



Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 14 July 2020 at 6.00 pm

This will be held as an online virtual meeting.

The link to view this online meeting is available by clicking [HERE](#).

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Kelcher (Chair)
Kansagra (Vice-Chair)
Aden
S Choudhary
Gbajumo
Johnson
Kabir
Mashari
Nerva
Stephens

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Afzal, S Butt, Ethapemi, Hector, Knight, Shahzad,
Ketan Sheth and Thakkar

Councillors:

Colwill, Maurice

For further information contact: Rashella Rapley, Governance Officer - 020 8937 3051, Rashella.Rapley@brent.gov.uk

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The press and public are welcome to attend this as an online virtual meeting. The link to attend and view the meeting is available [HERE](#).

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also significant enough to affect your judgement of a public interest and either it affects a financial position or relates to a regulatory matter then after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect of expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences** - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

(a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party or trade union).

(b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who is the subject of a registrable personal interest.

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Item	Page
1 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
2 Declarations of interests	
Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, the nature and existence of any relevant disclosable pecuniary or personal interests in the items on this agenda and to specify the item(s) to which they relate.	
3 Deputations (if any)	
To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.	
4 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 6
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.	
5 Matters arising (if any)	
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.	
6 Chair's Report	7 - 12
To receive a report from the Chair of the committee.	
7 The Public Realm	13 - 20
To consider the Council's strategy for the public realm and the implications of the management of current public health concerns.	
8 The Brent Economy	21 - 30
To consider the Council's strategy for the Brent economy and the implications of the management of current public health concerns.	
9 Social Welfare in Brent	31 - 42
To consider the Council's strategy for social welfare in Brent and the	

implications of the management of current public health concerns.

10 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Head of Executive and Member Services or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting: Thursday 1 October 2020



MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Thursday 12 March 2020 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Kelcher (Chair) and Councillors S Choudhary, Gbjumo, Kabir, Mashari, Nerva and Stephens

In attendance: Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources)
Councillor Tatler (Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning)
Councillor Tom Miller (Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement)
Councillor Krupa Sheth (Lead Cabinet Member for Environment)

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Councillor Kansagra, Councillor Aden and Councillor Thakkar

2. **Declarations of interests**

Councillor Nerva declared a personal interest that in relation to agenda Item 8 as he was a member of an Advisory Transport consultative body.

3. **Deputations (if any)**

None

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 January 2020 be approved as a correct record.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

The Chair noted that clarification for the response to the Motorcycling Parking Permit, from the Budget Scrutiny report would be received for April's meeting and that the Policy and Capital Strategy would include data around money on how much rent the council received from charities where it was the client.

6. **Chair's Report**

The Chair introduced his report and provided background commentary on the topics being considered at the meeting, as well as relevant issues outside of the public meetings.

7. **Violence Against Women Task Group Membership**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson presented the report that provided the Committee with an update on the new Task Group. The Committee were informed that further meetings were needed with the GLA to advance the report and noted that Michael Carr, (Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer), had built and continued to enhance relationships with various partnerships, namely Children's' Social Services, Adult Social Services, the Safer Brent Partnership, the police and the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC).

The Committee were asked to nominate members who would sit on the Task Group to include male membership, but it had not been possible to find anyone who was interested and able to participate at this time. Following discussions, the Committee welcomed the suggestion to include male members in the process.

RESOLVED: That the following members be appointed to the Violence Against Women Scrutiny Task Group established on 29th January 2020:

- Councillor Fleur Donnelly Jackson (Chair)
- Councillor Sandra Kabir
- Councillor Roxanne Mashari
- Councillor Anita Thakkar.

8. **Brent Cycling Strategy**

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on how the Council was progressing with the implementation of the Brent Cycling Strategy (2016 – 2021), including an overview of the strategy and measures to deliver cycle improvements. The strategy was due to be reviewed in its entirety every five years, that next being 2021.

The Chair invited Mr David Arditti from the Brent Cycling Campaign to address the Committee on the cycling strategy.

Mr David Arditti noted that cycling in Brent could be improved, but that the funding provided by the Mayor of London, had been significant. David Arditti felt that the standards set out in the report needed to be retained and that the Cycling Strategy required more detail with measurable and credible targets. The Committee heard that the proposed designed Cycle Route map had shown some vehicle roads as being cycle routes.

The Committee thanked David Arditti for his address.

Members went on to discuss issues that had been implemented to relieve fears about the dangers in cycling. Councillor Tatler, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning, informed the Committee that cycling training had been advertised on social media and in schools. A school program had been discussed that focused on cycling strategies and prioritised routes, with 2 schools having piloted the School Streets off Road program. It was believed that due to generational cultures, people were more comfortable to drive or be driven, but

Members heard that the infrastructure created, including Lime Bikes had made cycling more accessible.

Members commented that focus had been made on schools and wondered what support had been explored for employees who wished to cycle to work. Councillor Tatler explained that the information would be shared with the Committee once gathered. A Member commented that engagement with businesses and residents must be more consistent to ensure that strategies were applied.

Discussions continued with the participation of Councillor Johnson, Councillor Nerva and Councillor Kabir, during which several key points, including the following, were noted:

- The elements of cycling to the tube rather than driving needed to be reviewed, in terms of, infrastructure and cycling ports provisions.
- That there were many bike repair shops in the Borough but having more repair and second hand-shops would be desirable.
- The current price that Lime charged for parking bicycles was the same across all Boroughs.
- That the interest shown by other companies in supplying bikes for Brent at competitive charges were being explored.
- The Chair commented that he was pleased to have hangers in place. There had been a long waiting list for residents as the demand for hangers had exceeded supply. Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, reminded members that she was the contact for residents who wanted to be on the waiting list.
- Developing relationships with TFL had continued. The Chair noting, he was concerned that TFL may not understand the message on infrastructure as lifts being funded by them had still been a concern.

Having considered the update provided, the committee agreed to the following actions being referred on to the department for consideration and progress:

1. That a review of the Brent Cycling Strategy for the development of a new Strategy post 2021, include the following considerations:
 - i. to find as many ways as possible to encourage people to cycle,
 - ii. the encouragement of groups less likely to cycle, including, women and older people,
 - iii. accessibility to the public highway and cycling transport infrastructure for people with disabilities,
 - iv. access to existing Council cycle parking facilities to the general public.
2. That the new Brent Cycling Strategy include new and ambitious and measurable targets, including shorter term objectives, as well as longer term.
3. That the development of the new strategy involve consultation with key stakeholders, including the scrutiny committees.

9. **Brent Parks Strategy**

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Cabinet Member for Environment presented the report that provided a summary overview of the Brent Council policy, strategy, management and performance of Brent Parks for review by the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

Chris Whyte, Operational Director Environment Services also added clarifications.

The published Parks Strategy document was for 2010-2015.

During the detailed discussion that followed Councillors Gbajumo, Councillor Stephens, and Councillor S Choudhary made contributions highlighting the following key points:

- That the Parks Services had worked together to make parks greener and that re-wording of the Borough Plan would be regarded, for the strategy to read clearer.
- PSPO had conducted neighbourhood and motor patrols but the Committee heard there were no restrictions for parking in parks and therefore, those driving through parks on regular basis, would be investigated. Members were reminded to email hot spot locations to Councillor Krupa Sheth for patrols to be deployed.
- Some Members had raised concerns about discrete rubbish being left in green spaces as some parks no longer had designated Wardens to maintain vigilance. Only five Wardens now covered all parks. Councillor Krupa Seth reminded Members that Environment Officers continued to work to catch the culprits and a walk about in the Wards had been planned.
- Members were in agreement that parks should have designated spaces available for BBQs with permits being in place and a fine system for those that did not adhere. Councillor Krupa Sheth shared the concerns of permitting BBQs as safety had to be paramount. Barbeques could cause damage to parks, the wildlife and meadows species that had to be protected from anti-social behaviour from fires.

It was agreed that a report on barbeques would be conducted for the Committee.

- A member commented that Tower Hamlets had a therapeutic and rewarding vegetable patch and that South Kilburn had trialled this concept. Schools had also been encouraged to promote gardening clubs for children to grow fruit and vegetables.
- Committee Members were informed that the Allotment Officers post was discontinued and allotments managed by Chris Clarke. Members were reminded to share any concerns about allotments in their Ward.

