Whilst complaint levels were closely monitored and there was a clear ambition to reduce the overall volume received, there were no explicit targets set as it was believed that these could drive different behaviours, some of which would be negative. It was emphasised that all services were working to reduce the number of complaints in their respective areas.
- (HBISMS) The key preventative action was the delivery of high quality core council services which would be instrumental in bringing the number of complaints down. There were a number of contributors which drive complaints, including changes to local policies and practices. At present, it was clear that the current state of the local housing stock was a key driver behind the volume and nature of complaints received by the Council.

4.7 (Cllr Conway) What are the processes for ensuring that those complaints which require a more strategic response are triggered? For example, multiple complaints about the same issue would suggest, in some cases, the need for a more strategic approach?

- (HBISMS) There is a published complaints policy and the council works within the complaints frameworks of both the Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Local Government office (LGO). There are numerous case studies provided by these organisations to provide best practice examples as to how types of complaints should be addressed. All complaints are signed-off by the service manager so there should be oversight of the nature/location of complaints within respective departments which should prompt coordinated action where necessary. It was also noted that all Stage 2 complaints were handled centrally in the council, and that there was a strategic analysis and overview at this corporate level which often resulted in a dialogue with Group Directors / Directors requesting a more systemic response to recurring complaints.

4.8 (Cllr Patrick) Why are Stage 2 complaints such a small percentage of Stage 1 complaints? Is this because residents' complaints have been fully resolved, or is it that they are unhappy with the Stage 1 response and do not feel that they will get a better response through the Stage 2 process? Is this assessed in any way? Similarly in terms of housing disrepair, members were aware of instances where residents had been asked to drop their complaint before remedial work was undertaken?

- (HBISMS) To be clear, the housing disrepair cases are not part of the complaints process. In terms of Stage 1 complaints and escalation to Stage 2 the figures in Hackney are broadly comparable to other similar local authorities. It was also reiterated that the escalation process was clearly stated if they were dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1. This process is not hidden and it is actively used by residents, as is evidenced in the most recent figures. Stage 2 complaints are handled corporately by a different team who make an independent assessment of the complaint and frequently come to a different judgement to that which was obtained at Stage 1.

4.9 (Cllr Adejare) Further clarification is needed as to how and when a stage 1 complaint is escalated to Stage 2, as in some cases, dialogue between the complainant and the service goes on for many months yet there is still no resolution and no escalation.

- (HBISMS) It was noted that there had been some recent changes to the Stage 2 process, as the central complaints team had a concern that some complaints, most from housing services, were not being put through for escalation. If a complainant wishes to escalate the complaint to Stage 2, there is now a much clearer set of instructions to do this and this was now handled by the corporate complaints team rather than the Stage 1 officer (in the service where the complaint was made). It was acknowledged however, that sometimes there was a 'discussion' about whether a complaint would be progressed to Stage 2, for example if there were multiple parts to a complaint of which most had been resolved bar for one outstanding part. But if there was clear dissatisfaction at the end of Stage 1, then this would be escalated to Stage 2 to be further investigated.

4.10 (Cllr Adejare) A consistent complaint from residents about the complaints service, is that there is a lack of customer care throughout the process, with a lack of communication and update as to how their complaint is being addressed or resolved.

In many cases, complainants have to actively chase the service for a response to their complaint after it has initially been submitted. What is the council's policy or approach in this respect?

- (HBISMS) These concerns around customer care were recognised by the council. At Stage 2, there was a dedicated team handling these complaints and there was regular contact between the investigating officer and the complainant. Investigating officers would also undertake property visits if this was necessary to see the source of the problem. The quality of customer care in different services does vary but this performance is impacted by the volume of complaints received and the high turnover of staff in some service areas. In many areas the same numbers of staff were handling twice or sometimes three times as many complaints and are clearly unable to spend as much time on each case as they would like (or previously could). This was also the case for Stage 2 complaints handling. Stage 2 officers have previously undertaken training with other officers and dip-sampled Stage 1 cases for quality assurance, but this is not possible now with officers at full capacity.

