



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held on Monday 10 July 2017 at 7.00 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Bhagwanji Chohan

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Arshad Mahmood

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Agha
Ahmed	Allie
Bradley	Butt
Carr	Chan
S Choudhary	Colacicco
Collier	Colwill
Conneely	Crane
Davidson	Denselow
Dixon	Duffy
Ezeajughi	Farah
Harrison	Hirani
Hoda-Benn	Hossain
Hylton	Jones
Kabir	Kansagra
Kelcher	Long
Marquis	Mashari
Maurice	McLeish
McLennan	Miller
Moher	J Mitchell Murray
W Mitchell Murray	Naheerathan
Nerva	M Patel
RS Patel	Perrin
Pitruzzella	Shahzad
Ms Shaw	Ketan Sheth
Krupa Sheth	Southwood
Stopp	Tatler
Thomas	Van Kalwala
Warren	

Mayor's Statement – Order of Business

Before the formal business of the meeting began the Mayor informed members of a change to the order of business from the original summons. He stated that due to the significant interest in agenda item number 15, Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks, he intended to move this item to number seven on the agenda. He outlined that the agenda order would therefore be re-arranged accordingly to reflect this. He also explained that there would be no non-Cabinet Members' Debate (agenda item 10 of the original summons) at the meeting.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Warren (Leader of the Brent Conservative Group) to put forward a procedural motion which related to the business of the meeting. Councillor Warren stated that the Council should have attached greater significance to the agenda item on Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks and called for Members to agree to defer the item to an extraordinary meeting of the Council to be held on 17 July 2017.

Carolyn Downs (the Council's Chief Executive) clarified that in accordance with the Council's Constitution and the legal notice required to be given before Council meetings, any proposed extraordinary meeting would need to take place on 18 July 2017 as opposed to 17 July. Councillor Warren accepted this amendment to his motion and requested a recorded vote.

(Councillor Van Kalwala joined the meeting at 7.06pm)

The amended motion was put to a vote and declared **LOST**.

Voting was recorded as follows:

FOR the motion (2):

Councillors Ms Shaw and Warren.

AGAINST the motion (53):

Councillors Aden, Agha, Ahmed, Allie, Bradley, Butt, Carr, Chan, S Choudhary, Colacicco, Collier, Colwill, Conneely, Crane, Davidson, Denselow, Dixon, Duffy, Ezeajughi, Farah, Harrison, Hirani, Hoda-Benn, Hossain, Hylton, Jones, Kabir, Kansagra, Kelcher, Long, Marquis, Mashari, Maurice, McLeish, McLennan, Miller, Moher, J Mitchell-Murray, W Mitchell-Murray, Naheerathan, Nerva, M Patel, R Patel, Perrin, Pitruzella, Shahzad, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth, Southwood, Stopp, Tatler, Thomas and Van Kalwala.

ABSTENTIONS to the motion (2):

Councillors Chohan and Mahmood.

The Mayor also asked Members to agree to suspend Standing Order 48 of the Council's Constitution to ensure that the meeting could go beyond 10.00pm, if required.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) The business for the meeting be re-arranged in the following order:
 - Agenda Item Number Five – Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and Appointment of Chairs/Vice Chairs;
 - Agenda Item Number Six – Deputations;
 - Agenda Item Number Seven – Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks;
 - Agenda Item Number Eight – Reports from the Leader and Cabinet;
 - Agenda Item Number Nine – Questions from Members of the Public;
 - Agenda Item Number Ten – Petitions.
- (ii) The rest of the business for the meeting follow in the same order as per the original agenda summons; and
- (iii) Standing Order 48 of the Council’s Constitution, which related to the guillotine procedure, be suspended pre-emptively.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor outlined that direct apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Aslam Choudry, Daly, Pavey and Khan.

2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Mayor invited Councillor Warren to move his amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting which had been tabled. These included additional detail for the minute content of agenda item six, Changes to the Constitution, and agenda item nine, Calendar of Meetings for 2017/2018.

Councillor Warren said he accepted that minutes were not intended to reflect verbatim what Members said but that his amendments reflected some additional key points that he had raised at the meeting itself.

Councillor Warren’s first amendment was tabled as follows:

- *Agenda Item 6 – Changes to the Constitution*

Add at end of second paragraph.....Cllr. Warren recognised that the “Buttistas” on the Council believed it was heresy to challenge this Standing Order

The first amendment was put to a vote by a show of hands and was declared **LOST**.

Councillor Warren’s second amendment was tabled as follows:

- *Agenda Item 9 – Calendar of Meetings for 2017/2018*

Add new paragraph after “residents in attendance

In response, Cllr. Warren stated that he and Cllr. Shaw would not apologise for doing their job and continuing to challenge the Labour administration, unlike Cllr. Colwill who was a Labour apologist.”

The second amendment was put to a vote by a show of hands and was declared **LOST**.

The Mayor asked Members to approve the minutes as included in the original summons through a vote by show of hands. The vote was declared **CARRIED** and it was therefore **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council be approved as an accurate record. Councillors Warren and Ms Shaw recorded their dissent on the result of the vote.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

The Mayor invited Members to make any declaration of personal, prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests in relation to any matter due to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

- (i) Councillor Harrison declared a personal interest in respect to agenda item number seven of the agenda, Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks, in that she was a current member of the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Member and Resident Panel Board;
- (ii) Councillor Long declared a personal interest in respect to agenda item number seven of the agenda, Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks, in that she had a sister who lived in high rise tower block; and
- (iii) Councillor Duffy declared a personal interest in respect to agenda item number seven of the agenda, Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks, in that he had a cousin who lived in a high rise tower block.

Councillor Collier raised a point of order on whether it was a reasonable request for Members to declare whether or not they were landlords. Looqman Desai (the Council's Senior Solicitor, Governance) explained that this agenda item had given Members the opportunity to declare any interest they deemed relevant to any item on the agenda and it was not for anyone present at the meeting to demand any further disclosure of interests by Members.

