



## Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

10 January 2017

### Report from the Director of Performance, Policy & Partnerships

For Information

Wards Affected:

ALL

## Budget Scrutiny Panel Report

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 The Budget Scrutiny Panel was led by Brent's Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Chair, Councillor Matt Kelcher. In October 2016 the panel convened to analyse the Council's 2017/18 – 2018/19 budget proposals.
- 1.2 The Panel have scrutinised the Cabinet's plans and offered suggestions and recommendations for improvements where appropriate.
- 1.3 This was a joint Panel comprising of members from both Scrutiny Committees with the chair of the Resources and Public Realm Committee chairing the group to reflect that Committee's responsibility for resources and budgetary issues. The confirmed members from Resources and Public Realm are: Councillors Kelcher, Patel and Tatler (Councillors Ezeajughi and Davidson acted as a substitutes on one occasion). The members from Community and Wellbeing are: Councillors Sheth, Colwill and Chohan (Councillor Kansangra acted as a substitute on one occasion).

### 2. Recommendations

That the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee review and agree the Budget Scrutiny Panel report.

### 3. Details

- 3.1 The Panel met twice formally and further corresponded by email and telephone when producing this report. The Panel interviewed the Council's Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer in person. The Panel also met with Strategic Directors and Cabinet members where it sought to explore key lines of enquiries.
- 3.2 This report is the beginning, and not the end, of the budget scrutiny process. It is not designed to be a comprehensive account of all of the panel's concerns and queries

about the draft Council budget. Instead, it summarises some of the panel's broad thoughts about the direction and content of this budget.

- 3.3 This report is designed to provoke a discussion and further debate at future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee, where all Councillors will be able to question the Deputy Leader of the Council, and senior officers, about any aspect of the budget.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Scrutiny is an important part of the budget development process. The report does not have direct financial consequences per se, since decisions on the budget will be taken by council. However, if any recommendation to adjust the budget by amending savings proposals was accepted then the financial consequences of this would have to be matched in finalising the budget.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 None arising from the panel's review of the budget proposal.

#### **6. Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 None

#### **7. Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)**

- 7.1 None

#### **8. Background Papers**

- 8.1 The budget papers referred to in this report were submitted to the Brent Cabinet meeting for 24 October 2016 and can be found on the ModernGov or the Councils website, Link Below

[Agenda for Cabinet on Monday 24 October 2016, 7.00 pm](#)

#### **Contact Officers**

Pascoe Sawyers  
Head of Strategy and Partnerships  
020 8937 1045  
[pascoe.sawyers@brent.gov.uk](mailto:pascoe.sawyers@brent.gov.uk)

# Report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel

## Part One: Introduction

### Methodology










Brent has two scrutiny committees:

- Community and Wellbeing which focuses on issues such as health and housing, and;
- Resources and Public Realm which focuses on issues such as customer service and crime.

An issue as broad and cross cutting as the budget obviously affects all area of the Council's work and cannot be scrutinised by a single committee. It was therefore decided to establish a time-limited Budget Scrutiny Panel comprised of three members representing each permanent Committee.

These were:

- Representing Community and Wellbeing: Councillor Ketan Sheth, Councillor Colwill, Councillor Chohan (Councillor Kansangra and Councillor Davidson both acted as a substitute on one occasion)
- Representing Resources and Public Realm: Councillor Kelcher, Councillor M Patel, Councillor Tatler (Councillor Ezeajughi acted as a substitute on one occasion )

	Councillor Kelcher		Councillor Ketan Sheth
	Councillor M Patel		Councillor Chohan
	Councillor Tatler		Councillor Colwill
	Councillor Ezeajughi		Councillor Kansangra
	Councillor Davidson		

This composition was politically balanced in line with the makeup of the Council, with one member representing the Conservative opposition group and five the ruling Labour group.

As the latter committee leads on subjects like Council resources, investment and regeneration, the Chair of this Committee, Councillor Kelcher, chaired the Budget Scrutiny Panel and is the author of this report.

The work of the Panel was particularly supported by scrutiny officers Kisi Smith-Charlemagne and Pascoe Sawyers and the Panel thanks them for their characteristic diligence and dedication throughout this process.