4.11 (Cllr Adejare) There has been a 97% increase in housing repairs complaints. What has the service learnt from the administration and resolution of these complaints and how has it informed priorities for service improvement?

- (VS) There is currently a review of how complaints are handled across the housing services team, not just housing repairs or building maintenance. The service area was beginning to identify what could be done to improve complaints handling in the short term, and those aspects of this service which would require much more longer term solutions. The aim of this service is to reduce the volume of complaints submitted and the number of those complaints escalating to Stage 2. It was emphasised that internal workings in response to complaints were complex, and this would take some time to review.

4.12 (Cllr Adejare) In terms of the housing service, there were specific concerns around data and record management and case handling as experience would suggest that information systems are not integrated.

- (HBISMS) It was acknowledged that the Housing Service did not have a single record management system, but instead rely on up to 30 different management information systems, which is undoubtedly a significant challenge for this service and those other services which utilise this data (e.g. complaints, Member enquiries, casework).

4.13 (Cllr Patrick) Lift maintenance and repairs was also a significant area of concern and further clarification was requested on the Lift Maintenance Policy and the Customer Journey Review (of lifts complaints). Have there been any improvements in this service in response to these reviews? A case was cited of as a 12 story apartment block where both lifts have been out of action on numerous occasions which had resulted in residents being stuck in their apartment or not being able to return to their apartment. What is the council policy in this respect?

- (HBISMS) This would require a response from the respective housing service as this information was not available at the meeting.

**Action: BDV to provide (via housing) further information on the lift policy (as referred to in the report) and the outcomes of the Customer Journey Review. It would be helpful to have clarification on the policy / approach of the Housing Service when residents could not access / leave their apartments?**

4.14 (Cllr Lynch) Can the Corporate Management team reassure members that the development of an integrated housing information management system is a priority for the Housing Service? Given the huge volume of complaints and associated casework of members, it is clear that an effective information management system should be an organisational priority.

- (HBISMS) It was noted that the Strategic Director of Housing does see this as a priority and that a procurement process is underway to secure this for the housing service. Although a date for installation could not be provided by officers present, it was emphasised that procurement was at an advanced stage. There are a number of routes for procurement including Cabinet and Cabinet Insourcing and Procurement Committee and members would be notified of that process once it has reached that stage.

(Chair) Related to the above, the report notes that there have been a number of technological developments in relation to the management and oversight of repairs, yet none of these seem to have had an impact on performance to date.

4.15 (Cllr Conway) It is apparent that with no central records system that there can be little analysis of complaints or issues arising, and as a result, oversight of specific housing locations is limited. A case was cited of a housing block which repeatedly had back surges flooding downstairs apartments with sewage which was costing the council enormous sums to continually resolve, yet there has been no strategic response to rectify the underlying problem. A drainage company repeatedly attended to 'fix' the problem, but the problem remains. At what point does the Housing Service step in to intervene?

- (HBISMS) The issue was not that the Housing service did not have this data, it was just that individual information systems were not joined up. This data needed to be in one place. Therefore a contractor/ repairs team visiting a specific block would need to interact with a number of databases to get a full picture of what was happening on this specific site. Spot checks were taking place across the housing system (estates) to identify common issues. If members are aware of specific housing blocks which would benefit from a spot check, then this information should be passed on to the HBISMS or the Strategic Head of Housing to make sure these residences were included in these spot check programmes.

(Chair) Emphasised the concerns that members of Scrutiny Panel, and indeed other members, had about the issue of housing repairs and hoped that there would be an improvement in this area of council services.

4.16 (Chair) noted that there had also been a significant increase in complaints about Benefits and Revenues, and in particular, housing benefits and the council tax reduction scheme. Are there any plans to turn this service response around to complaints in this directorate?

- (JM) Officers with knowledge of this service were not present but these would be approached for further information.
- (Cllr Chapman) It was noted that it was difficult for the HBISMS to provide detail on specific service areas. The cost of living crisis had greatly impacted on the work of the Benefits and Revenue service and presented some significant challenges. In the last 6 months there had also been a more active strategy to recover bad debts accrued through the lockdown period. The service was also

looking at the interconnectivity of information systems to make sure these were as helpful and operationally smooth running.

