



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Minutes of the ORDINARY (BUDGET SETTING) MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Thursday 29 February 2024
at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Orleen Hylton

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Tariq Dar MBE

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Afzal
Agha	Ahmadi Moghaddam
Ahmed	Akram
Bajwa	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	Mahmood
Matin	Maurice
Miller	Mistry
Mitchell	Moeen
Molloy	Nerva
Mili Patel	Rajan-Seelan
Rubin	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. **Mayors Statement - Order of Business**

Before consideration of the formal agenda, the Mayor informed members of a change to the order of business. Given the attendance of Sophia Brown (Grant Thornton) as the Council's External Audit Partner for the External Audit Annual Report, she advised of the intention to move that report (listed as Item 7 on the agenda) so it was considered in advance of the main Budget and Council Tax debate.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- (1) The business to be considered at the meeting be re-arranged in the following order:
 - Agenda Item 6 – Auditors Annual Report on the London Borough of Brent
- (2) The remaining items of business to then follow in the same order as listed on the agenda.

(2) **Procedural Motion - Conduct of Business**

The Mayor advised that as this meeting had been designated as the Council's formal budget and Council Tax setting meeting, she would be inviting Councillor Crabb (as the Majority Group Chief Whip) to move a procedural motion, in accordance with Standing Orders, relating to the conduct of the debate on the budget report. Prior to the motion being moved Debra Norman (Corporate Director Governance) clarified the position regarding the vote on any alternative budget proposals moved during the debate, which the procedural motion was seeking to consider as an individual block rather than vote on as separate proposals. Should members require any individual proposals to be voted on separately at the end of the budget debate they were advised this would require them to vote against the procedural motion.

Having noted the advice provided, it was **RESOLVED** (on being put to the vote with all Liberal Democrats members voting against) that the following procedural motion be agreed:

- (1) That the Leader of the Council be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes in presenting the report to the meeting and setting out the Cabinet's proposals for the budget, after which, the following arrangements be agreed for the purpose of debating and voting upon the Budget and Council Tax:
 - (a) The Leader of the Conservative Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals;

- (b) The Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals for up to 10 minutes;
 - (c) The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes;
 - (d) The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes;
 - (e) A general debate follow during which the usual rules for debate will apply as set out in Standing Orders (save as set out in this procedural motion);
- (2) At the end of the general debate, the Leader of the Council be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes to submit his closing remarks.
- (3) Following the close of the debate, recorded votes on any amendments to the budget proposals and then the final substantive budget proposals be taken in turn with the recommendations taken on a block basis.

4. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Begum, Jayanti Patel and Shah.

5. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous Council meeting held on Monday 20 November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(3) **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

7. **Mayor's Announcements (including any petitions received)**

The Mayor made the following announcements:

(i) Kings New Years Honours List

The Mayor began her announcements by congratulating all those associated with Brent who had received an honour in the Kings New Year Honours list for 2024.

Members congratulated all those who had been honoured for their awards.

(ii) Holocaust & Genocide Memorial Day

The Mayor advised members that January had included the commemoration event for this year's Holocaust & Genocide Memorial Day with the theme focussed on the "Fragility of Freedom".

In reflecting on the nature of the human tragedy involved, the Mayor urged everyone to consider the lessons learnt in allowing hate and discrimination to be tolerated and how these could be used to stand against all forms of discrimination in order to prevent such atrocities from happening again in the future. Thanks were extended to all those involved in organising the event.

(iii) New Years Day Parade

Despite the cold weather, the Mayor advised that she has been pleased to attend the London New Years Day parade. Special praise was given to Mahogany in Harlesden who had represented Brent in the parade and, the Mayor was delighted to inform members, had achieved 2nd place in the parade event resulting in a £10,000 contribution being awarded to her charities.

(iv) 100th Birthday Celebration

The Mayor advised she had been pleased to join Mrs Mary “Mama” Thomas, a local Brent resident, in celebrating her 106th birthday. In celebrating this achievement all members joined the Mayor in wishing Mrs Thomas a happy 106th birthday.

(v) Death of Former Councillor Ramesh Patel

The Mayor informed members that it was with regret she had to end her announcements with sad news about the death of former Mayor and Councillor Ramesh Patel.

Recognising that many councillors would have known and worked with former Councillor Ramesh Patel during his time serving on the Council, the Mayor took the opportunity to pay tribute to his dedication and commitment as a representative of Brent and the communities he served for which, she felt, he would always be remembered. Speaking on behalf of the Council, the Mayor highlighted how much Ramesh would be missed by all those who knew him.

Given there were a number of members who had indicated they would also like the opportunity to pay personal tribute and commemorate him the Mayor advised she would be happy to provide an opportunity for other members to do so at this stage in proceedings with the following comments made:

In opening the tributes, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) began by highlighting the role former Councillor Patel had played in supporting and mentoring him when he had first joined the Council and took the opportunity to praise his honesty and integrity, especially during his time serving on the Planning Committee. Whilst aware that both Ramesh and his wife had been challenged by deteriorating health over the last few years Councillor M. Butt felt this had not dampened his warmth, determination and spirit, which were traits that would always be remembered, and he ended by offering his personal condolences to Ramesh’s family, who were welcomed as guests to the meeting.

Following on, Councillor Kabir also took the opportunity to offer her personal condolences to Ramesh’s family, highlighting his dedication, passion and commitment to the social values he had demonstrated as a keen trade unionist and been so keen to share in supporting and mentoring other members and the

local community he represented. Referring to the personal support she had also received, Councillor Kabir highlighted how much he would be missed not only by his children and family but also herself and many other colleagues on the Council.

In echoing the tributes previously made, Councillor Mistry also took the opportunity to recognise the kind, warm and supportive nature displayed by Ramesh, particularly in his role as a community leader and local ward councillor in Queensbury. She also took the opportunity to offer her condolences to Ramesh's family on their loss which she pointed out would also be felt across the local community.

Councillor Afzal, again echoing the previous comments made, also paid tribute to former Councillor Patel noting how it had been Ramesh who had first encouraged him to stand as a councillor. In highlighting his passion and commitment for the values he represented Councillor Afzal ended by commemorating Ramesh's life and all he had done for the borough.

Councillor Gbajumo also spoke in tribute to former Councillor Patel, recognising his warm and kind nature and legacy created with the local community he served and also ended by expressing her deepest condolences to his family for their sad loss.

As a former Mayor, Councillor Mahmood, also paid tribute to former Councillor Patel remembering his bright, kind and helpful nature and recalling the support and guidance he had provided during his time as Mayor, for which he would always be grateful. Once again, the opportunity was taken to pass on deepest sympathy to Ramesh's family for their loss.

In concluding the tributes, Councillor Chohan reflected on the previous comments made and how much Ramesh would be missed as a colleague, friend and in terms of the passion he had shown for the work undertaken across the communities he had work with. In recognising his, fairness, honesty and commitment to the values he had represented, Councillor Chohan ended by also offering his deepest sympathy and condolences to Ramesh's family.

Having thanked all councillors who had contributed for their kind tributes the Mayor ended by expressing the Council's sincere condolences to Ramesh's family and inviting all members to join her in observing a period of silence in memory and honour of former Councillor Ramesh Patel.

All present at the meeting then stood to join the Mayor in observing a minutes silence.

(vi) 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.

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

The Mayor referred members to the list of changes circulated in relation to appointments to Council Committees, Sub Committees and other bodies.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the following changes in the membership of Committee and Outside Bodies:

Committee Membership

- (1) To note that following her return from maternity leave (with effect from Monday 11 March 2024) the Leader of the Council had reappointed Councillor Mili Patel to resume her role as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform.
- (2) To confirm the appointment of The Venerable Archdeacon Catherine Pickford to fill the vacancy as the Church of England Statutory co-opted member on the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee for a period of 2 years (subject to confirmation of the ongoing appointment at the Annual Council meeting each year).
- (3) Following Councillor Mili Patel's return from maternity leave (with effect from Monday 11 March 2024):
 - (a) To confirm the appointment of Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Farah as a full member on the General Purposes Committee with Councillor Farah to replace the existing vacancy as a substitute member & Councillor Mili Patel to be reappointed as Vice-Chair on the Committee.
 - (b) To confirm the appointment of Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Tatler as a full member on the Health & Wellbeing Board.
 - (c) To note that the Leader of the Council had reappointed Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Tatler as full member and Brent's Chair of the Joint Borough IT Committee Brent, Lewisham & Southwark.
 - (d) To note that the Leader of the Council had appointed Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Knight as a full member on the Barham Park Trust Committee with Councillor Knight to replace the existing vacancy as substitute member.

Outside Bodies:

- (e) To confirm the appointment of Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Tatler as deputy on the London Council's Leaders Committee.
- (f) To note that the Leader of the Council had appointed Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Tatler as deputy on the London Council's Greater London Employment Forum.
- (g) To note that the Leader of the Council had appointed Councillor Mili Patel to replace Councillor Donnelly-Jackson as Brent's full representative on the London Council's Grants Committee with Councillor Donnelly-Jackson appointed as deputy.