The Panel held four formal meetings in addition to informal conversations, telephone calls and emails.

The first of these meetings consisted of the panel scoping the areas they felt needed closer investigation and coming to a collective view on which of the proposed savings and cuts they felt might be inappropriate.

The second meeting focused on broad discussions around key themes identified in the budget and the Council's broader financial position. Several senior officers including the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer were present to share their expertise.

The third meeting was held to allow the Panel to question Cabinet members on specific areas of concern within their portfolios, particularly cuts they were responsible for bringing forward and implementing.

The fourth meeting brought together the Panel for a final time to agree on its recommendations and the content of the final report which will go forward to the next meeting of the Resource and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to be responded to by the Deputy Leader of the Council.

### **First Thoughts**

The Panel were very encouraged by much of the information presented in the budget and the clearly diligent process by which it was set.

Last year, the Budget Scrutiny Panel felt that the role of Scrutiny in setting the Council's budget was a bit of an afterthought with the publication of the Panel's report not even being noted on the budget timetable.

However, this year there certainly seems to have been an improvement with senior officers and cabinet members keen to participate in our (sometimes lengthy) discussions and the work of the Panel included on the Forward Plan and the Leader of the Council's report to his Group.

Similarly, it was clear that the extent of savings required this year – whilst still deeply alarming – are not as severe as in previous years and certainly not on the scale of some other London boroughs. This is testament to the medium and long term planning built into recent budgets, for example the breathing room of 10 per cent "slippage" built into anticipated savings.

It is our opinion that the budget proposed is balanced and that it should move forward for further scrutiny and consultation.

## **Part Two: Major Themes**

### **Four-year settlement**

The Panel endorses the decision by Cabinet to accept a four-year grant settlement from central government. To be clear, this statement does not mean we believe the settlement is adequate or appropriate, just that it is the best plausible option on the table for the Council to take.

By accepting a deal of this nature – rather than renegotiating a new grant every year as has previously been the norm – the Council can plan for the future with a relative degree of certainty. Certainty is thin on the ground in a world with Brexit dominating the news and should be welcomed wherever it is found.

Furthermore, the Panel felt it was unlikely that, if central government were to find itself with far more funds than anticipated within the next four years, these would be passed down to local government. The pattern of previous years has been for governments of all stripes to prioritise funding to the NHS or schools and certainly not to Councils.

### **Council Tax**

The Panel believes that the Council should continue to consult on plans to increase the Council Tax over the next couple of years.

Until Business Rates become more fully devolved to local government and Brent's Civic Enterprise policies fully mature, Council Tax will remain our primary lever by which to generate significant new income. When any organisation, particularly a Council which provides services to the most vulnerable in society, faces overwhelming cuts to its budget it is duty bound to look at such levers.

The maximum a Council may increase its Council Tax by without recourse to a referendum is 4.99 per cent (a 1.99 per cent general increase plus 3 per cent set aside for social care).

Councils were previously allowed to raise council tax by up to 2 per cent per year under the social care precept. However, from next year local authorities will be allowed to use the social care precept to raise council tax bills by 3 per cent in 2017-18 and a further 3 per cent 2018-19. The net increase of the social care precept would need to remain at 6 per cent over the next three financial years, meaning if councils chose to levy 3 per cent in both 2017-18 and in 2018-19, they would not be able to raise a precept in 2019-20.

As these are very recent central government changes, Brent Cabinet have not yet formed a view on how this change will impact on Brent's council tax rates.

Increasing Brent's Council Tax by 4.99 per cent in the next couple of years could have a significant impact on the Council's ability to continue to deliver these services as clearly demonstrated in the table 1 below.

Table 1

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>In year Savings required</b>	0.0	10.5	6.6	16.8
<b>Additional council tax @ 4.99% for two years, then 1.99% for one</b>	0.0	(5.1)	(5.9)	(3.1)
<b>Savings required with @ 4.99% for two years, then 1.99% for one</b>	0.0	5.4	0.7	13.7

Of course, the Budget Scrutiny Panel was also acutely aware that it would be the ordinary residents of Brent who would have to pick up this tab.