4. **Mayor's Announcements (including any petitions received)**

The Mayor stated that he was honoured to be in the chair for his first Full Council meeting as Mayor of Brent and stated that he would always do his best to promote the extremely good work of the Council with integrity and pride.

He referenced the tragedies that had occurred since the Annual Meeting of the Council, in particular the Grenfell Tower Fire, and placed on record his personal thanks to the staff at Brent Council who had been part of the Grenfell Tower Response Centre.

He continued that the thoughts of everyone at the Council had been with those whose lives had been affected by the Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park terrorist attacks.

He asked everyone present to observe a two minutes silence for the victims of all of these tragedies.

A two minutes silence was observed.

The Mayor offered his congratulations to the three Members of Parliament within the borough for their recent respective general election victories. He also thanked the Council's Returning Officer, Carolyn Downs, and her team who had ensured that the election had been successfully organised at short notice.

He also paid tribute to the UK Armed Forces in their role defending the UK and its interests and noted that UK Armed Forces Day had been observed on 25 June 2017. He also encouraged Members to attend an event at the Civic Centre to remember the victims of the Srebrenica atrocity and make a collective pledge to Live the Lessons of Srebrenica.

The Mayor invited Members to support the first fundraising event of his Mayoral year in support of his chosen charities which would take place on 1 September 2017.

He concluded by wishing everyone a happy Pride Festival 2017 and mentioned that Brent and Harrow Council staff had joined the march in Central London as part of the festival.

5. **Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and Appointment of Chairs/Vice Chairs (if any)**

The Mayor referred Members to the second supplementary pack which contained a list of appointments and resignations from some of the Council's Committees, Sub-Committees and other bodies.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following appointment be approved:

- (i) Appointment of David Ewart as Co-Opted Member and Chair of the Council's Audit Advisory Committee;
- (ii) Appointment of David Ewart as Independent Member and Chair of the Council's Pension Board;
- (iii) Resignation of Sarah Mansuralli (Chief Operating Officer, Brent Commissioning Group) as a full voting Member of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Board, Sheikh Auladin (Deputy Chief Operation Officer, Brent Commissioning Group) is nominated to take her place, as a full voting Member;
- (iv) Appointment of Keir Hopley as Independent Person to the Council's Standards Committee;

- (v) Appointment of Nigel Shock as Independent Person to the Council's Standards Committee;
- (vi) Resignation of Councillor Claudia Hector as full Member of the Council's Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Main Committee, Councillor Sabina Khan is nominated to take her place, as full Member; and
- (vii) Resignation of Councillor Rita Conneely as full Member from the Council's Teachers' Joint Consultative Committee.

6. Deputations (if any)

The Mayor outlined that the Council had received a formal deputation on the Council's Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) from Willesden Green resident, Ms Sophie Simmons. Councillor Tom Miller (Willesden Green ward) introduced Ms Simmons.

Sophie Simmons began by stating that she was a resident of Whitby Apartments on Robson Avenue in Willesden Green. She explained that Robson Avenue was a largely residential area in close proximity to the Burnley Medical Practice. She said that the parking provision in the area had not matched the population growth and that parking on Robson Avenue was very limited. She said that the problems had been exacerbated by Robson Avenue not being covered by a CPZ when other surrounding roads had been. She outlined that this meant that the majority of residents were not able to park on the road and were forced to drive to an area outside of the CPZ to park, often over a mile away from their houses. She concluded that the simplest and most cost effective solution for the Council would be to include Robson Avenue within the neighbouring CPZs (Zones GS and HW). She said she would be willing to meet and work with the Council in order to address these concerns.

Councillor Southwood (Lead Member for Environment) responded and thanked Ms Simmons for having raised these issues. She noted that there were approximately 33,000 parking spaces in Brent to accommodate 56,000 households, which inevitably led to parking challenges in the borough. She said that the Labour Administration wanted to make it as easy as possible to travel by sustainable transport but also wanted CPZs to be effective so that those who needed to drive and park were able to. She explained that a review of the CPZs in Brent was due to be discussed at the Council's Cabinet meeting on the 24 July 2017 and that Robson Avenue was included as part of the review. She also explained that any proposed changes would mean that the Council would have to start a statutory public consultation process with residents in the area, but specified that changes were likely to be supported by the Council if there was a clear desire from the majority of local residents for inclusion within a CPZ.

The Mayor also outlined to Members that another request to speak had been received late, but that he proposed that Standing Order 39(c) be suspended to allow the resident to address the Council. He specified that the Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform would respond to the remarks during the course of the full debate on high rise safety in tower blocks.

It was **RESOLVED** that Standing Order 39(c) be suspended to allow Mr Pete Firmin to speak on high rise safety in tower blocks.

Pete Firmin stated that he was the Chair of the Alpha, Gorefield Houses and Canterbury Court Tenants Residents Association in South Kilburn. He said that this organisation stood in solidarity with all those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire and that their main concern was to ensure that no disaster like the one at Grenfell or any lesser disasters could ever happen anywhere in Brent. Members heard that there had been a number of assurances from BHP after Officers had met residents in South Kilburn, but that unfortunately residents had remained to be convinced. He referenced the planned removal of cladding on Swift House and George House (properties managed by Quadrant in South Kilburn) and also a new roof being required for George House. He mentioned that fire safety problems appeared to be increasingly prevalent in private sector high rise buildings. He urged the Council to publish fire safety assessments in full for residents to read; to improve its consultation process with residents and tenants associations; and for the Council to commit to end outsourcing. He detailed a number of issues which his tenants and residents association had raised to the Council of which he felt had not been taken seriously enough. He specifically raised the problems of BHP, Council and other vehicles having used routes which had been designed for access by the emergency services. He concluded that the Council needed show that it would seriously listen to its residents, and urged the Council to abandon its plans for additional tower blocks as part of the South Kilburn regeneration scheme.

7. Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks

The Mayor outlined the rules of procedure for the item, and introduced a panel of Officers who would be on hand to respond to any specific questions from members during the course of the debate. The panel included: Phil Porter (the Council's Strategic Director, Community Wellbeing), Mark Davidson (Borough Commander, London Fire Brigade), Peter Gadsdon (the Council's Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships), Rohal Bhandari (the Council's Team Leader of District and Commercial Services) and Alice Lester (the Council's Head of Planning).

Councillor Farah (Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform) introduced the item and stated that the tragedy which occurred at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 had been a wake-up call for all Councils. He said that it remained vitally important to consider what Brent should do next and that the debate would assist in ensuring that all options were explored. He emphasised that he had confidence in how Brent had responded to the tragedy and paid tribute to the support that the Council had provided to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) in the aftermath of the fire. He outlined that he was proud that the Council had proposed to go above and beyond what was required on existing fire and safety regulations for its housing stock, to ensure that all residents felt re-assured and safe within the borough. He urged all Members present to contribute and stressed the importance of the debate being carried out in a calm and respectful manner.

Mark Davidson (Borough Commander, London Fire Brigade) gave an overview of the action that the London Fire Brigade (LFB) had taken since the fire and offered some specific detail on what LFB's policies were with regards to tackling fires in high rise tower blocks. Members heard that, post-Grenfell, the Department of Local Government and Communities (DCLG) had asked all local authorities and social

housing providers to provide detailed information about their residential tower blocks and to submit any identifiable cladding materials on these blocks for testing. He noted that LFB had established a taskforce for an inspection process of 380 identified high rise buildings London-wide and that any building which failed the Government's test on cladding samples had been immediately prioritised. With regards to Brent, Members heard that, at the time of the meeting, two high rise buildings (Hornby Court in Willesden and Elizabeth House in Wembley) had failed these tests and had been inspected further by LFB.

Mr Davidson explained that LFB inspections of high rise buildings were focused on two key elements of building's structure, these were: access for the emergency services and common parts (the building's central shaft; staircase; wet or dry riser main pipe; and the means of escape). He noted that LFB were not involved in fire safety inspections within individual rooms but that they would check that fire risk assessments, a duty of the landlord, had been kept up-to-date. He mentioned that LFB aimed to inspect each high rise building at least once per year. Members also heard detail on the 'stay put' guidance which LFB gave to residents if a fire broke out in another part of their building. Mr Davidson outlined that, overall, this policy had been successful since it was first employed in the 1960s as long as the building had been built and maintained to an acceptable standard. He noted that the investigation into why the fire had spread so quickly at Grenfell was ongoing, but that the stay put guidance was likely to remain because LFB felt that this was usually the most effective means of keeping people safe.

The Mayor then opened the debate up to Members.

Councillor Ms Shaw (Deputy Leader of the Brent Conservative Group) referenced the Council's recent meetings with residents of the Watling Gardens tower block in Mapesbury ward. She questioned what action the Council had been taking to re-assure residents in her ward, Brondesbury Park, and across the borough that all of the Council's housing stock would be safe from this type of tragedy both now under BHP and when the management of the service was brought back in-house. She also questioned the future staffing arrangements of the housing service and how this would lead to improvements.

Phil Porter (the Council's Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing) responded that the Council had plans to communicate with all BHP residents after the meeting, in order to give residents a broader picture of what action the Council had agreed to take. He said that a lot of important issues had been raised by residents at the Watling Gardens meeting and that the Council was also planning to hold drop-in sessions with residents at every one of its 37 high rise tower blocks. He outlined that Officers would be present at these drop-in sessions to log concerns and respond to all of them accordingly. He stated that improvements were already being made within BHP and that it had supported the Council's previous investments on fire safety, but that the Council would not rest on its laurels and had continued to assess its fire safety procedures in conjunction with BHP.

Councillor Ezeajughi stated that since the Grenfell tragedy he had been in regular contact with the residents of two high rise buildings within his ward (Shackleton House and Amundsen House). He said that residents had raised concerns on: a lack of sprinklers within the buildings; a lack of awareness of the proper procedure to follow if there was a fire; and a lack of fire alarms installed. He said that the

Council needed to re-assure residents on the steps it was taking to address fire safety issues across the borough. He also called on the Government to draw up a more stringent set of policies for enforcing fire safety regulations in high rise tower blocks and to provide the funding required to local authorities in order to keep their residents safe. He concluded that he believed that the installation of sprinklers in all high rise tower blocks was an immediate priority.

Councillor Long outlined that she was the Chair of the Council's new Housing Scrutiny Committee and that one of the Committee's first actions would be to set up a new task group on fire safety in the borough. She said that on the whole, high rise tower blocks were not dangerous buildings and highlighted to Members that deaths in tower block fires in Scotland were at their lowest level ever. However, she did also point out that there were still areas which could be addressed in the future such as making sure that all buildings were fitted with working smoke alarms and improved access for emergency vehicles to respond to incidents across the borough.

Councillor Chan stated that the UK had now experienced seven years of austerity in the Government's management of public finances and questioned the extent to which cuts had negatively impacted on Brent's emergency planning preparation and what the Council could do to mitigate against this.

Councillor Stopp criticised the Conservative Group's motion at the end of the agenda, which condemned the leader of the Labour Party for the politicisation of the Grenfell Tower fire. He outlined his belief that this issue had been politicised after the leadership of RBKC refused to resign in the immediate aftermath to the tragedy and because the state of the housing market highlighted how deeply divided the country had become under the Conservatives. He stated that the tragedy of Grenfell had made this divide clear and that this was the legacy of the Conservative Government.

Councillor Colacicco asked the Borough Fire Commander when London would receive taller cranes and what his view was on the installation of sprinklers as a fire safety mechanism.

Councillor Shahzad said that all Councillors were concerned about the safety of the residents within their wards and that there were huge lessons to be learnt from the Grenfell tragedy. He thanked the Officers at Brent Council who had supported RBKC and highlighted the work which had been undertaken to ensure that all of the Brent's high rise tower blocks were safe. He noted that the tests on cladding which took place at Watling Gardens had re-assured residents, but that there were other fire safety concerns raised by both himself and residents which needed to be addressed. He also outlined that he had launched an appeal in support of the victims of Grenfell and their families and urged all Members to contribute.

