

Brent – Our Future  
2010 – 2014

One Borough, One Community, One Council

## **OUR VISION**

Brent will be a thriving, vibrant place, where our diverse community lives in an environment that is safe, sustainable and well maintained. All our services will enable local people to fulfil their potential and improve their quality of life. Public resources will be used creatively and wisely to produce lasting benefits for our residents and the borough. Our commitment to reducing poverty, redressing inequality and preventing exclusion will be at the heart of all our actions.

## **Our Strategic Objectives**

### One Borough

- Creating a sustainable built environment that drives economic regeneration and reduces poverty, inequality and exclusion.

### One Community

- Providing excellent public services which enable people to achieve their full potential promote community cohesion, and improve our quality of life.

### One Council

- Improving services for residents by working with our partners to deliver local priorities more effectively and achieve greater value for money from public resources.

## **BRENT TODAY**

Brent is a place of contrasts. Home of the iconic Wembley Stadium, and Wembley Arena and the spectacular Swaminaryan Hindu Temple, our borough is the destination for thousands of British and international visitors every year. Brent is served by some of the best road and rail transport links in London and the area is accustomed to the successful staging of major events. We are a 2012 Olympic borough and are working closely with the national Olympic Committee and our local partners to ensure this event leaves lasting economic benefits for our residents' and our borough. We have award winning parks, outstanding schools, a great night life and a reputation for fostering and celebrating community cohesion. Our population is young, dynamic and growing. Our long history of ethnic and cultural diversity has created a place that is truly unique and valued by those who live and work here.

However despite these strengths Brent is ranked amongst the top 15 per cent most deprived areas of the country. This deprivation is characterised by high levels of long-term unemployment, low average incomes and a reliance on benefits and social housing. In our priority neighbourhoods the impact of the recession has seen unemployment increase above nine per cent. Children and young people are particularly affected with a third of children in Brent living in a low income household and a fifth in a single-adult household. The proportion of our young people living in acute deprivation is rising with a growing disparity between the educational achievements of some children in comparison with a rising borough average. Living in poverty generally contributes to poorer health, well-being and social isolation. The statistics show that people on low incomes are more likely to have a life limiting health condition, take less exercise and have a shorter life.

Tackling these issues underpins the ambitions and commitments that are set out in this document. Our objective is to lead the physical regeneration of the borough to enable all sections of the community to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the future success of Brent.

### Key facts about Brent

- 59% of the population in Brent is from black and ethnic minority backgrounds
- 36% of the population is aged 20 – 39 and 23% are 19 or under. 16% are aged over 60 years.
- 16.8% of the population are claiming some form of out of work benefits. The London average is 15.4%
- 5.29% claim job seekers allowance but this proportion raises to 9.84% within our 5 most deprived wards.
- There is a low level of adult skills within the borough with only 25% of people having NVQ level 4 or above (the London average is 38.6%) Brent has the second lowest level in London of people with NVQ1 or above at 56% (the London average is 73.7%)
- 15% of the adult population have no formal qualifications at all.
- Average annual earnings are £27,248 which is below the London average of £31,096 and is the third lowest in London.
- 20% of households have an annual income of £15k or less.
- Average house prices are the 8<sup>th</sup> highest in London at £309, 819.
- Only 15.8% of adults undertake physical activity for 3 x 30 minutes per week. This is the second lowest level in London.
- 21.6% of adults are classed as obese. This is slightly below the national average, but 10.6% of children are obese which is above the national average.

- There is an 9 year gap in life expectancy between people living in Harlesden and those in Northwick Park.
- The incidence of cases of tuberculosis in the borough is the second highest in London at 100 cases per 100,000 head of population.
- The borough has one of the highest prevalence's of diabetes in the country at 6.3% and it is widely considered that this is an under reported figure.

## **ONE BOROUGH**

### **Driving economic opportunity and regeneration**

Our borough has great potential for economic regeneration. We benefit from excellent transport links both into central London and out to the wider sub-region. With the international visitor destination of Wembley Stadium located at our heart we are ideally placed to promote Brent as a place to do business and attract new investment into the borough.