**Agreed: Benefits and Revenues to provide further information on the nature of complaints to the service and those priorities and actions to reduce them.**

4.17 (Cllr Conway) In relation to children's social care it was noted that the complaints process had raised the issue of fathers not being systematically consulted in case assessments. Given that this was an important reflection on local social work practice which had repercussions for local children's social care policy, what assurance can be provided that similar strategic links were being made from complaints from other areas of children's services?

- (HBISMS) Complaints process for children's social care was a statutory process, which is separate from the main complaints process within the council. The HBISMS did not have access to information to be able to respond to these questions, and suggested that these are directed toward the Director of Children's Social Care.

4.18 As there were no further questions, the Chair thanked officers for attending the meeting. The Chair also wished to note the following:

Concern at the high level of complaints received;

- A desire to see progress in housing repairs service through the introduction of information management system;
- Further evidence of impact of other digital technologies on complaints
- More detail on the cost of increasing handling complaints;
- That senior officers from respective services should be invited next time, so that they can respond to questions around complaints in their service area.

**Agreed: That Scrutiny Panel would request further information on the cost of complaint handling across the council and any associated legal fees.**

**Agreed: That when this report is taken next year, that the group Directors are also present to enable them to respond to member questions on complaints in their respective service areas (as well as what has been learnt and new developments arising from the complaints process).**

## **5 Quarterly Finance Update**

5.1 Council Finance is a fixed item on the agenda of the Scrutiny Panel to allow members to retain oversight of the Council's overall budget. Reports and updates below are provided for members to review: The finance update will also include a verbal update about the following:

1. The Council's communication / engagement plans with residents about the Council's budget;
2. Update on the budget setting progress and budget gap;
3. Update on the Audit Committee work looking at Section 114 notices
4. Update on the Audit Committee Task Group for Fees and Charges.

5.2 Cllr Chapman introduced the item highlighting the ongoing financial pressures that the Council was facing. Due to reduced central government funding, the Council was

now £150m worse-off now than it was in 2010 and further tightening was anticipated over the next financial period.

5.3 The DoF presented a series of slides which are attached which covered the following issues:

- General fund forecast 2023/24
- HRA forecast
- London picture
- Capital programme & borrowing
- Update on Budget Process 2024/25 - 2026/27
- Budget communications
- Autumn Statement Update
- Public Interest Reports & S114 notices
- Income Generation Task & Finish Group

#### Questions from members of the Panel

5.4 The presentation noted that £14m of reserves had been used for this year. Can officers explain further about the use of reserves and the value of remaining reserves? Does the council have an appropriate level of reserves / contingencies to meet unexpected demands in 2024/25?

- (DoF) It was correct that £14m of reserves had been used, mainly for those services areas of high demand and spend such as children's and adult social care. It was anticipated that there would be a drop in reserves after this year, but next year significant growth monies had been put into these budgets to reflect the high demand for these services. Whilst this growth would have covered the overspend this year, this would not mean that additional reserves would not be needed for next year. The Audit Committee undertook a deep dive into the councils use of reserves which demonstrated that there was a long term decline of the amount of reserves available, a position which was common to many authorities across London. The reserves position would be updated after the final settlement which was expected on 18th December 2023. A stress test of the reserves available for next year was also planned to test out the financial resilience of the council. There was an agreed level of reserves and this would be set out in the Cabinet report in February.
- (Cllr Chapman) It was noted that there was also an overspend of £9m this year which may impact on reserves.

5.5 (Cllr Hayhurst) In terms of the £9m overspend, is it the case that to mitigate this that a certain amount of money is set aside at the beginning of the year and a conservative figure is set for Council tax collection? Once these factors are taken into account, how will this impact on the projected £9m overspend? How much is the council worse off in real terms compared to last year? Is there a notional reserve for the SEND overspend?