Councillor Thomas said that he was concerned for tenants in the borough, as it was clear that the tenants at Grenfell had felt that RBKC had not listened to them in the years that proceeded the fire. He spoke about Brent Council being in the process of bringing BHP back in-house and questioned what structures would be in place so that tenants' voices would be empowered to ensure that the Council would listen to their concerns.

Councillor McLeish also referenced the motion by the Conservative Group which condemned the Labour Party for the politicisation of the Grenfell Tower fire. He retorted that it was the Conservative Government that had relieved RBKC of its role in providing support for survivors of the tragedy because their response had been inadequate. He thanked Brent Council's Chief Executive, Carolyn Downs, for her role in leading the coordination of humanitarian assistance from different boroughs across London. He explained that in 2013 an independent inquiry had found a number of fire safety problems with Grenfell Tower. He also mentioned that although the building was insured for £20million, a legal firm had estimated that the overall cost of the tragedy could reach £1billion. He concluded that this had become a political issue as taxpayers money was being used to pay for RBKC's incompetence.

Councillor Duffy said that everyone had been shocked by the events at Grenfell. He commented that the fire had highlighted the poverty and neglect which were prominent on some housing estates. He said that RBKC's leadership had had no choice but to step down, and also condemned the leadership of the London Borough of Camden. He said that, on the whole, Brent's own response to the fire had been reasonable but that there were still lessons to be learnt on some of the fire risks which had been identified. He also said that the response from the Lead Member for Housing and Welfare should have been quicker. He also added that Senior Officers and the leadership of the Council had not fully addressed some of the issues raised by Members.

On the funding proposals within the report, Councillor Duffy questioned the financial implications for residents if the housing revenue borrowing cap was agreed to be increased, as proposed in recommendation 2.2. Conrad Hall (the Council's Chief Finance Officer) explained that funding was presently ring-fenced between the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Council's General Fund. He noted that if the cap was not lifted and additional borrowing was undertaken from within the HRA, this would lead to a re-prioritisation of items within programmes for future capital works. He explained that if the cap was agreed to be raised, the interest costs would be met over time from HRA funds. Councillor Duffy criticised the funding proposal as it stood, and argued that it was tenants who would ultimately pay the price for the additional measures.

Councillor S Choudhary praised Brent's Officers who had assisted in response to the Grenfell Tower fire. He stated that the tragedy had demonstrated the clear need for a second escape route within every high rise building. He advocated the idea of a second staircase on the outside of the building, which he felt could assist in such a situation. He said that the Council had been restricted in many ways because of national planning laws and urged the leadership to ask the Government to address this issue nationally.

Councillor Kansagra (Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group) emphasised that it was important to be able to have a civilised debate in order to learn from the events of Grenfell Tower. He said that he hoped landlords in the borough would take note of the debate and that he was disappointed that there were not more landlords in attendance. He also stressed that Members were themselves corporate landlords, and it was vitally important for the Council to ensure that a tragedy like this was avoided in Brent. He stated that there were a number of questions to be asked which included: how to establish the optimum way to extinguish fires in high rise

tower blocks given the limited reach of fire hoses; and whether the fire brigade had made any changes to its health and safety approval criteria to the cladding panels on the side of high rise buildings.

Councillor Kelcher associated himself with the remarks made by fellow Labour Councillors which condemned the Conservative Group's motion as part of agenda item number 16 on the agenda. He stated that the past seven years of the Government's austerity measures had unpicked the social fabric of the country and this had been proved by RBKC 'penny-pinching' to save £5,000 on cheaper cladding rather than pay for non-flammable cladding to protect their residents. He stated that the Council should pursue best practice with regard to fire safety inspections. He questioned whether the Council had enough staff to be able to carry out proper fire safety inspections on all building development work, particularly in the light of the amount of private development within the borough. He also asked whether LFB had carried out an equipment audit at all of the local fire stations and additionally whether the fire service were engaged with distributing and educating people on working fire alarms.

At this point of the debate, the Chair invited the Borough Fire Commander, Mark Davidson, to answer some of the points raised. Mr Davidson responded to Councillor Kelcher's question on an equipment audit and outlined that in terms equipment, each station in the borough was located strategically and had been equipped to the same level and standards. He said that when LFB's fire safety building inspections took place, this would be combined with a talk to residents on escape plans, smoke alarms and general guidance about safety in the home. He noted that LFB were currently working through inspections of their highest priority high rise buildings, and that they would then work down the list of buildings accordingly. He also explained to Members, in detail, LFB's typical procedure for tackling a fire in a high rise building. He additionally mentioned that there was no such thing as a formal fire safety certificate, and it was Building Control teams who would formally sign off on the safety of buildings. With reference to Councillor S Choudhary's point on a second escape route, Mr Davidson said that this tended not to be needed if buildings had a protected stairwell and that this would also ultimately be a planning issue rather than a fire brigade issue. He spoke about LFB's review of aerial appliances in tackling fires and highlighted that fires tended to be fought from inside the building. Members also heard that LFB had petitioned for the mandatory installation of domestic sprinkler systems for decades but there had been no political will to address this. He concluded on Councillor Chan's question on whether Government cuts had affected the fire service and outlined that LFB had a minimum target of six minutes for the first engine to arrive at an incident after being called, and that this was achieved 90% of the time London-wide.

Councillor R Patel commented on the issue of sub-letting within Grenfell Tower, and how it had meant that the exact number of lives lost might never be known. He added that the tragedy highlighted the daily struggle of ordinary people and that the wellbeing of tenants in Council housing had not been high on the Conservative Party's priority list. He called on the government to lift the 1% public sector pay cap and also for the government to suspend the leadership of RBKC by appointing an independent body to lead the Council until the local elections in May 2018. He concluded that London voters were increasingly turning against the Conservatives, which would make the capital a 'no-go' area for them in electoral terms.

