



# **LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

**Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL  
held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 20 November 2023 at  
6.00 pm**

## **PRESENT:**

**The Worshipful the Mayor**  
Councillor Orleen Hylton

**The Deputy Mayor**  
Councillor Tariq Dar MBE

## **COUNCILLORS:**

Aden	Agha
Ahmadi-Moghaddam	Ahmed
Akram	Bajwa
Begum	Benea
M.Butt	S.Butt
Chan	Chappell
Chohan	Choudry
Collymore	Conneely
Crabb	Dixon
Donnelly-Jackson	Ethapemi
Farah	Fraser
Gbajumo	Georgiou
Grahl	Hack
Hirani	Johnson
Kabir	Kansagra
Kelcher	Kennelly
Knight	Long
Lorber	Matin
Maurice	Miller
Mistry	Mitchell
Moeen	Molloy
Nerva	J.Patel
M.Patel	Rajan-Seelan
Rubin	Shah
Ketan Sheth	Krupa Sheth
Smith	Southwood
Tatler	

1. **Mayors Introductory Statement**

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Afzal and Mahmood.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the of the Council meeting held on Monday 18 September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

- (a) Agenda Item 12.1 Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee – Chair’s Update: Councillor Lorber declared a personal interest as a member of the Friends of Barham Park and Director and Trustee of Barham Community Library given reference within the update report to the outcome of the call-in considered by the Scrutiny Committee on the Barham Park Trust Accounts 2022-23.

There were no other declarations of interest made at the meeting.

5. **Mayor’s Announcements (including any petitions received)**

The Mayor made the following announcements:

- (i) Remembrance Sunday

The Mayor began her announcements by seeking to reflect on Remembrance Sunday and pay tribute to all those who had lost their lives in conflicts around the world. As part of the tributes, The Mayor advised she had been honoured to attend the borough remembrance service at Barham Park, which she was pleased to see had included representatives from a number of students at schools across Brent. As part of the programme of events, the Mayor advised she had also been pleased to attend the AJEC Jewish Military Association annual remembrance parade and ceremony at the Cenotaph.

- (ii) Conflict in the Middle East

Turning her attention to other events the Mayor advised that her thoughts were also with all those affected by the current conflict in Israel and Gaza. In recognising that every life lost was a tragedy on all those impacted she asked members to join her in praying for the innocent people who had been affected and for a swift end to the conflict in hope that peace could be achieved.

Highlighting the personal impact of the conflict on communities across the borough the Mayor advised that she was also aware of the trauma this had created and, whilst recognising that people would have different ways of expressing solidarity with the people of Gaza and Israel, outlined her continued commitment as Mayor to fostering a strong level of community cohesion and reaching out to all of the communities affected across the borough.

(iii) Black History Month and other Mayoral events

The Mayor took the opportunity to thank everyone involved in developing and delivering the programme of activities to celebrate Black History month during October, which she had been pleased to be able to participate in and had included a number of visits to schools across the borough.

Other events attended since the previous Council meeting had included:

- The launch of ManVan – Brent's Prostate Cancer Screening Bus.
- Brent Care Leavers Awards Ceremony.
- Brent Start Student Awards Ceremony.
- Act of Hope and Remembrance for those affected by hate crime.
- A number of visits to celebrate the Navratri Festival and to local temples in Brent with the Deputy Lieutenant in order to celebrate Diwali, with all those celebrating wished a Happy Diwali

(iv) Islamophobia Awareness Month

The Mayor advised that she was also pleased to be supporting Islamophobia Awareness month, which included a range of activities designed to raise awareness and bring people together in standing against discrimination and hate crime. Members were reminded that as part of the programme of activities, Brent Council would be hosting an event on 21 November from 6 – 8pm at the Civic Centre that would include stories, discussion and presentations and she hoped all members would be able to attend.

(v) Kings Award for Voluntary Service

On behalf of both herself and the Council, the Mayor advised she would like to congratulate the Central Mosque of Brent Charity following receipt of the Kings Voluntary award. The award had been received in recognition of the work being undertaken to serve the entire community through the support of various programmes including health, social, sports and community initiatives.

(vi) Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) Councillor Awards

The Mayor advised she was also delighted to be able to congratulate Councillor Choudry on his recent award as the LGIU Young Councillor of the Year reflecting the positive impact being made by members on the constituents and local communities they served. In receiving the award, members were advised that the LGIU had specifically commended Councillor Choudry for the work undertaken to support residents, lead on initiatives to tackle food poverty and empower young people and also to champion diverse communities in lobbying for change.

In addition, the opportunity was also taken to congratulate Councillor Nerva for being shortlisted in the category of lifetime legend, recognising his work in seeking to secure funding and engage local communities in the Kensal corridor project.

All members joined the Mayor in offering their congratulations to both councillors with a round of applause.

(vii) 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations

The Mayor advised she had been pleased to join Mr Edward Macgrath in order to celebrate his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Born into an Anglo-Indian family in India, the Mayor advised that Edward and his family had subsequently moved to Brent in 1949 where he had worked for a cable company and been fortunate to travel extensively around the world.

All members joined the Mayor in wishing Mr Edward Macgrath a happy 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

(viii) Mayors Christmas Fundraising Ball

Members were reminded that the Mayor would be hosting her Christmas Fundraising Ball on Thursday 7 December 2023 at the Civic Centre, with tickets available to purchase from the Mayor's Office.

(ix) Petitions

As a final announcement, the Mayor referred members to the list of current petitions tabled at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Orders which also detailed the action being taken to deal with them.

**6. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and Appointment of Chairs/Vice Chairs (if any)**

The Mayor advised that there were no appointments to Council Committees, Sub Committees and other bodies which had been received for consideration so moved to the next item.

**7. Deputations (if any)**

The Mayor advised that she had accepted two requests for deputations to be presented at the meeting. The first of these was from Elaine Sheppard and Sylvia Gauthereau (representing Action for the Climate Emergency in Brent) outlining concerns about the action being taken by the Council to address the climate emergency and achieve the target of becoming net carbon zero by 2030. The second was from Sheila Darr (as a local resident) seeking to highlight a number of practical implementation and operational concerns relating to the recently introduced blue bag recycling scheme across the borough.

Unless otherwise indicated by members, the Mayor advised that she intended to allow up to five minutes for presentation of each deputation before then allowing the relevant Lead Cabinet Member up to two minutes to respond.

As no objections were raised on the approach outlined, the Mayor moved on to welcome the first deputation.

## **7.1 Action to address the Climate Emergency**

In thanking the Mayor for the opportunity to address the meeting, Elaine Sheppard and Sylvia Gauthereau advised they were presenting the deputation on behalf of the newly established Action for the Climate Emergency in Brent (ACE Brent) which represented a coalition of groups including Brent Friends of the Earth, Brent Cycling Campaign, Brent Parks Forum, Brent Pure Energy, Brent XR and Divest Brent. In seeking to outline their concerns regarding the urgency of the action being taken by the Council to address the climate emergency and achieve the target of becoming a net carbon zero borough by 2030, Elaine Sheppard began by reminding members of the correspondence circulated in advance of the meeting, which had outlined the coalition's detailed proposals along with what they felt was a need to increase the pace of action over the coming five-year period. Whilst recognising that the government was not on track regarding the climate emergency, ACE Brent felt that Brent as a borough could be.

Although recognising the Council's commitment towards achieving net zero (as outlined within its Climate Emergency Strategy, Green Vision Planning guidelines, Green Neighbourhood pilots and other initiatives) it was not felt these were sufficiently urgent in nature as a response or reflected (given the diversity within Brent) the global and local social justice obligations which underpinned tackling the climate emergency. Whilst aware of the financial pressures on the Council and impact of cost-of-living crisis, it was felt that working together to focus on more ambitious and urgent action did not mean having to spending more money. ACE Brent were therefore seeking a revamped Climate Plan to galvanise and replace the existing strategy aimed at bringing together all current plans and initiatives to more clearly prioritise SMART and costed actions that would deliver net zero and protect those residents most at risk. Prior to handing over to Sylvia Gauthereau, Elaine Sheppard ended by expressing concern at the limited scope of the current Climate Strategy Delivery Plan in terms of the activities covered and also at the recent decision to revise reporting on climate action from an annual to biannual basis, reiterating that this decision negatively impacted the ability to effectively monitor delivery of the Climate Strategy in advance of 2030.

Sylvia Gauthereau then continued by advising that ACE Brent had welcomed the agreement at a recent Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to seek a more accessible accountability framework to monitor performance, especially with regard to clearer measurement of emissions which it was hoped was now in progress. It was also felt that the development of any new Plan should be initiated and informed by a new Climate Assembly which would engage in regular dialogue with residents and stakeholders. In support of this proposal, reference was made to the establishment of dedicated Climate and Emergency Scrutiny Committee's and Citizen Panels by other local authorities. As a result, ACE Brent felt that in order to effectively support the move towards net zero and ensure necessary co-ordination and oversight was provided, Brent should also consider establishing a dedicated Climate and Ecological Emergency Scrutiny Committee. To conclude, Sylvia Gauthereau outlined the main areas ACE Brent were seeking to address as part of any new Climate Plan which included enabling further choice for active travel;

implementing a major programme of insulation and retrofitting within the housing stock; fully divesting Brent's Pension Fund from the top 200 publicly traded fossil fuel emitters; ensuring the sustainability of new developments; encouraging the installation of solar panels on all public buildings in the borough and increasing the canopy cover and green spaces in Brent.

In responding to the deputation, Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action, welcomed ACE Brent's continued interest and contribution in supporting the Council to effectively tackle the climate emergency and meet the Council's ambitious target of net zero by 2030. In recognising this was not something the Council could deliver in isolation, the importance in ensuring all residents and stakeholders were engaged was recognised, with Councillor Krupa Sheth expressing her thanks for the work ACE Brent were undertaking as both a coalition and individual organisations in encouraging climate action. In expressing pride at the range of individuals and organisations across the borough taking on the challenge through practical action to reduce emissions and make the borough greener, Councillor Krupa Sheth also felt it was important to recognise the local leadership role being played by the Council in coordinating, convening and empowering local groups to contribute through the Brent Environmental Network, the Climate Action Plan and the Together Towards Zero small grant scheme.

In reminding members that Brent's Climate Strategy had been developed on a consensus basis, with the themes mirroring those areas the Brent Climate Assembly had viewed as being environmental priorities for the borough, the importance in ensuring that the Strategy and Delivery Plan remained adaptable had been recognised with work already underway to embed the actions more prominently in future climate delivery plans. With communication identified as key, in order to maintain progress, the work being undertaken to develop a data dashboard on a host of key climate measures to demonstrate impact was also outlined, which it was hoped to provide for the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee early in 2024. This was being designed to supplement and provide greater transparency on existing monitoring updates being provided to Cabinet and via existing communication channels. In ending her response, Councillor Krupa Sheth once again thanked Elaine Sheppard and Sylvia Gauthereau for the deputation and reiterated that the Council was keen to continue working constructively and collaborative with all sections of the community and stakeholders on the climate agenda to make Brent a low carbon, greener borough.