9. Auditor's Annual Report on the London Borough of Brent

In accordance with the change in the order of business agreed at the start of the meeting, the Mayor then invited Sophia Brown (Grant Thornton) as the Council's External Auditor Partner to introduce the External Audit 2022-23 Annual Report on Value for Money (VFM).

In introducing the report, Sophia Brown summarised the approach towards the VFM audit and drew Members attention to the positive nature of the process and key findings detailed within the Annual Report. As part of the auditor's work, members were advised that no significant weaknesses had been identified in terms of the Council's VFM arrangements. Whilst a small number of improvement recommendations had been identified, it was pointed out these had been designed to enhance existing processes rather than in response to any weaknesses identified. In commending the report to Council, she once again highlighted the positive outcome of the audit, Council's overall financial sustainability and achievement in being able to complete closure of the 2022-23 Statement of Accounts, with thanks expressed to all those involved in supporting the process.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Tatler, as Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform, to respond to the Annual report on behalf of the Council. In welcoming the report, she felt it important to recognise the positive nature of the independent audit opinion and findings identified in relation to the Council's VFM arrangements, particularly given the Council's challenging budgetary position and significant issues faced in this respect by other local authorities.

Whilst recognising the difficult nature of decisions which had needed to be taken in order to deliver a balanced budget and maintain the Council's financial sustainability, all those involved were thanked for their efforts to ensure the Council was able to continue operating on the basis of a prudent, financially sustainable and resilient approach towards management of its finances. In highlighting the fact that no areas of significant weakness had been identified within the audit findings Councillor Tatler advised she was also pleased to note that the audit had found the Council's approach towards financial planning both over the short and longer term to be based on sound judgement with a good track record in setting and achieving balanced budgets and identifying and responding to financial risks. Confirmation was also provided that the improvement recommendations identified had all been accepted with management responses provided, as detailed within the report.

Highlighting the value of continued collaboration given the ongoing financial and economic uncertainty, Councillor Tatler ended by thanking Sophia Brown and her team along with the Council's finance officers, Councillor Chan and the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee for the diligent work undertaken on the audit.

The Mayor then invited contributions from other members, with the following comments received.

In response to the outline of the audit process provided, Councillor Lorber sought further detail as to whether this had included any review of arrangements for the management and recovery of debt owed to the Council, management of the Council's commercial property portfolio (given specific concerns highlighted relating

to rental yield and collection) and progress on delivery of the Altamira Morland Gardens housing scheme. In responding on the issues raised Sophia Brown advised that the scope of the audit had been focussed on the Council's overall arrangements for delivering Value for Money as prescribed within the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice rather than on the delivery of specific schemes or projects. Whilst again not focussed on specific schemes, an assurance was provided that arrangements for the management of debt and borrowing had been reviewed as part of the audit of the Council's Financial Statements with management of the Council's Property Portfolio and capital projects due to be considered as part of the audit arrangements for 2023-24.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor once again thanked Sophia Brown for her attendance and then put the recommendations in the report to the vote which were declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to note the External Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money as part of the 2022-23 audit of the year end accounts.

10. **Budget and Council Tax 2024 - 2025**

The Mayor then moved on to receive the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources setting out the Council's budget proposals for 2024-25. Included within the report were the results of the budget consultation, scrutiny and equalities processes along with a summary of the overall financial position, risks, issues and uncertainties facing the Council over the medium term.

In accordance with the procedural motion agreed at the start of the meeting, the Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to introduce the report.

Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking members, officers, the public and other stakeholders for their contribution in preparation of the budget. Highlighting that the proposals presented another balanced budget he felt they not only set out a fair and responsible approach but also one that would continue to make a difference for residents across Brent in terms of ensuring no one was left behind.

Recognising the difficult nature of decisions needing to be made in developing the budget proposals and efforts being made to deliver more with less, he felt it important to highlight the ongoing impact of the Government's programme of austerity and funding restrictions imposed on public services, which had resulted in a cumulative impact for Brent totalling approx. £210m worth of cuts over 14 years since 2010. Despite this context, he felt it important to outline the Administration's commitment to continue protecting those services relied on by the most vulnerable in society, recognising the importance of the council's role as a 'forth emergency service' for those most in need.

Reflecting on what might have been possible with sufficient funding, Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined the extent of work undertaken to ensure that the proposals presented for consideration had been subject to detailed consideration and represented a reasoned and rational financial judgement reflecting the careful stewardship of the Council's resources and the difficult and often unpalatable nature of decisions which had needed to be made given increasing levels of

demand. He felt this was best demonstrated in relation to the current housing crisis, which had resulted in increasing levels of homelessness and a reduction in supply of temporary accommodation; the increased reliance on foodbanks and widening of health inequalities being experienced by those living in the most deprived areas under the current Conservative Government with public debt at its highest since they had come to power, increased NHS treatment times, real terms cuts to schools, record highs in child poverty, wage stagnation and poor economic growth coupled with a significant reduction in the welfare state.

Referring to the Chancellor's upcoming budget statement and nature of choices to be made, the Leader felt it important to once again highlight the case in support of retaining the Household Support Fund and in seeking to provide the necessary investment across public services in order to support the action required to tackle the current housing crisis, climate emergency, the disparity between income and wealth, delivering key infrastructure (including the West London Orbital) and resolving the ongoing impact of Brexit and need for reform of local government finance.

In thanking the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for their input into the process and recommendations made as a result, he compared that to the approach taken by both Opposition Groups in terms of the presentation of their alternative budget proposals and risks identified in terms of how they were seeking to fund them in order to avoid ending up in similar positions to other authorities who found themselves on the brink of insolvency and walking a financial tightrope.

Focussing on the alternative budget proposals, Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined his disappointment at what he felt to be the lack of responsible and reasonable alternative proposals submitted which he felt, especially in relation to the Conservative Group, represented the approach being led nationally to distract, divert and blame. Concern was also expressed at what he felt to be the lack of transparency from the Conservative Group in submitting their proposals a day prior to the meeting, limiting the opportunity for detailed scrutiny. In highlighting the work already being undertaken to address the collection of debt, develop the Council's Property Strategy (including management of the Council's commercial property portfolio) concerns were also expressed in relation to the proposed use of the New Homes Bonus and Future Funding Risks reserve as a means of funding a range of the alternative proposals which had been presented and which it was felt would place the future financial resilience of the Council at risk.

Moving on to focus in more detail on the budget proposals set out within the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt was keen to highlight the difference in approach between the Administration and both Opposition Groups in terms of the support provided for local residents in an effort to ensure no one was left behind. Whilst an unwelcome and difficult decision it had, he pointed out, been necessary to propose a 4.99% increase in Council Tax which was now an approach that the current government appeared to expect and he felt further supported the need for reform of local government finance and the way essential support for adult social care was also funded.

Although not seeking to undermine the challenges and difficulties identified and impact of the budget proposals, the Leader also felt it important to recognise the way in which the budget had been designed to improve prosperity and stability in

terms of future access to services. As a result, he was proud to highlight the additional support being provided through the Council Tax Support Scheme for those residents most in need alongside a range of measures within the budget, which had been designed to support and improve the lives of Brent residents. These included:

- Implementation of the landlord licensing scheme designed at tackling rogue landlords and driving up standards across the private rented housing sector;
- Continuing delivery of the programme to provide new safe, secure and affordable homes across the borough;
- Continuing funding support for Brent Start and Brent Works in order to harness the potential of local people and provide opportunities for Brent residents to access education, training, qualifications, skills and employment across the borough;
- Ongoing capital investment to support the extensive programme of regeneration being delivered within the borough alongside improvements to schools and colleges in an effort to drive their continuous improvement;
- The unlocking of £120m of support in relation to the provision of Adult Social Care for those most in need alongside continued investment in leisure services and in supporting residents to lead healthier lifestyles;
- Investment designed to support the Council in terms of delivering its corporate parenting responsibilities and to ensure that those requiring care can receive that within their own communities;
- The provision of £21.6m worth of investment as part of the work being undertaken to keep the boroughs streets clean and support creation of a cleaner and greener Brent whilst also maintaining and seeking to extend the enforcement activity required to tackle illegal fly-tipping.
- The £20m worth of investment provided to support the programme of investment and repairs on Brent's priority roads and pavements designed to keep the borough moving and also support more active forms of travel including walking and cycling.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised that the Administration, in presenting their budget proposals, had recognised and sought to match the realism of the financial challenges faced by the Council with a radical desire to do more in responding to the needs and aspirations of local residents across Brent which would not only protect crucial frontline services but also fuel ambition and deliver opportunities to ensure no one was left behind. On this basis he urged members to oppose the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals and commended the budget, as set out in the report, to all members for approval.

The Mayor thanked the Leader for opening the debate and then invited Councillor Kansagra, as Leader of the Conservative Group, to respond to the budget proposals.