Rohail Bhandari (the Council's Team Manager, District and Commercial Services) responded to Councillor Kelcher's question on the Council's resources for fire safety inspections and stated that although Brent's staffing levels in this area were largely unchanged since 2005, there remained an issue nationwide about recruiting more young people into building control jobs or jobs as surveyors. He emphasised that these jobs were subject to competition and that private sector organisations could often offer more attractive job packages than local authorities. He said that this had contributed to a difficulties in retaining staff.

Councillor Mashari questioned whether the Council had responded to all concerns raised by Council tenants or if there was a backlog. She also asked whether the Council had reviewed its policies on both building control and planning and how these areas could be utilised to prevent a tragedy such as this in future. She also put forward that the Council's Planning Committee should be a model for best practice, and actively scrutinise the fire and safety plans for developers and their planned developments going forward.

Councillor Kabir emphasised the need for the Council to ensure it enhanced the needs of residents with special needs, so that they had the maximum safety arrangements in place during emergencies.

Councillor Colwill (Leader of the Conservative Group) asked the Borough Fire Commander for an indication as to whether the fire was caused by a fridge explosion and why it had engulfed the building so quickly. Mark Davidson responded to this point directly and stated that as the police investigation was ongoing, he was not able to comment on this matter. Councillor Colwill also asked the Council's Social Services Team to take on board that there were disabled people on the top floor of Grenfell Tower, and that this should never be the case in Brent's high rise buildings.

Councillor Ms Shaw called on Members to work together to address this issue and highlighted the perceived lack of community engagement across the borough. She also asked that the Council's Strategic Director for Community Wellbeing work with LFB to visit and offer assurances to residents in tower blocks in Brondesbury Park. Phil Porter re-iterated that he was keen to work with Councillors on all forms of communication with residents in order to re-assure them on the fire safety standards of the Council's housing stock.

Rohail Bhandari responded with reference to Councillor Mashari's points and stated that there were 60 to 70 properties, generally high rise buildings, which the Council had contacted to request that they carry out audits and fire risk safety assessments. On building control policies being reviewed, he said that the Grenfell Tower investigation would reach a conclusion on this and he expected that the legislation would be upgraded if deemed necessary.

Councillor Tatler (Lead Member for Regeneration, Growth, Employment and Skills) thanked the Borough Fire Commander, Mark Davidson, for his attendance at the meeting and asked him to pass on Brent Council's collective thanks to the first responders who saved lives on the night of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. She referred to earlier comments from Members about South Kilburn and stated that she frequently visited the area, and that the current regeneration schemes were committed to improving the lives of residents. She added that she was disgusted by

the recent comments of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid MP, about the failings of accountability in local government. She stressed that it was the Conservative Government which had deregulated building control regulations and presided over the failings of 'permitted development' policies. She outlined her belief further that local government needed to be at the heart of these policies and that building control assessments should be completed by local authorities rather than independent assessors.

Alice Lester (the Council's Head of Planning) explained the key details of permitted development rights (office premises being converted to residential properties without the need for full planning permission) and the numerous problems associated with these. She directed Members to recommendation 2.3 of the report which asked the Government to urgently consider the revocation of the permitted development rights for office to residential conversions. She also referenced Councillor Mashari's question on the role of the planning and explained that as building regulations were the regulatory system for fire safety, this did not fall under the Planning Department's remit for assessments. She said that the focus therefore needed to be on building regulations being fit for purpose. In terms of planning policy and whether high rise towers were appropriate for the borough, she said that this could be fed back into the review of Brent's Local Plan. She said that any from a planning perspective any policy change would likely be focused on place making and appearance rather than fire safety because this did not fall wholly under their jurisdiction.

Phil Porter answered Councillor Thomas' earlier point on resident engagement and said that the Council had been consistent on the importance of resident engagement and scrutiny throughout the review of BHP and that it only wanted to strengthen residents' voices going forward. He specified that the new Housing Scrutiny Committee was due to consider co-opting residents as part of the Committee's composition that a separate resident and tenant panel board panel was also in place.

Councillor W Mitchell-Murray outlined her disappointment that the borough's registered social landlords were not present at the meeting. She also questioned why there appeared to be one rule for RBKC and different rules for other Councils. She also urged the Council to ask the Government to address changing the current planning laws for high rise tower blocks.

Councillor Nerva paid tribute to both the community spirit which had been prevalent since the disaster and to the Brent Officers who had assisted the response effort. He questioned what had been learnt from RBKC's poor emergency planning procedures, and asked Members to consider how consistent emergency planning policies could be implemented London-wide. He also mentioned water pressure within the Borough, and called for assurances from Thames Water that a heavy take of water would be maintained during an emergency. He urged the Council to: do more to lobby the Government on changing the permitted development laws; do more to ensure that fire safety standards are upheld more rigorously in the private sector; conduct a piece of work on bike storage throughout the borough; and ensure that housing associations were present at all future meetings on fire safety with residents in high rise tower blocks.

(Councillor Marquis left the meeting at 9.05pm.)

Councillor Miller (Lead Member for Stronger Communities) recalled that around the time he was elected to municipal office, he campaigned against the previous London Mayor's decision to close a number of fire stations. He asked whether these closures had provided a clear challenge for LFB.

Mark Davidson responded to Councillor Miller's question directly, stating that the current London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, had asked for recommendations on resources from LFB. He outlined that the outcome of the consultation was likely to be due over the next few months. In response to Councillor Nerva's point on water pressure, Mr Davidson said that fire engines had high volume pumps and that Thames Water were present at all assessments of these. On Councillor Ms Shaw's point on fire safety visits to high rise tower blocks, Mr Davidson outlined that LFB undertook home fire safety visits on a daily basis, which included high rise buildings. He outlined that LFB were more than happy to conduct these visits and that they could be requested from resident associations, housing associations or individuals themselves. He also clarified that this type of LFB visit were to give advice and guidance to residents and were not formal fire safety inspections.