The median income for residents of Brent is £33,482, significantly lower than both the outer London (£37,366) and inner London (£41,428) medians. We therefore have a special responsibility to ensure that the level of our Council Tax is not punitive.

Fortunately, it seems that Brent has so far met this obligation as our Council Tax is at the lower end of the spectrum in comparison to other London boroughs (Table 2).


We recommend that over the long-term Brent keeps a close watch on its position in this table to ensure that our Council Tax level does not rise out of kilter with the rest of London.

However, in the short term we believe that a Council tax rise would be affordable for most of our local residents, particularly with Council Tax Support which ensures those on eligible benefits only pay 20 per cent of the tax.

To put into context:

- A typical Band D property will currently be charged £1101.24 a year in 2016/17 (this is the Brent charge and excludes the GLA precept)
- A rise of 4.99 per cent would add £55.07 to this bill
- This would cost the tax pay a little over a pound per week

Table 2: London Councils Council tax Band D Monitoring

	2015-16 Council Tax for the authority	2015-16 Council Tax for area of billing authority (incl GLA precept)	2016-17 Council Tax for the authority	2016-17 Council Tax for area of billing authority (incl GLA precept)
	(Band D)	(Band D)	(Band D)	(Band D)
	£	£	£	£
<b>INNER LONDON</b>				
City of London	857.31	943.44	857.31	931.2
Camden	1,042.10	1,337.10	1,083.66	1359.66
Greenwich	981.04	1,276.04	1,020.18	1296.18
Hackney	998.45	1,293.45	1,018.42	1294.42
Hammersmith & Fulham	727.81	1,022.81	727.81	1003.81
Islington	981.22	1,276.22	1,020.37	1296.37
Kensington & Chelsea	782.58	1,077.58	782.58	1058.58
Lambeth	943.7	1,238.70	981.35	1257.35
Lewisham	1,060.35	1,355.35	1,102.66	1378.66
Southwark	912.14	1,207.14	930.38	1206.38
Tower Hamlets	885.52	1,180.52	920.85	1196.85
Wandsworth	388.42	683.42	403.91	679.91
Westminster	377.74	672.74	392.81	668.81
<b>OUTER LONDON</b>				
Barking & Dagenham	1,036.67	1,331.67	1,078.03	1354.03
Barnet	1,102.07	1,397.07	1,121.07	1397.07
Bexley	1,150.53	1,445.53	1,196.43	1472.43
<b>Brent</b>	<b>1,058.94</b>	<b>1,353.94</b>	<b>1,101.24</b>	<b>1377.24</b>
Bromley	1,030.14	1,325.14	1,071.27	1347.27
Croydon	1,171.39	1,466.39	1,218.13	1494.13
Ealing	1,059.93	1,354.93	1,059.93	1335.93
Enfield	1,100.34	1,395.34	1,144.17	1420.17
Haringey	1,184.32	1,479.32	1,208.01	1484.01
Harrow	1,234.36	1,529.36	1,283.61	1559.61
Havering	1,219.00	1,514.00	1,267.64	1543.64
Hillingdon	1,112.93	1,407.93	1,112.93	1388.93
Hounslow	1,079.77	1,374.77	1,079.77	1355.77
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,379.65	1,674.65	1,407.24	1683.24
Merton	1,106.45	1,401.45	1,106.45	1382.45
Newham	945.63	1,240.63	964.54	1240.54
Redbridge	1,095.53	1,390.53	1,139.22	1415.22
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,287.39	1,582.39	1,306.39	1582.39
Sutton	1,163.60	1,458.60	1,210.03	1486.03
Waltham Forest	1,152.21	1,447.21	1,198.18	1474.18
<b>Greater London Authority</b>	295		276	
<b>GLA - City of London</b>	86.13		73.89	

## **Reserves**

The Council currently has unallocated reserves of around £12m. The Panel are comfortable with this level and do not propose taking money out of reserves to make up for losses in the Council's grant.

The Council still faces many financial risks, from global factors in an uncertain political world, to local issues such as the increasing demand generated by the ageing population of Brent and the potential increase in demand for social care.

Should all of these risks to come to fruition the Council would only have reserves to cover the attendant costs for a couple of years. This is of course unlikely but reserves exist to cover the unlikely and we believe it would be imprudent to reduce them.

