

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD  
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford  
8 January 2026 (7.01 - 9.02 pm)**

**Present:**

**COUNCILLORS**

<b>Conservative Group</b>	Dilip Patel and David Taylor
<b>Havering Residents' Group</b>	Philippa Crowder, David Godwin and Julie Wilkes (Vice-Chair)
<b>Labour Group East Havering Residents' Group</b>	Jane Keane and Matthew Stanton Martin Goode
<b>Residents' Association Independent Group</b>	Philip Ruck

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

**15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from the Chairman (Councillor Laurance Garrard) and Councillor Bryan Vincent.

**16 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**17 REQUISITION OF CABINET DECISION - FUTURE PROPOSALS FOR FORMER LIBRARY PREMISES**

The Cabinet decision dated 10 December 2025 on Future Proposals for Former Library Premises had, as required under paragraph 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, been requisitioned by at least six Members representing more than one Group (Councillors Keith Darvill, Judith Holt, Dilip Patel, Nisha Patel, Viddy Persaud, Keith Prince, Tim Ryan, David Taylor, Christine Vickery and Michael White). The Overview and Scrutiny Board was asked to consider the requisition of the Key Executive Decision and decide whether to uphold it.

Officers explained that discussions were ongoing with the Harold Wood Foundation about their taking over the service and that planning and procurement processes for this were under way. The site of the former Gidea Park library was the preferred site for a respite centre as this would be adjacent to the planned SEND School. It was not felt that there would be undue disruption to neighbouring properties during the construction process. An additional capital budget had been requested to cover demolition costs.

Alternative proposals for the South Hornchurch site had not been reviewed at this stage. Proposals to redevelop the entire site had been considered to be too expensive. A separate Cabinet decision on upgrading the South Hornchurch Community Centre could be taken in due course.

A study undertaken in 2022 had looked at re-providing the library sites with flats above but none of these proposals had reached the planning application stage. As regards developing social housing on the sites, officers wished to locate the respite centre at Gidea Park to gain synergy with the SEND school at the site. It was felt that the South Hornchurch site gave an opportunity to generate capital receipt from its disposal rather than the Council developing it. There had been no final decision taken as yet on the level of residential development on the Harold Wood site.

The special needs accommodation at Gidea Park would attempt to mirror family settings with space for four children on short breaks as well two children on longer term stays. Two carers would also be present on site. This was felt to be sufficient to meet demand levels in Havering. The precise nature of the provision would have to be agreed by OFSTED but the highest demand for respite care was for children with learning and physical disabilities.

It was confirmed that the Council's long term ambition was to build housing on the Harold Wood library site and there was no plan beyond the submission by the Harold Wood Foundation to re-provide library services on the site. Officer delegation to take this decision was in the Constitution. It would depend on the value of capital receipt received as to whether the matter would need to be referred back to Cabinet.

A Member asked if the large number of vehicle movements at the Gidea Park site made it an appropriate location for respite. Officers responded that vehicle access to the nearby school was not adjacent to the respite site and that the same architects were being employed for both facilities.

It was clarified that the offer to make use of the South Hornchurch site would not pick up the site liabilities. It was difficult to quantify the costs if the respite centre did not go ahead quickly. The Council would own the centre but commission the running of it. The new facilities would be for local children but any spare or excess capacity would be released to other North East London boroughs. The SEND facilities had been needed for a long period and were approved when the decision to close Gidea Park library had been first made.

It was confirmed that no lease for the use of the Harold Wood site had been signed as yet. Any lease would allow flexibility but it was expected that there would be a break clause after three years. As the site was an asset of community value, the Council would offer the community a six month window to prepare a bid. It was confirmed that the nearby war memorial would be excluded from any proposals for the site.

Alternative uses for the sites were considered as part of the ongoing asset review process. Specific business cases had not been presented to Cabinet Members at this stage and the Cabinet Member reiterated the Council did have funds to invest in capital development. Officers added that they would return to Cabinet if the parameters of the development changed.

A Member questioned why further decision making had been delegated from Cabinet Members to officers. Officers responded that they worked to deliver the overall strategy of the Council. The Member felt however that the decision should still be taken in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.

The potential use of the library sites by other Council departments was covered in the asset review process. The review process was undertaken quarterly and it was confirmed that possible alternative uses for the sites had been shared with the present Cabinet.

Officers emphasised that, despite high cost pressures, savings could still be delivered and finance for projects such as the new respite centre would be found. Whilst it was wished to limit capital borrowing, this would not impede projects.

A Member felt that using the sites as temporary accommodation could be considered in order to reduce the demand for social housing. Officers responded that a testing exercise for the South Hornchurch site was currently in progress and that this may be brought back to Cabinet. If there were to be any major changes or unforeseen circumstances, this would also be brought to Cabinet. More capital would have been needed if a larger development was to be carried out on the site.

The Cabinet paper re the Gidea Park proposals was due to be presented to Cabinet in January and there was a reasonable expectation of the school going ahead. The budget for demolition works would be taken to Cabinet in February and then included in the overall Council budget papers.

The requisition was **upheld** by six votes for (Councillors Keane, Patel, Ruck, Stanton, Wilkes and Taylor) to two votes against (Councillors Godwin and Crowder) with one abstention (Councillor Goode).

The following comments were agreed to be passed to Cabinet for response.

1. Clarity should be given on whether the Gidea Park site is large enough to accommodate the planned Respite Centre and whether the site is too close to that of the proposed Special School.
2. More detail and clearer definitions should be given on the type of disabilities catered for at the Respite Centre and how existing respite care opportunities are used by Havering residents.
3. More information should be given about the position at the Harold Wood site when the three year break clause is reached. Any final decision on the longer term position should be brought to Members well before the three year point is reached.
4. Whilst acknowledging the Council's Scheme of Delegation, future decisions on the former library sites should be taken by officers but in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member(s). There should also be a lower financial threshold for the point at which decisions such as these should be considered by Cabinet.
5. Final decisions on the use of the former library sites must be taken at Cabinet level and there should be a separate recorded decision for each site. This latter point reflects the fact that the future plans for each site are markedly different and will have different consequences for each area.
6. Business plans for the use of the former library sites should be brought for scrutiny at the first opportunity and also presented to Cabinet before any decision on disposal or repurposing of the sites takes place.
7. The scoring of options should be included in the business cases for the sites in order that the financial benefits to the Council of any preferred option are more clearly identified.
8. Minutes of the Area Based Asset Review Process meetings in relation the former library sites process should be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

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**Chairman**