Having thanked Elaine Sheppard and Sylvia Gauthereau for their deputation and Councillor Krupa Sheth for the response the Mayor then moved on to welcome the second deputation.

## **7.2 Implementation and Operation of the Blue Bag Recycling Scheme for paper and cardboard**

In thanking the Mayor for the opportunity to address the meeting, Sheila Darr (as a local resident) advised she was seeking to highlight a number of practical operational concerns relating to the recently introduced blue bag recycling scheme across the borough. In referring to comments which had been highlighted on the Nextdoor app and various petitions in opposition to the blue bag recycling scheme, she began by outlining health and safety concerns involving the bags being blown

around on streets and not sufficiently holding or protecting their contents, which it was reported had resulted in additional litter. As a result, queries were raised in relation to any risk assessment completed regarding the danger that lost bags and loose waste posed to the community. Furthermore, in reiterating the impact of the current housing crisis, she pointed out concerns had also been raised in relation to storage of the bags in homes, given the limited space often available when they were full, and queried why excess paper and card could not be placed in recycling bins as residential blocks had continued to use. In addition, the difficulty in keeping blue bags dry during wet weather and cold conditions was highlighted, especially where collection timetables had been altered, causing bags to be left for a longer period of time leading to increased contamination. In highlighting other difficulties with the blue bag recycling scheme, Sheila Darr also raised concerns about the impact on those elderly residents who may struggle with the weight of the bag and questioned whether any risk assessment had included the practical impact of the scheme in this respect. Although recognising that support could be requested on the Council's website, Sheila Darr reiterated that many elderly people struggled with internet usage and therefore may not be receiving the support they required. In concluding, it was felt further guidance was required with concerns highlighted in relation to the impact of the scheme on the elderly, those whose main language was not English and the extent of consultation undertaken prior to the implementation of the scheme. In highlighting the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the health and well-being of local residents Sheila Darr ended by calling on the Council to reconsider the implementation of the blue bag scheme in order to avoid compounding the challenges already being faced by many residents across the borough.

In response to the deputation, Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action, felt it important to start by highlighting that the changes made to the recycling arrangements had been designed to reduce contamination and improve the amount and quality of material being recycled in order to reduce the borough's impact on the environment and contribute towards the goal of the Council becoming carbon neutral by 2030. This scheme had been predicted to save the Council £1.2m per annum by 2024-25, the first full year of operation for the new service, which she felt was also an important consideration to recognise given the wider financial challenges being faced by the Council as a result of funding restrictions being imposed by Central Government.

In terms of the consultation process undertaken on the future waste collection and street cleansing services, confirmation was provided that this had taken place in Summer 2022 with the outcome supported by a successful trial involving 5000 households in Autumn 2022. The scheme in Brent had also reflected similar schemes being successfully operated by other local authorities. In confirming that the changes introduced had only been to street level properties and not to flats in communal blocks, which continued to receive the same comingled recycling collections as before, Councillor Krupa Sheth felt it important to recognise the need to allow sufficient time for any major service change to fully embed, with the Council continuing to closely monitor the roll out of the new service. Work was also being undertaken with the contractor (Veolia) to address any operational issues and feedback identified so that, where required, improvements could be introduced to make the service better for both residents and the environment. The opportunity was also taken to highlight the positive impact of the scheme with a continued rise in the amount of separated paper and card being collected, mirroring the successful

trial from last year. As an example, members were advised that in the last two weeks of October, the Council had seen a 50% increase in paper and cardboard collected in comparison to the first fortnight and further increases at the start of November with no reported issues in terms of either contamination or the impact of the weather.

In addressing the specific concerns raised within the deputation, Councillor Krupa Sheth confirmed that residents could choose whether to store their sack indoors or outdoors, so long as they were presented at the kerbside on the scheduled collection day. They could also order additional or replacement sacks for free with additional assistance available (for those residents who required it) with their recycling arrangements, as before. In summing up confirmation was provided of the Council's ongoing commitment, despite the challenging nature of the budget pressures identified, towards the provision of key services across the borough whilst also seeking to protect the most vulnerable with Councillor Krupa Sheth advising she would welcome further feedback on the blue bag recycling scheme as experience continued to be gained following its implementation across the borough.

The Mayor thanked Sheila Darr for attending the meeting in order to present her deputation and Councillor Krupa Sheth for her response and advised that as this concluded consideration of the deputations she would move on to the next item.

## **8. Questions from Members of the Public & Brent Youth Parliament**

### **8.1 Questions from the Public**

The Mayor advised that one question had been received from a member of the public, which was as follows:

Question 1 from Peggy Wylie regarding operation of the 206 bus route on Wembley Stadium event days.

Members noted the written response provided on the question, which had been circulated with the agenda. Having been invited to attend in order to ask any supplementary question, the Mayor advised she was pleased to welcome Peggy Wylie to the meeting who addressed the following supplementary question to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action.

#### **Question 1 Supplementary Question from Peggy Wylie to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action.**

Thanking Councillor Krupa Sheth for the written response provided Peggy Wylie, in highlighting the impact of the reduced bus service on local residents and large number of school pupils who also relied on the service, sought further details on the timescale to complete the necessary infrastructure works along Bridge Road and North End Road that would enable the proposed changes to the route to be introduced on event days, prior to the programme of stadium events commencing during 2024.

In thanking Peggy Wylie for her question Councillor Krupa Sheth, in responding, reiterated the Council's commitment to continue working with Transport for London

in order to secure the necessary service improvements and infrastructure works with further discussion welcomed with residents, as required.

Having noted the response provided, the Mayor thanked Peggy Wylie for her supplementary question and Councillor Krupa Sheth for her response and then moved on to deal with the question submitted by Brent Youth Parliament.

## **8.2 Questions from Brent Youth Parliament**

The Mayor advised that the following question had been received from Brent Youth Parliament:

Question 1 from Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, relating to the improvement of support for young people with Special Educational Needs both in and outside of school.

The Mayor thanked Brent Youth Parliament for their question, with members noting the written response provided and advised that representatives from the Youth Parliament had also been invited to attend the meeting in order to ask a supplementary question. As a result, the Mayor welcomed Armaan Rattu and Manel Bensada to the meeting who addressed the following supplementary question to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

### **Question 1 Supplementary Question from Armaan Rattu and Manel Bensada to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.**

Having thanked Councillor Grahl for her written response and advising that they were pleased to hear about the support being provided for young people with Special Educational Needs and disabilities Armaan Rattu and Manel Bensada, as a supplementary question, sought further clarification on the definition of 'inclusive environments and facilities' and how these were determined e.g. would school students be actively involved in the design of these facilities.

In response, Councillor Grahl began by thanking Brent Youth Parliament for the question and work they were undertaking to represent young people across the borough. In clarifying the reference made in her original response, Councillor Grahl outlined the different types of special educational need provision available, referring firstly to that provided outside of a mainstream school setting with the example of the new 400 place SEND school provision being funded by the Council in London Road and secondly to inclusive educational provision, which involved the provision of additional support in a mainstream school environment. Whilst this would include an element of consultation on design with young people using the service Councillor Grahl, in ending her response, advised that she would be pleased to speak further with Brent Youth Parliament regarding the Council's proposals and to seek further feedback on the issues raised.

With no further questions to be considered, the Mayor advised that this now concluded the public question session.

## **9. Petitions (if any)**

The Mayor advised that no requests for debates on any petitions had been received for consideration at the meeting.

#### 10. **Reports from the Leader and Cabinet**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to introduce the report updating members on the work being undertaken across each Cabinet portfolio in order to manage the Council's finances and provide ongoing support and services to meet the needs of residents across the borough.

In referring to the draft 2024-25 budget proposals which had been approved for consultation by Cabinet on 16 November 23, the opportunity was taken to remind members of the significant financial pressures and challenges currently faced by the Council as a result of ongoing economic uncertainty, increased demand in relation to homelessness and impact of the wider funding reductions which had been imposed by the Government since 2010 through their programme of austerity. Despite these challenges, members were advised of the efforts being made to ensure the Council was able to deliver a balanced budget operating in a financially sustainable and resilient way, whilst seeking to support and safeguard local residents as far as possible during such challenging times, in line with the Council's core strategic priorities. As part of the update, members were also asked to note that no Executive decisions had been taken under the Council's urgency procedures, since the previous update provided for the Council meeting in July.

The Mayor thanked the Leader for the report and it was **RESOLVED** to formally note the update provided.

#### 11. **Questions from the Opposition and other Non-Cabinet Members**

Before moving on to consider the questions submitted by non-Cabinet members, the Mayor reminded Members that a total of 30 minutes had been set aside for this item, which would begin with consideration of the written questions submitted in advance of the meeting along with any supplementary questions. Once these had been dealt with, the remaining time available would then be opened up for any other non-Cabinet members to question Cabinet Members (without the need for advance notice) on matters relating to their portfolio.

The Mayor advised that five written questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting for response by the relevant Cabinet Member and the written responses circulated within the agenda were noted. The Mayor then invited supplementary questions on the responses provided:

- 11.1 Councillor Rajan-Seelan thanked Councillor Donnelly-Jackson, as Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture, for the written response to his question regarding the activities being planned to ensure the contribution of British Tamils was fully recognised by the Council as part of Tamil Heritage month. Whilst no supplementary question was received members were reminded that Tamil Heritage Month would be taking place during January 2024 with councillors, residents and community groups all being encouraged to participate.

- 11.2 Councillor Ahmed thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, for the written response to his question regarding the changes to recycling arrangements across the borough and impact these were having at reducing the level of recyclable waste going to landfill in support of the Council's environmental aim to become carbon neutral by 2030. No supplementary question was received.
- 11.3 Having thanked Councillor Knight, as Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, for the response provided on his question seeking details on the actions being taken by the Council to address the unprecedented increase in homelessness applications and use of Temporary Accommodation, Councillor Aden, as a supplementary question, sought further clarification on the contextual factors impacting on the housing crisis in the borough.

In response, Councillor Knight began by taking the opportunity to highlight the unprecedented nature of the current level of housing demand, with pressure in relation to the number of homeless households and applications continuing to grow driven by the cost-of-living crisis. This had led to a 322% increase in the use of temporary accommodation compared to previous years with it forecast (if demand continued to grow at the same rate) that the Housing Needs Service would receive a total of 7,500 applications over the year representing an average of 144 applications each week, the highest recorded. These pressures were exacerbated by a contraction in the number of properties available within the Private Rented Sector at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) level (used to prevent and relieve homelessness) with many landlords having also exited the sector. In emphasising that the Council did not believe homelessness to be a lifestyle choice, Councillor Knight outlined the establishment of a Temporary Accommodation supply and spend project aimed at addressing current pressures on the Temporary Accommodation budget and increasing the supply of temporary accommodation in order to address demand through new and alternative provision. In addition, she advised that the Council, in partnership with other local authorities, was calling on the government (as part of the Autumn Statement) to consider a long-term funding solution to address the pressures and issues highlighted and reassured members of the action being taken by the Council to do everything possible to continue supporting residents in housing need through the provision of an affordable housing supply.