In presenting the alternative proposals, Councillor Kansagra began by challenging the Leaders comments in relation to the transparency of the Conservative Groups proposals, which he pointed out had been submitted within the required timescale and also reflected the more limited support available to them as an Opposition Group. Highlighting the limited reference made to cuts in key frontline services during the Leaders introductory comments, he also felt it important to not only recognise the financial challenges faced by many local authorities, including Brent,

but also the additional package of funding support provided by the Conservative Government as part of its Local Government funding settlement alongside the progress being made in tackling inflation and encouraging economic growth and employment opportunities as part of the process in seeking build a more dynamic and prosperous economy.

As a result, he pointed out that the alternative budget proposals submitted by the Conservative Group had been designed to invest to the borough's towns, protect its greenbelt and deliver on the priorities identified by residents, ending what he felt to be a culture of waste created by the current Administration with the following identified as key recommendations:

- Removal of the landlord incentive scheme. In commenting on this proposal, Councillor Kansagra highlighted the Conservative Groups concern at the impact of the scheme on the housing rental market and at incentivising landlords to provide accommodation for those who ordinarily would have been unable to afford to live in the borough. Given that many ordinary working households had needed to move out of the borough in order to find somewhere affordable to live, he queried the nature of the scheme in seeking to subsidise landlords in this way. Concern was also expressed at the impact of the Landlord Licensing scheme, which it was felt would lead landlords to pass on any increase in costs and further disincentivise them from renting their properties.
- Reversal of the blue sack recycling scheme, recognising the level of concern expressed and reintroduction of the blue recycling bins.
- Increasing the budget for Reactive Highway Maintenance repairs (including potholes and footways) recognising the priority placed on this by local residents with tougher penalties also to be imposed on utility companies for sub-standard road repairs designed to ensure their work met a more rigorous criteria.
- The deletion of two Cabinet Member posts and reversing the planned increase in Special Responsibility Allowances for the Chairs of the Brent Connect Area Consultative Forums given the extent of their role. In presenting this proposal, Councillor Kansagra highlighted the reduction in number of members on the Council and cross over between certain Cabinet Member remits through which it was felt the savings could be achieved.
- The provision of additional investment in street lighting by reversing the current policy of dimming streetlights given the associated safety concerns expressed by local residents.
- The provision of up to 1-hour free parking (on and off street) within town centres across the borough designed to support revival of the high streets and support local businesses and employment opportunities.
- To oppose the increase proposed by the current Administration in General Fund reserves from £18m - £19m for 2024-25 recognising the funding pressures being experienced within many services and previously limited use of reserves, with the funding identified being used, as an alternative, to support the Council's overall revenue budget.
- Seeking to maximise use of available funding within the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) to support community safety initiatives such as CCTV, Enforcement officers, and youth-based activities to prevent knife crime, serious youth violence and school exclusions by engaging, educating, and empowering disadvantaged young people as well as providing

additional funding to support infrastructure improvements, including pavements and roads that would relieve pressure on the capital and revenue budget.

In formally moving the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals, Councillor Kansagra ended by highlighting that the proposals had been assessed as producing a legally balanced budget which he felt would also provide a responsible, commonsense approach in helping to ease the financial burden currently being faced by the Council and experienced by many residents across the borough. In thanking the Corporate Director and Deputy Director of Finance for their assistance, he ended by commending the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals to Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Kansagra for his comments and for moving the alternative budget proposals on behalf of the Conservative Group. She then invited Councillor Georgiou, as Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group, to move the alternative budget proposals submitted on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group.

In presenting the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals, Councillor Georgiou began by thanking the Corporate Director and Deputy Director of Finance for their assistance in developing a set of proposals designed to provide a balanced and realistic budget which it was felt would enhance the offer from the Council to local residents without the need to remove much needed support for the most vulnerable in society. The concerns previously expressed at the challenging nature of the financial pressures faced by the Council were also supported by Councillor Georgiou, which he felt involved a combination of factors such as the significant underfunding of local authorities, Brexit, and the economic mismanagement of the current Conservative Government but had been further compounded by spending decision taken by the current Council Administration, such as those related to Civic Centre improvements and the pursuit of what he regarded as unviable development schemes including the Altamira Project in Stonebridge.

Whilst recognising the need for difficult decisions in order to provide a balanced and sustainable budget, Councillor Georgiou advised he was keen to ensure that residents priorities were at the forefront of the budget proposals being considered, with the Liberal Democrats Group having therefore proposed ten amendments seeking to address areas of ongoing concern including street cleanliness, youth provision and the climate emergency which he was keen to ensure members had the opportunity to consider and vote upon individually as part of a balanced and fully costed package of measures. He then moved on to outline the key budget proposals recommended by Liberal Democrats Group as follows:

- Reflecting on concerns relating to street cleanliness and changes in the street cleaning and refuse collection service an increase of £500k was proposed in the street cleansing budget in order to reinstate weekly visits and daily street cleaning that were within 50 metres of a junction with busy shopping areas/high streets; the provision of wheelie bins for segregated recycling where requested by residents and conversion of blue topped bins for cardboard and paper recycling and the smaller wheelie bin for use for other recyclable materials; an increase in enforcement activity by establishing an invest to save pilot with teams targeting dumping, drinking and paan spitting hotspots and issuing on the spot Fixed Penalty Notices along with provision of more dual

- litter/ recycling bins and the establishment of a monthly cleaning service for all street bins.
- An increase in the capital budget provision for highways and footways upgrades and repairs with £2m of this to be allocated to regular preventative maintenance works to extend the life of existing road surfaces and to provide additional flexibility to target pavements and roads surfaces not properly reinstated following works by utility companies based on the negotiation of financial contributions towards the upgrade works.
 - Recognising the impact of the current overspend on the Council's finances in relation to the supply and cost pressures relating to temporary accommodation, to increase the provision of more genuinely affordable housing involving the introduction of more stringent planning strategies and a 50% target in relation to the provision of affordable housing within all new developments (once the current economic climate and associated impact on viability had improved) and through the targeting of underoccupied properties by providing suitable replacements in the right location to meet specific needs.
 - Whilst recognising that Brent had been one of the first local authorities to declare a climate emergency, disappointment was expressed at the progress in meeting the commitments made and in seeking to achieve Carbon Neutrality which was now unlikely to be met by the initial target date of 2030. In order to maintain progress, the Liberal Democrats were proposing, as part of an approach towards encouraging more active forms of travel, to work with Brent Cyclists and other local groups in seeking to allocate investment to develop safe cycle routes within and between growth areas across Brent over a 2-year period. In addition, it was proposed that the Council should immediately divest its Pension Fund from fossil fuel investments whilst also undertaking an assessment of its property portfolio in order to ensure that all public and community buildings were energy efficient, with funding to be allocated for this purpose over a 2-year period.
 - The allocation of £500k to support the protection, maintenance and cleaning of parks and open spaces across the borough, supported by the introduction of segregated cycle lanes in parks and linking routes to parks to ensure the safety of dog walkers and pedestrians. In addition, it was proposed to allocate £1m to support the installation of CCTV in parks and open spaces, particularly in anti-social behaviour hotspot areas with the package of measure designed to ensure parks and open spaces continued to be well utilised by local people in a safe and comfortable environment given the priority placed by residents on access to green spaces and wider environmental and health impacts.
 - The allocation and transfer of £1m from reserves for investment in a new "Youth Offer" provision recognising the negative impact arising from the reduction in funding for youth services and limited youth offer currently available, especially in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour with this focussed in supporting early intervention and work with community groups to bid for funding in order to enhance young people's positive development.
 - Given the increasing demands on Children and Young People and Adult Social Care the Liberal Democrats were also proposing a more co-ordinated approach between Housing, Adult Social Care and Children and Young people services in terms of the provision of housing development schemes designed to support people being able to remain in their own homes and reduce social care spend on high cost residential or supported accommodation placements. The piloting of an invest to save programme

- costing £1 million from the Public Health Reserve was also proposed in order to continue the support of unpaid Carers which would include access to community equipment and home adaptations.
- Supporting the creation of a flexible, freelancer-based service designed to address digital exclusion and assist local people with hands on digital inclusion training through the voluntary sector, paid for by specific grants, with NCIL acting as the prime match-finding source.

Given the proposed increase in Council Tax, Councillor Georgiou felt there was a need for the Council to ensure that as residents were being asked to pay more for services funding was refocussed and prioritised on local areas of concern. In highlighting the additional detail provided within the proposals included as part of the agenda papers, Councillor Georgiou ended by outlining the important role members had in representing residents and local communities, which he felt the budget amendments presented by the Liberal Democrats had been designed to reflect in a balanced and pragmatic way that would enhance the offer from the Council recognising priorities being identified locally. As such he hoped all members would be able to support the amendments outlined and commended the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals to Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Georgiou for his comments and moving the alternative budget proposals on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group and then moved on to invite Councillor Tatler, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform to speak as the next stage in the budget debate.

