



Full Council
8 July 2024

**Report from the Corporate Director
of Law and Governance**

**Resources and Public Realm Committee Chair's Update
Report**

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Council
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 To present Full Council with a report providing updates on the meetings and activities of the Resources and Public Realm Committee since the last Full Council meeting held on 20 November 2023.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

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

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

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

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Brent Council has two scrutiny committees; the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The Council is also a member of the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC).

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

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

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

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

Corporate policy, partnerships and resources; Budget; Customer services; Commercial services; Planning policy; Environmental policy; Public realm; Employment and skills; IT; Recycling; Regeneration; Transport and highways; Community safety; Property; Emergency planning and business continuity.

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

3.2.6 Since the last update to Full Council on 20 November 2023 the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee has met four times (18 December 2023, 24 January 2024, 27 February 2024, and 23 April 2024).

18 December 2023

¹ Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, paragraph 36.

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

² Brent Council Constitution Part 4.

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

3.2.7 The Committee heard from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, and Reform, Councillor Shama Tatler, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Governance on the Cabinet's decision from 16 November 2023 to refuse Sudbury Town Residents' Association's (STRA) renewal application to be the Neighbourhood Forum for the Sudbury Town Neighbourhood Area. This item was considered as a result of a call-in request made by five non-cabinet members in accordance with Standing Order 14 which claimed that:

- Local ward councillors (or at least NOT all) were consulted or informed about the proposals being presented to Cabinet.
- STRA was not notified of the Cabinet Meeting or offered an opportunity to make representations.
- As the complaints and objections directed against STRA originated mainly from former and current Labour Councillors the decision seemed to have been politically motivated.
- The Cabinet did not consider the implication of leaving Sudbury without a Neighbourhood Forum or present any alternatives.
- As another Group has expressed an interest to become the Neighbourhood Forum that application should have been dealt with at the same meeting.

3.2.8 Committee members sought further clarity on the robustness of the engagement/consultation activities that took place in the lead up to the Cabinet decision. It was acknowledged that STRA were on the Local Plan Database and thus received email notifications relating to the consultation in line with good practice; Similarly, that ward councillors had been notified of STRA's application (as well as the planned consultation) by email and via the Member Bulletin. Regardless, it was confirmed by the legal department that there was no specific requirement to proactively notify ward councillors or STRA of the proposals being presented to Cabinet, although there was a requirement in law for advance notice of Cabinet items to be added to the forward plan at least 28 days before a decision is made which had been actioned in this situation.

3.2.9 The Committee also noted efforts made by officers to engage STRA in constructive conversations about its operations prior to submission of its application as well as the various opportunities that had been presented to the organisation for positive resolution. For instance, the offer of external mediation to support STRA to work collectively with Sudbury Matters on the potential to create a new Forum that could best represent the needs of the local community. Whilst both groups had initially agreed to work together, it became evident that STRA had subsequently not played any active role in the process.

3.2.10 Whilst committee members recognised the added value of Neighbourhood Forums, it did accept that the Council in this situation should not approve an application for Neighbourhood Forum status that failed the statutory tests to be considered acceptable.

3.2.11 As a result of the call-in, the Committee confirmed the original decision made by the Cabinet to refuse the application received from STRA for Neighbourhood Forum status.

24 January 2024

3.2.12 Will Lexton-Jones (Detective Superintendent, Northwest Borough Command Unit, Metropolitan Police and Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership) introduced the Safer Brent Partnership report, detailing the activities undertaken by the Partnership to support the agreed priorities for 2022/23:

- Priority 1- Reducing Domestic and Sexual Abuse
- Priority 2 - Reducing the Impact of Gangs and Knives in our Community
- Priority 3 - Reducing Vulnerability and Increasing Safeguarding
- Priority 4 - Reducing Offenders and Perpetrators from Reoffending
- Priority 5 - Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour

3.2.13 The Committee sought details on what interventions were in place/planned to overcome the key challenges identified under each priority area, and raised specific concerns around:

- Funding and resources to adequately deliver on priorities.
- The lack of visibility of police in hot spot areas.
- The targeted engagement that was taken place with local communities as part of the Partnership's preventive work.
- The lack of safeguarding for LGBTQ+, Irish Traveller and disabled communities against domestic violence and sexual abuse due to underreporting in these types of cases.
- The rising number of violent incidents against women and girls on Wembley event days.
- The work to properly understand and address the drivers of knife crime.
- Ex-offenders not having access to suitable housing upon release from prison.
- Partners not attending Integrated Offender Management (IOM) meetings
- The separation of the Council's CCTV with Brent Housing Management's (BHM) CCTV in detecting and deterring crime.
- The lack of awareness of the Community Trigger process amongst residents/councillors.