Having considered the update provided, the committee agreed to the following actions being referred on to the Executive for consideration and progress:

RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet:

1. **That a new Brent Parks Strategy encompass the green and open spaces as a whole and include measurable targets, including bespoke targets for Brent, to facilitate the use of parks and open spaces by a diversity of different people in the community and to encourage sporting activities.**
2. **To improve the data on people using the park, which could be used to inform the strategy.**
3. **That provision be made within the strategy and management of parks to allow for barbeques in designated areas, perhaps with the requirement of a permit and perhaps after a trial period to test out how this might work.**

10. **Recommendations Tracker**

Shazia Hussain, Assistant Chief Executive, introduced the report that presented the Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker table, which tracked the progress of the recommendations made by the Committee.

Appendix 1: The Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker 2019 – 2020 was included with the report and provided detailed information and a breakdown to the Committee.

Informing the Committee how recommendations were progressed, the Assistant Chief Executive noted that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had provided summary updates for each scrutiny recommendation made. Members heard that when the Scrutiny Committee made reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and once confirmed, they were to be referred through the CMT, to the Cabinet, which was asked to agree and executive response. The issue was published on the Council's Forward Plan, which provided that date when the Cabinet considered it.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8:05 pm

M KELCHER
Chair

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 Brent	Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 14 July 2020
	Report from the Assistant Chief Executive
Chair’s Report – report from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non Key Decision
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Chair’s Report – report from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee
Background Papers:	None.
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Michael Carr - Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer michael.carr@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Chair’s Report; a report from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 That the Chair’s Report: report from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee be noted.

3.0 Financial Implications

3.1 There are no financial implications for the purposes of this report.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications for the purposes of this report.

5.0 Equality Implications

5.1 There are no equality implications for the purposes of this report.

6.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

6.1 None for the purposes of this report.

Report sign off:

Shazia Hussain
Assistant Chief Executive

Chair's Report

Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

July 2020

Tonight's meeting

I look forward to welcoming councillors and local residents to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee's first ever virtual committee meeting on 14 July 2020.

We would obviously prefer to be meeting in person, but I am pleased that thanks to the wonders of modern technology, and the hard work and dedication of our council support team, we are able to do the next best thing and host an online meeting tonight. This will also ensure our work continues to be open and accessible to the public.

As I am sure our residents would expect, tonight's agenda focuses exclusively on how the council has adapted to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and how we are planning to help our people and businesses to bounce back.

Our first item focuses on the public realm of Brent. All of us in the borough will have noticed physical changes take place to our streets and parks to react to the new normal of social distancing. In my own ward, along the Harlesden High Street pavements have been extended to allow for people to safely queue at bus stops, for example. Some of these changes will be temporary, others will have much longer consequences. It is therefore important for our committee to analyse these changes, suggest further adaptations, and help the council to plan for this new reality in the medium and longer term.

Secondly, we will be looking at how the local authority can support local businesses, the high street and employment. There is now doubt that our thriving small business ecosystem has taken a massive hit due to lockdown. It should be all of our goals to ensure that as many of these businesses as possible bounce back, as soon as possible. Councils can play a key role in delivering this aim, so it is therefore our responsibility as a committee to scrutinise the plans that the Cabinet have in place, and suggest additional ideas where appropriate.

Linked to this, our final item will look at the welfare implications of this crisis. No matter how many businesses we help to save, it seems clear that the country is heading towards a recession and levels of unemployment not seen since the 1980s. This will only add to the burden on our already strained welfare systems. It is absolutely vital that Brent has a plan to deal with this – as the futures of our most vulnerable residents are at stake. We hope to play our role in developing such a plan at this meeting.

Scrutiny during COVID

Our last meeting was due to be held in April, just as the full force of lockdown was taking effect. At the time the council did not have the full technology required to run a virtual meeting, and our officers were being re-deployed to fight the outbreak on the front line. We therefore agreed to postpone the meeting at that time.

However, over the past few months, backbenchers across the council have been taking advantage of a range of opportunities to oversee and scrutinise the work of the council and hold the cabinet to account. These opportunities included, but were not limited to:

Audit Committee – Under the council’s constitution, this committee leads on scrutinising emergency planning and powers. I watched their meeting on 5 May where they held the Chief Executive to account for over an hour and scrutinised the actions taken by the authority so far.

Budget scrutiny – One of the most important roles of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee is to oversee the budget setting process of the council. There is no doubt that the period of lockdown, and of fighting the virus, will have a huge impact on our finances, and that many of the budget assumptions we analysed in January and February are already out of date. We therefore organised a special budget scrutiny session on 27 May where members of the committee were able to question senior officers and the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council about the financial implications of COVID-19.

Health and Wellbeing Board – This is another important arm of oversight into local health provision in our borough. Their meeting on 29 June particularly looked at the local COVID response and the disproportionate impact that has had on some of our local BAME communities. Members of the committee, and other backbenchers participated in this meeting.

Webcast briefings – During the crisis the council have held weekly briefing webcasts, where backbenchers can ask questions the authority’s whole senior leadership team. On average around 60 questions have been tabled and answered at each of these meetings, allowing members to raise concerns at every step of the response.

Lead member briefs – Members of the cabinet have held regular online briefing sessions, where councillors could dial in to ask them questions about the work of their department during the crisis. Personally, I found the session on what each department needed to do to come out of lockdown to be particularly interesting and helpful.

Despite all of these opportunities it is great to know that the committee will be meeting, as closely as possible, in its conventional way on 14 July. This forms part of a bumper month for council meetings and oversight, including meetings of the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, Audit and Full Council.

Work plan

At the beginning of every municipal year, we attempt to set the committee's work plan in a collaborative way, taking on board ideas for cabinet members, officers and backbenchers – with the whole committee having the final say together.

This was made harder by the conditions of lockdown, but we were able to utilise video conferencing technology to still work together to set in a collaborative way. You can find our latest plan in the papers for this meeting.

Budget correction

It has been brought to my attention that there was an inaccuracy in the Budget Scrutiny Panel report that we published in January. Specifically, a paragraph on page 17 stated that:

'Our ability to generate income is limited by legislation in some areas. For example, we are currently barred from charging motorcyclists to park in resident parking bays and pay and display bays. This seems unfair as motorbikes still contribute to poor air quality (albeit to a lesser degree than cars) and they should therefore be liable to some charges. We would urge Brent to work with other boroughs, through London Councils and the LGA, to lobby for the powers to levy proportionate charges on parked motorcycles.'

This was based on information presented to us during one of our evidence gathering sessions. The way this was written up in the report would clearly give the impression that the council could not legally require residents to pay for a permit to park a motorcycle in a resident parking bay outside of their home.

To be clear, this is not the case. For a long time, it was simply impractical for the council to require parked motorcycles to carry a permit, because all permits issued were in paper form and could not easily be affixed to a motorcycle in the same way as a car. With the instigation of electronic permits for resident parking, this is no longer the case.

However, the council would still need to be mindful of the broad legislative framework around parking charges. This clearly states that parking charges cannot be initiated solely to raise revenue, but must be in response to evidence that a charge is required to properly manage parking space in the neighbourhood.

I have met with officers in the parking team who indicate that the majority of complaints they receive around motorcycle parking are actually around pavement parking where the council can (and does) levy penalty charge notices to those caught parking in this anti-social way. I would strongly urge any local people or resident's associations who feel they have a strong problem with motorcycle parking on their street to contact the council so they have the evidence base to respond with either specific motorcycle bays, or CPZ charges for resident motorcycles.

I understand that the Cabinet will be considering their wider policy in this area, and reviewing whether there is a need to consider permit charges for resident motorcycles. There are clearly arguments for and against this policy.

On the pro side, it does seem incongruous that, as things stand, a resident with a small electric car – which does not emit carbon when it drives – is charged a small fee for a permit, but the driver of a motorbike, which emits some pollution, does not.

The lack of motorcycle-specific resident bays also means that these bikes can currently take up significant road space in some streets without contributing to the administration of the CPZ.


On the con side, Brent has rightly taken the bold step of keeping the price of its cheapest parking permit at the low price of £25. By comparison, Hackney, which also levies resident permit charges on motorcycles, has a minimum price of £60. Brent has done this so that we can strongly incentivise people to buy the lowest polluting cars (the less polluting your car is, the less you pay). It is unlikely that any charging regime we could create that not have motorcycles in the lowest category and therefore only liable for a £25 charge.