The council is leading this drive with the creation of the new Civic Centre within the Wembley Regeneration area. This unique building will provide a world class public facility. It will be the most environmentally sustainable public building in the country, offering accessible community services and much needed space for arts and cultural events. Bringing together Council activities, along with our partners, into one modern building will enable us to provide better customer services while significantly reducing our property and administrative costs. These savings mean we can create an outstanding community asset for the future while still making better use of our public funding. Our investment in the Civic Centre will act as a catalyst for greater private sector investment with major retail, leisure and commercial developments coming into the area over the next four years.

To enhance access to council services in the south of the borough we will be redeveloping Willesden Green Library with more community facilities, a customer service point and a better library. In addition to these two public buildings we will create three further multi-use council contact points to ensure that all parts of the borough are well served. We will also be working with the voluntary sector to develop a resource centre for local community and voluntary groups.

Brent's Local Development Framework identifies five key growth areas across the borough. These include South Kilburn and Church End which we will transform by working with the private sector to create opportunities for more business, retail, housing and environmental improvements. Through the positive reputation we have already established with developers, vital new investment will be brought into these areas. In consultation with local residents we have agreed plans to tackle the poor environment and air quality along the North Circular. These plans will include redesigning local housing and making better use of open spaces to minimise the impact of traffic on peoples' daily lives.

We will use these regeneration projects to enhance the local skills base of Brent residents, supporting local employment and training wherever possible. Poor transport services to some parts of the borough act as a barrier to employment and we will work with partners in Park Royal to improve transport services to the area.

In addition to regenerating the physical environment existing local businesses are of course crucial to the economic future of the borough. We already have good relationships with many of our small and medium size firms, and are working with our Employers Partnership to coordinate the business support available to grow local enterprise. The 2012 Olympic and Para Olympic Games is a great opportunity to promote Brent as a destination and we are working with local business to enhance the employment and tourism opportunities from Brent being an Olympic venue.

Our local town centres provide vital services and amenities within their neighbourhoods. We want to work with local traders to improve their viability by creating a better mix of retail and leisure businesses, providing free parking for the first hour and improving public transport services. We will work with Camden Council to develop plans to improve Kilburn High Road as a shopping area.

### **Protecting our environment**

Our regeneration plans will be delivered within the context of creating a sustainable economic and social environment which provides residents with the services and opportunities they need, while protecting the quality of our environment for the future. For this reason we are concentrating our growth within areas that have good public transport access, have the capacity to accommodate growth and are in need of regeneration.

Environmentally we will lead by example and aim to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by as much as 25 per cent by 2014. This will be achieved by improving energy efficiency in council buildings, encouraging the use of public transport, minimising business travel, promoting car clubs and cycling facilities and using alternative sources of energy. The council will work with partners to implement our Climate Change Strategy so that the whole borough is prepared for its effects and local communities are kept informed. Where possible we will make sustainable choices in our purchasing of goods and services and promote the work of the Brent Fairtrade Network.

Making green choices is very important to many local people and we want to make it easier for them to do this. A Brent 'Green Charter' will be developed setting out how we can work together to protect our environment. One key objective is reducing the amount of house hold waste we all create and our aim is to increase the proportion of waste that gets recycled or composted to upto 60 per cent by 2014. We will improve the range of items that can be recycled in the collection service and make it easier for people living in flats to recycle by providing more bring sites with mixed collections. More of our residual waste will be treated to reduce the amount that is sent to landfill. Bulky items will be collected free of charge and where possible these items will be reused or recycled. Our residents parking permits will encourage people to choose cars with lower emission levels and the cost of permits will be set using this principle.

Everyone deserves to live in a clean and well maintained neighbourhood. Clean streets, free of nuisance cars, graffiti and dumped rubbish will be the norm. We will prosecute those individuals that do not respect our shared environment and spoil our streets.