Councillor Tatler began by highlighting the bleak nature of the economic context within which the Council's budget had needed to be set involving not only the impact arising from the 78% decrease in core government funding for the Council but of the resulting £210m worth of cuts made since the start of austerity and the additional £8m savings which the Council had been required to identify for the coming year and beyond, meaning the funding burden for Council services had remained focussed primarily on Council Tax, Business Rates and Fees and Charges impacting directly on local residents already suffering as a result of the cost of living crisis.

In outlining the seriousness of the Council's current financial position, with specific reference to the increased level of demand and costs related to adult social care and homelessness leading to a current pressure totalling £13m, the Deputy Leader felt it important to highlight that the challenges faced in achieving a balanced budget whilst seeking to preserve essential services reflecting the reality that many other local authorities also faced in being pushed to their financial limits.

In highlighting what she felt had been the Conservative Governments record of economic mismanagement and fact that the Government's provisional financial settlement had failed to meet the severe cost and demand pressures being faced by councils of all political persuasions, concern was also expressed at the Governments approach in seeking to force Councils to implement the maximum permitted increase in Council Tax in order for them to receive their full financial settlement. Moving on to reflect on the difficult nature of the decisions that had needed to be made in setting a balanced budget, Councillor Tatler felt it important to recognise the way the choices made had been designed to support a longer term strategic approach focussed on local growth and investment with the Council

therefore proud to have been able to continue investing in initiatives such as Brent Works and Brent Starts with the aim of enhancing local employment, training and skills opportunities.

In highlighting that the main limit on the Council's ambition remained funding, Councillor Tatler was also keen to assure members of the Administration's ongoing commitment to the building of more affordable homes, tackling the climate emergency and addressing the wider inequalities highlighted by the pandemic albeit operating under the reality of the constraints imposed following a decade of government austerity. As an example of the reality faced, reference was made to the current housing crisis and shortage in supply of affordable housing, which she felt required a more joined approach to address involving regeneration, building and community empowerment with Council's such as Brent seeking to deliver as much supply as possible whilst also having to address financial requirements in relation to the Housing Revenue Account and enhanced building and safety regulations given the reduction in number of new social rented homes delivered under the current Conservative Government. Focussing on Brent, pride was expressed at the Administrations housebuilding record which Councillor Tatler pointed out remained the second highest in London and with £31m allocated in the budget proposals presented for consideration to continue the progress being made in the delivery of new homes by 2028. Recognising the increasing levels of demand, members were also reminded of the further investment which had been committed to raising standards for private renters through the launch of the Council's Landlord Licensing Scheme in order to ensure everyone had the foundation of a safe and secure home.

In terms of social care and wellbeing, whilst recognising the challenges faced in terms of the government's approach towards the NHS and social care reform Councillor Tatler felt it important to highlight the proposals included within the budget providing investment in new school places for children with Special Educational Needs, funding to support Looked After Children during school holidays and for the 4,600 elderly and vulnerable residents in need of care across the borough as well as investment to support health and wellbeing services and leisure facilities across the borough.

In commenting on the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals Councillor Tatler, echoed the concerns expressed by the Leader regarding submission of the Conservative Groups proposals the day prior to the meeting and at what she regarded to be the irresponsible nature of the financial risk arising from the proposed use of reserves to fund temporary projects and associated future revenue costs (without the ability to fund them on an ongoing basis) within both sets of alternative budget proposals presented by the Opposition Groups. Despite highlighting concerns regarding the impact of demand on children's services and relying on the New Homes Bonus to fund their proposals, Councillor Tatler also queried the recent stance taken by the Conservative Group in seeking to challenge the purchase of a new children's care home and of both Opposition Groups in seeking to oppose new developments across the borough which had generated the funds they were now seeking to utilise to deliver their proposals. As a result, in challenging the economic literacy of both sets of alternative budget proposals, the Deputy Leader felt there was a need to recognise the cumulative impact of the current recession and programme of austerity introduced by the Conservative and

Liberal Democrat coalition government, on the Council, wider public sector and local residents rather than seeking to place the blame elsewhere and avoid the difficult longer term decisions that had been required to continue meeting the need and aspirations for residents across the borough.

In criticising the Liberal Democrats Group for their lack of engagement in the scrutiny budget Task Group, Councillor Tatler also felt there was also a need to reflect on the ongoing impact of the Conservative Government's underfunding of local government and the public sector which had left many local authorities with the difficult choice in having to consider increasing Council Tax in order to avoid further financial instability. This approach towards public finances had also been compounded by the lack of longer-term local government financial reform and one-year financial settlements by the government which had severely hampered the Council's ability to plan over the longer-term using its innovative, trusted and productive approach towards delivering change for local communities.

In concluding, Councillor Tatler took the opportunity to thank all residents who had contributed towards the budget consultation process along with the Finance Team and all other officers involved for their efforts and support in preparing the budget proposals. In commending the budget to Council, members were reminded of the detailed consultation and scrutiny which the budget proposals had been subject to, along with the prudent approach adopted by the Administration in order to protect and renew the provision of essential services, growth and investment for residents across the borough on a sustainable and long-term basis designed to ensure no resident was left behind.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Tatler for her comments and as the final contribution prior to opening up the debate then invited Councillor Conneely, as Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, to present the key themes within the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report, which had been included as an appendix to the Budget and Council Tax 2024-25 report.

Councillor Conneely in introducing the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report began by thanking all members of the Task Group and everyone else who had participated in the scrutiny process. In emphasising that the upcoming financial year would be one of the most challenging for local authorities across the country, Councillor Conneely highlighted what she felt to be the need for extensive reform of the current way in which local authorities were funded. Whilst trying to be as objective as possible in their review, it had not been possible for the Task Group to ignore the impact of the Government's programme of austerity over the last decade and piecemeal approach towards the funding of local government which had made it more difficult for local authorities to be able to plan financially. Highlighting concern at the damaging legacy created as a result, specific reference was also made to the impact of the current economic pressures and housing crisis which had exacerbated the financial challenges and uncertainty in which local authorities were having to operate.

In presenting the Task Group report, Councillor Conneely highlighted the extensive nature of the review and recommendations which had been identified in relation to the budget proposals, as detailed within section 2 of their report. In terms of the issues highlighted, particular reference was made to the importance placed on collaboration between neighbouring local authorities, partners and the voluntary

and community sector to not only deliver vital services for residents, but also to counter the competitive environment imposed by discretionary grant funding which positioned councils against each other. This emphasis on collaboration had been reflected in the Task Group recommendations, which included the establishment of a shared outcomes framework with the voluntary and community sector to co-design and co-deliver budget proposals. Furthermore, the Task Group had recommended implementing additional shared service agreements with other local authorities with Councillor Conneely also advising that they had welcomed the decision to retain use of the New Millennium Day Centre, operating under a new shared service arrangement.

Highlighting other key recommendations made as part of the review, Councillor Conneely also referred to the Task Groups support, as part of the wider approach towards addressing the budget challenges identified, for the development of a longer-term strategic and more holistic approach towards income generation including yearly action plans and a robust monitoring process with dedicated cross departmental resource to investigate and identify additional opportunities in areas such as compliance with mandatory Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing, collection of Council Tax on empty properties and Business Rates. Other recommendations highlighted include proposals designed to increase the available of meeting facilities within the Civic Centre for hire and a community impact levy for events taking place at Wembley Stadium.

Whilst recognising the nature of the financial pressures and challenges identified in relation to delivery of the Council's commitments within the climate emergency strategy Councillor Conneely advised that the Task Group had recognised the importance in progress being maintained with the introduction of a green budget also therefore supported in terms of securing the necessary funding.

In thanking all members, officers and other stakeholders who had supported the review and wide variety of engagement undertaken, Councillor Conneely ended by highlighting the need to recognise the cumulative impact of funding cuts across the public sector and local government given the significant and ongoing financial challenges and pressures identified and ability to be able to financially plan and deliver a balanced budget according to demand rather than being driven by the need to manage funding cuts as a result of austerity. On this basis the recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group were commended for consideration as part of the budget setting process.

The Mayor advised that this now concluded the opening statements and thanked Councillor Conneely for her comments. She then moved on to open up the debate on the budget proposals for comment by other members.

In opening the debate, Councillor Knight, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, began by outlining the importance of good quality housing and stability this provided to local communities with concern expressed regarding central government's approach to housing, given their inadequate level of funding provision, current Housing Benefit subsidy arrangements and failure to address supply issues. These various factors were all felt to have contributed to the current housing crisis and increase in homelessness, particularly across London, resulting in the significant additional financial pressures being placed on local authorities, including Brent. Focussing on Brent, members

were reminded that the Council had seen a significant and sustained increase in homelessness presentations, with Councillor Knight highlighting the ongoing work being undertaken to address these additional pressures through the continued provision of much needed affordable housing and efforts being made to secure and safeguard living conditions for existing tenants. Amongst the initiatives highlighted reference was made to implementation of the borough-wide landlord licensing scheme to protect private renters and tackle rogue landlords and ongoing delivery of the new Council homes programme. In concluding, Councillor Knight commended the budget to Council, on the basis the proposals would continue to protect housing services across the borough despite the significant challenges presented.