This could create a perverse incentive for motorcyclists to upgrade to a small car as they would no longer be making a saving – at least in terms of parking – by using a motorcycle or scooter instead.

This is clearly an interesting issue, with good arguments on either side. The committee therefore might like to explore the matter further and ask for any paper on the idea to be brought back to us for pre-scrutiny later in the year.

In the meantime, I have been glad to have the opportunity to correct the record through this chair's report.

Cllr Matt Kelcher
Chair, Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

	<p align="center">Report to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 14 July 2020</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment</p>
<p>The Public Realm in Brent</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	0
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Chris Whyte, Operational Director, Environment Services 020 8937 5342</p> <p>Sandor Fazekas, Project Development Manager, Highways and Infrastructure Service 020 8937 5113</p> <p>Ciara Whelehan, Spatial Planning Manager, Planning and Development Service 020 8937 6473</p> <p>Tim Martin, Transportation Planning Manager, Planning and Development Service 020 8937 6134</p>

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide information on the public realm strategies for Brent, including; Brent Council priorities, strategies and policies, planned strategy review and the impact of the COVID19 epidemic and public health restrictions.
- 1.2 To respond to the key lines of enquiry identified by the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee note the contents of this report.

3. Detail

- 3.1 This report has been prepared in response to a report request from the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee on 22nd June 2020.

- 3.2 The report request outlined questions for the key lines of enquiry by the Committee.

Key Lines of Enquiry

Q1. *What are the current Council priorities, strategy and objectives for the public Realm in Brent?*

- 3.3 The Brent Long Term Transport Strategy 2015-2035 (LTTS), the third Local Implementation Plan (LIP3) and the draft Local Plan outline the Council's strategy for improvements to the transport system and public realm, including the implementation of measures and interventions which will help connect people and places; promote healthy, sustainable travel; improve safety and security; and create better streets, spaces and places.
- 3.4 Our LIP3 aligns with the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy 2018 which sets out plans to improve London's streets, public transport and create opportunities for new homes and jobs, encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Also relevant is the Mayor's Environment Strategy May 2018 outlining the approaches to bring together aspects of London's environment integrating air quality, green infrastructure, climate change mitigation, waste and other areas.
- 3.5 A central tenet of the Council's strategy is the Mayor's 'Healthy Streets' Approach – with the view to making health and personal experience the priority for Londoners. Providing sustainable, safe and secure places to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling, especially for shorter journeys, represents one of the best ways of achieving this. An example of this approach is the Wembley to Willesden Healthy Streets corridor scheme where we are working with TfL, residents and businesses to deliver significant improvements to the highway and public realm and to improve people's walking and cycling experience. Further examples are the Kensal Corridor Scheme which was developed working closely with the community and includes wider pavements, improved accessibility to buses and the over ground station, tree planting and greening (including rain gardens), cycling amenities and safer pedestrian crossings. Another, the Kilburn High Road scheme being developed in partnership with Camden which also adopts 'Healthy Streets' principles.
- 3.6 The Council is consulting on the draft Brent COVID-19 Transport Recovery Plan which outlines its approach for delivering improvements to the transport system and public realm in response to the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan outlines changes needed in the short-medium term as well as those needed to support longer-term ambitions to ensure a more inclusive, healthier and sustainable future for Brent's residents. This plan will deliver new Low Traffic Neighbourhoods which will prevent through traffic and encourage walking and cycling, school streets to support safe and active travel, new cycle links and widening pavements in busy town centres.
- 3.7 The Local Plan emphasises the importance of good design, which is not just about what things look like but also about how places function and how individual buildings and the spaces around them contribute to the public realm and community wellbeing. The Plan outlines opportunities to improve and enhance the quality of the public realm across the borough. These include the implementation of improvements in town centres, securing high quality design and public realm improvements on individual site allocations, in identified Growth Areas and through the masterplanning process.
- 3.8 In areas of the Borough that are subject to Masterplanning, the improvement to and creation of good public realm is one of the core principles. This is evident in Wembley Park (planting of many trees, pedestrian and cycling connectivity between the stages,

spacious outdoor seating /open areas including a 3 hectare park). The emerging Neasden Growth Area masterplan and SPD has public realm as a core principle. The Alperton growth area and housing zone seek improved connectivity and enhancement to the Canal. The South Kilburn masterplan includes improved improved public realm including reinstating the original Victorian street pattern, and a major street improvement project on Carlton Vale.

- 3.9 The objectives of these strategies are to create a pleasant, safe and sustainable public realm where more people wish to walk and cycle, improving public health and the quality of life in the community.

Q2. How do Brent's public realm strategies link with other Council strategies and programmes and partner organisation's strategies; – specifically, the London Plan?

- 3.10 The objectives and commitments set out in the LTTS and LIP3 are focused on the creation of safe, sustainable and more welcoming streets and places for people. As such, they are closely aligned to the Borough Plan – in particular its themes around securing a future built for everyone; a cleaner Brent; and a borough where people can feel safe, secure, happy and healthy.

- 3.11 The draft London Plan places a strong emphasis on sustainable infrastructure, efficiency and resilience and seeks to capitalise on 'good growth' opportunities to become a smart and sustainable city, requiring developments to contribute towards becoming a zero-carbon city by 2050. The LTTS and LIP3 advocate close partnership working with a range of stakeholders, including developers, to ensure the delivery of good quality and well-designed public realm and 'Healthy Streets and Places' that facilitate residents making shorter, regular trips by walking and cycling.

- 3.12 The draft Local Plan has been prepared in line with the requirements of the London Plan. The Council has engaged with key partner organisations such as the GLA, TfL the OPDC, neighbouring boroughs and local stakeholders in the preparation of the Plan to ensure strategic and cross boundary issues have been carefully considered. The Council will continue to work with its neighbours and partner organisations in the implementation of the Local Plan and relevant public realm strategies.

Q3. The new draft London Plan was due to be published this summer. Has Brent Council contributed to the development of the new London Plan public realm sections? Please can you summarise the points submitted? Will the current public health situation affect the publication of the new London Plan and will the public realm sections of this now need to be reviewed in the light of the public health precautions?

- 3.13 Yes, the Council has contributed to all stages of the development of the new London Plan. The Spatial Planning Team commented in detail on the draft London Plan during each stage of consultation, namely in 2017 and 2018, and participated in and gave evidence during the London Plan examination hearings that took place in 2019.

- 3.14 In relation to London Plan policy D7 Public Realm, the following points were made:

- Overall support for the policy
- Policy needs to recognise the pressures on public finances to maintain the quality of spaces in the long term
- Design from the outset should be around ensuring increased cleanliness and greenery

- Communal areas to meet need to be designed to design out anti-social behaviour
 - Suggested changes to the policy were put forward, including an emphasis to promote active change of streets as places of public realm that can create a sense of place, with a rebalance to reduce vehicle dominance, e.g. specific mention of shared space/Homezones
 - Policy to benefit from greater emphasis on street trees as well as the generic term green infrastructure and pedestrian crossings being direct and unenclosed.
- 3.15 The Mayor of London and London Plan Team are currently considering their response to the Secretary of State's latest Directives before the Plan can be presented to the London Assembly for adoption. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic this work has been delayed. Officers are in regular contact with the GLA and updates on the London Plan adoption process can be provided when firmer timescales from the GLA are published.
- 3.16 It is not yet clear whether the public health sections of the London Plan will be updated to respond to the pandemic. It is more likely that the Mayor will publish the current version of the London Plan rather than delay its adoption, and then possibly seek to produce more detailed supporting guidance on issues such as the public realm/built environment. This could involve guidance for Councils to consider how they adapt the built environment to implement a range of measures that will help address wider priorities around public health, air quality, and climate change. As outlined under Q1, the Council has published its draft Brent COVID-19 Transport Recovery Plan which outlines its approach around introducing some of these measures.