- 11.4 In reiterating the concerns highlighted within her written question and as part of the deputation at the start of the meeting, Councillor Hirani felt it important to recognise the operational issues which had been highlighted as well as the financial and value for money considerations relating to implementation of the blue bag recycling scheme. As a supplementary question, and in view of the concerns raised, Councillor Krupa Sheth (as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action) was therefore asked whether she would consider suspending the blue bag recycling scheme in order for an independent inquiry to be conducted relating to its environmental and financial effectiveness.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth advised that she had yet to be provided with detailed evidence of the operational concerns identified in relation to

displacement of the recycling bags and reminded members that the introduction of the scheme had already been subject to review at the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, which included cross-party representation. Highlighting the positive impact of the scheme in terms of recycling rates for paper and card and need to allow time for the scheme to fully settle, Councillor Krupa Sheth ended her response by highlighting that the Council would continue to monitor roll out of the new service in order to address any issues highlighted and ensure, where and if required, that improvements were made to enhance the service for both residents and the environment.

- 11.5 Councillor Georgiou, in noting the written response to the question submitted regarding the current position on the Altamira Morland Gardens housing scheme expressed concern at the associated impact in terms of costs, grant funding and on current use of the site now that the original planning permission had expired. In outlining the basis of the original selection of the architects and design of the scheme further details were sought, as a supplementary question, on whether the £1.6m costs he understood had been incurred as a result of seeking to decant Brent Start could have been avoided and whether, given the failure to deliver the original housing proposed within the scheme, the current project would now be aborted.

In response, Councillor Knight referred to the details provided within the written response on the original question which she felt had also addressed the subsequent issues highlighted. Whilst the current Morland Gardens scheme had been paused for further review, Councillor Knight thought it important to recognise how the Council was continuing to prioritise the development of new homes (despite current economic conditions), which included recent approval of three Infill development council housing schemes designed to increase the level of affordable housing available across the borough for Brent residents. In recognising the unprecedented homelessness emergency facing the borough, Councillor Knight emphasised that despite the challenges identified the Council would continue to utilise its powers to deliver the homes that residents needed and deserved.

In response to a Point of Order raised by Councillor Georgiou in relation to the extent of the response provided on his supplementary question the Mayor advised that the response was felt to be sufficient with the member able to seek a more detailed response direct from the Cabinet Member following the meeting, should that be required.

Having thanked members for their written questions and Cabinet Members for the responses provided to the supplementary questions, the Mayor then advised that the remainder of time available would be used for an open question time session to the Cabinet. Questions relating to the following issues were raised and responses provided, as set out below:

- (i) Councillor Jayanti Patel highlighting concerns regarding anti-social behaviour and nuisance being experienced by residents in Milky Way, Queensbury linked to adjacent Housing Association blocks and action that could be taken by the Council working with the relevant Housing Association and Safer Neighbourhood Team to address the problems being experienced.

In response, Councillor Farah, as Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Public Protection, advised he was concerned to hear about the issues being experienced and as a result would be willing to facilitate discussions between the housing provider, police and relevant officers within the Council in order to address and seek a resolution to the issues being experienced.

- (ii) Councillor Chan regarding the powers and support available through the Council, working with the police and local residents, in seeking to prevent the use of local shop premises along Park Parade, Harlesden for illegal and unregulated activities.

In response, Councillor Farah, as Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Public Protection, advised that he was aware of the concerns highlighted having recently visited the area and whilst not seeking to prevent legitimate businesses from operating, advised that it had been possible to secure four three-month closure orders to properties whose operation was causing concern in the area. As further reassurance, Councillor Farah advised that the Council would continue to work closely with the police in order to monitor the area and ensure the necessary enforcement action could be taken as required, on which ward councillors would continue to be kept updated.

- (iii) Councillor Kelcher regarding the powers available to the Council to support the ongoing campaign to save the Royal Oak Public House in High Street, Harlesden from closure and in seeking to protect and offer business support to other similar venues, recognising their importance as local community hubs.

In response, Councillor Tatler, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Resources and Reform and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Growth, felt it important to recognise the important role played by various types of hospitality venues such as public houses as local community hubs. In outlining the actions available to the Council in seeking to protect and support these type of venues, Councillor Tatler advised of the work being undertaken to support and enhance the vitality of the boroughs high streets and town centres, including the use of planning policy to encourage new residential developments that would also drive business and footfall in the surrounding areas. In recognising the struggles faced by the hospitality sector due to the pandemic and cost of living crisis, Councillor Tatler ended by assuring members of the Council's commitment to increasing growth across the borough and working with ward councillors to support town centres and protect valued community assets.

- (iv) Councillor Rubin commended the Council for their ongoing efforts to support and work with the Brent Renters Union in seeking to ensure the necessary protections were provided for tenants in the private rented sector across the borough as a means of tackling serious health and safety concerns, providing protection from evictions and ensuring access to key services with further details sought on how these measures and support could continue to be developed.

Councillor Knight, as Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, thanked Councillor Rubin for his question and for raising

such an important issue. In highlighting a commitment to continuing working with Brent Renters Union in order to secure the necessary protections for tenants within the private rented sector, recognising the wider associated impact on current pressures relating to homelessness, members were also reminded of the priority given to the introduction of the borough-wide selective landlord licensing scheme that had also been introduced as a means of continuing to support tenants and increase the Council's ability to take action against rogue landlords operating within the sector.

- (v) Councillor Lorber highlighting concern at what he felt had been the limited scope of the discussion permitted in response to a call-in on the decision to approve the Barham Park Trust Accounts at the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee meeting held to consider the matter. Details were also sought as to when it was anticipated the high-level consultancy based review, which had been commissioned by the Chief Executive in relation to the Trust Accounts would be available to support reconsideration of the decision referred back as an outcome of the call-in process.

In response, Councillor Tatler, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Resources and Reform and Vice Chair of the Barham Park Trust Committee, felt it was important to recognise that the high-level consultancy based review had been commissioned independently by the Chief Executive outside of the call-in process and as such its publication and consideration would not be a matter for either the Cabinet Member or Trust Committee to decide upon.

- (vi) Councillor Maurice seeking clarification on the eligibility for a family with four children to bid for a 3 rather than 4-bedroom property under the Council's Housing Allocation Policy in order to maximise the opportunities available to secure a suitable property.

In responding, Councillor Knight, as Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, thanked Councillor Maurice for raising the issue and highlighting the extent to which overcrowding and homelessness remained an issue across the borough. In terms of the specific case raised, Councillor Knight advised she would be willing to investigate further if Councillor Maurice could provide the relevant details outside of the meeting.

- (vii) Councillor Mistry highlighting concerns relating to the dumping of rubbish and impact of other environmental and health and safety hazards identified by local residents along an unadopted alleyway adjacent to shops located on Kingsbury Road close to Kingsbury roundabout and Gore Court and seeking details on what measures the Council could take to address the concerns outlined.

In response Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, advised that she would be willing to facilitate a site visit with Councillor Mistry in order to review the issues highlighted and explore how they could specifically be addressed moving forward.

At this stage in the proceedings, the Mayor advised that the time available for the open question session had expired. The Mayor therefore thanked all members for their contributions and advised that the meeting would now move on to the next item.

## 12. **Report from Chairs of Scrutiny Committees**

Before being presented with the updates from each Scrutiny Committee, the Mayor reminded members the time set aside for this item was 12 minutes, with each Chair having up to three minutes in which to highlight any significant issues arising from the work of their Committees. Once these updates had been provided, the remaining time available would then be opened up for any other non-Cabinet members to question (without the need for advance notice) the Scrutiny Committee Chairs on matters relating to the work of their Committee.

Councillor Conneely was then invited to introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, with the following issues highlighted:

- Referring to the Committee's ongoing focus and work in relation to development and delivery of the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy, members were advised that this would be subject to further review early in 2024 with the contribution made by Action for the Climate Emergency in Brent as part of their earlier deputation also welcomed.
- The Committee had met twice since the previous update with one of those meetings having been to consider a call-in relating to the decision made by the Barham Park Trust Committee to approve their accounts for 2022-23. Having considered the concerns raised under the call-in in relation to accuracy of the accounts and noted that the Chief Executive had also (independently of the call-in) commissioned a separate high-level consultancy based review on the concerns raised the Committee had agreed, as an outcome of the call-in, to refer the original decision made on the Accounts back to the Trust Committee for reconsideration.
- The Committee had also continued to actively monitor the Council's financial forecast position and medium-term financial outlook along with the risks and uncertainties regarding the budget setting position for 2024 – 25. Having noted the current £13m overspend forecast and unprecedented nature of demand driving these pressures in relation to the rise in homelessness and reduction in the supply of suitable accommodation, the Committee had welcomed the actions being taken in response to mitigate against and seek to address the pressures identified. Whilst recognising the efforts being made to maintain a financially resilient, balanced and sustainable budget position the Committee had recognised how difficult this had become given the ongoing reductions in core funding received by central government and overall level of savings which had needed to be made as a result since austerity had been introduced in 2010. The position would continue to be kept under review by the Committee with the issues highlighted also due to be considered by the Scrutiny Budget Task Group which members were advised had recently commenced its review as part of the budget consultation process for 2024-25.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Conneely for her update and then invited Councillor Ketan Sheth as chair of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to

introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by that Committee. The following issues were highlighted as part of the update:

- The broad and dynamic nature of the Committee's work programme being delivered during 2023-24 with the Chair taking the opportunity to thank Helen Coombes (as Interim Corporate Director Care, Health & Wellbeing) and Zahur Khan (as Corporate Director Communities & Regeneration) for the support they had provided during their time at Brent and also to welcome Rachel Crossley as newly appointed Corporate Director Care, Health and Wellbeing and Alice Lester as newly appointed Interim Corporate Director Communities & Regeneration.
- Key issues considered since the previous report had included an update on the outcome of Ofsted's inspection of Local Authority Children Services with the Committee having welcomed the overall rating of "good" which had been received across all areas. As was usual practice, the inspection had identified a number of areas for improvement on which the Committee would continue to monitor progress as part of the action plan being developed in response. The Committee had also reviewed progress on implementation of the SEND Strategy as well as the work being undertaken between the Council and a cluster of schools in Harlesden on the Delivering Better Value programme, aligned to work being delivered through Brent Health Matters, Family Wellbeing Centres and the Intervention First Teaching Programme focussed on the way localities worked together to support children.
- Upcoming areas for focus at the Committee's next meeting included Brent Housing Management, including an update on tenant satisfaction measures and responsive repairs performance, the outcomes being achieved through the New Single Homeless Prevention Service and a focus on the impact of the new pilot introduced as part of the Landlord Selective Licensing scheme.
- The ongoing and active engagement of the Committee in the work of the North West London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee Brent, which Councillor Ketan Sheth continued to Chair.
- As a final issue the Chair also took the opportunity to congratulate Brent Health Matters and the volunteer team at the Central Mosque of Brent for the awards received at the recent North West London Health Equalities summit. This had been the first held in the area with the aim of reflecting on progress being made in addressing health inequalities and encouraging the development of wider community led engagement and inclusion across the region.

The Mayor thanked Councillors Ketan Sheth and Conneely for presenting their updates and it was **RESOLVED** that the contents of both reports be noted.