- (DoF) In the forecast, we have not utilised the contingency which we always hold in the budget. In terms of the council tax, the council was part of a localised NNDR pool and that can accrue a surplus for the council but as this is by no means uncertain, it is not factored into the budget to help with the £9m forecast deficit. There may need to be an additional drawdown (in excess of the £14m of reserve use for this year) to help balance the position. Other budget areas may also be used such as the Capital Programme. All these decisions are taken at year-end once a clearer assessment could be made. It was emphasised that none of these sources could individually offset the £9m forecast overspend.

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- (DoF) At the end of the last financial year there was approximately £150m of reserves, though it should be remembered that much of this was allocated for specific purposes such as set aside for capital spend and other areas. This was a complex area however and the DoF agreed to bring a more detailed summary to the Commission once the final settlement was in and agreement had been reached with Cabinet.
- (Cllr Chapman) Emphasised that most of the value of reserves were set aside for a specific purpose. If reserves are used, then this does not address the reasons for the overspend and of course, the reserves have to be replaced for their intended purpose. Reserves cannot and should not be used to finance expenditure and pressures associated with that.

**Agreed: (DoF) To provide a short summary of reserves of the Council to the Scrutiny Panel (once the final settlement and agreement of Cabinet reached) to a future meeting.**

5.6 What is the remaining budget gap for 2024/25 and the remainder of the MTF5 period?

- (DoF) There were a number of reports due to go to Cabinet which would affect the budget position and once these had been agreed there would be greater clarity on the budget gap. The overall budget gap would not be fully clear until the final settlement was published (December 2023) and then the final council tax rate could be set and published in the February Cabinet papers. Noting these variables, the Council was in a relatively good position for 2024/25, but again, this was dependent on the local government settlement for 2024/25. Difficult budget decisions had already been taken for 2024/25, but it was likely that further difficult decisions would be needed balance future budget for 2025/26-2026/27.

5.7 (Cllr Adejare) Noting the volatility in interest rates, how much of the projected borrowing to support the capital programme would be from external sources?

- (DoF) There would be no new external borrowing this year, as the council is able to use various cash flow processes to support its borrowing needs. For example, the council may utilise reserves which were held for specific purposes or use grants which are paid in advance or another example would be to use the 'right to buy' receipts. So borrowing would take place against these cash balances, but it must be remembered that these monies need to be repaid (through future borrowing or set aside). The Cabinet has also been working on developing a longer-term capital programme so that there is a much better understanding of long-term finance needs. A breakdown was provided in the budget report of capital spend, borrowing requirements to support these commitments and the source of funding / borrowing used.

5.8 (Cllr Hayhurst) In terms of Hackney Central Levelling Up money, £2.6m would need to be spent by the beginning of April 2024. Was this feasible?

- (Cllr Coban) A significant proportion of funding would be used for the Pembury Circus improvement and a report and decision is expected in Cabinet in December, with works commencing next year.

5.9 (Cllr Hayhurst) In respect of big project sites such as the Tesco site on Morning Lane, can officers reassure the Panel that current income from the site was offsetting ongoing costs for future planned development?

- (DoF) There is an income from Tesco which is held on the balance sheet for the most part which is uncommitted. In terms of the capital outlay, this was significant and has had to be reflected in budget and MTFS. New planning proposals for the site were being encouraged which would offset these costs going forward.

5.10 (Chair) One of the risks for local authorities mentioned in the report is the debt risk in relation to overall turnover. Can you give Hackney's position in relation to this risk?

- The current debt level for Hackney was around £70m and the gross budget was £1.3b, and with an annual budget of £365m. This was a comparatively low debt ratio compared to other boroughs. It was noted however, that the council would be moving to a higher degree of borrowing to fund the capital programme because capital receipts were being depleted or were committed elsewhere in the capital programme.

5.11 Income Generation Task & Finish Group - Cllr Lynch (Chair of Audit Committee) presented a summary of the key outcomes of this work. To commence, it was noted that there is an aligned programme of communication with local residents to improve awareness of what services the council was statutorily required to fund and provide and those services which were discretionary. For all members there were clear priorities in ensuring that there were effective services for maintaining the cleanliness of the borough (e.g. street cleaning and waste collection), education of young people and care for most vulnerable residents. This review was undertaken with a view to improving income generation across the council to be able to support both essential and discretionary areas of spend.