Brent Residents' value their parks and open spaces. We will protect our parks by improving their biodiversity and most importantly enabling people to use them safely with improvements to the wardens service. New sports and physical activities, particularly for older people, children and young people will be available in local parks and more multi-use games areas will be provided in suitable spaces. Overall our development plans aim to increase the amount of open space within the borough with the objective of creating new parks and allotments.

We are continuing to enhance the public realm, improving the state of our roads and pavements, and increasing road safety, particularly where it affects children. In addition the council will lobby the Mayor of London on strategic transport issues which matter to Brent, including high-speed orbital bus based services connecting outer London town centres.

### **Greater access to affordable housing**

As in many parts of London housing in Brent is expensive and in short supply. With a low average income in the borough and with the cost of housing well above the London average many people find it very difficult to afford suitable accommodation. Being in need of housing has a serious impact on people's job prospects, their health and sometimes their family relations. Homelessness affects the most vulnerable people in our community and frequently leads to isolation and exclusion.

One of the core principles of our Housing Strategy is to create more housing within our growth areas at Wembley, Alperton, South Kilburn, Church End, Burnt Oak and Colindale. Over the next four years we will provide 4500 new homes in the borough and 50 per cent of these will be designated as affordable. There is a particular shortage of family sized housing in the borough, which we need to protect through limiting the conversion of larger properties into flats. We will also ensure that 25 per cent of all new build properties are suitable for families.

While there is no quick solution to meeting all the housing need in the borough we provide a range of services that help to prevent people losing their homes, address inequalities in access to housing and offer alternative solutions. We will continue to reduce the numbers of families who are in temporary accommodation through our partnership work with registered social landlords and the private rented sector and ensure that social housing meets the decent homes standards. Working with private landlords to improve the quality of rented accommodation and bringing unused property back into use will be part of our overall strategy to create a better supply of affordable housing in Brent.

### **Increasing sports, leisure and cultural facilities**

One of our top priorities is to build more high quality sports and leisure facilities. Our ambition is to have a new third swimming pool serving the north of the borough and to redevelop and improve the centre at Bridge Park. Many people in our community are unable to enjoy the health and well-being benefits of an active life style which includes regular exercise. This is due to the lack of local facilities. 52 per cent of our population never undertake any exercise and the impact of this can be seen in growing levels of health inequalities and obesity. We must tackle this problem working with local health providers and the community to provide accessible sports facilities and services for all age groups.

Our joint Sports and Physical Activity Strategy sets out a programme of partnership work to increase the numbers of people taking part in regular exercise as well as provide practical support to local sports clubs and schools. These actions are closely linked to our response to the 2012 Olympic and Para Olympic Games. We will use this global event to promote the wider health and community cohesion benefits from participation in both individual and club sports. Our 2012 Action Plan also looks beyond the sporting benefits and includes projects that will train volunteers to gain new work skills and access job opportunities, support young learners to be inspired by the Olympics and cultural events that will showcase Brent at its best. In the build up to the Olympics we will implement the 2012 Action Plan to secure maximum employment, health and community cohesion benefits are delivered and sustained in the borough.

Brent is unique in its cultural diversity. This is reflected in a rich and dynamic cultural heritage which is celebrated and shared through our popular festivals programme and a myriad of local community events. We want to build on this foundation to support the growth of arts and cultural industries in Brent and encourage more people to engage with local arts projects. Cultural activities make a significant contribution to the lives of local people, fostering cohesion, supporting achievement and reducing exclusion. Our Cultural Strategy sets out actions to provide better venues for arts and community events, attract more funding for local cultural facilities and ensure all parts of the community can take part.

As part of our approach to neighbourhood services we will undertake a major review of our libraries service with the aim of creating a network of modern and fit for purpose libraries, in high quality buildings, at convenient locations across the borough. These will not only provide library services but act as contact points with access to a range of information, IT facilities and public services. The

model will be our successful Kingsbury Plus which has both increased library usage and made it easier for local people to get the services they need.