Other members who spoke on the budget proposals were as follows:

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, was next to speak and also felt it important to recognise the detrimental impact of the substantial funding cuts imposed by central government alongside the current economic position and worsening climate challenges, with residents ultimately bearing most of the burden from these issues. Despite the financial pressures identified, the opportunity was taken to reflect on the programme of work and investment being provided in relation to the boroughs highway infrastructure and to make Brent cleaner and greener. In addition, reference was made to implementation of the new arrangements for household waste collection, recycling and street cleansing which it was felt had delivered positive improvements and were now attracting attention from other local authorities looking to introduce similar initiatives in their respective areas. The opportunity was also taken to highlight the work being undertaken to address fly-tipping and other environmental crime, including support for CCTV provision with funding also provided for continuation of the community skips initiative, as well as the installation of electric vehicle charging points alongside work to maintain and enhance parks and open spaces across the borough, including the planting of trees. Members were also reminded of the work being funded to support the Council's ongoing efforts in tackling the climate emergency, which included expansion of the Green Neighbourhood pilots and work being undertaken to empower residents in support of the Council being able to achieve its commitments towards net zero. In commending the budget proposals to Council, Councillor Krupa Sheth ended by thanking all members and officers involved for their support in delivering the commitments outlined which had been designed to protect residents and maintain vital service provision both now and over the longer term.

Speaking in support of the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals, Councillor Maurice expressed concern at the ongoing impact of the proposed maximum increase in Council Tax in view of the additional financial burden placed on local residents. Whilst subject to year on year increase (including the precept set by the Mayor of London), Councillor Maurice also felt it important to challenge the use and impact of the funding given concerns identified in relation to the state of the boroughs road network, high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour and expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (which was not felt to have achieved its goal in seeking to improve air quality) and had resulted in residents feeling ignored and let down. Concern was also highlighted in relation to the impact arising from introduction of the Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme, efforts being made to bring empty or underutilised properties back into use and process undertaken when

seeking to place tenants in out of borough accommodation. As a result, he advised he would be voting against the budget proposals moved by the Leader and in support of the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals which he commended on the basis of them seeking to reduce the financial burden on local residents.

Councillor Mistry then spoke, also in support of the Conservative Group amendments to the budget proposals, which she felt would result in local residents having to pay less for better value service provision. Rather than seeking to blame central government for the challenges faced, she felt the Administration needed to recognise the measures the Conservative government had introduced to increase financial support available for local residents which had included a percentage increase in the financial settlement for the Council, reduction in the overall tax burden, increase in the National Living Wage and introduced up to 30 hours of free child care. Opposition was also expressed to the proposed uplift in Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairs of the Brent Connect Area Consultative Forums with Councillor Mistry also keen to support (as a means of addressing the current pressures in demand on housing supply) the efforts being made to bring empty or underutilised properties back into use. As a final issue, she advised the Conservative Group had also identified a need to consider the way in which Housing Benefit, Single Person and Council Tax Discount claims were being managed alongside the process for collection of debts and overpayments and on the basis of the comments outlined also commended the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals for approval.

Moving on, Councillor Mili Patel then spoke thanking members and officers for their work in formulating the budget and paying tribute to Councillor Tatler for the support in covering her portfolio as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform whilst she remained on maternity leave. Reminding members of the context in which the budget had needed to be set, Councillor Mili Patel felt it important to recognise the impact of austerity alongside the government's mismanagement of the economy and ongoing challenges created by Brexit. Highlighting a need for change she felt this was something the Labour Party would be able to deliver through its plans for improved economic stability, investment in green energy and the NHS. In expressing her support for the budget Councillor Mili Patel ended by thanking all officers and members for their continued work to support Brent residents despite the challenging financial climate, and in welcoming an opportunity for change nationally, advised she was also pleased to commend the budget proposals, as moved by the Leader, for approval.

Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Adult Social Care, also speaking in support of the budget proposals, opened his comments by expressing concern at the way in which he felt the current Conservative Government had overseen a deterioration in adult social care and widening of health inequalities during their time in power, pointing out that the Council's budget having been prepared in the context of an 11.6% increase in adult social care demand over previous years. In commending the work being undertaken across Brent's Adult Social Care service to address these issues, he also highlighted the way in which views expressed during the budget consultation process had been used to help shape the final proposals including retention of the New Millennium Day Centre via a new multi-service model alongside the Community Wellbeing Project. Highlighting the work also being undertaken to enhance the recruitment and retention of social

workers, ensure all care providers commissioned by the Council offered the London Living Wage, deliver health prevention and awareness initiatives and to support hospital discharge and independent living with the aim of enabling more residents to be cared for at home, Councillor Nerva was keen to thank all health & care staff, including carers, for their excellent work in such challenging circumstances. In comparing the approach being taken by the Council with the lack of action by the Government in seeking to address the challenges identified in relation to the funding and provision Adult Social Care (including the difficulty in being able to plan and operate under one-year funding settlements) he also ended by urging members to support the budget proposals moved by the Leader.

Councillor Afzal, as initial context to his comments on the budget, began by highlighting his concern and frustration at the financial challenges faced by Brent as a result of what he felt had been central government's continued programme of austerity and underfunding of vital public services, poor handling of the economy and indifferent approach to the most vulnerable members of society. Despite the significant challenges faced and £210m worth of cumulative budget cuts already delivered, he felt it important to recognise how hard the Council had worked to fill the gaps created in order to safeguard and support residents expressing concern at the direction in which he felt the country as a whole was heading under the current government with reference to the increasing reliance of residents on foodbanks, decrease in job security, unsustainable level of rents fuelling the housing crisis, increasing levels of poverty, stagnation of wages, underfunding of schools, the NHS and care provision and divisions within society increasing with more incidents of islamophobia and antisemitism. In contrasting this with the Government's focus in reducing the tax burden for the wealthy, the impact of the UK's support and involvement in foreign conflicts and deregulation of the finance sector, Councillor Afzal felt it was time for a change with the prudent and compassionate approach adopted by the Labour Administration (despite the constraint in resources) in seeking to safeguard and support local residents and those more vulnerable members of society, highlighted as a basis for his support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader.

Following on from this contribution, Councillor Kansagra raised a point of order in relation to comments made during the previous speech on the impact of the UK Governments support and involvement in foreign conflicts, which he felt were not in keeping with the standard of conduct required during the debate and should therefore be withdrawn. In response, Councillor Afzal advised that as he supported the views expressed he did not feel he could withdraw the comment made with Councillor Kansagra therefore advising he would seek to pursue the matter outside of the meeting.

The Mayor then moved on, with Councillor Ahmed speaking in support of the budget proposals particularly in view of the challenges created as a result of the financial pressures faced across local government. Having expressed his appreciation for the work being undertaken across the Council to safeguard and protect residents, Councillor Ahmed advised he was proud to be able to support a budget focussed on ensuring no one was left behind and also took the opportunity to highlight and commend the work on development of the Staples Corner Masterplan which he felt would bring much needed regeneration and benefits within his ward and across that part of the borough as a whole.

Councillor Ethapemi then spoke and once again highlighted what he felt to be the damage being caused by central government's programme of austerity and underfunding of local government and other public services with a record number of food bank users and the acute housing shortage, which councils across the country were working hard to rectify and address. In outlining the difficulties in seeking to produce a balanced budget in such circumstances, Councillor Ethapemi felt that the Administration should be commended for delivering what he felt to be a financially responsible, prudent and workable budget and in closing commended the budget proposals moved by the Leader for their effective management of the limited resources available, which he felt was in contrast to the alternative proposals moved by both Opposition Groups.

Councillor S. Butt, in supporting the budget proposals, also began by thanking all those involved for their work in being able to produce a balanced budget in such challenging circumstances which also sought to protect the most vulnerable and ensure no one was left behind. Highlighting the Council's achievements and ongoing efforts in seeking to continue the delivery of affordable housing across the borough he felt it important to contrast the approach taken by previous Labour Government's in seeking to introduce the minimum and London Living Wage, reduce NHS waiting times and introduce Working Tax Credits with that of the current Conservative Government and their programme of austerity, supported by the Liberal Democrats when in coalition, given its significant impact on public services and funding for local authorities, including Brent. In ending, Councillor S. Butt also expressed concern at the proposed use of reserves and the New Home Bonus proposed by both Opposition Groups as a means of funding their alternative budget proposals, which he felt would be financially irresponsible in terms of the associated risks.

