



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 18 November 2024
at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Tariq Dar MBE

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Ryan Hack

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Afzal
Agha	Ahmadi Moghaddam
Ahmed	Akram
Bajwa	Begum
Benea	M Butt
S Butt	Chan
Chohan	Choudry
Collymore	Conneely
Dixon	Ethapemi
Farah	Fraser
Gbajumo	Georgiou
Grahl	Hirani
Johnson	Kabir
Kansagra	Kelcher
Knight	Long
Lorber	Mahmood
Matin	Maurice
Mistry	Mitchell
Moeen	Molloy
Nerva	J.Patel
M Patel	Rajan-Seelan
Rubin	Shah
Ketan Sheth	Krupa Sheth
L.Smith	T.Smith

1. Mayors Introductory Statement

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

2. Apologies for Absence

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Chappell, Crabb, Donnelly-Jackson, Hylton, Kennelly and Tatler.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the of the previous Council meeting held on Thursday 19 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Hirani & Jayanti Patel both declared a personal interest in relation to the question submitted by the Conservative Group on the Private Sector Landlord Selective Licensing Scheme (Item 12 - Questions from the Opposition & other Non Cabinet Members) as landlords within the borough.

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

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

The Mayor made the following announcements:

(i) Appointment of Deputy Mayor

The Mayor began his announcements by advising members that he had appointed Councillor Ryan Hack to fill the vacancy as Deputy Mayor for the remainder of the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

In raising a Point of Order on the basis of the appointment process for the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Lorber sought further clarification from the Corporate Director Law & Governance on the constitutional requirements regarding the need for advance notice to have been provided on the agenda and ability for the appointment to be made part way through the year. Concern was also expressed at no reason being provided for the vacancy having occurred. In response, Debra Norman (as Corporate Director Law & Governance) confirmed that the appointment of the Deputy Mayor was a decision made by the Mayor. Under Standing Order 27(b) the Mayor was required to provide written notice of the appointment, which had been received, with the matter then reported to Council. There were no specific constitutional requirement for the appointment to be listed separately on the Council agenda. In addressing the reason for the appointment, it was confirmed the vacancy had arisen following the resignation of the previous post holder from the role.

Having confirmed the appointment, the meeting was paused briefly to enable Councillor Hack to be robed and receive the Deputy Mayors Chain of Office prior to him joining the Mayor on the dais for the remainder of the meeting.

The Mayor then invited all members to join him in welcoming and congratulating Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor.

Members then joined the Mayor in a round of applause welcoming the new Deputy Mayor.

(ii) Remembrance Sunday

The Mayor then moved on to pay tribute to all those who had lost their lives in conflicts around the world. As part of the tributes, the Mayor advised he had been honoured to attend the borough remembrance service at Barham Park, which he was pleased to report had been so well attended. He felt the service had been an opportunity to remind everyone about the importance of peace and harmony and need to work towards a future without conflict.

(iii) Mayoral events attended

The Mayor then took the opportunity to provide a brief summary on the range of Mayoral engagements he had attended since the previous Council meeting. This had included numerous events to celebrate Black History Month as well as a visit to HMS Belfast where the Windrush anchor flag had been raised celebrating Caribbean hero's. In addition, he was pleased to have been able to attend several Diwali celebrations including a visit to Neasden Temple for their firework display.

(iv) Petitions

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

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

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

Having considered the changes outlined it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note that effective from 8 November 2024 the Leader of the Council had incorporated the role of Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Growth within his remit following Councillor Shama Tatler having stood down from her role as a Cabinet Member.
- (2) To approve the following changes in committee membership:
 - (a) Audit & Standards Advisory Committee and Audit & Standards Committee – Councillor Lesley Smith to replace Councillor Teo Benea as a full member.
 - (b) Community & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Teo Benea to replace Councillor Diana Collymore as a full member.
 - (c) Corporate Parenting Committee – Councillor Lesley Smith to replace Councillor Diana Collymore as a full member.
 - (d) Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee - Councillor Teo Benea to replace Councillor Diana Collymore as a substitute member

- (e) Service User Consultative Forum Pensioners – Councillor Diana Collymore to be replaced by a vacancy.

7. Deputations (if any)

The Mayor advised that no requests had been received for the presentation of any deputations at the meeting.