Following the updates provided, the Mayor advised that the remainder of time available would be open for questions from non-cabinet members to the Scrutiny Chairs. The Mayor reminded members of the need to ensure that questions raised were focused on the updates provided or the work being undertaken by the relevant Committee.

As a result, Councillor Lorber took the opportunity to once again highlight the concerns raised at what he felt had been the limited scope of the discussion permitted in response to the call-in on the decision to approve the Barham Park

Trust Accounts at the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee call-in meeting held to deal with the matter.

The Mayor advised that as no specific question had been raised for the Chair of either Scrutiny Committee to respond on, she would move to the next item and thanked all members for their contribution.

### 13. **Report from the Vice-Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee**

The Mayor invited Councillor Chan, as the Vice-Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee, to introduce the report updating members on the work of the Committee.

In terms of issues highlighted, Councillor Chan drew members' attention to the important role and work undertaken by the Committee in relation to monitoring and advising on various governance matters relating to audit activity, the Council's finance, accounting and regulatory framework and members standards of conduct. As one of their key responsibilities, members were advised that the Committee had now signed off the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts 2022–23 having reviewed and also sought assurance around the management responses on the External Audit findings and Enquiries of Management. Officers were thanked for their efforts relating to sign off of the Accounts, with Brent being only one of a small number of local authorities to have completed the process for 2022-23. The importance of this process was also recognised in terms of the wider financial challenges, risks and pressures being faced by local authorities as a result of the current economic climate and Government's programme of austerity.

In highlighting the importance of other work also being undertaken in relation to issues such as delivery of the Internal Audit Plan and Counter Fraud activity, Councillor Chan concluded his update by reminding members of the Committee's continued focus on the adequacy of the Council's governance, risk and control arrangements in order to provide assurance and confidence on compliance and control of the Council's key governance, financial management and accounting arrangements.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Chan for the update provided and it was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

### 14. **Non-Cabinet Member Debate**

In accordance with Standing Order 34, the Mayor advised that the next item on the agenda was the non-cabinet member debate, with the subject chosen for consideration being Making our Borough Clean & Safe.

Members were advised that the motion submitted as the basis for the debate had been circulated with the agenda and that the time available for the debate was 25 minutes.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to introduce the motion which had been submitted as the basis for the Non-Cabinet Member debate. In moving the motion, Councillor Georgiou began by highlighting what he felt was the need for the current Administration and Lead Cabinet Members to recognise the concerns being

expressed by residents at the cleanliness of the borough's streets, anti-social behaviour and also in relation to the blue bag recycling scheme. The motion submitted for debate had sought to raise these matters given the frustration and concerns being expressed by local residents at the general condition and cleanliness of streets across the borough, and on which it was felt decisions made by the current Administration had also negatively contributed towards.

Whilst calling on the Council to take more proactive action in relation to fly tipping and enforcement of the street cleansing contract, the motion had also sought to highlight the significant concerns being expressed by local residents (as highlighted by the strength of feeling expressed within current petitions and the deputation considered earlier in the meeting) relating to the roll out and impact of the blue bag recycling scheme. The motion was therefore calling for an immediate review of the scheme in order to avoid any longer term loss of confidence in recycling initiatives with the Liberal Democrats Group having already proposed an alternative approach when the matter was reviewed by the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

In outlining the key actions being sought through the motion, Councillor Georgiou ended by querying the position of the Administration and Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action on the issues identified with the need for urgent action highlighted in order to address the concerns raised in seeking to make the borough clean and safe and positively impact on how local residents felt about the borough as a place to live.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Georgiou for introducing the motion and then drew members' attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Krupa Sheth on behalf of the Labour Group, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, felt that the original motion moved as the basis for the debate had missed the opportunity for a genuine cross-party discussion about making the environment cleaner, acknowledging the extent of work that was being undertaken within the funding available along with the challenges and compromises required to achieve the Council's target for carbon neutrality by 2030. The amendment had therefore been designed to recognise, in a way it was felt the original motion had not, the constraints placed upon the Council in relation to the increasing level of demand on services whilst at the same time having to mitigate against the extensive funding reductions imposed by central government and prioritise protection of the most vulnerable residents. In highlighting the hard work, funding and difficult nature of decisions required to resolve the issues identified Councillor Krupa Sheth advised that, whilst sharing the frustrations expressed in relation to the problem of fly-tipping and illegal dumping of rubbish, the amendment moved had sought to recognise the work required to address and pursue the minority of individuals causing problems as well as the range of actions being taken to create a cleaner and greener borough. On this basis, the amendment moved was as follows:

To add the wording underlined and delete the wording indicated:

**Making our Borough Clean and Safe**

## **This Council notes:**

~~A major issue of utmost importance to Brent Council is the general condition of our area. is poor and~~ Residents are increasingly frustrated that a small minority of individuals disregard their streets are full of and use them for rubbish and illegal fly tipping. As ward ~~C~~councillors we are receiving daily updates from local people about dumping in the Borough, and we work tirelessly with Council Officers to resolve these enquiries and prevent the problem from ~~that is getting worse, not better.~~

This includes large fly tips in hotspot locations that have been identified by the Council for a considerable time, but with limited resources, it is an ongoing battle for our environmental enforcement teams to tackle, nonetheless we do ensure that proactive action is taken to prevent further ongoing dumping at these sites.

In some areas of the borough 'paan spitting' continues to be a major problem local people are forced to contend with. The Council's campaigns to reduce unsightly, unhygienic mess caused by this bad habit ~~have failed~~ will encourage behaviour change.

Rubbish on our streets contributes to how people view the area and can have a knock-on effect in terms of further Anti-Social Behaviour in the community.

~~Decisions made by this Labour Administration have negatively contributed to the problem, by making it harder for some people to dispose of waste in the proper manner and by not prioritising effective enforcement and education campaigns that would deter this illegal behaviour.~~

A key priority of this local authority must be to address to scourge of fly tipping and crack down forcefully on those who continue to disrespect our community.

The new Waste Service Contract with Veolia is in place, and it is crucial that the company are held to account in delivering the set-out terms of their contract, particularly around targets on street cleansing.

~~The roll out of the new blue bags recycling service has created more problems and confusion. already led to a 50% increase in the tonnage of paper and cardboard collected in the first month. Operatives throw bags around which are then blown away and lost. While the scheme requires~~ Residents are then penalised, to adjust to the new regime and their more blue bins bags not are already being collected on the grounds of without contamination, with a record low of 1% contamination. There is a risk of local people losing confidence in the Climate Emergency Strategy should we choose to do nothing to improve the revised recycling system and ~~turning their back on it~~ increase levels of recycling.

It is ~~unlikely~~ that the new system will result in the Council's stated aim of increasing the boroughs overall recycling rate.

Prioritising making our borough clean will have a positive effect on the way people feel about where they live and how others who visit Brent view our area.

## **Therefore, this Council believes:**

1. Keeping local streets clean and free of rubbish must be a ~~renewed~~ continued focus, particularly in light of increased dumping locally.
2. The best way to discourage illegal behaviour is by a programme of mass fining and continuing a zero-tolerance approach to rubbish on our streets and in our open spaces and paan spitting.
3. The Brent Connects areas ~~need to be reformed in order to~~ ensure Enforcement Teams are not overly stretched ~~and~~ so that a targeted approach is deployed in hotspot fly tipping locations – such as deployment of additional resources in Wembley and Alperton.
4. It is possible to change behaviours and educate people about how to treat our streets and opens spaces, through well run, targeted and engaging education campaigns.
5. Volunteers who spend hours every week trying to keep our borough clean and tidy must be commended for the work that they do and assisted wherever possible by the Council.
6. The blue bag scheme ~~needs to~~ will be reviewed ~~as soon as possible in 2024~~ with ~~and~~ improvements to be considered by Cabinet and the recommendations by Scrutiny looked at again.

**This Council therefore resolves to call on the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action:**

1. To make ~~the~~ a non commercially sensitive version of the new Waste Service Contract with Veolia publicly available to enable effective scrutiny of the company and so that we can be confident that they are meeting the set-out terms of their contract with Brent.
2. To continue to work with partners across the Council and with outside agencies to identify additional resource to assist the existing Waste Enforcement teams across the borough in delivering effective enforcement against those who continue to disrespect our area.
3. Where additional resource is needed ~~To~~ scope the possibility of employing apprentices to work alongside Neighbourhood Managers and Enforcement Teams in fly tipping hotspot locations in the borough.
4. Subject to further engagement work, ~~Working with~~ to work with the Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture, to undertake an internal review of the Brent Connects areas, particularly the Wembley Connects area, to see whether splitting them into smaller geographical areas can help with more effective, targeted waste enforcement work.
5. To ~~develop~~ continue the ~~an~~ education campaign including door to door communications about the Council's renewed focus on dealing with rubbish dumping and fly tipping in the area, this will include details of fines individuals would face if caught not adhering to the law.

6. To ~~E~~ensure that until the New Year all blue bins are emptied ~~at every collection~~ according to criteria and scheduled times published in residents' calendars. The Council will ~~instructing~~ the contractor to ensure that blue bags are not thrown about and that all bins are returned to the correct location. ~~And~~ Above all the Cabinet will reconsider the feedback from ~~option of providing residents and the emerging data from the roll out to consider all options with a smaller wheelie bin that will support residents with~~ for their mixed recycling more and converting the larger bins for the bulkier cardboard and paper collection utilising the Capital budget of £1.6 million which has been allocated for this.
7. To ~~explore~~ lobby the government regarding the possibility of introducing a long awaited deposit scheme for cans and bottles, which would discourage dumping in our area.
8. To work with other London local authorities to gain insight on best practice around dealing with ongoing rubbish and fly tipping issues that are sadly prevalent in some areas in the capital.
9. To ~~call on~~ continue our ongoing work with the Mayor of London to ensure areas in our borough under his jurisdiction are kept clean and safe, including TfL land.
10. To write to Government urging that they consider banning the sale of paan, or at the very least require businesses who sell it to have a License.
11. To write to Government about the ongoing fly tipping problems in Brent and request additional funding to support renewed efforts to get to grips with this issue.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth for moving the amendment on behalf of the Labour Group and then opened the debate for contributions from other members in relation to both the original motion and amendment.

Councillor Mistry, in supporting the original motion, highlighted the continued problems being created by a minority of residents with specific reference to illegal dumping of rubbish and also paan spitting. Despite having previously raised these concerns, Councillor Mistry felt that current reporting methods and level of action being taken in response were not sufficient with reference made to ongoing issues along Kingsbury High Road and within Queensbury. Expressing support for a ban on the sale of paan and the work being undertaken locally by residents to monitor issues, Councillor Mistry ended by also highlighting the need for improved education and for the Mayor of London to enhance funding for the Police in order to support the work being undertaken across neighbourhoods.

In support of the concerns raised regarding the introduction and operation of the blue bag recycling scheme, Councillor Lorber felt it important to remind members these had also been raised at the time the changes had been considered by the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee. Recognising the issues raised as part of the deputation on the same matter earlier in the meeting, he pointed out that concerns highlighted during the Scrutiny Committee meeting had included the

quality of the bags, potential issues with contamination and collection with the suggestion made that residents should be offered an alternative option of a separate bin. In support of the original motion moved as the basis of the debate, Councillor Lorber felt that the decision to proceed with the blue bag recycling scheme had not only been poorly implemented but was also contributing to the problem of keeping local streets clean and free of rubbish by creating excess litter.