3.2.14 Looking ahead, committee members received assurances that the Partnership would take a 'Public Health' approach to deliver the Safer Brent – Community Safety Strategy 2024 – 2026; meaning that they would work with key partners to act earlier, identify wider support needs and improve interventions to prevent criminal and anti-social behaviour. The priorities identified for 2025/26 were:

- Priority 1: Tackling Violent Crime.
- Priority 2: Challenging Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Priority 3: Focusing on Incidents Impacting our Community.

- Priority 4: Protecting those most Vulnerable.

3.2.15 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestions for improvement:

1. Share more information and brief Members on the Community Trigger to help them understand how to support their residents to use it.
2. Ensure there is a clear priority around Tackling Violent Crime, including Knife Crime in the Community Safety Strategy.
3. Have a greater focus on targeting youth violence through our grants programmes.
4. Collaborate with Safer Brent Partnership to access funding from the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and similar grant funding routes.
5. Work with the Police and Safer Brent Partnership to improve the granularity and quality of data and impact assessments, with the aim of presenting the impact of crime and criminality on specific communities. This consists of sharing and reporting more granular data around the key priority areas of the report e.g. domestic violence and violent crime.
6. Maintain the current level of resource in the Community Safety team.

3.2.16 Councillor Conneely, Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Committee, then presented the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings report³ which consisted of 11 evidence-based recommendations on the Cabinet's draft budget proposals for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

3.2.17 All recommendations put forward by the Task Group were accepted by the Committee, and subsequently agreed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 5 February 2024.

3.2.18 Cabinet's final Budget for 2024/25 (inclusive of the Task Group's recommendations) received approval by Full Council on 29 February 2024.

27 February 2024

3.2.19 The Committee heard from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Muhammed Butt, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources on the Draft Property Strategy outlining the proposed asset management process - from maintenance, compliance, development, value-creation, and disposal. This discussion was a continuation of the conversation that took place at a previous committee meeting on 'Spaces for Community Use'⁴, where officers agreed to map out the property assets that existed in the borough (including those for community use), and to report back to members

³<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s138798/8.a%20Final%20Budget%20Scrutiny%20Task%20Group%20Report%202024-25.pdf>

⁴ <https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=64409>

on a revised approach to manage the portfolio which facilitated fair and transparent letting opportunities to community and voluntary sector organisations.

3.2.20 Members received assurances that adequate mitigations were being put in place across the commercial property portfolio to address outstanding rent arrears, lease renewals, and rent reviews. Additionally, that work was underway to ensure compliance with energy and accessibility standards in its stock.

3.2.21 The Committee welcomed the Draft Property Strategy but queried the action plan timeline therein, suggesting that the proposed implementation timeline for the Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology should be revised to enable officers to define social value criteria prior to introducing rent discounts.

3.2.22 Concerns were raised on the omission of Brent Housing Management (BHM), i4B and First Wave Housing assets management from the report. While these assets did not fall within the remit of the strategy, reassurances were provided they would still inform the Council's approach to all assets, where relevant. Similarly, committee members also questioned how the strategy joined up planning and building control processes to ensure new buildings were built to high quality standards to prevent depreciation. In response, members were advised that the Property Team collaborated with colleagues from Regeneration to actively manage existing properties and avoid acquiring new ones that could burden council operations.

3.2.23 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestions for improvement:

1. Share the final version of the Property Strategy with housing colleagues for best practice in respect of HRA, i4B and First Wave Housing non-housing assets for potential alignment purposes.
2. Condense the final strategy into a short, easily digestible format for the benefit of residents.
3. Conduct rent reviews in line with lease agreements.
4. Actively explore additional opportunities for energy efficiency upgrades (e.g. solar panels, insulation etc.) in existing properties to generate additional income and cost savings.
5. Liaise with the Legal department to ensure the utilisation of all legal powers in the pursuit of developers building substandard properties in the borough.
6. Upon completion, sight the Committee on the draft Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology for feedback.
7. Upon completion, publish the final Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology for the benefit of residents, businesses, and community organisations.

3.2.24 The Leader then introduced a progress report from the Corporate Director of Resident Services on the Climate and Ecological Emergency 2022-24 Delivery Plan and Green Neighbourhoods action plans.

3.2.25 Key areas of debate included:

- Areas of focus in the plans that could achieve the most meaningful results in achieving climate goals.
- Robustness of the accountability framework for the plans.
- Quality of engagement taken place with local communities and businesses around behaviours to bring about positive change.
- Funding barriers/challenges in achieving climate goals and the carbon neutrality target for 2030.