- The review has contributed to clear set of principles around oversight of fees and charges which means that proposals are always stress tested to ensure that these do not have a disproportionate impact on residents;
- The review has also highlighted that commercial decisions (income generation through fees and charges) is a partnership between councillors and senior council officers, where the latter were able to provide a range of alternative financial options for local policy ambitions. From this initial work, it was apparent that there needed to be greater awareness of the financial decision making process and role of respective bodies (Cabinet, Labour Group etc.).
- There would be further opportunities for the other council members to become involved in this work (which started in November 2023). The review has already assessed some income streams within the council and noted those which are over performing (e.g. filming in Hackney) and would progress to look more widely at other areas where income may be increased.
- (DoF) Stressed that whilst this was a move to greater commercialisation of the council, this would be within the general business of the council and not expose the council to further external risks (as evidenced in a number of other authorities which had faced financial problems in this respect).
- (Cllr Chapman) Thanked members and officers supporting this task and finish review.

5.12 (Cllr Hayhurst) When fees and charges are increased or a new fee is introduced, is there an internal audit process for assessing the impact to make sure it is delivering the required income and that there are no adverse effects? The example of increased

charges for skips was used, which it was suggested this had incentivised residents to move to private contractors.

- All the changes to fees and charges would be reviewed as part of the ongoing budget monitoring function of the council to ensure that these were delivering the required level of income. The Council has been very careful to ensure that where new charges were introduced or fees were increased, that this did not have an adverse impact on demand and therefore reduce income for the council.

5.13 The Chair thanked Cllr Lynch for this work and indicated that further updates would be welcomed by Scrutiny Panel. The Chair also thanked DoF and Cllr Chapman for the budget presentation.

## **6 Executive Response to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review Report**

6.1 The Scrutiny Panel set up the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) Task and Finish group to review the CTRS model in Hackney, the options and costs to the Council to reduce the liability of council tax contributions for relevant working age adults and the cost implications to implement a zero based CTRS model in Hackney. The Task Group reviewed the impact of localised council tax support schemes in England and Hackney and considered proposals by Hackney to reduce the local contribution rate paid by working age households eligible for council tax support from 15% to zero. The draft report and recommendations were finalised and agreed by the Scrutiny Panel in April 2023 and the Executive response was agreed by Cabinet in July 2023.

6.2 Cllr Chapman (Cabinet member for Finance) introduced the response and what progress had been made since July 2023.

- The scrutiny exercise was helpful in setting out the implications of the different council tax reduction scheme options and helped to inform local plans and final agreed approach.
- The newly proposed scheme had been formally consulted upon with a positive response from the community and local voluntary groups.
- A Cabinet decision was expected on the agreed scheme by January 2024 Cabinet and be included within next year's budget.
- This policy was important in the context of the lack of government financial support for such initiatives and the ongoing cost of living crisis experienced by local residents.

6.3 (Chair) Scrutiny Panel was pleased with the Cabinet response but would like to further assess the role of advice services in relation to this review. An update on the implementation of these recommendations would take place in 1 year.

**Agreed: That a follow up be undertaken to this review, to assess implementation of the agreed recommendations.**

## **7 Executive Response to the Net Zero Scrutiny Panel Report**

7.1 It was recognised that to reach the UK's net zero ambitions will require all tiers of government, businesses, institutions and communities to work closely together. The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has been building its vision to transition to net zero since. Hackney has made good progress in reducing emissions over the last decade, but it was recognised that faster and more coordinated action

will be needed to protect communities and the environment from the effects of climate change.