## **ONE COMMUNITY**

### **Reducing worklessness and low incomes**

Brent is one of the country's most deprived areas for employment and income. In our priority neighbourhoods unemployment is at over nine per cent while the borough average is also above that of London. Many people who are in employment still have a low income and during this time of economic recession many individuals and families are financially vulnerable or already living in poverty. We know that living in poverty contributes to poorer physical and mental health, excludes people from their community and reduces the chances of children doing well at school.

Our plans for the physical regeneration of Brent will bring new job opportunities into the borough and we want our residents to access these jobs, to improve their own prosperity and benefit from a thriving local economy. We also want them to be better equipped to compete for jobs across London.

We have a comprehensive range of employment services in place to prepare and support people into local jobs. Whether it is help with making an application or additional language skills over 1000 local people have successfully got into employment through Brent in2work. We will focus on those people who have been out of the labour market for longest and provide them with the right skills and experience to gain employment. We will provide specialist support to people with a disability who wish to find employment. By working with local employers to identify the type of skills they need our programmes help local people make that all important first step into a job.

Raising local employment is a critical part of our ambition to reduce poverty and inequality in Brent particularly for our most deprived communities. Our aim is to reduce the numbers of people claiming out of work benefits to the London average and raise the income level to at least the London average by 2014. Together these actions will reduce the numbers of households living in poverty to 16 per cent by 2014.

### **Supporting Children and Families**

A good education is the foundation for future success. The educational achievement of Brent's children and young people has improved dramatically in the past decade and our ambitious young people have exam results amongst the top performers in London. The quality of teaching in our local schools is very high with 85 per cent of our schools being judged as good or above by OFSTED. We will work in partnership with local schools to deliver an excellent education for all children in Brent and reduce the gap in attainment that exists for some ethnic groups. Our challenge is to support those children that find it most difficult to succeed educationally, either because they need extra assistance with learning or because the circumstances of their lives are difficult. Through specific support programmes for children looked after by the local authority, those who have special educational needs and children with disabilities we will ensure they are able to achieve their full educational potential.

Demand for school places continues to increase and our schools are already oversubscribed. Our aim is to build at least one new secondary school and one primary school in areas with high demand as well as expanding capacity at our existing schools where there is the potential. We will lobby central government for the necessary resources to build new schools, expand our existing schools and re-build dilapidated facilities.



All Brent schools now have a range of extended services that support pupils learning and focus on providing children with the additional help that they sometimes need to do well at school such as home work clubs, language support and mentoring. These extended services provide vital neighbourhood sports, arts and cultural activities and we will seek more opportunities for these facilities to be accessible for community uses. All Brent schools will achieve accreditation as 'Healthy Schools' promoting sensible eating and regular exercise as part of a preventative approach to health and well-being for children and young people.

We know that the earlier in a child's life support is provided the better they will do in the future. All children deserve the best start in life within a strong and safe family environment. Our programme of locality services and children's centres are working with families to provide the right kind of help during those first crucial years of a child's life. We will invest in our early years services and increase access to childcare to make sure that families are able to take-up employment or training opportunities more easily.

Keeping children safe and protecting those that are most vulnerable is a critical responsibility of all local authorities. Working with our partners on the local Safeguarding Board we will strengthen our role as 'Corporate Parents' making sure that our early intervention services identify, protect and support any child at risk. We will respond quickly and appropriately to the needs of all children and where it is in the interests of the child to be looked after by the authority we will provide a stable, consistent and caring environment.

### **Enabling young people to thrive**

Twenty three per cent of the population in Brent is under 19 years of age. Young people have been particularly badly affected by the economic recession with many finding it increasingly difficult to gain employment or access appropriate further education. We need to ensure that we support these young people during their transition to adulthood with better careers guidance and ensuring they have access to effective education and training provision at age 14-19 within our schools, colleges and other training provider organisations.

A lack of suitable activities for young people in our neighbourhoods is often raised as a concern by residents. We are addressing this through developing neighbourhood projects as part of our Ward Working initiative often in collaboration with voluntary groups and schools. Our sports service works closely with local clubs and groups to deliver activities for young people in parks and sports centres. However we recognise that we can do more and will be reviewing our Youth Service to ensure that all parts of the borough have access to a relevant and engaging range of activities for young people. Information about the youth activities provided locally needs to be more easily and widely available. We are working with young people to continually improve our dedicated young people's website, Bmyvoice, to make sure they can find out what is going on in their neighbourhood, as well as giving them better information about other public services that can provide them with support and advice.