Councillor Duffy mentioned that fires were most likely to start in kitchens, and questioned whether the Council had assessed the cost of having sprinklers fitted in Council owned buildings that did not have them already. Carolyn Downs outlined that recommendation three of the fire safety report proposed an itemised and costed programme of work being presented to Cabinet in October 2017, which would include the relevant costings for sprinklers being fitted.

Carolyn Downs responded to Councillor Nerva on emergency planning procedures and said that it had been clear that the processes in place at RBKC had not worked effectively in the aftermath of the fire. She said that there had been a need for them to ask for help in this scenario and that a process of mutual aid had been forthcoming. She stated that, as Chief Executive, she had been reviewing Brent's emergency planning procedures and she said that the Council needed to do more on planning for humanitarian aid assistance as this was a crucial area after a disaster had occurred. She also mentioned that it would be important to engage with the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committees to ensure that the emergency planning structures in place were deemed to be robust enough.

Phil Porter responded to some of the additional queries raised within the debate. He said that there remained a dedicated BHP email address for dealing with tenants' and leaseholder's concerns and that the Council was committed to responding to any issues which arose. He stated that the Council had also been working with housing associations, as detailed within the report, and that it was evident that they were taking this issue very seriously. With regards to points on private sector licensing, he explained the details of the Council's borough-wide Extended Licensing Scheme and specified that this would give the Council greater enforcement powers in relation to fire safety. He concluded by referring to Councillor Colwill's point on where disabled people were placed in high rise buildings and said that the Council would never want to force older or disabled people to move from their homes, but was aware of the need to balance this with the need to ensure resident safety. He explained that the Council would be looking at personal information boxes in its assessment of fire safety to ensure that it had

the best intelligence about where people with additional needs were living and that each had a personal evacuation plan.

Councillor Nerva questioned what the Council was doing to address 'isolated owned occupiers' whom he felt had a level of fire safety far below what was envisaged on page 12 of the fire safety report. Peter Gadsdon (the Council's Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) responded that communication was key in this instance and that it was important to encourage residents to be thinking about safety measures that could be implemented in their houses. He mentioned the creation of the Brent Advice Partnership and that this would assist in liaising with relevant voluntary sector organisations in order to reach out to these vulnerable people. He also noted it was likely that this issue would be looked at by the new Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Butt (Leader of the Council) thanked the panel for attending and answering Members' questions. He stated that the fire at Grenfell was unprecedented and that the Council had reacted by reviewing all of the fire safety provisions for its housing stock. He stressed that the safety of residents remained paramount and thanked LFB for their re-assurances to residents during this period. He also praised the work of some of the registered housing providers in the borough who had put staff on the ground around the buildings 24 hours a day in the aftermath to ensure that residents had extra re-assurance of fire safety within these properties. He said that the proposals within the report went above and beyond what was required and that it was important that the building control and permitted development laws were challenged nationally and that local government was given more powers in both areas. He also mentioned that the Council's leadership had spoken with Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (Shadow Minister for Local Government and Housing) to ensure that Brent's concerns were fed into the national housing picture. He concluded that the measures proposed within the report were a good starting point and intended to give further assurance to residents that the Council was always on their side.

Discussions ensued on the recommendations within the report. Members agreed that recommendation 2.2, as presented within the agenda pack, would be deleted and that the wording in recommendation 1 would delete the line *'to be financed initially by additional borrowing'*.

Councillor Collier declared that he was the Chair of Generation Rent and also raised that the recommendations within the report did not fully address issues prominent in the private rented sector, such as whether all dwellings were fit for human habitation. He also pointed out that despite it being mentioned several times during the course of the debate, there was no recommendation which asked the Government to review building control laws to ensure that local authorities regained the ability to adequately inspect buildings for the purpose of building control approval. Councillor Collier also made a wider point on the potential for bad governance within an authority with a large majority. Members agreed that two additional recommendations be drawn up to capture Councillor Collier's points on a review of building control and licensing laws for landlords who own private sector dwellings.

To conclude the debate, Councillor Farah thanked the panel for their responses and the residents who had attended the meeting. He emphasised that the Grenfell

Tower fire tragedy had prompted Brent to look at its own strategies for fire safety within its housing stock and emergency planning. He acknowledged that there had been a lot of valid issues raised during the debate and that these would all be dealt with accordingly. He stressed that it was vitally important to listen to residents' concerns and re-iterated that this would continue when the Council's housing stock had been brought back in-house. Members heard that none of the issues raised would be taken lightly, and Councillor Farah thanked them for their time.

The amended recommendations were put to a vote by show of hands and declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) A £10million increase to the Council's 2017/2018 Capital Programme, in order to meet the cost of enhancing the fire safety measures in the Council's housing stock, be agreed;
- (ii) The Council's Chief Executive be asked to write to the Government as a matter of urgency to request that the Government provide direct financial support meet the costs incurred;
- (iii) The Council's Chief Executive be asked to write to the Government as a matter of urgency to request that the Government urgently consider revocation of the permitted development rights for office to residential conversions, in order to ensure that such proposals go through the proper planning process to enable full consideration of all relevant planning considerations;
- (iv) It be noted that a report which proposed an outline programme of works would be taken to the Council's Cabinet meeting on 24 July 2017;
- (v) It be noted that a report with a fully itemised and costed programme of work would be prepared for Cabinet consideration and approval by October 2017, and that its implementation would be monitored by the Housing Scrutiny Committee;
- (vi) The Council's Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing be asked to write to Registered Providers in the borough to request that they keep the Council updated as to the status of their Fire Risk Assessments for the high risk tower blocks that they were responsible for within the borough;
- (vii) The Council's Chief Executive be asked to write to the Government as a matter of urgency to request that the Government review the use of building control teams from the private sector and other Councils to inspect buildings for the purposes of building control approval, which can mean a total lack of oversight by the relevant local authority inspectors of the fire risk level in some privately owned high rise blocks; and
- (viii) The Council's Chief Executive be asked to write to the Government as a matter of urgency to request that the Government address whether licensing laws for landlords in the private sector are stringent enough to ensure that all dwellings are fit for human habitation.