Councillor Fraser, in expressing support for the amendment moved, felt that the focus for any concerns raised would be better targeted at the need to ensure Councils were being properly funded by central government to tackle fly-tipping and waste collection as well as other key services and to support the reintroduction of communication campaigns and initiatives such as "Keep Britain Tidy" to support the work being undertaken to change the behaviour of the minority of people who caused problems. In addition, Councillor Fraser felt there was a need to recognise the extent of the financial pressures being faced by the Council and impact these were having not just in relation to recycling and litter but also across a range of other crucial services relied on by many residents across the borough.

In pointing out that Brent were third in London for prosecutions relating to fly tipping and eighth for fines issued for fly tipping, Councillor Miller supported the need to focus attention on those creating the problem. In recognising the extent of littering and fly tipping as an issue across London the need to address individual behaviours was highlighted as a specific focus, including the issue of rogue landlords within the private rented housing sector. In commending the introduction of selective licensing schemes to better regulate the sector he was keen to ensure the necessary protections continued to be sought for tenants with action taken against landlords found to be in breach of their licence or to have been illegally fly-tipping as a means of avoiding business expenses. To conclude, Councillor Miller expressed disappointment that central government had decided not to bring forward the proposed Renters Rights Bill and in expressing support for the amendment moved, also hoped for a cross-party consensus which would result in the implementation of the renters' rights provisions in future.

Councillor Kansagra in contributing to the debate and supporting the concerns raised in relation to introduction of the blue bag recycling scheme felt it was important, in considering the motion, to recognise the strength of public feeling which had been expressed on the issue and limited level of public support for the scheme which appeared to have been received in response. For these reasons he advised he would not be supporting the amendment moved by the Labour Group.

In responding to previous comments Councillor Dixon, whilst acknowledging the concerns raised regarding the blue bag scheme felt it important to recognise that the introduction of any borough wide scheme would require a period of review and adjustment, which she advised the majority of residents appeared to have understood given what the Council was seeking to achieve in terms of improving recycling rates and reducing the borough's impact on the climate. Whilst patience would be required in refining and addressing operational issues, the priority in dealing with these at the same time as needing to focus on a range of other significant issues impacting on residents across the borough was highlighted, which it was felt the amendment had sought to recognise in a balanced way. For these reasons Councillor Dixon advised she would also be supporting the amendment moved rather than original motion.

As there were no further contributions, the Mayor then invited Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, to summarise and close the debate.

In drawing the debate to a close, Councillor Krupa Sheth reiterated that the Council would continue to pursue those who littered and illegally fly tipped, detailing the outcome of a recent successful prosecution as evidence of the approach being adopted. Furthermore, Councillor Krupa Sheth advised of the work being undertaken to explore all available options in addressing the issue, including the use of new technology and wider use of the community skip initiative. Rather than singling out the blue bag scheme, members were advised that the amendment had sought to highlight and support the wider environmental and climate impact being achieved as a result of a wide range of initiatives with members assured that the blue bag scheme would continue to be reviewed moving forward in order to ensure it remained as effective as possible. In summing up, Councillor Krupa Sheth provided examples on the wide range of activities being progressed by the Council in addition to the recycling scheme, which included lobbying for a bottle deposit scheme, reducing the impact of paan spitting and littering as well as the efforts being made to seek an increase in funding from central government to support the range of initiatives outlined. Taken together it was felt this approach would best serve the borough in terms of creating a cleaner and greener future which she hoped all members would support, as a final outcome of the debate.

Having thanked members for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion moved as the basis for the Non-Cabinet Member debate starting with the amendment moved by the Labour Group. The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive motion, as amended, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion as the outcome of the non-cabinet member debate:

**“Making our Borough Clean and Safe**

**This Council notes:**

A major issue of utmost importance to Brent Council is the general condition of our area. Residents are increasingly frustrated that a small minority of individuals disregard their streets and use them for rubbish and illegal fly tipping. As ward councillors we are receiving daily updates from local people about dumping in the Borough, and we work tirelessly with Council Officers to resolve these enquiries and prevent the problem from getting worse.

This includes large fly tips in hotspot locations that have been identified by the Council for a considerable time, but with limited resources it is an ongoing battle for our environmental enforcement teams to tackle. Nonetheless we do ensure that proactive action is taken to prevent further ongoing dumping at these sites.

In some areas of the borough 'paan spitting' continues to be a major problem local people are forced to contend with. The Council's campaigns to reduce unsightly, unhygienic mess caused by this bad habit will encourage behaviour change.

Rubbish on our streets contributes to how people view the area and can have a knock-on effect in terms of further Anti-Social Behaviour in the community.

A key priority of this local authority must be to address the scourge of fly tipping and crack down forcefully on those who continue to disrespect our community.

The new Waste Service Contract with Veolia is in place, and it is crucial that the company are held to account in delivering the set-out terms of their contract, particularly around targets on street cleansing.

The roll out of the new blue bags recycling service has already led to a 50% increase in the tonnage of paper and cardboard collected in the first month. While the scheme requires residents to adjust to the new regime more blue bin bags are already being collected without contamination, with a record low of 1% contamination. There is a risk of local people losing confidence in the Climate Emergency Strategy should we choose to do nothing to improve the revised recycling system and increase levels of recycling.

It is likely that the new system will result in the Council's stated aim of increasing the borough's overall recycling rate.

Prioritising making our borough clean will have a positive effect on the way people feel about where they live and how others who visit Brent view our area.

**Therefore, this Council believes:**

1. Keeping local streets clean and free of rubbish must be a continued focus, particularly in light of increased dumping locally.
2. The best way to discourage illegal behaviour is by a programme of mass fining and continuing a zero-tolerance approach to rubbish on our streets and in our open spaces and paan spitting.
3. The Brent Connects areas ensure Enforcement Teams are not overly stretched so that a targeted approach is deployed in hotspot fly tipping locations – such as deployment of additional resources in Wembley and Alperton.
4. It is possible to change behaviours and educate people about how to treat our streets and open spaces, through well run, targeted and engaging education campaigns.
5. Volunteers who spend hours every week trying to keep our borough clean and tidy must be commended for the work that they do and assisted wherever possible by the Council.

The blue bag scheme will be reviewed in 2024 with improvements to be considered by Cabinet and the recommendations by Scrutiny looked at again.

**This Council therefore resolves to call on the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action:**

1. To make a non commercially sensitive version of the new Waste Service Contract with Veolia publicly available to enable effective scrutiny of the company and so that we can be confident that they are meeting the set-out terms of their contract with Brent.
2. To continue to work with partners across the Council and with outside agencies to identify additional resource to assist the existing Waste Enforcement teams across the borough in delivering effective enforcement against those who continue to disrespect our area.
3. Where additional resource is needed to scope the possibility of employing apprentices to work alongside Neighbourhood Managers and Enforcement Teams in fly tipping hotspot locations in the borough.
4. Subject to further engagement work, to work with the Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture, to undertake an internal review of the Brent Connects areas, particularly the Wembley Connects area, to see whether splitting them into smaller geographical areas can help with more effective, targeted waste enforcement work.
5. To continue the education campaign including door to door communications about the Council's renewed focus on dealing with rubbish dumping and fly tipping in the area, this will include details of fines individuals would face if caught not adhering to the law.
6. To ensure that until the New Year all blue bins are emptied according to criteria and scheduled times published in residents' calendars. The Council will instruct the contractor to ensure that blue bags are not thrown about and that all bins are returned to the correct location. Above all the Cabinet will consider the feedback from residents and the emerging data from the roll out to consider all options that will support residents with recycling more cardboard and paper utilising the Capital budget of £1.6 million which has been allocated for this.
7. To lobby the government regarding the possibility of introducing a long awaited deposit scheme for cans and bottles, which would discourage dumping in our area.
8. To work with other London local authorities to gain insight on best practice around dealing with ongoing rubbish and fly tipping issues that are sadly prevalent in some areas in the capital.
9. To continue our ongoing work with the Mayor of London to ensure areas in our borough under his jurisdiction are kept clean and safe, including TfL land.
10. To write to Government urging that they consider banning the sale of paan, or at the very least require businesses who sell it to have a License.

11. To write to Government about the ongoing fly tipping problems in Brent and request additional funding to support renewed efforts to get to grips with this issue.”

#### 15. **Statement of Gambling Principles 2024-2027**

The Mayor invited Councillor Farah, as Cabinet Member for Safer Communities & Public Protection, to introduce a report from the Corporate Director Resident Services setting out the Statement of Gambling Principles, which it was noted there was requirement (under the Gambling Act 2005) for all local authorities designated as a Licensing Authority to keep under review, prepare and publish every three years.

In introducing the report members were advised that as part of the Statement each Licensing Authority was expected to outline local issues, priorities and risks that would be used to inform their approach and policy for dealing with applications and regulating gambling premises, with the draft updated Statement for Brent having been detailed within Appendix 1 of the report. In preparing the Statement of Principles members were advised each authority would also be required to reflect current regulations and have regard to the Gambling Commission’s guidance, with concerns expressed at the limitations this placed on Licensing Authorities in terms of relevant matters that could be taken into consideration as part of this process and when considering licensing applications for gambling premises given they prevented decisions being considered on public health and moral grounds as well as on the basis of demand. In noting that the draft Statement of Principles had been subject to an extensive consultation process, as detailed within Appendix 2 of the report, disappointment was expressed at the current legislative position with local authorities felt to be best placed to make decisions on the impact in relation to the assessment of relevant policy considerations when considering applications for gambling premises in their area.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Farah for introducing the report and then opened the debate for contributions from other members.

In supporting the concerns highlighted regarding the limitations currently placed on the relevant matters that could be taken into account when considering applications in relation to gambling premises, Councillor Lorber also felt it important to recognise the role of the current and previous governments in supporting de-regulation of the gambling industry, with a need highlighted for the Council to take a strong stance in seeking to oppose these type of licenses.

Councillor Nerva, in supporting the frustrations expressed regarding the limitations placed on Licensing Authorities in being able to oppose applications relating to gambling premises within the borough, felt it important to highlight that these were also shared by a majority of local residents who recognised the serious harm and nuisance being caused as a result of gambling centres operating within their local areas. Highlighting that the lack of control was even more serious in relation to online gambling he hoped that a future government would be more willing to address the issues raised working with local authorities and the health services in order to provide a more joined up approach.

In supporting the wider concerns raised, Councillor Grahl felt it important to also recognise the work undertaken to prepare the revised draft Statement particularly the focus which had been included under Objective 3 in terms of the protection of children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling.

Councillor Miller also spoke to highlight his support for the approach adopted within the Statement and Council's stance in seeking to oppose (as strongly as possible) applications from gambling premises within the borough. At the same time concern was expressed regarding the lack of support provided for Licensing Authorities by the government who had failed to seek reform of the current legislation which he felt required a more responsible approach in order to address.