## **Front-line/back office distinction**

For entirely understandable and even laudable reasons, the Council have so far prioritised savings in back office functions ahead of cuts to frontline staff. However, it was the strong impression of the Panel that we have now reached the point where no further cuts could be made in this area without directly impacting the front line.

We therefore would suggest that in future years any proposed reductions in spending should not be targeted to meet a strict ratio which guarantees more back office cuts. Instead we think all cuts should be evidenced-based with a clear understanding of what changes service users will experience being at the heart of any suggestions.

## **Parking**

Within the budget the Cabinet are announcing a 'demand-led' review of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) in Brent. This essentially means that if local Councillors or residents raise an issue with a CPZ in their locality it can be reviewed.

This is welcome in itself, and we are in no doubt that the Council will be inundated with suggestions from local people. However, this also provides the potential to prioritise the views of those people who are most plugged into the system and have the skills, confidence and experience required to respond to a public consultation. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has previously recommended that the Council undertake a large project – which locally elected Councillors should be ideally placed to assist with – of building up a database of every resident's association in the borough. This would be a valuable tool in seeking to ensure that people in every area of Brent are encouraged to participate in this consultation.

A complete reassessment of parking in every area of Brent could overcome this and allow areas without CPZs currently to be treated to the same scrutiny as those with them. Furthermore, the Panel supported the idea of mid-day windows in CPZs to protect local people from commuter parking near stations, but to allow them to welcome visitors, deliveries and trades people in the middle of the day.

We also feel that the review could have been even more ambitious with the aim of devising a new parking policy to last twenty years. This would provide even greater financial certainty in a key area of fees and charges for the Council as well as resolving a range of long-standing concerns raised by local residents.

## **Areas of overspend**

The Panel identified the Community and Wellbeing, specifically Adult Social Care and Children and Young People's Departments as the areas where the risk of overspend is greatest as a proportion of the budget.

This is not least because, the demand for social care is unpredictable and in times of national austerity the Council can only do so much to limit this demand.



The Adult Social Care Department, the Council faces challenges of a changing demography with our residents living longer and developing more complex needs.. As a result, the last three years has seen this department deliver care to an increasing number of users and also find funds for more complex and expensive care packages.

The Panel broadly supported the mechanisms with which the Adult Social Care team are managing this increasing demand. These include promoting New Accommodation for Independent Living (NAIL) and introducing new equipment to minimise the need for two carers to provide care.

Despite finding new ways to meet demand, the pressure is still growing. There is a gap and we would urge the Council to continue to work innovatively to fill this gap

Within the Children and Young People's Department there seem to be two clear factors which cause this.

Firstly, the costs of children's placements has been increasing in Brent. This is particularly due to the high number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The generally accepted target for the number of children's placement in a borough is 0.07 per cent of the population, which would account for 50 children in Brent. We currently have 150 CYP, 90 of whom are in placement, and 60 of whom are care leavers for which we have a continuing and ongoing responsibility.

*Secondly*, many social workers still prefer to work through agencies rather than being direct employees of a local authority. This brings a significant extra financial burden to Brent. It is good news that the percentage of social workers who come from an agency has decreased from 65 per cent to 35 per cent since 2014, but more progress needs to be made, particularly amongst senior social workers and Social Work Managers where 54 per cent remain on agency contracts.

All of this contributes to an overspend of £0.8m in the department which the Council has been able to meet in previous years due to an underspend in other areas.

There is some hope that changes in IR35 legislation will remove a tax loophole which currently allows agency workers who do not meet the HMRC's definition of self-employed to claim additional expenses. The additional monetary expenses encourages social workers not to take full time employment with a Council.

However, as a report written to be read in the real world, it would be remiss of us not to acknowledge that the recent record of the government successfully closing tax loopholes has been patchy at best, therefore we are cautious about Brent relying on this reform to address the issue.

Encouragingly, we heard that one of the Council's partners – empower, who work with many local authorities to reduce placement costs – have stated that from their experiences there are not any large or obvious inefficiencies in Brent's operations and that other boroughs have actively copied some of our efficiency drives.