8. **Reports from the Leader and Cabinet**

(Councillor Shaw left the meeting at 21.41pm)

Councillor Butt referred Members to the key decisions taken since the 23 January 2017 meeting of Full Council which had been tabled and circulated around the Council Chamber. He specified that due to the number of agenda items which remained at the meeting, Cabinet members had agreed to waive their reports at this meeting and would provide their reports at the next meeting of Full Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that the reports from the Leader and the Cabinet would be deferred and reported in full at the next meeting of Full Council 18 September 2017.

9. **Questions from Members of the Public**

The Mayor outlined that no questions from Members of the Public had been received for this meeting in accordance with Standing Order 39A.

10. **Petitions**

The Mayor informed Members that there were no petitions to be debated in accordance with the Council's petition rules and Standing Order 68.

11. **Non Cabinet Members' Debate**

As had been mentioned during the Mayor's statement at the beginning of the meeting, it was explained to Members that the Leaders of the Council's political groups had agreed to waive the Non-Cabinet Members debate at this meeting in order to allow more time for Members to discuss and debate Fire Safety in High Rise Tower Blocks.

12. **Questions from the Opposition and other Non-Cabinet Members**

The Mayor invited the eight Members who had asked a question to the Cabinet (as detailed within the agenda pack) to ask a supplementary question should they wish.

- (i) Councillor Crane thanked Councillor McLennan for her initial answer to his question. As a follow-up, he pointed out that residents in Fryent ward had rejected austerity at the 2017 General Election and questioned what additional steps the Council could take to spend more on residents' priorities such as roads repairs and infrastructure investment.

Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader of the Council) stated that the Council had continued to face fierce financial challenges but that the Council had implemented projects which it encouraged residents to access in order to improve the areas that they lived in. She referenced the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy, 'Love Where You Live' Grants and Section 106 agreements as the means for funding improvements in local areas. She concluded that it was positive that a recent Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review had outlined that the Council's financial approach had been the right one.

- (ii) Councillor Colacicco thanked Councillor Southwood for her initial answer to her question. As a follow up, she asked for clarification that the Lead Member was referring to fracking in Brent amid recent rumours of exploratory drilling in the NW10 postcode.

Councillor Southwood confirmed that no licence had been granted within the London Borough of Brent to undertake fracking work. She made clear that Brent's position from 2013 remained unchanged and that fracking was not welcome anywhere in the local area. She also referenced Councillor Crane's earlier question on investment in infrastructure and hoped that all Members would support the Cabinet as continued to make the case for greater investment in the Council's roads and pavements.

There were no supplementary questions from Councillors Conneely, McLeish, S Choudhary, Krupa Sheth, Colwill and Ms Shaw.

(Councillor Thomas left the meeting at 9.50pm.)

13. **Report from Chairs of Scrutiny Committees**

Councillor Kelcher (Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee) stated that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee would have its first meeting of the municipal calendar on 11 July 2017 which would introduce the Committee's annual work plan.

Councillor Long (Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee) explained that the new Housing Scrutiny Committee had not yet met but was due to discuss fire safety and the BHP transfer at its inaugural meeting. She said that housing was area which had never been scrutinised too rigorously by the Council. She mentioned that the Traveller Site would be discussed at some point during the year, and that the Committee were also looking for Members and residents to be part of relevant task groups. She hoped that the Committee would help to inform the key decision making process within the borough.

Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee) directed Members to the content of his report within the published agenda pack for an update on the work of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the content of the reports be noted.

14. **Report from the Vice-Chair of the Audit Advisory Committee**

Councillor Nerva (on behalf of Councillor Aslam Choudry, Vice-Chair of the Audit Advisory Committee) began by thanking both the Independent Chair and Independent Member of the Audit Advisory Committee for their studious work. He said that the Committee had undertaken some important work recently and urged Members to refer themselves to the Committee's work on: debt charges on high interest rates; the capital programme; anti-fraud; scrutiny of KPMG's charges to the Council to investigate residents' complaints. He stated that the Committee was aimed for best practice in its functioning, rather than solely working in ways to

achieve value for money. He explained the Committee had an obligation to advise the Cabinet relevant aspects of its decision making and encouraged all Members to take an interest. He agreed with Councillor Collier's point on the potential for poor governance in authorities with large majorities which was made during the fire safety debate, and outlined that the Audit Advisory Committee also had a role to ensure that this did not happen in Brent.

It was **RESOLVED** that the content of the report be noted.

15. **Changes to the Constitution**

(Councillor Jones left the meeting 10.01pm)

Councillor Butt introduced the report from the Chief Legal Officer which proposed a number of constitutional changes. He explained that these included a change to clarify the powers of the Chief Executive in order for her to make urgent decisions in the event of an emergency and additional changes to the Council's partnership arrangements and collaborative procurement.

The Mayor invited Councillor Warren to move his amendments which had been tabled and circulated around the chamber.

Councillor Warren outlined that he had no problem with the recommendation within the report itself, but was minded to propose some additional recommendations. He said that he had raised the issue to delete Standing Order 13 in the past and would continue to do so because of the unnecessary constitutional stipulations which needed to be met before a vote could be held. He also called on Members to agree to the deletion of Standing Order 27(d) (Special Meeting) as there was no procedure of how a special meeting would ever be called in place of an extraordinary meeting, and therefore this standing order was unnecessary.

Councillor Butt responded and stated that the Local Government Act 2000 stipulated where the Council stood on votes of no confidence. He said that the second amendment was a valid point, however it would need to be looked at more closely in future at the Council's Constitutional Working Group and that Councillor Warren was welcome to attend to discuss further.

Councillor Mashari raised concerns about the number of times that the Constitution had been amended at Full Council meetings in recent years. She requested that Members each be given a hard copy of the Constitution and that the changes over the last five years be detailed and explained to Members. Carolyn Downs explained that there would be a vast expense for the Council if a hard copy was produced for all Members and asked Members to specifically request a copy if they wanted one.