Q4. *What is the link to the Councils Local Plan and the development of the new Local Plan for Brent?*

- 3.17 The ambitious growth plans set out in the draft Local Plan, including significant new housing and employment provision, will bring new populations into the borough and place additional pressures on our public realm. In this context, the LTTS and LIP3 highlight the need for investment in the public realm - including the need for high quality, safe places and the provision of supporting infrastructure that maximises opportunities for walking and cycling.
- 3.18 The draft Local Plan also emphasises the need for public and private sector investment in the public realm. The Plan's site allocations and Growth Areas present a number of opportunities to improve and enhance the quality of the public realm. In addition, policy BT1 Sustainable Travel Choice outlines the Council's ambition to promote active and sustainable travel and the importance of designing public realm to meet healthy street principles and provide access for all.
- 3.19 A number of Neighbourhood CIL awards relate to community led public realm projects, for example trees, murals and open space.

Q5. *Please could you briefly summarise the Councils role in creating well-designed places that are prosperous and welcoming to the benefit of both businesses and residents – and the impact of the requirements of post-COVID 19 recovery?.- including changes to public highways etc.*

- 3.20 The Council has an important role to play creating well-designed places that are prosperous and welcoming to the benefit of both businesses and residents. This is one of the main intentions of the Local Plan and new developments. Also the council will approve the design of streets for adoption and we generally carry out all of the design

for improvement schemes to deliver the TfL funded LIP3 programme in-house. With TfL removing the LIP funding and focussing on funding measures to deliver the London Streetspace Plan in response to COVID-19, the Councils in-house design team have developed schemes for implementation. The Council has more recently placed a greater emphasis on improved design and public realm in recognition of the value that it creates in improving quality of life. It has updated its design guidance, provided better design advice in masterplans and requires the use of a design review panel on major developments. The Local Plan contains a number of site allocations which present opportunities to deliver a high quality public realm.

- 3.21 The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how our streets and public realm are being used. For example, when lockdown measures were imposed in March 2020 this initially resulted in a significant reduction in trips being made on the transport network, but has also led to changes in the way in which people travel – with more people walking and cycling. Even though lockdown restrictions are being lifted, the need for people to remain physically distant is predicted to remain for a long period. Therefore, Brent’s infrastructure needs to be adapted to enable effective physical distancing to protect the health and wellbeing of residents when activity and journeys increase as the lockdown lifts.
- 3.22 Where immediate problems have been identified emergency measures such as temporary footway widening have been designed and implemented. Work is also progressing on the identification and implementation of more short-medium term measures to enable safe social distancing and provide people with safe, expedient access to work and key facilities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also provides significant opportunities for the Council to adopt radical new approaches and implement a range of measures that will help address wider priorities around public health, inequalities, air quality and climate change.

Q6. *Please provide an update on the implementation of the Councils strategic objectives for the public realm.*

- 3.23 The Council is making steady progress towards achieving its objectives for improving the public realm. Notable achievements include;
- £20m investment programme into footways, which will see 42 miles of public footways repaired and improved between October 2019 to March 2021.
 - Improved road infrastructure using innovative injection patching method, via contractor Velocity, to treat potholes. In March 2019, Velocity were awarded a two-year contract to delivery injection patching across the borough.
 - Piloting two ‘schools streets’ in 2019 with the aim to roll out to other areas in the borough as part of our LIP programme.
 - Cycleway 3 (a residential cycle route) runs between Regents Park and Gladstone Park, with the Brent section linking Kilburn to Gladstone Park.
 - 67 cycle hangars installed will be installed by the end of 2020. Additional cycle hangars will also be installed with low traffic neighbourhoods (2 per area) subject to funding.
 - Removed the byelaw which used to prohibit cycling in our parks
 - 115 charging points for electric vehicles installed across the borough. We aim to add 120 more lamp column charge points, and 75 kerbside charge points this year.
 - 553 adults and 2,942 children received free cycle training in the last year.

- 16% drop in the most polluting cars after changes to parking permits.
 - 1,033 new trees planted in 2019/20.
 - Procurement of a landscape design team for Carlton Vale boulevard
 - Many NCIL community led public realm projects awarded and implemented
 - Draft Local Plan which will provide statutory planning framework at examination stage.
 - The proposed landscaping and public realm within the Grand Union (formally Northfields) will be an exemplar in landscaping in large new developments.
- 3.24 The Council recognises that ‘Healthy Streets’ schemes have been delivered successfully across London, and have resulted in behavioural change and reduced congestion and air pollution, particularly where there has been a significant investment.
- 3.25 The Local Implementation Plan (LIP) Annual Spending submission report to [Cabinet on 11th November 2019](#) highlighted a new ‘healthy neighbourhood’ approach to improving the public realm.
- 3.26 Our ambitious COVID-19 Transport Recovery / Active Travel plan provides an opportunity for a new approach to improving the public realm in the borough. Whilst some of the measures are temporary there will be the opportunity to permanently implement schemes such as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and support modal shift towards greener travel. This plan identified 23 locations for LTNs, 16 new school streets, 10 additional footway widening locations and also cycling quick wins, and bus priority measures.
- 3.27 The programme is designed to be flexible and adaptable to address emerging issues as lockdown measures are eased. Although delivery of the programme is subject to funding availability, the introduction of schemes under this programme will represent a step change in the Councils approach to improving the public realm.
- 3.28 Our environmental services are regarded as of critical importance to the council; they contribute significantly to both the appearance of the public realm and the quality of the built environment. In recent years the department has adopted a ‘neighbourhood approach’ with a strong focus on community engagement, performance, customer satisfaction and cross-council working.
- Q7. *How do we consult residents, local interest groups, partner organisations and cross departmental stakeholders on our public realm strategies?***
- 3.29 Consultation and partnership working are central to the development of our various programmes and strategies and ongoing engagement will continue to inform their planning and implementation. Methods of engagement typically include:
- Workshops/meetings involving Council Members and officers, local businesses and representatives of local interest/amenity groups;
 - Transport forums, such as the recently reconvened Active Travel Forum and Public Transport Forum which meet regularly to consider transport issues in the borough;
 - Partnership arrangements with health, education, social services authorities and transport operators to work on joint interest projects;

- Joint working with other departments, neighbouring local authorities (e.g. Camden regarding on-going highways improvements in Kilburn) and other organisations (e.g. OPDC as part of the recent Park Royal Liveable Neighbourhoods bid);
 - Workshops/events/surveys seeking the views of the wider public on individual schemes and the transport issues that most affect them (e.g. the recently completed Kingsbury High Streets Improvements scheme);
 - Consultation on the portal supported by a communications plan to raise awareness.
- 3.30 Since mid-2017 a significant amount of work has gone into shaping the draft Brent Local Plan. Public consultation took place in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Throughout the process, all stakeholders had the opportunity to comment on challenges and opportunities related to planning for accommodating Brent’s predicted population growth – this included commenting on policies and site allocations.
- 3.31 The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 17 March 2020. Examination hearings are anticipated to take place in Autumn 2020 (dates tbc).

Q8. *What is the organisational structure for delivering this service?*

- 3.32 Responsibility for the development/delivery of the Council’s transport and public realm related policies and programmes is split between a number of services including Planning and Development services, South Kilburn estates regeneration, Regeneration team, Property and Assets, and the Highways and Infrastructure teams within the Regeneration and Environment Directorate, plus Housing in terms of their responsibility for estates.
- 3.33 Spatial Planning is principally responsible for the more strategic issues around policy (the Local Plan and LIP), strategy and programme development and working with various organisations and developers to secure transport and public realm infrastructure improvements in the borough; the landscape architect contributes to scheme design and leads on community bids for trees under NCIL. Development Management is responsible for negotiating improvements within schemes and S106 contributions.
- 3.34 Highways & Infrastructure is largely responsible for the development, design and delivery of a range of transport and public realm schemes and initiatives and working with the local community and partners to achieve healthy, sustainable places. Also, this service leads on air quality policy and projects, road safety, travel planning, and active travel initiatives to promote walking and cycling.
- 3.35 Cabinet Member leadership is shared across two portfolio areas:
- Cabinet Member for Environment – including responsibility for: operational transport planning; highways; the Conway Aecom contract; street cleaning; envirocrime and enforcement; and air quality / climate change.
 - Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning – including responsibility for: strategic transport planning, estate regeneration and renewal, planning (spatial planning and development management); CIL allocations; and property.