The Panel does not think that underspends elsewhere can be relied upon continually, nor would we like to see cuts to the frontline in this most important of departments. We therefore hope the Council can continue with its efforts to drive down costs through efficient working and continually reducing the number of agency staff.

### **Need for a philosophical shift**

Fundamentally, the Panel believes that there needs to be a shift in cultural thinking throughout the local government sector, in order to adapt to the revolution in funding which will soon be upon us. The government have committed to removing the block grant to

councils by 2020 and instead letting the local government sector keep all income generated from business rates instead. This will be the biggest change to local government finance in thirty years.

We are pleased to see that Brent is ahead of the curve when it comes to gearing up for this change. In 2016 the Resources and Public Realm Committee commissioned a cross-party task group to thoroughly investigate this new policy and come up with proposals on how the Council should adapt to these changes. Our research indicates that we are the only Council in London, and perhaps the country, to undertake such a move, and our report has already been presented to the wider London Scrutiny Network.

But, of course, there is still much more to be done. The report on budget assumptions which went to Cabinet in October 2016 refers many times to the anticipated growth in the Council Tax base which will come with additional house building in the borough. But come 2020 a square metre of domestic property would be worth less to the Council than a square metre of highly-rateable non-domestic property. This will represent a huge change which will require a deep shift in philosophy throughout the sector.

The Panel was impressed with the Council's Civic Enterprise strategy which seeks to lead such a cultural shift and questioned cabinet members and officers at length about the work we do to attract business to the borough.

We want to ensure that there is cross-departmental work to promote more mixed developments through the planning system so that all housing developments feature some areas for business use and vice versa. This will secure local jobs and diversify our local tax base.

To begin this process we ask that a report outlining all large-scale developments in the recent and upcoming years is brought to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee in three months' time. This should emphasise what proportion of the developments were given over to either category and allow members to take a view on whether the balance has been done correctly.

Furthermore, we believe that there should be a specific focus in any regeneration and development work on our local tube stations and transport hubs. These are the windows to our borough and convenient places to shop. The Council should be forceful when dealing with TFL and seek to maximise business space in tube stations and use every development of a tube station as a potential to attract a new business to Brent.

More broadly, we believe that there is the potential to go much, much further when it comes to growing our local private sector. The Panel were attracted to the idea of creating a single post, or small team, whose sole role would be to attract business to the borough. We believe that this could be funded through incentives with the additional rates brought into the borough used to pay costs and wages, it would therefore not represent a significant new financial burden.

We would also emphasise that significant private sector experience be essential for anyone applying for this position or team, and that the role not be specifically tied to any one department within the Council. Instead the business manager or business team should have free reign to float between departments identifying areas where the work of the Council may be making things unnecessarily (we would very much emphasise the word "unnecessarily") difficult for businesses and suggesting improvements.

Of course, they should not have the only or final say and the Council should never simply become a tool of business, but with such huge changes to the financing of local government soon to be upon us we feel that creating a new point of view within our structures could be essential in ensuring Brent takes a lead in adapting to life after the central government grant.

In other countries, such as Germany, membership of a Chambers of Commerce is compulsory for registered businesses ensuring that these Chambers are much more powerful and authoritative voices for businesses in their areas and that they have a semi-formal relationship with public bodies. The option suggested by the Panel for Brent could replicate some of the best features of this system.

Such reforms to the machinery of government – local or national – to support our own businesses are long overdue in this country. The head of the US Small Business Administration reports directly to the US President whereas none of the 15 direct reports to the permanent secretary in BIS is responsible for small British businesses. No wonder 45 per cent of US Federal procurement spend goes to home grown American small businesses - a figure represents roughly eight times the lending rate of the UK Enterprise Finance Guarantee scheme after taking into account the relative sizes of the two economies.

Brent should not be afraid to think big, and realise the huge role it can play in creating a virtuous cycle where local businesses are supported to grow and then contribute back into the community and council coffers.

One in every seven pounds in the UK is spent by the state, making procurement one of the key levers that any public sector body has to boost business, employment and the economy.

Currently many businesses feel frustrated and locked out of the public sector procurement process. All public sector bodies set their own pre-qualification test for procurement contracts, so in any given area the Council might ask for copies of accounts dating back five years and a biography of the CEO, the Fire Service might ask for six years of accounts and a biography of every director, the CCG for something different altogether.

