

	<p align="center">Full Council 20 November 2023</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director of Communities & Regeneration</p>
<p>Resources and Public Realm Committee Chair's Update Report</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Council
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Jason Sigba, Strategy Lead – Scrutiny, Strategy and Partnerships Tel: 020 8937 2036 Email: Jason.Sigba@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Tom Pickup, Policy Partnerships and Scrutiny Manager, Strategy and Partnerships Email: Tom.Pickup@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Janet Latinwo, Head of Strategy and Partnerships Tel: 020 8937 4104 Janet.Latinwo@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 To present Full Council with a report providing updates on the meetings and activities of the Resources and Public Realm Committee since the last Full Council meeting on 18 September 2023.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the update from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

3.0 Detail

3.1. Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

3.1.1 The work of the Committee contributes to the delivery of all of the strategic priorities set out in the Borough Plan 2023-2027. It seeks to ensure Council decision-making remains transparent, accountable and open, resulting in improved policies and services.

3.2. Background

3.2.1 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 member of the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC).

3.2.2 A scrutiny committee can look at anything which affects the borough or its inhabitants, subject to its remit.

3.2.3 Brent Council Standing Orders allow for the chairs of the scrutiny committees to report to ordinary Council meetings on the activities of their committees¹.

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

3.2.4 The remit of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee is set out in the Council Constitution under the Terms of Reference for scrutiny committees². The remit of the Committee includes:

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.

3.2.5 The Committee is also the Council's "crime and disorder committee" for the purposes of Section 19 of the Police & Justice Act 2006 and as such may review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of the crime and disorder functions by the responsible authorities (as defined by section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) who make up the Safer Brent Partnership, in order to make reports or recommendations to Full Council.

¹ Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, paragraph 36.

<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s123308/Part%202%20April%202022%20Procedural%20Rules.pdf>

² Brent Council Constitution Part 4.

<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s123310/Part%204%20May%202022%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20.pdf>

3.2.6 Since the last update to Full Council on 18 September 2023 the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee has met two times (26 October 2023 and 7 November 2023).

26 October 2023

3.2.7 The Committee heard from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, and Reform, Cllr Shama Tatler, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Governance on the Barham Park Trust Committee's decision to approve the Barham Park Trust Accounts 2022/23. To note this discussion was a result of a successful and valid call-in request made by five non-cabinet members in accordance with Standing Order 14 which claimed the following:

- The accounts are produced on the wrong basis, inconsistent with previous years.
- The accounts are wrong and misleading.
- The accounts do not show correct figures for both income and expenditure, incurred by the Trust.
- The accounts do not show sufficient analysis and detail of main expenses.
- The accounts do not show the correct interest earned due.
- The accounts show a charge or consultants' fees, which were due to be met by the Council and not the Trust.
- The review carried out (by the Independent Examiner) is inadequate and failed to identify numerous mistakes as set out above.
- In view of the above concerns, the appointment and nomination of the person to carry out future independent review also needs to be reconsidered.
- No such submission should be made (to the Charity Commission) until the correct accounts are presented, as any such submission would lead to reputational damage to the Trust.

3.2.8 Many of the points outlined above were elaborated on by Councillor Paul Lorber in person at the meeting. These were disputed by the Deputy Leader and the Deputy Director of Finance. It was however stated that Brent's Chief Executive, Kim Wright, had commissioned a high-level consultancy based review relating to the issues and concerns raised about the accuracy of the Barham Park Trust accounts for 2022/23. At the time of the call-in meeting this review had not yet concluded. Additionally, the Independent Examiner, was on pre-planned annual leave, and therefore the Committee could not present any clarifying questions to him.

3.2.9 Based on the above factors, the Committee referred the item back to the Barham Park Trust Committee to reconsider its decision.