In contributing to the debate, Councillor Molloy also took the opportunity to express his support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader and to challenge members about what more they could do individually to address the financial pressures under which the Council was continuing to operate. This included the use of local knowledge to identify potential underutilised or empty properties and support the collection of Council Tax as supporting implementation of the Landlord Licensing Scheme and in enforcement activity related to illegal parking and fly-tipping. In concluding, he encouraged members to consider how best they could support the development of income generation and revenue sources designed to enhance the Council's overall financial position.

Councillor Choudry, in supporting the budget proposals, commended the balanced nature of the proposals and their approach in seeking to protect the most vulnerable, particularly given the significant reduction in the Council's core funding due to austerity and diminishing local government financial settlements. Concern was highlighted in relation to what he regarded as an overreliance within the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals on the use of reserves given the unsustainable nature of this as an approach. In praising the Administrations continued commitment towards the Council Tax and Resident Support Funds he felt this demonstrated the type of empathy required in seeking to support those most in need through such challenging times. In recognising austerity as a political choice and the difficult nature of options needing to be considered, he confirmed he would also be supporting the budget as moved by the Leader, highlighting the protection

the proposals would continue to provide for the most vulnerable and their progressive, pragmatic and sustainable nature.

Councillor Johnson then spoke, referring to his role as Chair of the Brent Pension Fund Sub-Committee. As an example of the prudent approach adopted by the Administration to management of the Council's finances, he advised members of the outcome of the Fund's triennial valuation which had been completed during the year and had concluded that the health of the Fund had significantly improved. In comparing this with the approach adopted by the current Conservative government he urged both Opposition Groups to join the Council in lobbying for an end to austerity and for a sustainable and long-term increase in local government core funding to address the key priorities identified, including the backlog in highway maintenance and repairs. In commending the approach adopted within the budget in terms of its focus in putting residents first and continuing to support communities during the cost-of-living crisis and following the pandemic, he also expressed concern at the proposed use of reserves and the New Homes Bonus to fund the alternative budget proposals moved by both Opposition Groups and as a result advised he would be opposing these and supporting the budget proposals as originally moved.

Councillor Kabir, in supporting the budget proposals, began by thanking all those involved for their work in being able to produce a balanced budget in such challenging circumstances. Taking the opportunity to focus on proposals relating to children and young people she felt it important to recognise the support required and being provided to assist young people in seeking to improve their life chances and realise their aspirations. In referencing the Council's SEND priorities 2021-25, Councillor Kabir welcomed the additional SEN school places being delivered alongside the provision of Post 16 provision but, as chair of The Village School Governing Body, acknowledged the increased support needed by families in terms of both respite care and housing. Despite the significant financial challenges identified, Councillor Kabir was pleased to recognise the way in which the budget proposals had sought to protect services for the most vulnerable and on this basis advised she was proud to comment the budget proposals, as moved, to members for approval.

Councillor Hack, highlighting the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and austerity in forcing many more families into hardship and poverty also expressed concern at what he felt to be the failed approach of the current Conservative Government. In contrast, he was pleased to support the Labour Administrations approach in seeking to fight for the improvement of public services and to tackle poverty with the Council having adopted a more progressive approach towards tackling austerity, racism and in seeking to build a fairer society that ended injustice and neglect in addition to preserving and protecting the NHS. In recognising the way in which he felt the budget moved by the Leader sought to mitigate against the challenges created by the Conservative Government and support those most vulnerable, including families and young people in building for the future, Councillor Hack advised he would also be supporting the proposals as moved.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Culture, in echoing concerns previously highlighted in relation to the impact of austerity, cost-of-living crisis and Government's approach towards the funding of local government and public services, felt it important to reiterate the

core values on which development of the Councils budget proposals had been based in terms of fairness and supporting those most in need. Recognising the way in which support provided through the Brent Hubs and Customer Access Team offered a safety net and lifeline to those struggling as a result of current economic pressures, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson criticised central government for their management of the economy, welfare reforms and ongoing programme of austerity given the impact on public finances and the need to deliver such significant levels of cuts across local government whilst also having no option but to increase Council Tax. Concern was also expressed at the lack of clarity concerning future of the Household Support Fund, given the assistance this had provided to those most in need. Turning to the funding commitments within the Council's budget, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson felt it important to highlight the continued support being provided for the Resident Support Fund and Council Tax Support Scheme along with the ongoing programme of investment in the boroughs libraries and Brent Hubs as well as towards the ongoing provision for cultural activities and grant support for community projects designed to enhance partnership working and empower local communities to further improve their neighbourhoods. Reflecting on previous comments made, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson also highlighted the changes recently agreed to the way in which Council Tax premium would be levied on empty properties and whilst recognising the difficult nature of choices required, also commended the budget proposals to members given the ongoing commitment she felt they represented in terms of supporting and protecting residents and in ensuring no one was left behind.

Moving on, Councillor Lorber then spoke to highlight his support for the alternative budget proposals moved on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group, which he felt presented both a balanced and affordable series of amendments to the proposals moved by the Leader. In querying whether any change in government would lead to an immediate provision of additional funding to support local government given the nature of the national economic challenges faced, he outlined how the amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrats Group had been designed to address what he felt was the reality of the financial position focused on the priorities being identified by local residents rather than just seeking to blame austerity. In terms of specific priorities, reference was made to management of the Council's property portfolio including rent reviews and collection of rental income, the provision of additional investment to support highway and footway maintenance as well as to address concerns relating to the new arrangements for street cleansing, household waste collection and recycling (including the blue bag scheme) and in relation to progress in tackling environmental issues and promoting more active forms of travel such as segregated cycling lanes. In commending the alternative proposals moved by the Liberal Democrats Group Councillor Lorber ended by highlighting what he felt had been the reasonable approach adopted given concerns being expressed by residents relating to the level of services being provided locally, with the proposals assessed as affordable and providing a legally balanced budget.

As a further contribution to the debate, Councillor Collymore also spoke to highlight her concern at the extent and impact of financial hardship currently being faced by many residents across the borough which she had witnessed in her role as a community health educator. In welcoming the equity, diversity and inclusion considerations which had supported development of the budget proposals Councillor Collymore thanked all those involved for their efforts in seeking to ensure

the proposals avoided discriminating against individuals in order to support those in genuine need with fairness and equity remaining core principles and, on this basis, advised she would also be supporting the budget, as moved by the Leader.

Councillor Kennelly, also expressing his support for the budget proposals, felt it important to recognise the way in which they had been designed to stand up for local residents and maintain the provision of essential local services despite the ongoing funding restrictions imposed by central government and ongoing impact of austerity, and the cost-of-living crisis. Referring specifically to the need for reform of local government finance and the end of single year financial settlements, he commended what he felt to be the progressive and forward-thinking nature of the budget proposals moved by the Leader especially in terms of the investment being provided to tackle the climate emergency and improve air quality through a neighbourhood ward-based approach and through initiatives such as the School Streets programme. Support was also expressed for continuation of the Household Support Fund and free school meal programme in addition to the need identified for a borough wide review of rental and leasing arrangements across the private rented sector.

In thanking everyone who had contributed to development of the budget proposals, including Brent Renters Union, Councillor Ahmadi Moghaddam echoed the concerns previously expressed by members regarding the impact of the current housing crisis recognising the specific financial hardship and issues for tenants in the private rented sector as one of the largest demographics in Brent. In welcoming introduction of the borough wide landlord Licensing Scheme, it was felt this would assist in terms of providing additional safeguards for tenants and improving living standards across the private rental sector, which was deemed crucial in terms of providing access to safe and secure homes. Looking forward, Councillor Ahmadi Moghaddam also welcomed the upcoming Private Rented Sector Fair as a means of encouraging further engagement with the sector and in emphasising the need for change he called for an end to austerity and reform of the housing sector recognising the challenges created through the Right to Buy programme and cuts in funding and need for proper government investment in a social house building programme. Recognising the efforts and investment being provided by the Council in this respect he also commended the budget, as moved by the Leader to members for support.

As the next speaker, Councillor Moeen, also expressed her support for the budget and praised the aspirations of the Labour Administration in seeking to support growth, local residents and maintain local services despite the financial challenges created through the Conservative Government's approach towards austerity and in managing the cost-of-living crisis. Amongst the commitments highlighted the support provided in relation to the creation of employment opportunities, training, skills and economic regeneration (including support to small business and fair labour practices), youth and social and health care, provision of additional SEN school places, delivery of affordable housing along with the efforts being made to enhance community cohesion and tackle inequality were commended as a means of addressing the gaps identified in response to the budget cuts imposed by Central Government. In commending the proposals to members, she highlighted her pride at being part of an Administration seeking to protect and provide a more inclusive and prosperous future for all in Brent with concern also expressed at the way in

which governments proposals relating to free childcare were being funded and implemented, given their impact on providers across the sector.