7.2 The Net Zero Review was established by the Scrutiny Panel in October 2021. It was set up to look at what is needed to meet national and local net zero targets set out by Government and the Council. This review also looked at how the Council planned to meet its ambitions in a manner that was affordable, efficient and fair. The review was an amalgamation of work by the overarching Scrutiny Panel and the thematic Scrutiny Commissions: Health in Hackney, Living in Hackney and Skills, Economy and Growth during the municipal year 2021/2022. The draft report and recommendations were finalised and agreed by the Scrutiny Panel in April 2023 and the Executive response was agreed by Cabinet in October 2023.

7.3 The Chair welcomed the Cabinet response and invited the lead Cabinet member for this policy area (Cllr Coban) to introduce the report. The following is a summary of the Cabinet members response:

- The Cabinet member thanked the Chair and Panel members for their support for this work, and its efforts to focus on the delivery of these climate ambitions. It was important to focus on the social justice aspect to the delivery of climate change and to make sure that residents were not disproportionately impacted, but also to make sure that residents had access to all the new green opportunities which may arise from this work.
- Scrutiny involvement had been important in supporting the development of the Climate Action Plan so the council can track and monitor progress.
- It was important that scrutiny continued to hold the council to account on its climate goals and ambitions and the Cabinet member was keen to ensure that local governance arrangements reflected this.

7.4 (Written question from Cllr Binnie Lubbock) What are the plans for community oversight for the council's response to climate change plans and ambitions?

- Local residents have had an opportunity to have a say on proposals via the initial public consultation on his work as well as the Green Recovery event as well as local Climate Summit. Feedback from these events noted that there was a desire for wider engagement and involvement beyond the ambit of the council, that is, what the community could do to progress local climate goals and ambitions. There was a desire to engage in more democratic technologies which may be able to support more neighbourhood led initiatives (e.g. citizen assemblies or juries). In terms of the consultation, there was an overrepresentation of responses from residents with an income in excess of £100k, so it will be important to engage with those residents who may be differently impacted going forward.

7.5 (Written questions from Cllr Binnie Lubbock) Does the council accept the National Infrastructure Committee report that the switch from gas boilers to hydrogen boilers as these are most likely to be more expensive and less efficient?

- The Cabinet member noted that there would always be changes to the cost benefit analysis of certain climate action initiatives. The following example was cited; a new refuse disposal truck would cost £190k which could use vegetable oil to reduce carbon emissions by 92%, but a wholly electric vehicle was available, but at a significantly higher price of £420k. There had to be an assessment as to what these additional monies might otherwise be used for in reaching the councils climate aims against the reduced carbon emissions of

both vehicles. In terms of boilers, similarly, the council would always put environment and sustainability factors first but in the context of financial cost benefit analysis.

7.6 (Cllr Adejare) The report notes the commitments to encourage social housing landlords to push for the use of renewable energy. Is this to be reflected in other planning policy regulations?

- The Cabinet member noted that this was an important area for climate action and it was important that approaches across the capital were informed by best practice and were consistent. Meetings had been undertaken with planning officers in other boroughs and it was hoped that some changes could be incorporated into the Local Plan and that there was appropriate guidance for developers to support these climate ambitions. A report will be presented to Cabinet in January 2024 on the extending of solar provision on local estates to reduce emissions and of course, to reduce the costs to local residents. In terms of the council's own building, the council was operating at 100% renewable energy but was looking to extend these to other leased buildings such as Hackney Marshes Centre and London Fields Lido, as it was important that the Council lead by example. An audit had identified all of those buildings which could be converted to solar energy but central government needed to act to support this not only in terms of developing funding streams to support these conversions but also in updating national planning regulations.

7.7 The Chair agreed that this report should come back at a later date to review progress against the agreed recommendations. The Chair thanked Cllr Coban for attending and presenting the Cabinet response.

## **8 Minutes of the Meeting**

8.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13th July 2023 were noted and agreed.

**Agreed: Minutes of the 13th July 2023.**

## **9 Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2023/2024**

9.1 The Interim Chief Executive Question Time was being held at the next meeting on the 30th January 2024. Members were reminded to submit questions by the 18th December 2023.

9.2 Members agreed the work programme for the remainder of the year.

## **10 Any Other Business**

Next meeting to be held on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.25 pm