In sharing the frustrations and concerns identified, particularly given the number of licenced gambling and Adult Gaming premises currently operating within his ward, Councillor Kelcher highlighted the impact these were having not only in terms of local town centres and high streets but also on local communities in relation to the harm and anti-social behaviour associated with gambling activity. Whilst fully supportive of the Statement and approach adopted by the Council (as Licensing Authority) in seeking to oppose these type of premises operating in the borough, Councillor Kelcher felt more support was required from the government in terms of the legislation enabling the issues to be addressed as a public health consideration supported by relevant planning and licensing policy.

As a final contribution to the debate, Councillor Maurice, whilst recognising the concerns which had been expressed during the debate also felt it important to highlight the need to ensure that national policy provided a consistent approach towards the gambling industry supported with, for example, proper regulation of the profits being generated as a result.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor thanked members for their contribution and invited Councillor Farah to exercise his right of reply. In closing the debate, Councillor Farah thanked members for their support and highlighted the work being undertaken involving a wide range of community organisations to continue lobbying for a change in the way the current licensing policy operated in relation to gambling given the lack of focus on regulation by the current government since an initial review had been announced in 2020 and the ongoing impact of the gambling sector lobbying to prevent reform. In recognising the concerns highlighted, Councillor Farah ended by commending the draft Statement of Principles to members on the basis it had been designed to continue seeking to protect, as far as was possible within the limitations of current regulations, local communities and individuals from the harm and anti-social behaviour associated with gambling activity.

Having thanked Councillor Farah for closing the debate, the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore unanimously **RESOLVED** following its referral by Cabinet on 16 November 2023, to approve formal sign off and adoption of the revised Statement of Gambling Principles (31 January 2022 – 31 January 2025) as set out within Appendix 1 of the report.

## 16. Changes to the Constitution

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce a report from the Corporate Director of Governance outlining a number of proposed changes to the Constitution. In introducing the report, it was noted that the changes related to speaking rights for public organisations, such as the Police, at Planning Committee and the Council's Procurement Rules.

The Mayor thanked the Leader for introducing the report and then opened the debate for contributions from other members.

Referring to the changes proposed in relation to speaking rights at Planning Committee meetings, Councillor Lorber also took the opportunity to highlight what he felt was an additional need to consider allowing members of the public who had spoken in objection to an application the ability to sum up at the end of the associated debate, prior to any final decision being made by the Committee. Based on experience, he felt this would further enhance public engagement and participation in the process.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt to exercise his right of reply. In closing the debate, Councillor Muhammed Butt took the opportunity to remind members of the role and function of the Constitutional Working Group which he advised would be the appropriate forum to undertake consideration (on a cross-party basis) of any further suggestions relating to public speaking rights at meetings, reminding members of what he felt were the extensive arrangements already in place in relation to Planning Committee. On this basis, he commended the report as submitted to the Council.

Having thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for closing the debate, the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the amendments to the Constitution as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report relating to speaking rights at Planning Committee (Standing Order 57) and the Procurement Rules within Contract Standing Orders.
- (2) Following on from (1) above, to authorise the Corporate Director of Governance to amend the Constitution accordingly, including making any necessary incidental or consequential changes.
- (3) To note that, to the extent that the changes related to executive functions of the Council, they had been approved by the Leader.

## 17. **Motions**

Before moving on to consider the motions listed on the summons, the Mayor advised members that a total of 40 minutes had been set aside for the consideration of the four motions submitted for debate, based on an initial allocation of 10 minutes per motion. Should the time taken to consider the first motion be less than 10 minutes she advised that the remaining time available would be rolled forward for consideration of the remaining motions.

## **17.1 1<sup>st</sup> Motion (Conservative Group) – Expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ): Don't Punish Brent Drivers**

The Mayor invited Councillor Jayanti Patel to move the first motion which had been submitted on behalf of the Conservative Group. Councillor Jayanti Patel began by providing context to the motion which had been focussed on concerns regarding the expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) from its previous boundary along the North and South Circular Road to cover the whole of London, including all of Brent. This expansion, he felt, had caused a significant impact on local residents and businesses especially for those with non-compliant vehicles not eligible or able to take advantage of the existing limited scrappage scheme and who continued to rely on their vehicles for employment, social use or to take advantage of local businesses and high streets who were being forced to pay the charge to drive within the ULEZ. In addition, Councillor Patel felt there was a need to recognise the regressive nature of the charge, not only in terms of the less well-off being disproportionately penalised but also in terms of residents unable to afford the charge having to rely on what he felt to be inadequate levels of public transport in many areas.

The motion, he pointed out, also sought to challenge the science behind the expansion as an anti-pollution and environmental protection measure with the scheme, in his view, designed purely as a means of generating additional income to address the significant gap in TfL funding during the current the Mayor of London's tenure. Highlighting the financial and social impact on local residents and lack of what he regarded as realistic alternatives, such as an acceptable scrappage scheme, Councillor Patel advised the motion was seeking support to abolish the ULEZ expansion with the funding released as a result used to fund other measures which it was felt would have a more positive impact on residents in Brent and across London including faster upgrade to a zero-emission bus fleet, increasing the roll out of rapid electric vehicle charging points, encouraging more freight consolidation schemes, reinstating the Boiler Cashback Scheme and providing a fairer and more generous scrappage scheme for non-compliant vehicles.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Jayanti Patel for moving the motion before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

In opening the debate, Councillor Grahl queried the challenge made to the science supporting expansion of the ULEZ given figures provided by the World Health Organisation in relation to the percentage of children now exposed to air pollution and associated damaging health impacts. Rather than seeking to deny the impact of climate change or criticise the Mayor of London for his efforts to protect the health of those living within the borough and across London, particularly children, Councillor Grahl in opposing the motion felt the more responsible approach would be to support the efforts being led through initiatives such as expansion of the ULEZ to improve air quality and protect health.

Councillor Krupa Sheth also speaking against the motion felt it important to recognise the difficult nature of the decisions which had needed to be made in relation to expansion of the ULEZ but which were already making a significant difference in addressing air quality highlighting, as an example, the increase in vehicle compliance across outer London and across London as a whole with ULEZ

emission standards since the scheme's introduction and expansion. Highlighting the cost to Council taxpayers of the unsuccessful legal challenge against the ULEZ expansion supported by a number of Conservative led outer London Boroughs, it was felt the stance taken by the Mayor of London had sought to place the health of residents over those who continued to pollute with the motion containing no new ideas in seeking to address the climate emergency. Recognising the impact achieved in reducing levels of nitrogen dioxide since introduction of the ULEZ as well as highlighting and expressing support for the continued expansion of eligibility for the scrappage scheme, Councillor Krupa Sheth urged all members to reject the motion in support of providing a cleaner and greener future for Brent's residents.

In highlighting the importance and ongoing attempts made by the current and the previous Mayor of London to address air quality and pollution, Councillor Lorber felt the most appropriate means of addressing the concerns highlighted would be for the current government to properly finance and support expansion and introduction of a more generous scrappage scheme and for these reasons advised he would also not be supporting the motion.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Kansagra felt that the expansion of ULEZ had not represented a serious attempt to address the environmental and health issues highlighted but instead supported the view that it had involved the introduction of a regressive income generation scheme where those who could afford to pay the charge were able to continue polluting. Given the significant impact on local residents, he encouraged members to support the motion.

As there were no other members who had indicated they wished to speak the Mayor then invited Councillor Jayanti Patel to exercise his right of reply. In summing up Councillor Patel once again highlighted what he felt to be the significant and unfair impact arising from expansion of ULEZ by the Mayor of London on local residents and businesses, many of whom he pointed out were already struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. In support of the motion, he outlined the choice available to residents in the upcoming Mayoral election in seeking to support abolition of the expanded ULEZ and on this basis commended the motion as moved to members.

Having thanked members for their contributions the Mayor then moved on to put the motion, as set out below, to a vote which was declared **LOST** and not therefore approved.

### **“Expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) – Don't Punish Brent Drivers”**

This Council notes that:

1. On 4th March 2022 the Mayor of London announced his plan to expand the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) from its current boundary of the North and South Circular Roads to cover almost all of Greater London. Despite the best efforts of Londoners, the Mayor of London (Sadiq Khan) pushed through and expanded the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) on 29th August 2023 to all cover the whole of London.

2. Whilst the ULEZ was originally introduced covering the same area and with the same boundaries as the Congestion Charge Zone it was expanded on 25th October 2021 by 18 times its original size to its previous boundaries before the further expansion on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2023. The ramifications of this significant change are being felt in outer London Boroughs with the full extent still to be assessed. It goes without saying that the Mayor of London is on an anti-car rampage and won't be satisfied until we are "all out of cars"!
3. The expansion of ULEZ means that those with non-compliant vehicles are paying £12.50 per day to drive within the ULEZ. Residents are being forced to pay more to get to work, attend hospital appointments, visit friends and family and are not being able to take advantage of local businesses and high streets. This is costing jobs with essential workers such as doctors, nurses, care workers, teachers who rely on their vehicles also affected, especially those working nights who rely on use of their cars. ULEZ is damaging the social fabric of our local area, and many businesses have been forced to locate elsewhere or plan to close.
4. The ULEZ is a regressive tax, as the less well-off are disproportionately penalised. The expansion has also meant many more areas with poor public transport have been included within the zone which is fundamentally unfair as those residents unable to afford to keep or replace their car are being forced to rely on inadequate levels of public transport.
5. It is disappointing, but not at all surprising, that the Mayor of London has left a black hole in TfL's finances and the Labour Mayor now expects millions of families to foot the bill with an exorbitant £12.50 daily charge.
6. Drivers have paid an estimated £52 million in levies and fines in the first month of the ULEZ expansion. £52 million paid out of the pockets of the poorest Londoners is a disgrace with the scheme nothing more than a tax and money-making scheme and nothing to do with protecting environment.
7. During his time in office as Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has accumulated enough air miles to fly around the world fourteen times. He even chose to fly to Argentina for a hybrid meeting. All this whilst charging Londoners more and more to use their cars! That can't be right.
8. The science behind the expansion and other anti-pollution measures more generally is a case of pay your money, pick your scientist. Sadiq Khan has pointed towards figures suggesting ULEZ reduced Nitrous Oxide levels by more than a quarter in its first six months but a team at Imperial College London looked at the data and suggested they fell by just 3%. Lies, damn lies, and emissions statistics.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan's suggestion that a majority of voters back his crusade to tackle air pollution and that backing ULEZ places him on "the right side of history" and might work as a long-term strategy, is a fantasy.

As a result of the concerns highlighted this Council believes that:

1. Measures such as ULEZ which have been backed by the Labour leadership nationally, push up the cost of living in Brent by imposing taxes and charges on residents who rely on motor vehicles without providing them with realistic alternatives should continue to be opposed.
2. The £400 million set aside by the Mayor of London for the expansion of ULEZ and related projects would have been better spent on measures that would have a more positive impact on residents in Brent and across London such as
  - a faster upgrade to a zero-emission bus fleet.
  - increasing the roll out of rapid electric vehicle charging points.
  - encouraging more freight consolidation schemes.
  - bringing back the previous Boiler Cashback Scheme to encourage Londoners to upgrade their boilers to reduce household emissions.
  - financing a generous scrappage scheme to support Londoners in replacing their non-compliant vehicles.