Q9. *What are the future plans for the public realm in Brent?*

3.36 The development/delivery of a range of transport and public realm schemes aimed at creating healthy, sustainable places and increasing the number of journeys made by walking and cycling is planned. Priorities include:

- Healthy Streets Wembley Corridor (Wembley to Willesden Junction), providing a valuable strategic link once TfL's programme resumes;
- Delivery of the Kensal Corridor and Kilburn High Road schemes;
- A Liveable Neighbourhood scheme in Park Royal;
- Introducing new School Streets schemes to encourage active travel, following the successful completion of two pilot schemes;
- Continuing to introduce new Low Traffic Neighbourhoods;
- Delivery of a series of 'quick win' measures to remove barriers to walking and cycling - for example, improving signage/wayfinding;
- Providing more electric vehicle charging points;
- Introducing more cycle parking including cycle hangars;
- Promote greener and sustainable travel through improvements to our website and active travel initiatives.
- Carlton Vale Boulevard procurement and implementation


3.37 The delivery of the above will be dependent on funding available.

3.38 A review and update of the Brent Long term Transport Strategy 2015-2035 and the development of a Brent Parking Management Strategy are planned for 2020.

Report sign off:

Amar Dave

Strategic Director, Regeneration and Environment.

	Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 14 July 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment
The Local Economy in Brent	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	0
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Amar Dave Strategic Director of Regeneration & Environment Email: amar.dave@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee on economic strategies for Brent, including Brent Council priorities, current strategies and policies, and the impact of the COVID19 epidemic and public health restrictions, specifically on business support, high streets, and employment.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the contents of the report.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 This report sets out the strategic objectives that support the local economy and what the council can do to mitigate some of the worst effects of the Covid-19 pandemic by reducing business closures, helping businesses to grow/sustain themselves, supporting town centres, stimulating new businesses and entrepreneurship activity, and retaining and creating new jobs for local people.

- 3.2 The impact of the crisis on the economy is severe and will be long lasting. In Brent there is a particular risk of residents in crisis presenting as homeless further down the line. Housing affordability in Brent is among the weakest in West London, with the average house costing over 15 times the average salary in 2019. Continued furloughing and job losses may weaken household incomes further and lead to accommodation costs accounting for an even larger share of household spending across the borough. Brent households are also less likely than those elsewhere to have adequate savings to help them get through periods of unemployment or reduced income.
- 3.3 Statistics published in June 2020 indicate that in the constituency of Wembley Central 45% of the local workforce has been furloughed. Further data published indicated that 49,900 workers in Brent have been furloughed, the second highest in London. The figures are high across the West London authorities, in part because of the impact of Heathrow being so inactive.
- 3.4 It is therefore imperative to consider what measures can be taken to support and stimulate the local economy and support local employment. Whilst it is acknowledged that some measures will have upfront costs, these must be balanced against the potential human and financial costs of increases in homelessness, poverty and unemployment.
- 3.5 **Economic data and context**
- 3.6 The Office for Budget Responsibility has suggested a potential 35% decrease in economic output across the UK in Q2 2020. Figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that the UK's economy shrank by 20.4% in April 2020. Research by Oxford Economics commissioned via the West London Alliance also highlights the expected impact on the Brent economy.
- 3.7 Detailed analysis suggests that our local economy will be disproportionately affected because:
- The sectoral mix is relatively reliant on sectors which are especially vulnerable, and tend to be lower value ones — particularly manufacturing, but also transport & storage, leisure and hospitality, retail and construction.
 - Long term unemployment and youth unemployment are particularly prevalent.
 - Micro-businesses (1-10 employees) make up approximately 93% of the borough's business base (higher than the London average). These are more vulnerable than larger businesses in the current situation. Many are likely to be retailers, supply chain organisations, or selling services directly to local consumers, and many may have weaker financial positions than larger companies with less resilience to weather large gaps in turnover.
 - As household income levels in the borough are relatively low, high street businesses are reliant on a weaker customer base than similar companies in more prosperous areas. This will be further exacerbated as unemployment increases.
- 3.8 Overall the data suggests that the Brent economy is likely to shrink between 9% and 14% in 2020. This is a sharper contraction than the London economy as a whole.

4.0 Detail

4.1 How do Brent's economic strategies link with other Council strategies and programmes and partner organisation's strategies; specifically, the London Plan?

4.2 The council's economic strategies and the Local Plan in particular have been prepared in line with the requirements of the London Plan and other Mayoral strategies such as the Economic Development Strategy, the Housing Strategy and the Transport Strategy. It is a statutory requirement for Brent's Local Plan to be prepared in general conformity with the Mayor's London Plan.

4.3 Preparation of the Local Plan has involved the scoping of various council's plans, programmes and strategies, such as the regeneration strategy, to ensure relevant priorities and objectives are considered in developing the most appropriate planning policy for the borough.

4.4 The draft London Plan emphasises economic development and growing a good economy and seeks to capitalise on 'good growth' opportunities to conserve and enhance London's global economic competitiveness and ensure that economic success is shared amongst all Londoners. These principles are emphasised in the council's economic strategies and Local Plan, and are also closely aligned to the Borough Plan – in particular, its themes around every opportunity to succeed and a future built for everyone, an economy fit for all.

4.5 The council has engaged with key partner organisations such as the GLA, TfL the OPDC, neighbouring boroughs and other local stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan to ensure strategic and cross boundary issues have been carefully considered. The council will continue to work with its neighbours and partner organisations in the implementation of the Local Plan and economic strategies.

4.6 **The new draft London Plan was due to be published this summer. Has Brent Council contributed to the development of the new London Plan economic development, regeneration and sustainability sections? Please can you summarise the points submitted? Will the current public health situation affect the publication of the new London Plan and will the public realm sections of this now need to be reviewed in the light of the public health precautions?**

4.7 The Spatial Planning Team commented in detail on the draft London Plan during each stage of consultation, namely in 2017 and 2018, and participated in and gave evidence during the 2019 London Plan examination hearings.

4.8 In relation to economic development, some of the key issues raised included:

- The Council's ongoing commitment to ensuring Brent's economy flourishes to support jobs for the growth in its population and to help London in its role as a leading world city. We reinforced the need to have good public transport and orbital links in outer London as essential to supporting a good economy across London, not just in inner or central London;
- The need for the affordable workspace policy to emphasise that developers carry out engagement with workspace providers as early as possible in the planning process, with a view to having a named provider in the S106 (this approach also reinforced in draft Brent Local Plan policy *BE1 'Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for All'*)

- Our support around the intensification of industrial land, in particular looking at innovative ways in which to deliver additional jobs and employment opportunities. However, concerns remain around Brent having to provide the equivalent of an additional 43 hectares of industrial land (land solely for light industry, general industry and storage and distribution) over the plan period (an issue that will be discussed in detail at our Local Plan examination, anticipated to take place in Autumn 2020)
- 4.9 In relation to sustainability, our comments were largely in support for policies and the London Plan's approach to air quality, climate change and resilience, energy and water infrastructure.
- 4.10 The Mayor and London Plan Team are currently considering how they respond to the Secretary of State's latest Directives following the Mayor's response to the London Plan Panel Report before the Plan can be presented to the London Assembly for adoption. This work has been delayed. Officers are in regular contact with the GLA and updates on the London Plan adoption process can be provided as and when firmer timescales from the GLA are published.
- 4.11 It is not yet clear whether the public health sections of the London Plan will be changed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is more likely that the Mayor will publish the current version of the Plan and then seek to produce more detailed supporting guidance on issues such as the public realm/built environment. This could involve guidance for councils to consider how they adapt the built environment to implement a range of measures that will help address wider priorities around public health, air quality, and climate change.
- 4.12 The Council has recently published for consultation the draft Brent COVID-19 Transport Recovery Plan which outlines its approach for delivering rapid improvements to the transport system and public realm in the borough in response to the challenges raised by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Plan outlines those changes that need to be made in the short-medium term as well as those needed to support longer-term ambitions to ensure a more inclusive, healthier and sustainable future for Brent's residents.
- 4.13 We will continue to work closely with the GLA and TfL in particular on the implementation of the Council's strategic objectives for the public realm.
- 4.14 **What is the link to the Council's Local Plan and the development of the new Local Plan for Brent?**
- 4.15 The draft Local Plan has been prepared to be in line with other council plans and strategies in particular the Borough Plan and the regeneration strategy.
- 4.16 The draft Local Plan sets out ambitious growth plans including significant new housing and employment provision up to 2041. The economic development policies include aspirations to deliver increased employment floorspace, new affordable workspace, improvements and intensification of existing employment areas.
- 4.17 In particular, the Local Plan recognises the importance of supporting existing businesses. However, there is also a need to enable future growth sectors such as the low carbon circular economy, science and technology, and creative industries. This will involve improving infrastructure, particularly digital and 5G networks, and securing a range of high quality workspaces, including affordable, incubator, accelerator and co-working (IAC) spaces,
-

research labs and makerspaces. In this regard, the Local Plan and economic strategies are aligned to ensure these objectives are met.