### **Greater personal choice and independence in adult social care**

Many people at some point in their lives will require additional care to maintain their quality of life and independence. For some this can be a short intensive period of help, for others with a critical illness or disability it can be more long-term. Our services for adults are designed to give people more choice about the type of care they receive and to retain an independent life style for as long as possible.

We will encourage more of our social care clients to use direct payments as a way of having more choice and control over the services they receive, while working with our partners in the voluntary

sector to develop a range of suitable options that reflect cultural preferences. Our aim is to streamline the assessment process and service provision, making the best use of resources and enabling individuals to take an active part in their community. Our staff will provide advice and guidance on making the best choice for each individual client depending on their personal circumstances and needs.

Our fully comprehensive reablement service will support people to return to independence more successfully after treatment and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions in the future. Working with our colleagues in the health sector we will reduce the number of people whose transfers from hospital are delayed by not having suitable intermediate care packages in place to help them return home.

When people decide to use care services provided directly by us, they will receive a modern service that better reflects their aspirations and wishes. We will improve the buildings and facilities for our day care and residential homes and increase the efficiency of our transport services. Relatives and friends provide vital support to many of our social care clients. When putting in place care packages we will also assess the impact on carers and their need for assistance to maintain a good quality of life while caring for their relative or friend. Our assessment process will be streamlined to give people a decision more quickly and we will review our charging policy to ensure that it is fair.

With growing demand for adult care services it is vital that we use our resources wisely to provide the best care options for local people. In collaboration with other local authorities in west London we are working to maximise the purchasing power of our budgets through joint procurement arrangements and shared service models.

Staying active and participating in the local community prolongs health and well-being and reduces isolation. Our range of sports, cultural and leisure activities are designed to improve the physical fitness, mental well-being and social inclusion of all our residents. Helping people to lead an active life is a key component to maintain independence and prevent the escalation to more serious levels of need.

### **Reducing crime and the fear of crime**

Protecting the public from crime and the fear of crime is one of our highest priorities. Despite an overall decrease in crime of over 20 per cent in recent years, there are still some parts of the borough where violent crime, including knife and gun crime is a concern. We will focus on reducing gun crime through more intelligence lead approaches in high risk areas and engaging with the communities most affected. Working with the police, we will focus on preventative programmes in schools engaging children, young people and their families to understand the social impact and consequences of violent crime. Violence in the home frequently leads young people to develop a wider acceptance of violence in all forms. Our programmes to reduce domestic violence, which is a significant proportion of all violent crime in Brent, will support victims and their families to escape from violent situations and put in place alternative solutions.

Working with the Safer Neighbourhood Teams we will reduce residential burglary by targeting known burglary locations, increasing advice and support on home security and focusing on known repeat offenders to prevent future crimes. Our range of local ward projects designed to reduce anti-social behaviour are popular and successful. These targeted initiatives create alternative options for young people, tackle problem locations that encourage anti-social behaviour and use the right level of deterrent measures to prevent re-offending. 85 per cent of resident's are happy with how we have dealt with anti-social behaviour in their area and as a result the number of young people coming into the criminal justice system has reduced. We will focus this preventative work on those

young people most at risk of becoming an offender and support them to make better choices for their futures.

The incidence of brothels and prostitution is an emerging issue in Brent and one which we are determined to tackle. Following an innovative research project into this disturbing issue the police and other partners have agreed a set of protocols that will make identifying women who have been trafficked or pressurised into prostitution easier. We will lobby local newspapers to stop the advertising of sex services and promote charities that assist women to exit prostitution.

Drug and alcohol abuse, while not a wide spread problem in Brent, is an acute and persistent problem for some individuals and can lead to criminal activity as a means of funding a drug or alcohol addiction. The completion of treatment and the successful transition to a new life style are key to preventing repeat offending. We will improve the support available to people completing treatment and help them to lead a life that is drug and alcohol free.