Therefore, this Council resolves to call on the Leader of the Council to write to the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan outlining the concerns set out within the motion and crippling impact of the ULEZ tax on residents in Brent.”

### **17.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Motion (Liberal Democrats Group) - Making our Voting System Fairer and More Representative**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to move the second motion which had been submitted by the Liberal Democrats Group. In moving the motion Councillor Georgiou, began by outlining what he felt had been recognised as the unfair and outdated nature of the current First Past the Post electoral system and one that was no longer fit for purpose within a modern democracy. Highlighting the growing consensus that the UK’s voting system needed to change, which had been supported by the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Green Party along with a host of Trade Unions and pro-democracy organisations, he advised that the motion had been designed to support this process and move towards Proportional Representation (PR) as a more consensual and pragmatic way of conducting politics that valued all votes cast equally. In recognising the extensive use of PR across other democracies the benefits provided in terms of those elected better reflecting the communities they represented were also outlined along with the opportunity to enhance decision making, encourage wider participation and provide renewed confidence in the current political system. In urging all members to support the motion and join with other local authorities supporting calls for a change to the UK’s voting system, Councillor Georgiou ended by highlighting the opportunity such a change would present to move forward in the aftermath of the current Conservative government and deliver the type of government which it was felt the majority of British people now wanted to see.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Georgiou for moving the motion before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

Speaking against the proposed change being sought within the motion, Councillor Maurice opened the debate by highlighting concerns at the impact he felt the introduction of PR would have in enabling more extremist political parties to gain an

element of power with damaging consequences on community relations. Referring to the opportunity already provided to support a change in electoral system through the Alternative Vote referendum held during the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in May 2011, which had been lost, Councillor Maurice pointed out that whilst no electoral system was perfect the current arrangements, in his view, did at least provide a more stable form of government than any coalition.

Also speaking in opposition to the motion, Councillor Rubin outlined what he felt to be the advantage of the current First Past the Post electoral system in terms of clearer democratic accountability around delivery of political manifestos and commitments. This compared to the type of electoral outcome provided through PR often involving the formation of coalitions between parties and the associated compromise which, he felt, could be seen as less democratic. As an example, Councillor Rubin ended by referring to the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government following the election in 2010 and the impact compromises made in the process of forming that government had delivered in terms of tuition fees and the start of austerity.

Supporting the concerns raised about the impact of the Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition, which he accepted had not provided a strong example of coalition government, Councillor Miller advised that he was minded to support the change being sought within the motion given the stance taken towards the proposal by the Labour Party at its recent Conference.

As a final contribution Councillor Kelcher also spoke in opposition to the motion, highlighting the fundamental importance in the electorate being able to hold their elected representatives to account. Whilst supporting the concept of all votes having equal value, concerns were raised that certain forms of PR (such as the Party List system) may adversely impact the link between the electorate and their representatives as well as enable more extremist political parties to gain power. In view of these concerns and on the basis that more clarity was needed in terms of the type of PR system being sought, Councillor Kelcher advised he would be opposing the motion.

As there were no other members who had indicated they wished to speak and in view of the remaining time available, the Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to exercise his right of reply. In summing up, Councillor Georgiou felt it was important to recognise the fragile state of democracy in the UK, with confidence in politics at a record low. As a result, he hoped members would join him in supporting the motion in seeking a change in the voting system to guarantee that every vote counted equally as a means of fairness, increasing participation and inspiring renewed confidence in the current political system.

Having thanked members for their contributions the Mayor then moved to put the motion, as set out below, to a vote which was declared **LOST** and not therefore approved.

### **“Making our Voting System Fairer and More Representative”**

**This Council believes:**

The next General Election is an opportunity to take our country on a different course after years of chaotic Tory rule. This is especially true in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, which saw the UK crash out of the European Union, with a bad deal, that has left us diminished, poorer and less important on the world stage. The next General Election will be fought under the antiquated First Past the Post voting system.

First Past the Post (FPTP) originated when land-owning aristocrats dominated parliament and voting was restricted to property-owning men. It is not fit for a 'modern democracy'.

In Europe, only the UK and authoritarian Belarus still use archaic single-round FPTP for general elections. This produces governments that have typically not had strong support across the country.

Internationally, Proportional Representation (PR) is used to elect the Parliaments of more than 80 countries. It is a system that works and has fostered a more consensual, pragmatic way of conducting politics and policy making.

PR ensures that all votes count, have equal value, and that seats won match votes cast. Under PR, MPs and Parliaments better reflect the age, gender and protected characteristics of both local communities and of the nation. Whilst the UK has taken leaps forwards in terms of electing a more diverse Parliament, we are still behind many other countries.

MPs better reflecting the communities they represent in turn leads to improved decision making, wider participation and increased levels of ownership of decisions taken. PR would also end minority rule. In 2019, 43.6% of the vote produced a government with 56.2% of the seats and 100% of the power. Fair, proportional votes also prevent 'wrong winner' elections such as occurred in 1951 and February 1974.

PR is now the national policy of the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Green Party, SNP, Plaid Cymru and Women's Equality Party along with a host of Trade Unions and pro-democracy organisations.

There is a growing consensus that the UK's voting system must change.

PR is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its use should now be extended to include Westminster and considered at a local level too.

Our democracy is in a fragile state, with confidence in politics at a record low. Changing the voting system to guarantee that every vote counts equally can help to inspire renewed confidence in our political system, increase participation and ensure that the electorate are able to elect the type of government that the majority of the British people want to see.

**This Council therefore resolves to:**

- 1) Join 29 other local authorities across the country, of different political persuasions, in supporting calls for a change to the UK's voting system to Proportional Representation.
- 2) Request that the Leader of the Council write to H.M. Government calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws and to enable Proportional Representation to be used for UK general elections and local Council elections.
- 3) Request that the Leader of the Council write to H.M. Leader of the Opposition to encourage that the Labour Party include changing the electoral system in their next election manifesto."

### **17.3 3<sup>rd</sup> Motion (Labour Group) – Save our Services**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Benea to move the first motion submitted by the Labour Group. In moving the motion Councillor Benea, began by referring to a quote made by Rishi Sunak when seeking election as the Conservative Party leader prior to becoming Prime Minister relating to changes he felt needed to be made in the way funding was being allocated to different parts of the country under the levelling up agenda. Whilst acknowledging the need for levelling up, which had been understood by the previous Labour Government, Councillor Benea felt the approach adopted by the Conservative government had been the exact opposite in terms of the programme of austerity imposed on local authorities and public services. As a result, Councillor Benea advised that the motion was seeking to highlight the concerns being expressed by not only the Labour Administration in Brent but also the LGA, London Council's and a range of other local authorities of different political persuasion regarding the perilous state of local government finances and failure of the government to address the fundamental reforms identified as required in moving towards a more long term and sustainable funding solution and away from the current model of ad-hoc bidding for funding whilst also recognising the impact of the reduction in central government funding and £210m of cuts that had needed to be delivered in Brent since austerity had begun. In commending the motion to members, Councillor Benea ended by outlining the five specific actions being sought from the government on which support was being sought as a means of saving services and which it was hoped would start to be addressed in the Chancellors upcoming Autumn statement.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Benea for moving the motion before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

In support of Councillor Benea's opening statement, Councillor Tatler also took the opportunity to highlight the serious and challenging nature of the Council's current financial position, which it was pointed out had arisen as a result of the unprecedented pressures created by continued economic and financial uncertainty along with the rapidly increasing demand for services and reduction in government funding as a result of austerity since 2010. Highlighting the decrease in core funding provided by the government for local government (totalling 78%) and cumulative impact of the cuts which had needed to be made as a result within Brent (totalling £210m) since 2010, Councillor Tatler urged all members to support the motion which she pointed out was seeking to secure a fully funded, long term funding solution from the government and had recognised the difficult nature of decisions needing to be taken to deliver a financially sustainable and resilient

balanced budget given the ongoing uncertainty over future government funding whilst also seeking to safeguard key services for residents.

In support of the concerns outlined, Councillor Knight highlighted the specific budgetary pressures being created as a result of the unprecedented increase currently being experienced in levels of homelessness and demand in relation to housing supply as well as the increase in costs for the provision of suitable Temporary Accommodation. In referring to the £400m shortfall in funding identified by London Councils for local authorities across London, members were advised that nearly £90m of this related to pressures on Temporary Accommodation with 9 in 10 boroughs expected to overspend on their budgets during the current financial year. Whilst Brent continued to deliver one of the highest levels of affordable new housing the increase in supply was not able to match current demand with, she pointed out, the Council having experienced a 22% increase in the number of residents presenting as homelessness when compared to last year and current economic conditions within the construction sector making it even more challenging to deliver major housing projects in a viable way. In support of the motion, Councillor Knight felt there was a need for the government to recognise the seriousness of the financial position faced by local government and to take the necessary action to address the shortfall in funding in order to support the delivery of new homes and services relied on by some many residents.

Whilst supportive of the need to identify a permanent solution that would provide the long-term sustainable funding required by local government Councillor Kansagra, as a further contribution to the debate, also highlighted the extent of funding which had already been provided by the government in different forms to support the ongoing delivery of services for residents, which he felt also needed to be recognised as part of the approach towards the debate. The comments made by Councillor Kansagra were also supported by Councillor Hirani who felt there was a need to focus on the current Administration's control and management of the budget when considering the current financial pressures and challenges faced rather than the way funding was being allocated centrally and with concerns expressed to avoid the need for any Section 114 notice to be issued as a result.

In challenging the previous comments made by members of the Conservative Group, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as a final contribution to the debate) highlighted, despite their claims to the contrary, what he felt had been the government's failure to address the need for reform of local government finance and to increase the core spending power for local government. In contrast, he outlined what he regarded as the prudent and sustainable way in which the Council had sought to manage its budget despite the significant financial pressures and challenges highlighted with the government, he pointed out, having sought to shift the subsequent financial burden onto local resident through use of Council Tax, having consistently declined other equitable alternatives to raise funding. Pointing out that Brent was currently one of only a small number of Council's nationally to have received assurance regarding the completion of its Statement of Accounts for 2022-23 Councillor Butt ended by outlining the measures being taken to continue supporting and safeguarding local residents despite the approach taken by the Conservative Government towards the funding of local authorities, which he advised he was proud to support in seeking to ensure no one was left behind whilst also delivering a well-managed and balanced budget.

As there were no other members who had indicated they wished to speak and in view of the remaining time available, the Mayor then invited Councillor Benea to exercise her right of reply. In responding and closing the debate, Councillor Benea thanked members in their support for the motion whilst also expressing concern at the approach taken by the Conservative Group in their response. Highlighting the serious nature of the financial position faced by local government as a result of the government's approach towards its funding, she ended by commending the Council on the measures being taken to manage Brent's budget whilst also seeking to prioritise the protection of frontline services and support those residents most in need and on this basis hoped all members would support the motion as moved.