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

8.1 Questions from members of the Public

The Mayor advised that three questions had been received from members of the public, which were as follows:

Question 1 from Martin Francis regarding progress on the development and delivery of various educational development sites.

Question 2 from Joy Field regarding the delivery of grounds maintenance services on housing estates.

Question 3 from Madeleine Shea regarding the availability of on-street parking provision across Alperton.

The Mayor advised that those members of the public who had submitted questions had all been given the opportunity to attend the meeting in order to ask a supplementary question. Whilst he was pleased to welcome Martin Francis to the meeting, members were advised that Joy Field and Madeleine Shea had not been able to attend with the written responses provided in relation to their questions therefore noted.

Following the Mayor's introduction, the following supplementary question was then raised:

Question 1 supplementary Question from Martin Francis to Councillor Gwen Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children Young People & Schools.

In thanking Councillor Grahl for her written response, Martin Francis began by welcoming the approach outlined to increase local SEND provision within the borough. Concerns were, however, highlighted regarding the ongoing uncertainty over the future of Islamia Primary School, with the outcome of an informal consultation undertaken in November 2022 (which had been the only consultation to date) having revealed that 141 parents opposed the proposed move to the Strathcona site and only 19 were in favour. It was also pointed out that the local Resident Association had also opposed the proposal. As a result, further details were sought on whether the Islamia Primary School had put forward any plans for a statutory consultation process to be conducted with the assistance of Brent Council; what expenditure had been incurred by Brent Council on the Strathcona site to date and whether (following the Leopold Primary School Brentfield Road site having been earmarked for closure) any discussions had taken place with the Islamia

Governing Body or the Yusuf Islam Foundation regarding the use of that location as an alternative site for Islamia Primary School.

In thanking Martin Francis for his question, Councillor Grahl responded by advising that there were currently no plans for a formal consultation regarding the Strathcona site. Confirmation was also provided that the Council remained committed to collaborating with Islamia Primary School to secure a site within the Borough with no specific expenditure incurred to date in relation to the Strathcona site for this potential purpose.

The Mayor thanked Martin Francis for his attendance and supplementary question along with Councillor Grahl for her response and with no further questions to be considered, then moved on to deal with the question submitted by Brent Youth Parliament.

8.2 Questions from Brent Youth Parliament

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

Question 1 from Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools, relating to the provision of budget support for Brent Youth Parliament in seeking to expand their reach.

The Mayor thanked Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) for their question, with members noting the written response provided, and advised that representatives from the Youth Parliament had also been invited to attend the meeting in order to ask a supplementary question. As a result, the Mayor welcomed Kenechi Ezeajughi (BYP Deputy Chair) and a fellow representative of Brent Youth Parliament to the meeting who asked the following supplementary question.

Question 1 Supplementary Question from Kenechi Ezeajughi and fellow member of Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools

Whilst thanking Councillor Grahl for her response and the commitment provided to making a budget available for use by the Youth Parliament Steering Group in determining their spending priorities (supported by wider membership of the Youth Parliament) further details were sought on the timescale for the budget allocation process and whether this would be available during the current financial year. In addition, details were sought on plans being developed, as part of the National Youth Strategy, to enhance and restore youth service provision (including youth clubs) in Brent and to involve young people in any associated decision making process.

In response, Councillor Grahl advised that whilst the aim was to provide a budget allocation during the current financial year this would be subject to the necessary consultation and process being agreed with officers in advance. In terms of the National Youth Strategy, Councillor Grahl confirmed that the Council would welcome and encourage input from the Youth Parliament and ended her response by advising she would be happy to meet with them separately outside of the Council meeting to engage further.

The Mayor thanked the representatives from Brent Youth Parliament for attending the meeting and Councillor Grahl for her response to the supplementary question raised and with no further questions to be considered, advised that this now concluded the public question session

9. Petitions (if any)

The Mayor advised that no requests for the presentation or debate of any petitions had been received for consideration at the meeting.