In recognising and praising the values and work being undertaken by community groups across the borough, Councillor Dixon expressed support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader, which she felt best reflected the priorities being expressed by local residents. In looking back upon the pandemic, Councillor Dixon praised health care staff who had worked tirelessly to protect residents despite the approach taken by central government which had been highlighted during the covid inquiry. Praise was also extended for the support provided by the Council in tackling the pandemic, including the establishment of vaccination centres, provision of PPE and work with local community groups to support vulnerable residents, which again was felt to be in direct contrast to the approach adopted by the Conservative Government. Whilst forced to make a number of tough decisions in seeking to set a balanced budget and reiterating the challenges created in terms of financial planning around the provision of single year financial settlements, Councillor Dixon welcomed the efforts being made by the Council to manage the limited resources available as responsibly and diligently as possible, including the provision of a new residential children's care facility in the borough which she reminded members the Conservative Group had sought to challenge. In concluding, Councillor Dixon advised that she would also be voting in support of the budget proposals, emphasising the moral responsibility under which she felt the Council were acting in order to ensure no one was left behind.

Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, then spoke to highlight the extent of the financial pressures currently faced across the Children and Young People service, which she felt had been exacerbated as a result of the stance taken by the Conservative Government in relation to funding provision. Expressing particular concern at the increase in child poverty and health related issues being experienced by children and young people (including obesity and tooth decay) since the Conservative Government had been in power along with the inadequacy of school funding and current gap in funding for the provision for children's social care and Special Educational Needs assessments and provision reflecting the lack of government priority towards children and young people. In contrast to the Governments approach and in highlighting that children, young people and their families deserved better, Councillor Grahl outlined the importance of the Council's budget proposals in seeking to address these gaps. Despite the financial challenges and cuts in funding identified she pointed out how the budget proposals included continued investment in Family Wellbeing Centres, investment to provide additional SEN school places, the provision of a new residential children's care home facility, support & championing of local schools alongside improvements in the foster care offer and support of the Mayor of London's Free Schools Meals programme as a means of tackling food poverty and public transport subsidy for care leavers. As a result, she urged all members to support the budget as moved by the Leader given the way they had been designed to support children, young people and their families in seeking to secure a better future at each stage in their life that would empower them to feel valued and prioritised.

As a further contribution to the debate, Councillor Chohan also took the opportunity to express his support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader, highlighting the ongoing impact and difficulties being created for an increasing number of residents as a result of the Governments approach towards managing the

economy, supporting small businesses and funding public services including the closure of local police stations. Despite the significant challenges and pressures on public services created as result of the cuts imposed by the Government since 2010, Councillor Chohan highlighted his pride at the way in which the current Administration had sought to protect key services and support health partners, small businesses, young people and those more vulnerable residents. Whilst acknowledging that the budget proposals would require difficult decisions to be made, Councillor Chohan was keen to commend the compassionate approach adopted in seeking to protect the most vulnerable and bring people together as an alternative to the approach adopted by the Government.

Councillor Farah, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Public Protection, then spoke also highlighting concerns at the impact of government austerity on the provision of public services, focussing specifically (in relation to his remit) on the reduction in funding for the police and community support officers and what he felt was the associated increase in crime (including serious knife related crime and violence against women and girls) with Councillor Farah calling for urgent action by the government to address these pressures. Reference was also made to the decline in government funding for youth provision and community facilities, with Councillor Farah keen to highlight the work being undertaken in response through the Safer Brent Partnership via their Community Safety Strategy in seeking to address the gaps identified based on a public health approach designed to support early intervention and protect the most vulnerable. In concluding, Councillor Farah stated that the Council was delivering projects that addressed priorities such as reducing violent crime and in commending the budget to Council, compared this approach with that of the Conservative Government, re-iterating that despite the government's ongoing restrictions in funding and difficult decisions which had needed to be taken the Council was continuing, through its effective approach towards financial management, to deliver long term positive outcomes for local residents.

As a final contribution to the debate, Councillor Fraser felt there was a need to recognise the financial context within which the budget proposals had been developed based around the impact of austerity and limited financial support being provided by the Government which had left not only the Council but many residents struggling financially. Expressing particular concern at the impact on carers, Councillor Fraser commended the budget proposals which she felt demonstrated the Councils commitment to continue prioritising the protection of frontline services and those most in need, including the ongoing provision of financial support through the Resident Support Fund and Council Tax Support Scheme, investment to provide additional SEN school places as well as to support and improve infrastructure across the borough including highway maintenance and reactive repairs. These were felt to be significant achievements given the impact arising from the reduction in government funding over the last decade. Whilst also recognising the difficult nature of choices faced given the challenging financial climate, Councillor Fraser ended by advising she was also proud to commend the secure and resident focused budget that the Administration had proposed in seeking to build a better future for all.

Having concluded the debate, the Mayor thanked all members for their contributions and then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt to summarise and respond to the points raised.

In response to the debate, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking all members for their contributions at the meeting. In summing up, he felt that the debate had demonstrated the passion and commitment amongst councillors to deliver for their residents. In responding to the Conservative and Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals he expressed concern at the financial and budgetary literacy which he felt had been demonstrated in terms of their approach given the associated risks which had been identified in relation to both their impact and unviable way in which it had been proposed to fund them. He therefore urged all members to reject the alternative proposals recognising, in response, the measures taken by the Council (as an example) to introduce new levies in relation to the Council Tax charge on empty properties and the concerns increasingly being expressed by local businesses in relation to the benefits of free 1 hour parking.

In contrast, he felt the Administration's budget proposals not only demonstrated an understanding of the challenges faced but were also designed to protect and support residents in the borough, with reference made to delivery of:

- £31.4 million dedicated to constructing 1,700 new homes by 2028, providing secure and accessible housing options for residents.
- £3.4 million to drive initiatives connecting residents with job opportunities and skill development programs, fostering a thriving and empowered workforce.
- £1.5 million to directly support community projects, empowering local residents and groups to actively contribute to improving their neighbourhoods.
- £21.6 million allocated for efficient waste management and street cleaning services.
- The dedication of £397 million to fund schools (of which 97% were currently rated as good or outstanding) with an additional £44 million for the creation of new special needs places.
- £24.3 million allocated to enhance residents' health and tackle the root causes of illness, promoting long and healthy lives.
- £117.9 million to support over 4,600 elderly and vulnerable residents.
- The maintenance of one of London's most generous Council Tax Support schemes, offering a total of £34 million to over 26,000 households
- An additional investment totalling £1 million in the Resident Support Fund to assist residents facing financial difficulties with bills and essential needs.

In concluding, whilst recognising the difficult nature of decisions which had needed to be made, he outlined his pride that despite the challenges highlighted during the debate the Labour Administration had been able to present a balanced budget that reflected a more hopeful vision for Brent that would not only continue to prioritise essential services for the well-being of local residents but would also seek to foster a spirit of empowerment in order to meet the needs and aspirations of communities across the borough. On this basis he ended by once again commending the budget to Council.

Having thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for his closing comments, the Mayor advised that this now concluded the debate on the budget and she would therefore be moving to the vote on the alternative budget proposals and then (subject to any amendments agreed) the recommended budget moved by the Leader of the Council. As the recommendations to be considered related to the budget setting

process he reminded Members that, in accordance with Standing Order 43, these would all need to be subject to a recorded vote.

Prior to the vote, Councillor Georgiou moved an amendment to the procedural motion agreed at the start of the meeting in relation to the conduct of the budget debate seeking to enable a separate vote to be undertaken on each of the alternative budget proposals moved by the Liberal Democrats Group rather than for them to be considered enbloc. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **LOST**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the budget and alternative proposals to the vote.

On a recorded vote being taken the budget proposals, as moved by the Leader of the Council were declared **CARRIED**.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Agree an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2024/25, with 2% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 2.99% general increase.
- (2) Agree the General Fund revenue budget for 2024/25, as summarised in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) Agree the savings proposals for 2024/25 and 2025/26, as set out in Appendices C (i) and C (ii) of the report.
- (4) Note the Equalities Impact Assessments on the budget proposals, as set out in Appendices C (iii) and C (iv) of the report.
- (5) Note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in Appendix D of the report.
- (6) Note and agree inclusion of the HRA budget and business plan in the overall Council budget for 2024/25 as set out in section eight and appendix Q of the report.
- (7) Agree the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section nine of the report.
- (8) Agree the changes to the existing Capital Programme in relation to additions of new schemes and reprofiling, as set out in section 11 and Appendix E of the report and note the Capital Pipeline Schemes in Appendix F of the report.
- (9) Agree the Capital Strategy, the Investment Strategy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendices G, H, I and J of the report.
- (10) Agree for a new loan and equity facility of up to £40m to be made available to i4B Holdings Ltd for the provision of PRS accommodation in line with the Temporary Reform Accommodation plan as set out in section 11.40 of the report.