7 November 2023

3.2.10 The Committee heard from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, and Reform, Cllr Shama Tatler, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Governance on the Complaints Annual Report

2022/23 with two appendices attached (Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints 2022/23 and Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints 2022/23). The Leader of the Council was also in attendance for this item and contributed to the discussion. Members reviewed the effectiveness of the current complaints procedure (e.g. how easy it is for residents to navigate the current procedure, the quality of responses provided, and the timeliness of responses etc.), and sought additional detail on the root causes of complaints causing the most risk to the Council's reputation and leading to the most cases of compensation being paid out. The Committee proceeded to question how the different types of complaints and root causes of complaints are being proactively addressed, asking for examples of the service improvements/learnings implemented. As part of this discussion, committee members, for example, explored how the Council welcomes and collates feedback from service users, residents, and other local authorities in making service improvements as well as general improvements to the complaints process. At the end of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestions for improvement:

1. Moving forward publish a user-friendly summary version of the Complaints Annual Report to accompany the full version.
2. Publicise and promote service improvements made as a result of upheld complaints.
3. Improve the publicity and accessibility of the complaints procedure. For example, promoting the complaints procedure more regularly in 'Your Brent', and adding the customer service telephone number to the 'How to make a complaint' section of the Council website.
4. Liaise with other local authorities for learnings to reduce the amount of ASC cases being referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGCSO).

3.2.11 The Committee proceeded to review the Council's Quarter 2 2023/24 financial performance. The item was also introduced by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform, Cllr Shama Tatler, and an accompanying report was provided to committee members by the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources, highlighting most notably a forecast overspend of £13.4m against the General Fund revenue budget at Quarter 2. The main cause of the forecast overspend is within the Housing Service, where it was highlighted that the department continues to see an exceptionally high level of demand due to a rise in homelessness and a reduction in the supply of suitable accommodation. Although Brent has maintained a strong position in terms of financial resilience and sustainability with a good track record of delivering savings and balancing the overall budget, officers did however stress how increasingly difficult this is becoming taking into consideration that the core funding the Council receives from central government has decreased by 78%, and where £210m of cuts have already been made since the austerity programme began back in 2010. Thus emphasis was placed on the need for the Council to take urgent actions in the short and medium term to maintain financial control. These include, but are not limited to, the implementation of a

Budget Assurance Panel to provide additional oversight and scrutiny of the Council's financial position, limits on new recruitment, and reductions in the use of agency staff. The Committee recognised the proactivity of officers in identifying measures to reduce the risk of the Council's financial situation worsening. However, sought further reassurances around the specific mitigations to address Brent's temporary accommodation pressures, whilst also raising specific questions about income generation options, the financial risks associated with Council borrowing, and the use of Council reserves. Furthermore, as the outlined measures have only recently been implemented, members stressed the need for officers to provide additional updates to the Committee throughout the course of the financial year in order for the financial situation to be closely monitored. At the end of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations and suggestions for improvement:

Recommendations to Cabinet

1. Continue to lobby central government to establish a locally controlled business rates system in order for local authorities to influence policy around the setting of Business Rates and to generate additional income.

Suggestions for Improvement made to council departments:

1. Explore new ways to increase collection rates for Business Rates, learning lessons from other local authorities.
2. Liaise with the Office for National Statistics to explore whether further census data could be provided to the Council on the specific properties in the borough identified as 'unoccupied dwellings'.
3. Undertake a communications and engagement campaign to encourage owners to rent vacant properties to the Council to address the shortage in temporary accommodation supply.

Next meeting: 24 January 2024

3.2.12 The next meeting of the Resources and Public Realm Committee will be held on 24 January 2024. As it currently stands, members will review the following papers:

1. Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report
2. Draft Property Strategy/Asset Review Findings Report
3. Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2022/23

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Councillors will discuss this report at the Council meeting.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no financial considerations arising from this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are no legal considerations arising from this report.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 There are no EDI considerations arising from this report.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations arising from this report.

9.0 Communication Considerations

9.1 There are no communication considerations arising from this report.

Report sign off:

Zahur Khan

Corporate Director, Communities and
Regeneration