

	<p align="center"><b>Full Council</b> 23 November 2020</p>
	<p align="center"><b>Report from the Assistant Chief Executive</b></p>
<p><b>Chair's Report: Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee</b></p>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b>	Open
<b>Appendices:</b>	One Appendix 1: Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Annual Work Programme 2020-2021
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Michael Carr - Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer Tel: 020 8937 2855 Email: <a href="mailto:michael.carr@brent.gov.uk">michael.carr@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 At each meeting of Council, the Chairs of Scrutiny Committees may submit written reports on any matter in respect of which the committees have been consulted or which it has been reviewing and to speak to highlight significant issues to Council, in accordance with Part 2, paragraph 36 of the Brent Council Constitution.
- 1.2 This report provides a brief complementary summary of the activities of Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

## 2 Recommendation

That the report from the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

### 3 Detail

- 3.1. Brent Council has two scrutiny committees; the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The Council is also a party to the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.2. Brent Council Standing Orders allow for the chairs of the scrutiny committees to report to ordinary council meetings on the activities of their committees<sup>1</sup>.

#### The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

- 3.3. The remit of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee is set out in the Council Constitution under the Terms of Reference for Scrutiny committees. The remit of the committee is:

*Corporate policy, partnerships and resources; Budget; customer services; commercial services; planning policy; environmental policy; public realm; employment and skills; IT; recycling; regeneration; transport and highways; community safety; property; emergency planning and business continuity.*

- 3.4. The committee is also the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee and as such may review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, by the Safer Brent Partnership.
- 3.5. The committee has continued to meet since March in a virtual online setting during 2020, with meetings on Tuesday 14 July 2020, Wednesday 23 September 2020 and Thursday 1 October 2020. The committee also received informal briefings on the financial impact of the COVID19 epidemic and an informal Joint Scrutiny Briefing Meeting on 18 August 2020 on the report of the Poverty Commission.
- 3.6. At its meeting on Tuesday 14 July 2020 the committee considered items on the Public Realm in Brent, the Brent Economy and Social Welfare in Brent in the light of the COVID19 epidemic, including, specifically, the proposals to introduce the two new support funds using the surplus money from the Council Tax: COVID-19 Hardship Fund 2020-21.
- 3.7. The committee heard evidence from Councillor Shama Tatler – Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning and the Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment on the Public Realm and the Brent Economy and from Councillor Eleanor Southwood - Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, the Strategic Director Customer and Digital Services and the Head of Customer Access on Social Welfare.
- 3.8. In its consideration of *The Public Realm in Brent*, the committee received a detailed report and oral evidence from Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment and Councillor Shama Tatler – Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning and lead officers within the Environment Services, Regeneration and Environment department.

---

<sup>1</sup> Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, paragraph 36.

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s98196/part%20%20May%202020%20Procedural%20Rules.pdf>

3.9. At the end of its consideration of this issue, the committee made five recommendations to Cabinet, set out at paragraph 5.3 of the officer report, all of these on Brent's transport strategy. These are:

1. *That the new parking strategy ensure that it is always cheaper to park a bike than park a car in Brent, and ensure that the cheapest resident parking permit is more expensive than using a bike hangar.*
2. *That 20mph be adopted as the default speed on Brent roads, subject to an environmental audit, and that a timetable be drawn up for the introduction of a 20mph speed limit across the borough.*
3. *That unspent balances in the capital budget be reinvested in active travel.*
4. *That any future transport strategies and plans include clear measurements and modelling for active transport and the impact on air quality.*
5. *That low traffic streets be rebranded in a way that is clearer for the public, for example 'Healthy Streets' or 'Peaceful Streets'.*

3.10. At its meeting on 12 October 2020 Cabinet agreed that consideration be given to raising the lowest parking permit price to the equivalent of the starting price for using a cycle hanger and to introducing 20mph as the default speed on Brent roads to an extent that reasonably accounts for the feasibility, the cost, the value, the actual impact on traffic and speeding at any given location, and the capacity of the department to deliver this policy. Also, to give consideration, when reviewing and updating the Long Term and to brand the Council's low traffic streets policy 'Healthy Neighbourhoods'. The committee's recommendation that unspent balances in the capital budget be reinvested in active travel was however rejected as it was not envisaged that there will be any unspent capital budgets available.

3.11. In its consideration of *The Local Economy*, the committee received a detailed report and oral evidence from Councillor Shama Tatler - Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning and lead officers within the Regeneration and Environment department.

3.12. At the end of the consideration of the issue, the committee recommend to Cabinet:

*That the Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning work with the West London Prosperity Board to set up a jobs summit with large local employers (regardless of sector) to look at ways the public and private sectors can work together to support local employment.*

At its meeting on 12 October 2020 Cabinet agreed this recommendation.

3.13. The committee's consideration of the social welfare implications of the public health crisis, included;- Council Tax collection and recovery of Council Tax debt, access to housing benefit and Universal Credit, debt collection, enforcement action and deferred payment agreements during the COVID-19 period, the Council Tax Support scheme, signing people to third party support and Government Support Schemes. The committee considered two specific proposals- a proposed grant fund to be administered by the Council; and a proposed interest free loan to be administered by a Credit Union.