Having thanked all members for their contributions, the Mayor then put the motion, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

**“Save our Services**

This Council notes:

- The ongoing campaign by both Unison and the Local Government Association highlighting the devastating impact of cuts and the £3.5bn shortfall in funding for the local services we all rely on every day.
- During the pandemic, councils spent billions of publicly accountable funds, to protect the most vulnerable residents – and now after 13 years of cuts, local services that were already stretched are at breaking point.
- Over the last thirteen years core funding from government has decreased by 78%. On top of the £210m of cuts made since 2010 we now must find a further £8m in cuts between 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- While funding has decreased, demand for our services has exponentially increased. There are now 800,000 more Londoner's and overall funding across the capital remains a fifth lower than 13 years ago.
- Rather than fully fund local government from the centre, successive Conservative Chancellors have moved the responsibility onto residents – using Council Tax, a tax aimed not at the wealth of the occupants but based on your property value as rated in 1991. The Government has consistently declined other equitable alternatives to raise funding.
- Successive Conservative Chancellors have insisted that Core Spending Power has increased in local government – but this metric is a smokescreen and reliant on all local authorities increasing Council Tax by the maximum amount.
- In a recently published study, London Councils, a cross-party organisation representing all 32 boroughs, has found that councils across the capital face a £400m shortfall in 2023. Of this figure, nearly £90m is due to unprecedented

pressures on Temporary Accommodation. They also found that 9 in 10 boroughs were expected to overspend on their budgets this year.

- The cross-party Local Government Association has published analysis ahead of the Chancellors Autumn Statement, showing that inflation has added £15 billion nationally to the cost of delivering council services in just 2 years.
- A survey of 47 local authorities in the SIGOMA group revealed that five are in the process of deciding whether to issue a Section 114 notice and a further nine councils may have to declare bankruptcy next year, with at least 12 other councils across the country also considering issuing a section 114 notice in 23/24.

**This Council also notes:**

- Over the last 13 years of austerity, difficult decisions have been taken to allow this council to pass a legally balanced budget each year. In doing so, funding has been directed to protect frontline statutory services and ensure no resident is left behind – with to date, £14.5m invested in the Residents Support Fund and £32m dedicated to our Council Tax Support Scheme each year.
- Sadly, Brent like authorities up and down the UK, is experiencing an unprecedented demand for housing, driven by spiralling rents, catalysed by high interest rates.
- If demand continues at the same rate, the housing needs service will receive a total of 7,700 applications this financial year, an average of 148 applications every week, the highest it has ever been.
- In the last year, we saw more new homes built in Brent than anywhere else in the country. In contrast Liberal Democrat controlled Richmond, Kingston and Sutton built less than 200 between them.
- Yet our increased supply cannot keep pace with unparalleled demand, with a 22% increase in the number of residents presenting as homelessness, when compared to last year.
- The Chair of the G15 group of major housing associations has said that the capital is now facing the “worst situation” in regards to housing, ever seen. With inflation in the construction sector running at between 25% and 43% many major projects will need to be paused to await more favourable economic conditions.
- The seriousness of the Council’s financial position cannot be understated. Fulfilling our statutory duty to support those at risk of homelessness has driven a potential overspend estimated by officers at £13m.
- As a result, we are bringing in additional spending controls across the council to help balance our budget this year. These sensible, proactive and prudent

measures will ensure vital services are safeguarded at the same time as protecting our financial position.

**This Council believes:**

- Austerity was always a political choice not an economic necessity.
- The government should be held accountable for its role in every Section 114 notice issued by councils of all political colours across the country.
- It is the essential role of all Councillors to set a balanced budget, which ensures the long-term sustainability of this council.

**This Council welcomes:**

- The recommendations of Labour's Commission on the UK's future, chaired by Gordon Brown, setting out a plan for what Labour would do for local government – bringing decisions closer to the people affected by them; and with longer-term financial settlements, moving away from a model of ad-hoc bidding for funding pots.
- The Leader of the Labour Party's recent comments outlining how a Labour government would fix how councils are funded and move away from short-term funding settlements. In contrast, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said "it was up to councils to manage their own finances".

**This Council resolves:**

- 1) To request that the Leaders of all Group's should write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and call on the government to take responsibility for providing the long-term sustainable funding that councils so desperately need.
- 2) To ensure that budget proposals taken by Brent Council prioritise the protection of frontline services and the support available to residents most in need.
- 3) To support London Councils five-point plan to address the housing crisis in the capital:
  - Raising Local Housing Allowance (LHA)
  - Supporting councils to buy accommodation sold by private landlords
  - Boost Homelessness Prevention Grant funding
  - Increase Discretionary Housing Payments
  - Bring forward a cross-departmental strategy to reduce homelessness."

**17.4 4<sup>th</sup> Motion (Labour Group) – Lift the Ban**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Moeen to move the second and final motion submitted by the Labour Group. In moving the motion Councillor Moeen, began by highlighting the collective effort being coordinated through the "Lift the Ban" coalition in advocating for the right to work for people seeking asylum in the UK who

were currently prohibited from doing so whilst awaiting a decision on their asylum applications. Highlighting the impact of the ban in restricting the ability of those affected to support not only themselves and their families but also in undermining their dignity and self-worth the approach was also seen as detrimental towards society and the economy as a whole, given it denied those same individuals the ability to contribute and share their skills, knowledge, and potential which would not only enhance integration and provide a sense of purpose but also help alleviate the associated burden on public funds.

In addition, Councillor Moeen advised that the motion sought to recognise how lifting the ban would align with the UK's commitment to human rights and international obligations in terms satisfying the right to work and free choice of employment which she felt were principles to be recognised, in addition to the concept of equality, fairness, and the empowerment of all individuals regardless of their background or immigration status, in supporting a fair and inclusive society. As such, she ended by commending the motion to all members in support of the solution being sought by the "Lift the Ban" coalition in seeking to stand up to inequality and grant people seeking asylum the right to work after a maximum waiting period of six months.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Moeen for moving the motion before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson opened the debate by expressing concern at the Government's current stance towards Asylum Seekers and prolonged delay in tackling the backlog of asylum applications directly impacting on the dignity and right to work of those affected and the contribution they were able to make not only in terms of supporting themselves and their families but also in terms of their health, wellbeing and broader contribution and integration towards society. Highlighting Brent's proud history of embracing individuals seeking safety and recognising and valuing the diverse nature of communities who had settled within the borough, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson advised that she welcomed the motion which she hoped all members would support.

Echoing the comments previously made, Councillor Nerva also spoke in support of the motion highlighting the valuable contribution he felt those seeking asylum could make in areas such as the health and social care sector if they were able to contribute and share their knowledge, skills, resilience and potential rather than being denied the opportunity to work by the government.

As further contributions in support of the motion, Councillor Ahmadi-Moghaddam in outlining concern at what he felt to be the unacceptable way in which Asylum Seekers were being treated by the government commended the efforts being made by charities and other organisations such as the "Lift the Ban" coalition to champion the rights of those seeking refuge within the UK in order to promote integration and avoid those individuals falling into impoverishment, isolation and exploitation with the need to address the recent damaging rhetoric of individuals within the government also highlighted. These concerns were also supported by Councillor Ethapemi, who queried the stance being taken by the government in seeking to challenge international law and longstanding commitments and obligations contained within the Human Rights Convention as a result of its Rwandan policy

and lack of what he felt was any credible and compassionate alternative immigration policy.

As a final contribution, Councillor Kansagra advised that whilst commending the sentiment behind the motion and keen to welcome and support those genuinely seeking refuge he also felt there was a need to recognise the need for the asylum process to be properly managed and shared across the international community.

As there were no other members who had indicated they wished to speak and in view of the remaining time available within the block allocated for the motions, the Mayor then invited Councillor Moeen to exercise her right of reply who, in closing the debate, once again urged all members to support the motion and campaign by the "Lift the Ban" coalition. Recognising the comments made during the debate she ended by calling on members to be guided by their compassion, empathy, and fairness in seeking to champion the rights of people seeking asylum, promote integration, and foster a more inclusive society as a way of securing a brighter future for all.

Having once again thanked all members for their contributions, the Mayor then put the motion, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

**"Lift the Ban**

**This Council notes that:**

- Brent has a proud history of embracing individuals seeking safety within our borough. Our diverse community of communities has contributed to the values which make Brent the open and welcoming borough it is today.
- The Conservative Government's attitude towards asylum seekers is unacceptable. It seeks to demonise families who have come to the UK for safety and a better life. This is reflected in both the UK-Rwanda partnership, which will criminalise refugees and threaten them with removal to Rwanda. It is also seen in the recent rhetoric of the Home Secretary who has said that multiculturalism has "failed".
- The government's approach can be seen in the significant problems with the UK asylum system, with over 700 individuals residing indefinitely in hotels in Brent while awaiting the outcome of their application to remain. There is a record backlog of cases awaiting a decision alongside a de facto ban on working, all of which leads to a circle of impoverishment.
- Since 2002, people seeking asylum have only been able to apply for the right to work after they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for over a year, and only if they can be employed into one of the narrow, highly-skilled professions included on the government's Shortage Occupation List.

- That people seeking asylum are left to live on £5.39 per day, struggling to support themselves and their families, and left vulnerable to destitution, isolation, and exploitation.
- The potential for economic gain of millions of pounds to the UK via increased taxable income and reduced payments of accommodation and subsistence support is foregone.

**This Council believes that:**

- The Home Secretary's view that multiculturalism has failed is an insult to the residents that have built their lives in Brent and contributed to this borough.
- People seeking asylum want to be able to work so that they can use their skills and make the most of their potential, integrate into their communities, and provide for themselves and their families.
- Restrictions on the right to work can lead to extremely poor mental health outcomes, a waste of potentially invaluable talents and skills for the economy, and greater poverty and homelessness in Brent.
- Allowing people seeking asylum the right to work would therefore lead to positive outcomes for the local and national economy.
- The UK needs an asylum system that empowers people seeking safety to rebuild their lives and enables communities to welcome them, not to isolate them.

**This Council therefore resolves to:**

- 1) Join the Lift the Ban Coalition (led by refugee action), which is campaigning to restore the right to work for everyone waiting for more than 6 months for a decision on their asylum claim.
- 2) Request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Home Secretary to request that:
  - People seeking asylum and the right to work should be unconstrained by the shortage occupation list, after they have waited six months for a decision on their initial asylum claim or further submission.
  - The Home Office work with local authorities and communities to build a refugee protection system that treats all people with dignity and compassion.
  - Financial support be made available for councils like Brent, that will have more refugees that require wraparound support with housing, upon being awarded the right to remain.
  - The Home Secretary apologise for describing rough sleeping as a "lifestyle choice." There are at least 1.5 million people residing in the UK

that have no recourse to public funds, many facing homelessness and many whose visa status has not been determined.”

18. **Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items of business raised at the meeting so the Mayor, in closing the meeting, thanked all members for their co-operation and support and advised that she looked forward to seeing everyone again in person at the next Full Council which would be the budget setting meeting on Thursday 29 February 2024.

The meeting closed at 8.36 pm

COUNCILLOR ORLEEN HYLTON  
Mayor