10. Motions

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

10.1 1st Motion (Conservative Group) – Effect of Labour Government budget on residents in Brent

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mistry to move the first motion which had been submitted on behalf of the Conservative Group. Councillor Mistry began by highlighting concerns at what she felt to be the broken promises by the Labour Government in relation to the impact of their most recent budget on working people, pensioners and students. This included increases in National Insurance, Inheritance Tax and removal of Winter Fuel Allowance payments based on what were felt to be unsubstantiated claims regarding the £22 fiscal billion black hole the Chancellor had claimed to have inherited. Despite the time available for them to plan when in Opposition, it was felt the budget had exposed traditional Labour rhetoric in seeking to increase public spending and taxes impacting on economic growth, families, business and those more vulnerable such as the elderly. Particular concerns were highlighted in relation to the impact of the increase in National Insurance contributions across sectors such as social care and also in relation to the impact on the farming sector and food production as a result of the change in Inheritance Tax rules and anti-business regulation affecting the flexible labour market.

As a result of the concerns expressed and outlined within the motion, Councillor Mistry ended by calling on the Leader of the Council to write to Sir Keir Starmer in seeking restoration of the Winter fuel supplement and reverse of the NI increases in recognition of the impact on Brent residents.

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

Councillor Maurice, speaking in support of the motion, also highlighted how he felt the Labour Government had ignored the wishes of the electorate and broken their manifesto promises given the way in which the recent budget had impacted on families and working people and was anti-business. Concern was also expressed

regarding the imposition of VAT on private school fees and impact this would have on those from less wealthy backgrounds in seeking to access the sector. Given the impacts outlined in relation to the budget, he felt these demonstrated the reality of a Labour Government and price that would be paid by residents across Brent as a result.

Speaking in opposition to the motion, Councillor Kelcher felt there was a need to recognise the difficult nature of the decisions faced by Labour in seeking to balance the financial position inherited from the previous Conservative Government. Highlighting what he felt were contradictions in the position adopted by the Conservative Group within their motion, including on tuition fees, and seeking to place into context those that would actually be impacted by the change in Inheritance Tax, Councillor Kelcher outlined the need for a consistent approach in the opposition challenges. In contrast he felt the fiscal policies adopted by the Labour Government had sought to achieve a credible balance in seeking to fund much needed improvements in public services, including health, with the need to deliver a balanced budget and address the significant budgetary gap they had inherited.

In formally responding to motion, Councillor Mili Patel spoke next highlighting what she felt had already been the differences made by the Labour Government for people across Brent. In contrast to the last budgets delivered by the previous Conservative Government she felt the Chancellors latest budget had adopted a different approach aimed at addressing the inherited gap in public finances and economic health of the country over the longer term. Whilst recognising the challenges to be addressed, the approach towards delivering longer term growth had also been acknowledged by the Office for Budget Responsibility. As specific examples of the issues the budget was seeking to address, Councillor Mili Patel highlighted how the proposals had been designed to tackle a decade of real-term pay cuts in the public sector, reform pensions and increase investment in high-potential British firms, provide a cash injection for the NHS as well as new capital investment for large scale infrastructure projects. In concluding, it was therefore felt the Conservative motion should be seeking to apologise for their previous government's mismanagement of the economy and inability to deliver the change required rather than criticising the efforts being made to address the issues highlighted. On this basis, it was confirmed the Labour Group would be opposing the motion.

As a final contribution, Councillor Lorber felt it was also important to recognise the impact which the increase in Council Tax agreed by the Labour Administration was having on local residents in Brent and need for urgent reform of the local government funding regime. Given the Labour Government's criticism of the previous Conservative Government's approach towards local government funding when in opposition, he hoped the shift in burden for the funding of essential public services, including Adult Social Care, on to Council Tax payers was addressed and not continued by the new Government. This included the need for a fair funding settlement that addressed the significant demand led pressures identified and recognised the impact on local taxpayers.

As there were no other members who had indicated they wished to speak the Mayor then invited Councillor Mistry to exercise her right of reply. In summing up, Councillor Mistry expressed concern regarding the Chancellor's and Labour

Government's economic credentials given the approach set out within their budget and as such commended the motion to members for support.

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

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

“Effect of Labour Government Budget on residents in Brent”

On the day Sir Keir Starmer took office he said he wanted to restore trust to British politics “with actions, not words” but he chose to break Labour’s manifesto promises, hit working people and thrown pensioners into the cold, University tuition fees are going up 3.1%.