Although Brent is now a safer place, residents still express concern about crime levels. Through the Safer Neighbourhoods Teams (SNT's) we are working with the police to provide local people with more influence and information about how their neighbourhoods are policed. The SNT's work with the Ward Panels and neighbourhood watch to coordinate the work of the Police Community Support Officers on the streets. High visibility policing is central to our approach to stopping street crime and helping to reduce the fear of crime felt by local people.

#### **Address health inequalities and the gap in life expectancy**

People who enjoy the best health in Brent can expect to live an average of 9 years longer than those who experience poor health. This stark difference in life expectancy across the borough is the result of the significant inequalities in health and well-being experienced by residents in our most deprived wards compared to the most affluent parts of Brent. Across a range of health conditions such as heart disease, obesity, cancers, diabetes and respiratory conditions communities on lower incomes are disproportionately affected. Health and well-being is frequently determined by an individual's quality of life and circumstances. Poor housing, air quality, diet and poverty are all contributory factors. Working with local health service providers we have developed a set of co-ordinated plans that will decrease the gap in life expectancy and reduce the inequalities in health and well-being. The Health and Well-being Strategy focuses on two objectives, improving the wider environment issues that impact on health and supporting people to adopt healthier life styles.

By delivering our ambitions to regenerate the borough, reduce unemployment and improve housing provision we will address many of the underlying causes of poor health. Our environmental health service is focused on protecting and promoting public health with initiatives to improve air quality, enforce food standards, reduce obesity and control tobacco use. By improving Brent's environment, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour and encouraging achievement we will make a significant contribution to securing longer, healthier lives for our residents.

As well as providing the right environment we need to make it easier for people to make healthy choices in their lives. We aim to build at least one new swimming pool serving the north of the borough and run more local sports events in parks and local venues. Our sports centres provide a range of activities for all abilities and ages that will improve physical fitness and help in the management of weight. All of our schools are working towards being accredited as 'Healthy Schools' and we run intensive support projects for families wanting to improve their diet and fitness as part of tackling childhood obesity. Our planning and design policies will make it easier for people to include exercise in their daily lives with more cycle routes and safe foot paths.

Smoking is the single greatest cause of preventable illness and death. While smoking has decreased overall, in some wards in Brent 25 per cent of people still smoke. We aim to reduce smoking further by delivering our programme of practical help and advice to quit smoking and making sure that young people don't start by implementing robust systems to tackle the availability of tobacco to them.

Take up of routine screening for cancers and immunisation rates are low amongst some communities. We must encourage people to use these valuable preventative services with more information on the availability of primary care services and better access to GP's. Brent has a particularly high level of people contracting tuberculosis. Early diagnosis of this condition is important for effective treatment, so regular screening for those who are most susceptible to this illness is critical.

Changes to the way in which primary health care and hospital services are provided in London are likely to take place in the coming months. The council will work with Brent GP's to ensure that the new process for commissioning local health services reflects the diverse and specific needs of the local population. We will ensure that local health services are safe, modern and effective and accessible to all parts of the community.

## **ONE COUNCIL**

### **Consistent engagement with local communities**

We will empower local people by providing more opportunities for them to engage with local elected Members on decisions affecting their area at ward forums. Our new Brent wide Engagement Strategy sets out the ambition of the council and partners to inform, consult, engage and involve our communities in all aspects of service provision from design through to delivery. To achieve this we will provide a variety of opportunities to engage with officers and Members and ensure that all communication and information materials are written clearly and simply. The Brent Magazine will be distributed to households regularly containing information on available services and consultation events. Working with our partners we will make the best use of consultation information and share the results with local communities. Our regular Residents' Attitude Survey and Citizen's Panel will be used to measure residents' satisfaction with the area and local services and we will respond to the concerns raised.