4.18 What are the current council priorities, strategy and objectives for the local economy in Brent, and what is the council's role in promoting economic development, sustainability and regeneration?

4.19 The council's Regeneration, Growth, and Employment department leads on economic development, planning, growth and regeneration. It is led by the priorities outlined in the Borough Plan, the Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Brent Local Plan and Recovery Plans being put in place across Employment, Skills, and Enterprise.

4.20 The Regeneration Team's role is to:

- Set a clear vision for regeneration and growth across the borough, to deliver new homes, jobs, and place-making.
- Ensure regeneration and growth is inclusive, benefits all and reduces inequality.
- Lead by example to deliver Council-led regeneration schemes of high quality.

4.21 The Planning Team's role is to:

- Contribute to the regeneration of the borough through the development of the Local Plan and supporting policy documents – a strategy that will deliver new homes, jobs, supporting infrastructure and high quality places and neighbourhoods.
- Negotiate on, and determine planning applications to secure good quality developments
- Secure CIL and s106 contributions and prioritise spend on key infrastructure and social value to ensure regeneration is inclusive and benefits both existing and new communities.
- Manage strategic transport projects unlocking potential for growth, promoting active travel, delivering enhanced walking and cycling infrastructure.

4.22 The Economic Growth Team's role is to:

- Support improvement of the 9 priority town centres in Brent through clear town centre action plans covering public realm, business support and place-making objectives.
- Support the local economy through a series of business events including supply chain events and online or face to face training programmes.
- Lever funding to support diversification and physical improvements and capital investment in Brent's town centres

4.23 Over the past 12 months the following strategic objectives have been delivered:

- £200,000 of NCIL secured for town centre improvements including community-led street art projects, local events to promote footfall, greening, public realm improvements and business support.
- £400,000 of Historic England funding secured to deliver improvements to conservation area in Harlesden high street
- Council acquisition of Picture Palace to diversify Harlesden High Street and provide community infrastructure and workspace.
- Brent for Business events programme delivered with over 200 businesses engaging over 19/20.
- Significantly improved the quality and reach of the council's business communications with over 7,000 businesses signed up to the council's business e-newsletter (previously fewer than 3,000 businesses signed up). This has been invaluable during Covid-19 to allow us to quickly and efficiently communicate key changes in legislation, government guidance and support available to the business community.
- Development of the Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- 2 new affordable workspace schemes start on site in Wembley (Watkin Road + Parkwood House, 902sqm) ;
- 2 new affordable workspace schemes secured under s106 planning agreement in Alperton and Neasden (Alperton House + 60 Neasden Lane, 2350sqm).
- May 2020 Planning Committee resolution to grant Peel Precinct in SK (560sqm affordable workspace)
- Submission of the Local Plan to the planning inspectorate for examination – a significant milestone in the process. A positive ambitious strategy for growth up to 2041
- 1,731 net additional homes delivered
- 2716sqm industrial employment floorspace (storage and distribution) gained

4.24 **Covid 19 response – specifically on business support, high streets, and employment.**

4.25 Since the beginning of lockdown, the Economic Growth Team have worked closely with other council teams to deliver a range of interventions in support of the local economy:

4.26 Supporting the re-opening of town centres

- Campaign launched around 'Shop Safe, Shop Local' in advance of the shops re-opening on 15th June.

- Clear and consistent comms produced to support social distancing in high streets, disseminated through a wide range of channels including through business newsletter and Town Centre manager networks.
- Officers have been engaging with businesses in the High Streets and providing red and green cards to relevant businesses so they are aware if they can open or not. The cards provide further detail and signpost to information. Posters are being provided for shops to display once they have carried out the requirements needed to open. Businesses have been advised about how they can safely reopen and what enforcement action they will face if they do not comply with the new Covid 19 guidelines.
- Teams representing a range of services have been out and about since 15 June to support businesses reopening, including enforcement officers to talk to businesses who should not be open or are in breach of guidelines.
- A programme of street/pavement widening proposals at pinch points in high-footfall locations has been implemented. Collaboration between Neighbourhood Manager, Town Centre Managers, and Highways allowed pinch points to be identified quickly and further pinch points will be identified as more shops start to re-open. We are keeping a spreadsheet of new requests as they come forward and arranging for inspections to confirm if we can do anything.
- There has been an increase in applications for premises licences and street trading. Currently, applications for street trading (e.g. stalls outside shops or outdoor tables/chairs) are being approved only if the business can demonstrate a clear 2m of pavement will remain for pedestrians to move to. Those where 2m space is not possible are being referred to Highways colleagues to ensure that any approvals are not creating more pinch points or an additional burden to widen footways.
- Planning enforcement have extended compliance periods for enforcement notices to give businesses longer to rectify breaches of planning control.
- Planning enforcement initiative on improving street frontages in some of the town centres has paused so as not to impose additional burdens on businesses.

4.27 Supporting local businesses

- The number of Business Newsletters produced has increased and is sent out weekly to over 7,000 businesses providing updates on support, advice and information.
- Strong promotion of the government grant schemes to maximise awareness and take-up amongst the business community.
- The Council has paid out £56m of grants to businesses (4,550 businesses paid or due to be paid) and the new discretionary business grants scheme is also live for applications.
- Responding to grant fund payments and liaising with Business Rates team and Capita to ensure as many grants as possible reach local businesses and working with landlords to ensure that grant payments reach intended tenants wherever possible.

- The Economic Growth team are liaising with businesses to advise them of other various grants and loan schemes available.
- The Brent for Business Events programme has moved online and a series of business webinars have been delivered to date. An online events programme is in place for the rest of 2020 and includes a Meet the Buyer (supply chain) event, focussed on the construction sector, due to take place in November.
- Brent's newly approved Social Value and Ethical Procurement policy sets a framework for more local procurement spend and specifically identifies amount of local spend and the number of local suppliers as key performance indicators.
- An online delivery map has been created and published on the council's website in order to promote those businesses delivering locally and to encourage local spend.
- Brent Works are providing a recruitment and apprenticeships service free of charge for local businesses, including piloting of apprenticeship levy transfer for a cohort of SMEs.
- Other measures to support residents and businesses are being pursued under the financial inclusion workstream.

4.28 Implementation of the council's strategic objectives: response and recovery planning

4.29 Going forward, in order to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on business support, high streets and employment, the council's Economic Growth team will be focusing on the following:

4.30 Continuing the work to ensure businesses get the advice and support they need through effective Communications and regular online webinars/networking/events and looking at training packages including digital training.

4.31 Encouraging local spend in a number of ways:

- Building on the Stay Safe, Shop Local Communications campaign
- Working closely with Procurement on the council's own spend and doing more to link up local businesses with opportunities that come up for tender in line with the council's new Social Value and Ethical Procurement policy.
- Participating in strategic discussions about loans, grants, council investment, or cheaper credit options for businesses so that they can invest to innovate and stay afloat.

4.32 Working with Highways, Licencing and other colleagues around public realm and highways interventions. This will primarily focus on social distancing in the short term and then move into how to capitalise on the interest in cycling infrastructure and other forms of active travel.

4.33 Continuing to animate the public realm through greening, street art and other local infrastructure initiatives.

4.34 Pushing for more diversification of town centres. Creating a framework for council investments in vacant properties, and using the levers in our new Meanwhile Strategy and Affordable Workspace Strategy to encourage different types of uses to come forward on our high streets.