- (11) Agree the Reserves Strategy and schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendices K (i) and K (ii) of the report.
- (12) Note the action plan to implement CIPFA's Financial Management Code and conduct a Financial Resilience Assessment, as set out in Appendix L of the report.
- (13) Agree the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix M of the report.
- (14) Note the results of the budget consultation, as set out in section seven and detailed in Appendices N (i) and N(ii) of the report.
- (15) Note the legal advice from the Corporate Director of Governance, as set out in Appendix O of the report.
- (16) Agree the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix P of the report.

Council Tax recommendations

- (17) In relation to the Council Tax for 2024/25:

It was agreed that the following amounts be now calculated as the Council's element by the Council for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended:

- (a) £1,099,616,055 being the aggregate of the amount that the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act.
- (b) £937,554,302 being the aggregate of the amounts that the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
- (c) £162,061,753 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year.
- (d) £1,564.65 being the amount at (c) above, divided by the amount for the tax base of 103,577, agreed by the General Purposes Committee on the 11 December 2023, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

- (e) Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
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£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1,043.10	1,216.95	1,390.80	1,564.65	1,912.35	2,260.05	2,607.75	3,129.30

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (d) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

- (18) That it be noted that for the year 2024/25 the proposed GLA precept issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, in respect of the GLA, for each of the categories of dwellings are as shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
314.27	366.64	419.02	471.40	576.16	680.91	785.67	942.80

- (19) That, having calculated the aggregate of the amounts at 17(e) and (18) above the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for the year 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1,357.37	1,583.59	1,809.82	2,036.05	2,488.51	2,940.96	3,393.42	4,072.10

- (20) That it be noted that the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources has determined that the Council element of the basic amount of Council Tax for 2024/25 is not excessive in accordance with the principles approved under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

- (a) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be and is hereby authorised to give due notice of the said Council Tax in the manner provided by Section 38(2) of the 1992 Act.
- (b) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be and is hereby authorised when necessary to apply for a summons against

any Council Taxpayer or non-domestic ratepayer on whom an account for the said tax or rate and any arrears has been duly served and who has failed to pay the amounts due to take all subsequent necessary action to recover them promptly.

- (c) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be and is hereby authorised to collect revenues and distribute monies from the Collection Fund and is authorised to borrow or to lend money in accordance with the regulations to the maximum benefit of each fund.

Prior to the above recommendations being approved, the alternative budget proposals moved as amendments to the budget report by the Conservative & Liberal Democrats Groups were put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The voting recorded on the amendment moved by the Conservative Group was as follows:

For the Amendment (4): Councillors Hirani, Kansagra, Maurice & Mistry.

Against the Amendment (47): Councillors Aden, Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Akram, Bajwa, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chan, Chappell, Chohan, Choudry, Collymore, Conneely, Crabb, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Georgiou, Grahl, Hack, Johnson, Kabir, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Lorber, Mahmood, Matin, Miller, Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, M.Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth, Southwood and Tatler.

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Hylton (Mayor) and Dar (Deputy Mayor).

The voting recorded on the amendment moved by the Liberal Democrats Group was as follows:

For the Amendment (3): Councillors Georgiou, Lorber and Matin

Against the Amendment (48): Councillors Aden, Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Akram, Bajwa, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chan, Chappell, Chohan, Choudry, Collymore, Conneely, Crabb, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Grahl, Hack, Hirani, Johnson, Kabir, Kansagra, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Mahmood, Maurice, Miller, Mistry, Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, M.Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth, Southwood and Tatler.

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Hylton (Mayor) and Dar (Deputy Mayor).

The voting recorded on the substantive recommendations, as detailed above, was as follows:

For (45): Councillors Aden, Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Akram, Bajwa, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chan, Chappell, Chohan, Choudry, Collymore, Conneely, Crabb, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Grahl, Hack, Johnson, Kabir, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Mahmood, Miller,

Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, M.Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth, Smith, Southwood and Tatler

Against (7): Councillors Georgiou, Hirani, Kansagra, Lorber, Martin. Maurice, & Mistry.

Abstentions (2): Councillors Hylton (Mayor) and Dar (Deputy Mayor).

Prior to moving on to deal with the remaining items on the agenda, the Mayor advised that as the remaining time available for the meeting was shortly due to expire she intended to move the suspension of Standing Order 44 (Council Guillotine Procedure) in order to extend the time of the meeting initially by a period of 10 minutes to enable consideration of the remaining items to be dealt with. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **CARRIED**.

11. **Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2023-2024**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Tatler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform, to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources updating members on Treasury Management activity for the first half of the 2023-24 financial year. Members noted that the report had also been considered and agreed by the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee on 6 December 2023 and Cabinet on 15 January 2024 who had agreed to refer it on to Council for consideration in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

In introducing the report, Councillor Tatler outline the importance of the Council's Treasury Management function in underpinning all Borough Plan priorities and in ensuring the Council was able to continue meeting its financial obligations including those associated with the affordability and delivery of the Capital Programme. Whilst recognising the impact of the current economic challenges in terms of interest rates and inflation this had, she pointed out, also provided opportunities in terms of benefits arising from higher investment income and new longer term borrowing options with the strategy aimed at achieving an appropriately low risk balance between securing lower interest costs and achieving cost certainty without compromising the longer-term stability of the debt portfolio.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Tatler for introducing the report and then invited contributions from other members.

In responding to the report, Councillor Lorber highlighted the complexities involved in terms of overall management of the strategy given the current economic challenges and trends identified, which he felt also required consideration moving forward in terms of the potential impact any change in Government nationally may have on tax and borrowing requirements.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor invited Councillor Tatler to exercise her right of reply. In closing the debate, Councillor Tatler advised members of the opportunity already provided to seek further details on the longer-term focus of the strategy as part of its consideration by the Audit & Standards

Advisory Committee and on this basis, commended the report as submitted to the Council.

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

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to note the 2023-24 Mid-Year Treasury report in compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Prudential Indicators and CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management (the Code).

12. **Members' Allowance Scheme Annual Review 2024 -25**

As the final item of business to be considered, the Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Governance which sought approval to the proposed Members Allowance Scheme for the 2024-25 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Leader outlined the background to the proposed uplift in the level of basic, special responsibility and civic allowances for 2024-25, which members were advised had been designed to take account of the latest review completed in 2023 by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) on behalf of London Councils and their initial review in 2022. In recognising the importance of the representational role undertaken by members alongside the increasing challenge in terms of managing demand and supporting the delivery of local services, the proposals had also sought to ensure any uplift could be managed within the existing Members Allowance budget, given the current financial pressures faced by the Council, which he advised had resulted in a recommended uplift of 5% in basic allowance for 2024-25, comparable with the staff pay award.

As part of the annual review, members were advised that the current level of Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) had also been reviewed in line with the IRP recommendations, with a limited number of existing SRAs subsequently identified as falling outside of the recommended percentage bands for those allowances. As a result of this and the increased workload and scope of the respective roles affected, the Leader advised that the review was also proposing an uplift in SRAs for the Chairs of the Brent Connect Area Consultative Forums and also members of the Licensing Committee. As a final comment in presenting the proposals to members, the Leader advised that despite recognising the independence of the IRP review process he would be keen to support the establishment of a fully independent review and allowance setting mechanism for local authorities across England that would be responsible for final decisions on the setting of member allowances rather than these being matters for individual authorities to consider, having taken account of the relevant IRP review.

Prior to inviting contributions from other members on the report, the Mayor advised that as the remaining time available for the meeting was shortly due to expire she would be moving a further suspension of Standing Order 44 (Council Guillotine Procedure) in order to extend the time of the meeting by another 10 minutes in order to enable the conclusion of the debate on this item and closure of the meeting. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **CARRIED**.

The Mayor then moved on to invite contributions from other members.

In response to the proposals outlined, both Councillor Kansagra (as Leader of the Conservative Group) and Councillor Georgiou (as Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group) highlighted concerns in relation to the justification provided and appropriateness of seeking an uplift in the specific SRAs outlined in the report based on the limited detail provided and also current arrangements for chairing the Brent Connect Area Consultative Forums, with further benchmarking against comparative rates also identified as required.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor invited Councillor M.Butt to exercise his right of reply. In response to the concerns identified and in closing the debate, the Leader once again highlighted that the proposals in relation to SRAs had been designed to bring those specific allowances in line with the IRPs recommended percentage bands whilst also reflecting the increase in scope and workload for both roles with reference made to the increase in range and number of Licensing Sub Committees alongside the enhanced role of the Connect Area Consultative Forum Chairs in relation to neighbourhood level engagement and new approach towards community grants. On this basis, he ended by commending the report as submitted to Council.

Having thanked Councillor M.Butt for closing the debate, the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED** (with all members of the Conservative Group and Liberal Democrats Group voting against).

Council therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the Members Allowance Scheme in the proposed terms set out within the report for the 2024-25 Financial Year.
- (2) To authorise the Corporate Director of Governance to comply with the statutory requirements to publicise the Council's Members' Allowance Scheme.

13. **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 Annual Council and Mayor Making meeting on Wednesday 22 May 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

COUNCILLOR ORLEEN HYLTON
Mayor