Our Ward Working initiative focuses on Members working in their communities to address local priorities and improve the way services are delivered on a neighbourhood level. Each ward has a budget to spend on community led projects and the environmental improvements that matter most to local residents. We will ensure that residents have regular feedback about what is happening in their area through ward bulletins and the opportunity to influence neighbourhood priorities. By ensuring that their involvement can make a difference to the place they live we aim to encourage residents to participate in the democratic life of Brent.

The council website is a popular source of information on services and events. Increasingly people expect to be able to access more services via web technology. We will put more transactional services onto our website to make it quicker for users to get the response they need at a time that is convenient to them.

Overview and scrutiny is a Member led process independent of the council's decision making function that looks at the performance of Brent Council and partner organisations in the borough to ensure that they deliver good quality services to local residents. The overview and scrutiny function

enables our Members to become involved in reviewing and developing council policies and provides constructive challenge to the Executive and partners. It can also look at other matters of concern such as policing, health services or a particular local issue such as fuel poverty. We will encourage residents from all sections of the community to engage with and participate in overview and scrutiny. To do this we will focus on the issues that matter to local people, hold meetings out of the town hall when possible, work with partners and voluntary groups and publicise our work as widely as we can.

The building of our new Civic Centre will provide the perfect venue for more people to participate in local democratic debate. With the move to the Civic Centre we will consider televising Council meetings and our citizenship ceremonies via the internet.

Our engagement and consultation activities will take into account the need to reflect the diverse needs of our population and seek out the views of all sections of the community. We are working towards achieving 'Excellence' level of the national Equalities framework by 2012. Through our approach to addressing and reflecting diversity within our service planning and employment practices we will become a beacon of best practice for ensuring equality of opportunity.

### **Achieving organisational efficiency and service improvement**

The whole of the public sector is facing an unprecedented reduction in the level of central government funding for local services over the next four years. With the level of demand for many services increasing, and the population in urban areas such as Brent expanding, we will inevitably be faced with making some hard choices. However a difficult financial environment should not be used as the excuse for mediocrity and poor service standards. It is now that we need to be most innovative, ambitious and creative to turn this challenge into an opportunity to reinvent how we deliver public services in the future.

Our One Council programme has been carefully designed to target reductions in the operating costs of the council so that we can deliver efficiency savings while minimising the impact on front line services to the public. The programme will reduce our expenditure on property, consolidate our support functions and redirect a greater proportion of our staff and resources to direct service delivery. We will make maximum use of new technology to reduce the costs of internal business processes and review all our externally procured contracts to ensure value for money is being achieved. These actions mean we can redesign our customer contact arrangements making sure that more enquires and requests for service are resolved on the first contact.

We are undertaking fundamental change projects in our mainstream services such as adult social care, children's social care, waste collection and street cleaning that will enable us to provide better services, increase our performance and reduce the costs. By implementing our One Council programme we will be better placed to protect the vital public services that many people depend on, while still maintaining a fair balance between taxation and spending.

As part of our approach to efficiency we are working with our public and voluntary sector partners to identify how we can collectively make best use of all public spending in Brent. The aim of having an area based focus on our expenditure, rather than a single organisation is to eliminate duplication, explore how investment in preventative services could release savings and find ways that we can share facilities or support functions.

Although we recognise resources will be tight we have not lowered our performance targets and still aim to have 85 per cent of our indicators within the top two quartiles of performance by 2014. We will measure our achievements against the views of local residents and our objective is for 90 per

cent of residents to be satisfied with their area as a place to live and 85 per cent to be happy with how the council runs the local area.

The next four years will be challenging and at times difficult for our staff. We will be a smaller organisation but we will also be more effective with more of our resources focused on responding to the needs of our residents. We will support our staff by providing high quality training that gives them the skills they need to excel as part of a modern, public service organisation. All staff will be given the opportunity to contribute to discussions and decisions on how we implement our change programme and they will be kept well informed through staff forums, briefings and the intranet. Individual appraisals and development plans will ensure that good performance is recognised and rewarded. In return staff will observe the highest standards of conduct, maintaining our commitment to excellence in every thing we do and serving the public.