- 4.35 Supporting residents into good quality and sustained employment, including reviewing the capacity and funding of Brent Works to meet additional need from increased unemployment and bidding for funding to provide additional support to those with greater barriers to the labour market, including delivery of the Moving on Up, Bright Futures, Work and Health Programme, and Supported Internships projects
- 4.36 **How do we consult residents, local interest groups, partner organisations and cross departmental stakeholders on our local economic strategies?**
- 4.37 The Inclusive Growth Strategy was presented at Partners for Brent October 2019, with a wide range of partners in attendance, and discussion at the event used to develop the Strategy.
- 4.38 Town Centre specific plans are consulted on in a case by case basis. Examples include the recent Harlesden Design and Planning Framework and the Kilburn Night-Time Economy plan which incorporated a range of business surveys, public drop in consultations and meetings with community groups to seek views.
- 4.39 Individual elements of town centre action plans are also consulted on regularly and prior to implementation. The Town Centre Managers ensure they have the support of the community (gained through drop-in consultations, surveys, or letters of support from key local organisations) for any NCIL bid they put forward.
- 4.40 Since mid-2017 a significant amount of work has gone into shaping the draft Brent Local Plan. Public consultation took place in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Throughout the process, all stakeholders had the opportunity to comment on challenges and opportunities related to planning for accommodating Brent's predicted population growth – this included commenting on policies and site allocations.
- 4.41 The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 17 March 2020. Examination hearings are anticipated to take place in Autumn 2020 (dates still to be confirmed).
- 4.42 **What is the organisational structure for delivering these objectives?**
- 4.43 The organisational structure is summarised in 4.20-4.23 above. In addition, the employment support team and adult education function sit within the department in the Economic Development, Employment and Skills team.
- 4.44 **What are the future plans for the local economy strategies in Brent?**
- 4.45 All relevant strategies or action plans will be reviewed on an ongoing basis in line with changing government guidance.

4.46 The Council is also working closely with the other West London authorities in the West London Alliance on a specific West London recovery plan, and with London as a whole via London Councils and finally with the London Economic Action Partnership (LEAP), the local enterprise partnership for London.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 This report is for comment. Therefore there are no specific financial implications arising at this stage.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 This report is for comment. Therefore there are no specific legal implications arising at this stage.


7.0 Equalities Implications

7.1 None

Report sign off:

Amar Dave

Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment.

	<p align="center">Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee</p> <p align="center">14 July 2020</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services</p>
<p>Social Welfare and Financial Inclusion: the COVID-19 Support Fund</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	2 Appendix 1 –COVID-19 Interest Free Loans Eligibility Criteria Appendix 2 - Poverty Commission Feedback
Background Papers:	0
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report considers the social welfare implications of the current COVID-19 epidemic and the support available to Brent residents.
- 1.2 The report also outlines a proposal to introduce two new support funds using the surplus money from the Council Tax: COVID-19 Hardship Fund 2020-21, which will be considered by Cabinet on 20 July 2020 for approval. The proposal includes:

1. A grant facility delivered by the Council
2. An interest free loan administered by a Credit Union

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members of the Committee are asked to comment on the proposals within the report.
- 2.2 Members of the Committee are also asked to provide any recommendations on the proposals in advance of the Cabinet meeting on 20 July 2020.

3.0 COVID-19 Social Welfare Implications

Council Tax

- 3.1.1 Council Tax collection rates at the end of May were 19.4% compared to 22.6% for May 2019. The number of residents in receipt of Council Tax Support has increased by 5.3% from 17,510 at the start of the year to 18,438 as more residents are claiming Universal Credit.
- 3.1.2 1,215 Council Tax account holders have contacted the Council to inform us that they have been affected by COVID-19 and are struggling to make Council Tax payments. Deferred payments have been offered to those impacted by the pandemic and hardship payments of £150 have been awarded to working age recipients of Council Tax Support.
- 3.1.3 Recovery of Council Tax debt was paused during lockdown. As of 8 June 2020, reminders for amounts owed over £200 restarted, excluding those who are on Council Tax Support. The Council is implementing a treble touch campaign, which will take a soft approach to seek contact from residents for smaller balances under £100. Contact includes:
 1. An automated voice message
 2. SMS text message
 3. Email

Housing Benefit

- 3.2.1 The Council is processing more complex changes in circumstances. Previously someone changing jobs would just be one change to be processed. A furloughed customer could now have a least the following changes to be processed on different days:
 - Furloughed with no income for several weeks
 - Child Care costs stop
 - Tax Credits change following the first two changes
 - Furlough support paid to the claimant
 - Returns to work
 - Child Care Costs resume
 - Tax Credits change

3.3 *Universal Credit*

3.3.1 Universal Credit applications in Brent reached a record high of 18,775 in the period 1 March to 9 May 2020. Of the London Boroughs, Brent has the second highest claim rate behind Newham, which has the highest.

3.4 *Debt Overview*

3.4.1 The Council has taken a supportive approach for collecting debt during the COVID-19 period. Contact has been made with customers who have outstanding debts to the Council and routes of support have been offered to help manage debt through:

- The Council Tax Support scheme
- Accessing benefits such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefits
- Deferred payment agreements
- Actively sign posting to third party support

3.4.2 Enforcement action through the court bailiffs is currently postponed. The Council is working towards an open and collaborative working relationship with a Brent-based money advice agency.

3.4.3 Identifiers have been included in the Housing Benefits Overpayment and Adult Social Care debt systems to flag those residents who contact us to tell us they have been impacted by COVID-19.

3.5 *Government Support Schemes*

3.5.1 The government has introduced a number of national schemes to protect individual's income and help those who may be facing financial hardship due to COVID-19. These include:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme
- Repayment holidays for mortgage, personal loans and other credit products
- Pause on debt enforcement, housing possessions and evictions

3.5.2 As a borough, Brent has the second highest number of residents who are on the government's furlough scheme out of all London Boroughs – 49,900.

3.5.3 Of the residents in Brent furloughed, 23,300 reside in the Brent Central constituency and 20,400 in the Brent North constituency. The Hampstead and Kilburn constituency, which spans Brent and Camden, has 13,800 residents furloughed.

4.0 **Covid-19 Support Fund**

- 4.1 The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) has paid each Local Authority an amount of money, with the “strong expectation” that this will be used to credit £150 to the Council Tax liabilities to all Working Age Council Tax Support Customers, where the liability is not already nil.
- 4.2 Brent’s allocation is £3.9 million.
- 4.3 Brent’s new Council Tax Support scheme award pays 100% to a relatively large proportion of the Working Age tax base already. Modelling suggests that after £150 has been paid to all current and future liabilities in 20/21, there will be approximately £2.6 million remaining in this fund. That said, the amount spent is expected to increase, as more residents are likely to apply for Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) in the current COVID-19 climate.
- 4.4 The Council is free to use this additional money to meet the needs of local residents who have been affected by the virus outbreak, the funds must be spent by 31st March 2021.
- 4.5 In May 2020, a cross-council group was convened to look at the impact of COVID-19 on Financial Inclusion in Brent and develop solutions to address the issues arising in response to the pandemic. The group included Officers from Brent Community Hubs, the Children and Young People Directorate, Employment Skills and Enterprise, Customer Access, Strategy and Partnerships and Housing and Neighbourhood Services.
- 4.6 Two proposals for the use of surplus funds are being submitted to Cabinet for consideration on 20 July. These include:
- A grant fund to be administered by the Council;
 - An interest free loan to be administered by a Credit Union.

5.0 Grant Funding

- 5.1 The grants made will be delivered by colleagues across Brent in Customer Access, Housing, and the Community Hubs. Decisions will be made at these first points of contact. An eligibility criteria is being developed and will include the need for those accessing grant funding to be Brent residents financially impacted by COVID-19, and a simple means test which is likely to be a capital disregard sum in line with other benefits and grants administered by the Council, such as the Council tax reduction scheme.
- 5.2 Colleagues across Brent were widely consulted on how the fund could be used to support residents where current mechanisms fall short of remedying the fundamental issues they are facing. Set out below are the proposals on how the Council will award the grant fund:
- Parachute payments to ease the financial pressures experienced by those waiting to receive their first Universal Credit payment

- Training to help people retrain and access employment opportunities
- Support clearing rental arrears
- A digital inclusion support package which includes a laptop, broadband connection and digital skills training
- Support with unexpected expenditures due to the pandemic such as costs to cover online food delivery charges
- Meeting residents basic needs by supporting food banks and providing fuel vouchers
- Funding debt advice from a Brent based money advise agency
- Mortgage support
- Bereavement support
- Financial support to help residents identified through track and trace to self-isolate

6.0 Interest Free Loans

- 6.1 As the virus outbreak and lockdown have advanced, there has been a significant increase in the up-take of Welfare Benefits. In the first weeks following the lockdown, 1.5 million claims for Universal Credit were made in a week. There is a risk that someone with an impaired credit history who is unable to access bank loans may be in a position that they turn to a loan shark or pay-day lender for financial support, with repayment plans that are unrealistic and inflated interest rates.
- 6.2 It is proposed that the Council uses surplus money from the COVID-19 hardship fund to work with a Credit Union to administer an interest free loan facility. The Credit Union will be responsible for undertaking a financial assessment and facilitating the loan agreement and payment of monies to resident's debtors.
- 6.3 It is anticipated that the Council will pay a fee to the Credit Union for each loan administered. The exact cost of the scheme will be dependent on a number of factors including the term and amount of the loan. Market testing has indicated that the contract will be 'low value' under the Council's constitution and as such, officers will seek to obtain at least three quotes from Credit Unions that operate in the Brent to ensure value for money.
- 6.4 The loan will be targeted towards residents who have been financially impacted by COVID-19 as per the obligations of the MHCLG fund; have multiple debts; and are unable to access mainstream financial support. An interest-free loan will be given to clear outstanding debts in order to maintain

resident's housing tenure, whilst helping them build a credit profile. Appendix 1 outlines the proposed draft eligibility criteria to access a loan.