Brent Council is ideally placed to act as a central coordinator bringing together all public sector bodies who procure services in Brent and get them to synchronise their pre-qualification policies. This would give a strong message that Brent is open for business and encourage businesses to base themselves here so that they can access many different procurement opportunities, and in the long term pay more business rates back into Brent.

We would emphasise that within in this there would also be a golden opportunity to ensure further Living Wage payment within local supply chains if such a commitment became a more regular requirement to secure local procurement opportunities.

To truly adapt to the changing world of local government finance we must not only think openly but big and learn from the best practice around the world.

### **Part Three: Detailed Policy Options**

The Budget Scrutiny Panel considered all of the detailed cuts and savings brought forward by the Cabinet. Before reaching a collective conclusion on any single proposal we sought further information, initially by email and then in meetings with the relevant officers and cabinet members.

On a broad note, we found that the way the proposals were laid out in the Cabinet papers meant a lot of detail was lacking. When we questioned officers and cabinet members it was clear that a lot of thought had gone into the proposals. However, the very short format of the document of proposals led to a lot of initial misunderstandings and the need to ask further questions. As these are public documents we feel that local residents wanting to know about changes to council spending might also be confused by them and the lack of detail which might lead to confusion about what is being cut. We recommend the format is rejigged to give more latitude to officers writing them in future years.

#### **1718BUD1 – Adult Social Care**

We support the principle of providing more information about sexual health services online as an end in itself, and we hope this will also have the desired effect of reducing the number of people who feel compelled to present themselves at clinics to find the information they need.

However, we would ask that more mitigation work is done to ensure that those who do not have easy access to the internet are still able to get the information they need. For example, those who regularly use public libraries to surf the web might not feel comfortable about accessing this information in a public arena, and it might even get blocked by some particularly zealous servers.

#### **1718BUD2 – Adult Social Care**

Following further questioning of officers, the Panel were broadly comfortable with the idea of bringing forward charges which would be incurred in any case.

#### **1718BUD3 – Adult Social Care**

The Panel agreed with the concept of using Brent Council assets, including buildings more widely. This is a more efficient and effective way of working.

#### **1718BUD4 – Adult Social Care**

Moving people towards supported living is a laudable goal as many people prefer to live in an independent setting. This should be an aim of the Council in any circumstances and so we believe it is regretful that it may be seen by some as a purely financial reform by being presented in this budget.

However, we would like every effort to be made to identify those users who may be fearful of change at the earliest possible stage to ensure work is done to reassure them and help them to adapt.

#### **1718BUD5 – Adult Social Care**

As noted above, we believe that moving people with care needs to more permanent and independent settings is generally a laudable aim. This was one policy where we felt it might be a stretch for the Council to achieve the level of saving anticipated due to the general housing pressures in the borough, but hope that the general precautions built into the budget will mean that this would not unbalance the overall budget in any case.

#### **1718BUD6 – Environmental Improvement**

The Panel had severe concerns about this proposal, primarily focused around the potential reputational damage to “Brand Brent” for what is a relatively small saving.

We understand that this proposal is designed to offer a “gold standard” option for people who wish to dispose of bulky waste items. In essence rather than wait the current standard period of time of around six weeks for a free collection they can pay to have the items removed sooner. However, as the policy is stated on the detailed options paper this is less than clear and could be interpreted as restricting the right of local people to have their bulky waste collected by the Council. This is a sensitive political area and we feel that when speaking about this subject the Council needs to be extra careful to get its messaging right so no misinformation gets into the public arena.

We are not confident that the Council has fully modelled the potential cost of an increased level of illegal rubbish dumping which may occur if people come to believe that they will have to pay new costs to have their bulky waste taken away. This could undermine the overall level of savings.

Overall, the Panel felt that similar savings may be achievable by better sign posting people to other agencies who collect waste for free, including the growing number of furniture and electrical charity shops, or charities which provide furniture and white goods to people on low incomes.

This will not be a simple task. Council staff will have to be trained to give absolutely accurate information to ensure that residents do not become frustrated or feel they are being misinformed.