The October Labour Budget is littered with broken promises. We Conservatives warned that Labour would tax, borrow and spend far beyond what they told the country. As at September 2024 inflation was 1.7% down from 2.2% in the previous month, reflecting the sound state of the economy passed over by the Conservative Government. We left Labour with inflation back on target, interest rates falling, the fastest growing economy in the G7 with four million more people into work.

You can already see the Chancellor making excuses about their economic inheritance and the unsubstantiated basis of the fiscal £22 billion black hole they claim to have inherited. The Budget fiscal rules changed, borrowing increased by £70billion, inflation busting handouts for trade unions, Britain’s poorest pensioners squeezed, welfare spending out of control and inflation busting tax rises.

This Council Notes:

- The harsh reality under Labour with National Insurance Up, Inheritance tax Up, Energy taxes Up, Businesses rates Up, First time buyer stamp duty Up and Tax on Pensions Up.
- When Covid hit, the Conservative Government took responsible decisions and spent an estimated £400 billion to protect British people and businesses from the impact of Covid. They brought in Furlough and provided funding to the NHS and delivered the fastest vaccine roll out in the world.

This Council recognises:

- The need to support residents through the crises by creating a package of support for anyone facing hardship.
- That small business owners in Brent will be hit hard with higher NI contributions and a rise in national minimum wage.
- Whilst taxes impacting on Brent residents are going up, including young couples saving to buy their first home families wanting to pass on their home or business to their children, parents sacrificing to give their kids the best start in life, , the only thing that’s going down is what’s left in people’s pockets.

- This Budget laid bare that Sir Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves are following the same old Labour rhetoric: higher public spending, sky-rocket taxes in our country's history and record-high borrowing. This will deliver a hammer blow for Brent families and pensioners' pockets.
- The Labour Party has no experience of business and enterprise. Relentlessly talking down our economy. Delivering a tidal wave of anti-business regulations and destroying our flexible labour market. It is the classic Labour agenda: higher taxes, higher borrowing; no plan for growth and working people of Brent will pay the price.

This Council, therefore, resolves to request that the Leader of the Council write to Sir Kier Starmer seeking a restoration of the Winter fuel supplement and reverse of the NI increases."

10.2 2nd Motion (Liberal Democrats Group) – Time to get tough on chewing tobacco

The Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to move the second motion, which had been submitted on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group. As context for the motion, Councillor Georgiou began by highlighting its focus on addressing a local issue of concern to many residents given the impact that the use of chewing tobacco was having, particularly in the Wembley, Sudbury and Kingsbury area. The unsightly nature of the stains left on streets resulting from the use of chewing tobacco (often referred to as paan) was highlighted as a source of continual complaint by residents leading to feelings that the areas worst affected were being neglected with reference also made to the associated public health impact.

Given the concerns identified, and associated impact in relation to public health and what were felt to be declining standards of cleanliness across the borough, Councillor Georgiou felt the attempts made to tackle the problem had failed with no consistent approach identified in relation to engaging with local communities in terms of the harmful impact of chewing tobacco from both an environmental and public health perspective. As a result, he advised the motion was calling on the Council to provide the necessary resources required to tackle the issue, including the targeting of specific hotspots and delivery of a more joined up community led public health approach. On this basis, Councillor Georgiou commended the motion to Council.

In responding to the motion, Councillor Krupa Sheth took the opportunity to thank Councillor Georgiou for raising what was recognised as an important issue and to outline the Council's commitment to addressing the problem given the considerable implications for both community health and public spaces across Brent. In responding to the concerns regarding previous campaigns run by the Council these were felt to have delivered substantial results in terms of not only significantly enhancing public awareness, but also through the issuing of fines and in terms of visibly improving street cleanliness in targeted areas such as Wembley, Ealing Road, and Sudbury. The campaigns undertaken had been driven by ongoing community engagement, with key achievements highlighted as including the introduction of high-visibility anti spitting stencils on streets supported by a social media and publicity campaign which had achieved 90% household reach in key