- 3.14. At the end its consideration of this issue, the committee fully supported the use of the funds to support these programmes and made the following recommendations to Cabinet:
1. That the COVID-19 Interest Free Loans Eligibility Criteria to include debt as part of the criteria.
  2. That the department organise a member development session to brief elected members of the Council on the new support funds and when it may be appropriate to refer people to them.
  3. That the department use the information it has available on vulnerable local people to proactively contact them to advise of the support on offer, and accompany this with a media campaign through social media and traditional media.
  4. That the department conduct a review of its debt collection processes in the light of the COVID-19 crisis, to ensure that the circumstances of vulnerable people adversely affected by the epidemic will be taken into account.
- 3.15. At its meeting on 20 July 2020, the Cabinet agreed to support and approve the recommendations made as part of the development and implementation of the new support funds:
- 3.16. On 17 August 2020 Cabinet resolved to approve the Executive Response to the recommendations made by the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2020 relating to the Council's Parks Strategy, but noted that consideration of the provision to allow use of BBQs in designated areas would require further review, in terms of the options available to manage any change as part of the ongoing development of the strategy.
- 3.17. On 18 August 2020, there was an Informal Joint Scrutiny Briefing Meeting on the Brent Poverty Commission report and recommendations, ahead of it being received by Cabinet. Cabinet received comments of the Joint Scrutiny Briefing on 7 September 2020.
- 3.18. On Wednesday 23 September 2020 the committee was convened to consider an executive key decision that had been called in for review by the scrutiny committee, which was a decision made by the Operational Director – Property & Assets on behalf of the Strategic Director – Regeneration & Environment in respect of the award of a contract for enabling works at Stonebridge Annexe.
- 3.19. The committee heard evidence from the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader, the Lead Member for Schools, Employment and Skills, the Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning, the Strategic Director, Regeneration and Environment and the Operational Director Property and Assets. The committee also heard from members of the Council who had called in the decision and members of the public that had requested to speak.
- 3.20. The committee heard that the Council was required to carry out bats surveys on the site before budding works could begin, it also heard, however, that the award of the contract would not go ahead until the necessary planning processes had been completed and that the bats survey was entirely a matter related to Moorland Gardens

planning decision and that the timing of the survey had, in fact, no bearing to the decision to let the contract.

- 3.21. Given the assurances that the committee had received that the appropriate required bats surveys would be carried out on the site and that the necessary directions under the Moorlands Garden planning decision were being sought from the Mayor of London (GLA); and that the alternative course of action was agreed, it was agreed that the committee did not wish to refer the matter back to the decision maker, so that the decision could be deemed to be confirmed and take effect immediately.
- 3.22. At its meeting on Thursday 1 October 2020 the committee reviewed the delivery of Brent Council Priorities and Council Strategies, the Brent Council Procurement Strategy, reviewed Brent Council budget performance and financial position and agreed a scrutiny report on Violence Against Women.
- 3.23. The review of delivery of Brent Council Priorities and Council Strategies included an overview of the Brent Council policies and strategies, a review of the implementation of the Borough Plan (at year one), and a performance summary report, with oral evidence from Councillor Muhammed Butt- Leader of the Council, Councillor Margaret McLennan – Lead Member for Resources and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Head of Strategy & Partnerships and Corporate Performance Team Leader.
- 3.24. The review of the Brent Council Procurement Strategy considered the Council's Procurement Strategy 2020-2023, including consideration of its alignment with the remaining term of the Borough Plan 2019 – 2023, as well as with recent significant events relating to the impact of COVID19 on the local economy and supplier base and the Black Lives Matter movement and how the Council should support these, alongside the Council's key priorities. The committee received a detailed officer report and oral evidence from Councillor Margaret McLennan – Lead Member for Resources and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Strategic Director Customer and Digital Services and the Head of Procurement.
- 3.25. The committee gave specific consideration in questioning and debate to the issue of the Council's Modern Slavery and Fair the Trade policies and how these are taken into account through procurement strategies and practices. It also considered how the procurement strategy affects on the local economy and upon the opportunities for smaller business providers.
- 3.26. At the end of the consideration of this issue, the committee recommended to Cabinet:
  - i). That the Council policy on Modern Slavery be published on the Council website.
  - ii). That the Brent Council Procurement Strategy include how fair trade is to be delivered.
  - iii). To consider how Council contracts may be made available to smaller company providers.
- 3.27. Cabinet on 12 October 2020 noted the intention to incorporate the recommendations made by the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee when considering the strategy.

- 3.28. The committee's review of Brent Council budget performance and budget position included a report from the Director of Finance setting out the financial position of the Council, financial forecasts for the following year and the possible expenditure priorities of the executive, financial performance, and other key financial data, as well as a review of the implementation of the 2020 Budget Scrutiny recommendations, as agreed by the Cabinet in 2020. The committee received oral evidence from Councillor Margaret McLennan – Lead Member for Resources and Deputy Leader of the Council and the Director of Finance.
- 3.29. The committee also agreed a Violence Against Women Scrutiny report and recommendations, following an in-depth scrutiny task group inquiry. The scrutiny report and recommendations will be considered by the Cabinet on 7 December 2020, when it is anticipated that the Cabinet will agree an Executive Response and make decisions in respect of the scrutiny recommendations.
- 3.30. The next meeting of the committee is on Tuesday 1 December 2020, when it is anticipated that the committee will consider proposals for the climate emergency, including the draft Climate Emergency Plan, the impact of COVID19 on employment in Brent, the Brent Poverty Commission Delivery Plan and appoint a Budget Scrutiny Task Group to consider the Draft Budget proposals for 2020/21 – 2022/23.

#### **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **5 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

#### **6 Equality Implications**

- 6.1 There are no equality implications.

#### **7 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

- 7.1 The Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee has been consulted. Councillors will also discuss this report at the Council meeting.

**Report sign off:**

**SHAZIA HUSSAIN**  
Assistant Chief Executive