Councillor Collier questioned the extent that the Council was covered by the Constitution for shared service agreements between different authorities when there had been a severe service failure by one of the Councils involved.

Carolyn Downs responded that this was entry in shared services was a contractual matter that the Audit Committee had looked at in the past and could be looked at again by a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Warren's first amendment was tabled as follows:

- *Delete Standing Order 13 (Vote of No Confidence)*

The first amendment was put to a vote by shows of hands and declared **LOST**.

Councillor Warren's second amendment was tabled as follows:

- *Delete Standing Order 27(d) (Special Meeting)*

The second amendment was put to a vote by show of hands and declared **LOST**.

The substantive recommendation, as detailed within the report from the Chief Legal Officer, was put to the vote by show of hands and declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) The change to the Constitution be approved and that Chief Legal Officer be authorised to amend the Constitution accordingly; and
- (ii) A report on how contractual arrangements for shared services are formed, be considered by a future meeting of the Audit Advisory Committee.

16. **Motions**

(i) Motion from the Labour Group – Government Funding for Fire Safety

Councillor Conneely introduced the motion from the Labour Group. She said that she had worked with vulnerable young people and street homeless adults in Kensington and Chelsea for seven years. She said that the ultimate goal had been to move vulnerable individuals into a Council flat, because it was thought to guarantee them safety in every aspect of life. She highlighted that years of deregulation on building control standards and austerity imposed by the Conservative Government had undermined this, and had bred a culture of cost-cutting at the expense of residents' safety. She referenced the measures that Brent had agreed to take in response to the fire, and added that the Council was under no illusion that these would be easily afforded. She concluded that this formed the basis for the Labour Group's motion which sought clarity on funding for any post-Grenfell fire safety related works.

Councillor Warren said that he was disappointed by the Labour Group's failure to acknowledge the reasons that austerity measures had been taken. He stated that the last Labour Government had left a massive deficit in the country's finances which needed to be addressed immediately in 2010. He suggested that local government had its own role into helping to reduce the deficit because of the financial mistakes Labour had made in the past.

The motion was put to a vote by show of hands and declared **CARRIED**.

(ii) Motion from the Conservative Group – Grenfell Tower Tragedy

Councillor Davidson introduced the motion from the Conservative Group. He said that he and his Conservative colleagues had been deeply dismayed by the events at Grenfell. He said that hearts remained with the families of the tragedy and also offered his thanks to the emergency services and Brent Officers who assisted with the response effort. He praised Brent's calm and measured approach in the aftermath and stated that the Government had also approached the issue sensibly. He cited the funding committed by the Government to help to rehouse the victims and the immediate review of high rise buildings across all local authorities, which included testing on any cladded buildings. He stated that the Conservative Group had put forward their motion because it was felt that there was no need to politicise such a terrible tragedy. He said that the Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell MP, had inspired hatred with his comments after the disaster and that this did a disservice to the victims. He called for a calm and sober investigation into the causes of fire that mirrored the assured approach Brent had taken.

Councillor Butt stated that the Labour Group simply could not support the premise of the motion. He said that the Conservative Government's cuts to local government finances and subsequent role in the tragedy needed to be accounted for. He criticised the Conservative Group for bringing the motion forward and stated that the Government had caused more confusion and delay in its response. He said that there was no confidence in the planned inquiry and also that the £5,500 offered to victims would not recompense victims in any way. He called on the Government to provide the funding necessary for fire safety improvements in local communities to ensure that all residents were safe.

Councillor Davidson responded and highlighted that mistakes had been made by Governments of both parties, and commented that the deregulation of fire safety building control had begun in 2005 under Labour. He added that it was embarrassing for the whole country that so many tower blocks had failed the recent fire safety tests. He said that it was infantile to politicise the issue and that he had been alarmed by some of the comments being shouted by residents from the public gallery. He stated that this type of behaviour was linked to the comments made by the Labour Party's national leadership after the fire and re-iterated that a calm approach was needed.

The motion was put to a vote by show of hands and declared **LOST**.

(iii) Motion from the Brent Conservative Group – Tricycle Theatre

Councillor Warren introduced the motion from the Brent Conservative Group. He said that it had now become clear that the Labour Group had raised council taxes as a means to fund organisations that they were biased towards, like the Tricycle Theatre. He questioned why the Labour Group felt the award of a £1million grant to the Theatre was such a good news story and referenced its feature in the Brent magazine. He stated that there were community groups within the borough who had been shocked by the decision to award £1million to Tricycle Theatre and put forward that a bidding system to allow other community groups to also benefit from part of this grant should have been put in place. He also questioned why a grant had been given to an organisation which had a poor record on artistic discrimination and emphasised the Theatre's cancellation of the Jewish Film Festival.

Councillor Davidson stated that Councillor Warren's motion was mean-spirited and followed on from a failed campaign against the Willesden Temple. He referred to the cancellation of the Jewish Film Festival and said that whilst he had also been critical of the cancellation, the Tricycle Theatre had apologised and that it was time to move on from the issue. He said that Councillor Warren should have applauded the work of Tricycle Theatre because it was a cultural asset to the borough and that the Conservative Group rejected the motion outright.

Councillor Tatler encouraged Councillor Warren to attend Cabinet meetings in order to voice his concerns on the Council's key decisions. She questioned why he was so against the Tricycle Theatre as it was a vital community resource, particularly in its work cultural work with young people, child refugees and the Irish traveller community. She also pointed out that Brent Council held the freehold to the Tricycle Theatre building and that it was in the Council's best interests to protect and maintain its assets.

Councillor Warren responded that he frequently attended Cabinet to speak on contentious issues, but was often denied permission to speak by the Leader. He said that he had attended the relevant Cabinet meeting in question to speak on several items, but had not been granted the opportunity to do so.

The motion was put to a vote by show of hands and declared **LOST**.

17. **Urgent Business**

The Mayor stated that there was no other urgent business to transact.

The meeting was declared closed at 10.27 pm

COUNCILLOR BHAGWANJI CHOCHAN
Mayor