- 6.5 Referral routes with a Brent based money-advice agency will be established to identify additional support for residents who are not deemed eligible for a loan, or for those residents who are in receipt of a loan and default on a repayment.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The Hardship grant awarded to the Council is £3.9m and modelling undertaken to date suggests £1.3m will be spent on reducing the bills of working age claimants of CTS by up to £150, leaving £2.6m to fund the activities proposed in this report.
- 7.2 There is a risk that the cost of providing further CTS to working age claimants increases beyond the £1.3m spend currently forecast as more residents become eligible for CTS. If this transpires, the activities proposed in this report will need to be scaled back accordingly. Therefore, strong financial controls will need to be implemented from the outset to ensure total expenditure does not exceed the £3.9m grant amount.
- 7.3 The hardship grant will fund the interest on each loan, including any one off set up costs. The interest amount will vary depending on the assessment of the credit union. Furthermore, as the Council will be underwriting these loans, any defaults will become the liability of the Council to fund, which reduces the amount available for further loans and direct grants.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 The money that is paid out under the Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund 2020-21 by MHCLG to Brent Council as a billing authority is made through a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 8.2 Paragraph 13 of the Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund 2020-21 Local Authority Guidance ("the Guidance") states the Government's strong expectation is that billing authorities will provide all recipients of working age local council tax support ('LCTS') during the financial year 2020-21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of £150, using their discretionary powers to reduce the liability of council tax payers outside of their formal LCTS scheme design. On 26 May 2020, the Chief Executive used her emergency powers to approve the reduction in council tax liability of up to £150 for the period of 2020/21 for those council tax payers living in Brent who are of working age and in receipt of LCTS.
- 8.3 The Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund 2020-21 Local Authority Guidance ("the Guidance") sets out the grant provisions for those working age Local Council Tax Support recipients. The said Guidance also states that having allocated grant monies to reduce the council tax bill of working age Local

Council Tax Support recipients by a further £150, billing authorities should establish their own local approach to using any remaining grant monies to assist those in need. This point is expanded in paragraph 19 of the Guidance.

- 8.4 The Council is also proposing to use grant monies under the Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund 2020-21 to fund discretionary reductions in council tax liability pursuant to its proposed policy under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and that policy will be submitted to the Cabinet for approval on 20 July 2020.
- 8.5 The Council has powers to administer and distribute grant funding and implement the proposals set out in sections 5 and 6 of this report pursuant to the general power of competence as set out in section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. Any distribution of grant funding will need to be in accordance with delegated powers in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution. There will need to be an agreement between the Council and the recipient to govern the terms and conditions of the grant.
- 8.6 With regard to the recommendation to make interest free loans, the selection of a Credit Union for processing loans would be classed as a procurement. Based on the estimated value referred to in paragraph 6.2 above for the delivery of the service, the value of the the contract for the purposes of the Council's Constitution will be classified as a "Low Value Contract". Contracts valued between £25,000 and £189,330 are classed as "Low Value Contracts" under the Council's Constitution. Pursuant to Contract Standing Order 86 (c) of Part 2 of the Council's Constitution no formal tendering procedures apply to Low Value Contracts, except that at least three (3) written quotes must be sought and the quotes sought and/or obtained shall be recorded or alternatively the contract is procured through the Online Market Place. Where quotes are sought, advice must be sought from the Council's procurement officers about how to select the three organisations to be invited to quote and how to structure the quotation process. Unless the Council's procurement officers advise that it is not necessary or appropriate, all quotes shall be sought using the Electronic Tender Facility and at least one of the quotes shall be sought from a Local Brent provider.
- 8.7 Consideration will also need to be given to ensuring that such arrangements for capital funding are state aid compliant. Given the purpose of the funding, it is likely to satisfy the requirements of the Services of General Economic Interest Block Exemption
- 8.8 There will need to be an agreement between the Council and Credit Union to govern the contractual relationship between the parties and to ensure that any monies invested are ring-fenced for the categories of borrowers identified. The Council will also need to approve any loan template between the Credit Union and the individual borrowers.

9.0 Equality Implications

- 9.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has not been carried out. This scheme is intended to benefit all residents in Brent affected by the virus-outbreak and will be available to all eligible residents, including those in any one of the 9 protected groups.
- 9.2 We will be advertising this scheme through our partners in the charity sector and would expect them to help us reach their clients and patrons to make sure they are applying for this additional support.
- 9.3 No resident will be worse off because of these proposals.

10.0 Any other implications

- 10.1 N/A

11.0 Proposed Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 11.1 Because of the urgency of the current pandemic situation, the need for payments in loans and grants to be made as soon as possible to support local residents in financial difficulty arising from the pandemic situation and as this funding from the Government must be spent by March 2021, it is proposed that a consultation process is not carried in relation to the proposals in this report.

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon

Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services

Appendix 1 - COVID-19 Interest Free Loans Eligibility Criteria

- 1.1 The below should be used as a guide to determine resident's initial eligibility for a loan.
- 1.2 All applications which meet the below will be subject to an independent financial assessment to ascertain their financial eligibility and ability to make repayments.
- 1.3 To receive a loan, residents must be able to evidence that:
 1. Their household has been impacted by COVID-19. Suggested criteria includes:
 - In receipt of Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
 - In receipt of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme
 - In receipt of Small Business Bounce Back Loan
 - On the NHS COVID-19 Shielding List
 - A reduction in household income in the period since 1 March 2020
 - Being made redundant in the period since 1 March 2020
 - A new application for Universal Credit in the period since 1 March 2020
 - Previously tested positive for COVID-19 and/or had to self-isolated for a period of time due to COVID-19 symptoms in the household
 2. The above has resulted in an impact on the household finances, evidenced by one or more of the following:
 - Rental arrears
 - Mortgage payment default
 - Default on Utility Bill payment (Energy, Water, Broadband)
 - Default on Council Tax Payment
 - Default on Housing Benefit Overpayment
 - Default on Credit Card payment, where it is evidenced that the money has been used to pay for food/household essentials in the period since 1 March 2020
 3. They haven't already received a loan in the last 12 months
 4. They have a source of income, from either employment or receipt of benefits

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Appendix 2 - Poverty Commission Feedback on the Interest Free Loan Proposal

- 1.1 A draft of the interest-free loans proposal was submitted to members of the Brent Poverty Commission in May 2020 for consideration.
- 1.2 Below is a summary of the key themes of feedback received from representatives. The feedback received was considered when developing the proposal further.
- An interest free loan scheme in Brent is welcomed
 - There is a clear demand for this type of support in Brent
 - This would be a particularly beneficial form of support for those residents who have been furloughed and are fortunate enough to have jobs to return to and may have built up debts during the pandemic
 - A loan period of longer than 12 months would be beneficial for those residents who have larger debts and would otherwise struggle to pay of loan whilst managing their other monthly payments (such as rent and utility bills)
 - The offer of money management advice is an integral part of the proposal and will be beneficial in helping residents determine the most suitable routes for financial support and ensuring that they can access the full range of support available to them
 - A financial assessment is crucial in determining that residents don't borrow more than they need and they are able to make loan repayments
 - The Council should carefully consider the steps it would take to recover money owed if a resident failed to make a loan repayment

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