An example would be a local person ringing the Council to ask them to take away a sofa. The resident would be informed that they can wait up to 6 weeks for the Council to take it away, or call their local British Heart Foundation store who could take it away more quickly and for free. The Council operative would have to be sure from the call that it was an item of furniture the charity shop would take, and have the correct number for the shop as well as knowing the areas it collects from etc.

Similarly, Council departments would need to work together even more closely to ensure that products offered for collection to the environmental teams are passed to the benefits teams when people are in need of second hand goods for their homes.

We believe that this investment in time and training would be worthwhile as it would not only reduce the number of collections the Council needs to carry out but also reduce the amount of waste going into landfill which incurs a Landfill Tax charge to the Council. It would also have the wider social benefit of promoting re-use and recycling as first options in even more circumstances.

#### **1718BUD7 – Regeneration**

Overall the Panel agreed that this saving was sensible and achievable. However, we noted that this was a strange area in that the budget item was shared by two lead members. This reflected some wider confusion about exactly who on the cabinet has final responsibility for regeneration projects. We would recommend that this is cleared up so that Councillors and members of the public are able to hold the correct politician accountable at all times.

#### **1718BUD8 – Regeneration and Environment**

The Panel noted that a major risk associated with this saving was that agreement with Harrow Council, with whom we share the service, is required first. In similar circumstances in future it would probably be prudent to get confirmation of support from the partner authority before factoring in the saving to the budget papers.

#### **1718BUD9 – Parking and Lighting**

Our comments on parking, to which this saving refers, have been given in full above.

#### **1718BUD10 – Environmental Improvement**

The Panel was encouraged by the fact that we have an outcome based contract with our suppliers which should help this saving to be delivered without a severe detriment to residents.

But, we were also clear that, with the impending change in council funding through business rate devolution, Brent should have an ambition to encourage business, large and small, to come to the borough. As such any future decisions - particularly around budgetary decisions about the public realm - and the look of the borough need to assess the impact and the ambition we have to attract business to Brent. The new business manager positions we have suggested could play a lead role in this work by giving feedback on the likely reaction of business to any suggested reforms in this department.

The Panel also proposed that the Council could make further savings in the road and curb repair contracts by instituting a bond on residents and businesses carrying out large scale

refurbishments or developments. This would ensure that if their use of skips and large vans damages the public highway the Council would have the necessary funds to make good.

### **1718BUD11 – Parking and Lighting**

We were satisfied with this proposed saving.

## **Part Four: Key Recommendations**

This report has presented the Budget Scrutiny Panel's views on a wide range of topic attending to the budget. The report should be read as a whole with suggestions and ideas to be pulled out of almost every section. However, the key recommendations for reform which we would like to highlight are as follows:

1. In future, any further proposals to reduce spending in Council budgets should be thoroughly evidence-based, with research into the likely impact on service users from any such change. The Council will need to be flexible and open-minded in looking at the most effective ways to deliver better services to Brent residents for the lowest possible cost.
2. The current demand-led review of Brent's CPZ should be expanded with the aim of delivering a settlement for the whole of Brent which will be sustainable over the next twenty years to give further financial certainty to the authority. As part of this, the idea of day time visitor windows should be particularly investigated.
3. A report outlining all large-scale developments in the recent and upcoming years should be brought to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee in three months' time. This would emphasise how mixed used each development was and allow scrutiny members to take a view on whether the balance is currently correct.
4. The Council should be forceful when dealing with TFL and seek to maximise business space in tube stations and use every development of a tube station as a potential to attract a new business to Brent.
5. A single "Business Attraction Manager" post, perhaps accompanied by a small team, should be set up in Brent. This would be a none-departmental role with the responsibility of attracting business to the borough and incentivised financially to achieve this without become a new financial burden to the Council.
6. Brent should seek to coordinate all local public sector bodies to develop a standard set of pre-qualification tests for procurement opportunities to make it easier for local firms to bid for work.
7. We believe that Cabinet should reconsider proceeding with proposal 1718BUD6 which would introduce charges a more rapid collection of bulky waste, due to the reputational risk to Brent. Specifically, officers should model whether better signposting to other local services, including those within the authority, could deliver similar savings.