3.2.26 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestions for improvement:

1. Establish a devolved climate advisory forum led by community organisations/residents to provide feedback on the Council's climate initiatives and to monitor progress on the delivery of the Brent Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy 2021-2030.
2. Update the Brent Climate Action Data Dashboard to include:
 - Comparable benchmarking for Theme 4 Nature and Green Space;
 - Identify additional data points that illustrate a more complete picture than a comparison between Inner and Outer London;
 - Healthy Streets Scorecard measures, such as the number of 20mph zones;
 - The number of schools meeting EPC targets.
3. Explore whether the current controlled parking zones (CPZs) are assisting the Council to achieve its climate commitments, and if not, explore whether an expansion to the zones could in fact help achieve these goals.
4. Explore whether an expansion to the CPZs in the borough is likely to result in additional income that could be used to fund freedom passes.
5. Explore ways to reduce the timeframes of implementing CPZs in the borough.
6. Review parking charges and, if possible, introduce variable charging that accounts for the size, weight and emissions of vehicles to encourage sustainable travel.

23 April 2024

3.2.27 The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Growth, Councillor Shama Tatler, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Regeneration providing an update on the principal challenges that had arisen in the delivery of existing regeneration

schemes in growth areas, and the lessons learnt. The Chair also invited evidence from a resident which provided further insights into issues that were not identified in the report.

3.2.28 Members noted financial viability being one of the key challenges of Regeneration in Brent, specifically probing for further information on the impacts this has had on affordable housing delivery targets. This led committee members to question what measures were being taken to address viability issues and to explore alternative funding models for projects.

3.2.29 Other issues raised (which were not included in the detail of the report) included the poor quality of builds, the lack of community space provided for in projects, and the lack of communication to residents around delays in regeneration projects.

3.2.30 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations and suggestions for improvement:

Recommendations to Cabinet

1. Work alongside the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London Councils to develop a unified London building standard with stricter quality measures than required by current legislation and regulations.
2. Call on London Councils to establish a unified agreement across London boroughs seeking a consistent methodology for assessing affordable housing.
3. Lobby the next government to increase the obligation on the private sector to deliver more affordable homes.

Suggestions for Improvement made to council departments:

1. Incorporate plans for additional community spaces into current and future Council regeneration projects.
2. Where appropriate, and consistent with the adopted Local Plan, negotiate for additional community space within private developments in the borough.
3. Identify opportunities for implementing additional mechanisms that ensure private developers that meet high quality standards (as set out in the adopted Local Plan and associated SPD Design Guidance) and are more accountable to both residents and the Council.
4. Provide a member briefing session on viability assessments, covering key topics such as affordable housing and social value.
5. Review the viability assessment criteria for council-owned housing schemes to include consideration of the Council's reduced housing benefit costs (e.g. by not accruing Housing Subsidy Loss) as a result of residents being moved

from temporary accommodation into permanent social housing accommodation.

3.2.31 The Committee then heard from Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment and Enforcement; and received a report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Regeneration on the first year (2023/24) performance of the Redefining Local Services (RLS) programme service contracts, namely the Highways services, Parking enforcement, Integrated waste and recycling, street cleansing, grounds maintenance, winter gritting, and Grounds maintenance contracts.

3.2.32 Members raised concerns about the robustness of current parking enforcement measures and questioned whether more could be done to improve adherence to parking rules in the borough; For example, the introduction of postal PCNs.

3.2.33 Specific points were also raised about the poor quality of the blue sacks provided to residents as part of twin stream fibre recycling. Also, there was a discussion around targeted resident engagement strategies to improve recycling rates and reduce contamination in waste collections.

3.2.34 In relation to street cleansing, committee members reviewed the effectiveness of the intelligence-led approach. Themes included the user-friendliness of the "Fix My Street" application and ways to improve data utilisation from the tool to enhance street cleaning operations.

3.2.35 Additionally, examples were provided of poor performance by the contractor in maintaining sports facilities as part of the Grounds maintenance contract. Members have since sought further information on how resident and user feedback is incorporated into monitoring the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Contract.

3.2.36 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestions for improvement:

1. Explore utilising data from the Landlord Licensing Scheme in order to provide the correct amount/types of bins needed per household.
2. Investigate incentive programmes for parking enforcement officers in comparison with other local authorities to establish whether this has led to more effective parking enforcement.
3. Optimise resource allocation on the 'Fix My Street' application to facilitate timely responses to complaints and case closure.
4. List instructions on the 'Fix My Street' application for users to escalate/challenge responses that they are unsatisfied with.

Next meeting: 17 July 2024

3.2.37 The next meeting of the Resources and Public Realm Committee will be held on 17 July 2024. As it currently stands, members will review the following report:

- Budget Monitoring Update 2024/25 (to be inclusive of the Q1 financial forecast for 2024/25 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS))

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Members of the Committee continue to be fully engaged in the development and delivery of the scrutiny work programme.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no financial considerations for the purposes of this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are no legal considerations for the purposes of this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 There are no EDI considerations for the purposes of this report.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations for the purposes of this report.

9.0 Communication Considerations

9.1 There are no communication considerations for the purposes of this report.

Report sign off:

Debra Norman

Corporate Director, Law & Governance