areas, educating residents on the health and environmental impacts of chewing tobacco and increasing awareness around anti-spitting rules leading to a reduction in stains identified through local inspections. This proactive approach had received positive support from residents and businesses and been supported by ongoing work with enforcement teams involving the use of Fixed Penalty Notices for continued offenders. The need for further co-ordinated action had, however, also been recognised with the Council having written to the previous Conservative Secretary of State for Health outlining the need for new government legislation and support on this issue. As no response had been received to the initial approach, this was now being followed up with the new Labour government supported locally by an increase in enforcement officers, in line with the Council's "Don't Mess with Brent" strategy, a programme of sensitive engagement with hard-to-reach groups and young people highlighting the dangerous public health implications of using Paan and continuing collaboration with organisations like the Paan Action Network to raise awareness. In concluding, Councillor Krupa Sheth once again outlined the Council's commitment in seeking to address and reduce paan spitting as part of the approach towards making the borough cleaner, safer and healthier. Given the commitment outlined and work already being undertaken she advised the Labour Group would therefore not be supporting the motion.

Councillor Hirani spoke next in support of the motion, echoing the sentiment and concerns expressed by Councillor Georgiou regarding the impact and extent of the problem particularly across Kingsbury and Kenton. Given the unsightly impact created by the spitting of chewing tobacco and associated costs to the borough in terms of maintaining street cleanliness and also in relation to public health she ended by highlighting what she felt was a need for the Labour Administration to take responsibility for the action required to clean up the mess and ensure the concerns highlighted were addressed on a longer term basis.

As a final contribution, Councillor Lorber also spoke in support of the motion to highlight concerns regarding the current limited effectiveness of the enforcement approach, given the current hours of operation accompanied by the limited resources available within the Safer Neighbourhood Teams. In highlighting the specific impact of these issues across Sudbury and commending the efforts being made by local resident organisations to maintain street cleanliness, Councillor Lorber supported the call within the motion for more targeted enforcement action across the areas worse effected backed up by a meaningful programme of engagement and outreach within those communities where the use of chewing tobacco was most prevalent.

As there were no other members who had indicated they wished to speak the Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to exercise his right of reply. In summing up Councillor Georgiou, having noted the response from Councillor Krupa Sheth, felt it important to highlight the reality of the situation being experienced across those parts of the borough worst affected using the condition of Wembley High Road as an example. Given that it was felt the campaigns and action taken to date to address the concerns highlighted had been largely ineffective he advised the motion was seeking to encourage a more targeted campaign of action and programme of outreach within relevant communities supported by a task group consisting of local councillors, key officers and members of the local community tasked with devising a strategy to combat chewing tobacco that involved greater

enforcement action, a public health approach and lobbying for greater regulation in terms of supply by government, which he hoped all members would support.

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

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

“Time to get tough on chewing tobacco.

Brent Council are failing miserably to deal with the scourge of chewing tobacco (often referred to as paan) across our borough, particularly in the Wembley area. The problem of chewing tobacco has gotten far worse in recent years, which has led to the area looking dirtier than ever.

Red spitting stains across the area from Wembley High Road, Sudbury Town centre, Ealing Road to residential streets across this part of Brent are unsightly and have resulted in residents feeling that their area is being neglected and forgotten by Brent Council.

Declining cleanliness and standards on local roads, in part caused by growing levels of chewing tobacco has led to other issues, including increasing levels of rubbish dumping and fly tipping, street drinking (despite the boroughwide PSPO) and other forms of anti-social behaviour. This is cumulatively having a hugely negative impact on residents who deserve much better.

The Council's current strategy (*if there even is a coherent one!*) to deal with the issue does not go far enough. Campaigns over the years, fronted by Members of the Cabinet, have been a total failure. They have done very little to truly engage with the community, and beyond a few pictures in the Brent Magazine, there has not been consistent messaging about the harms of chewing tobacco and the impact it has in our area and on users.

The ineffective anti-paan stencils that were sprayed in certain locations on Wembley High Road, Ealing Road, have had no impact. In fact, just days after they were put down, some even had red spit stains on them!

Chewing tobacco not only causes our area to look filthy, but the impact on the user is significant too. More needs to be made of the considerable health implications of chewing and spitting tobacco. According to the NHS website, paan, a form of tobacco, is both addictive and can lead to the user developing mouth cancer and oesophageal (food pipe) cancer, as well as having a terrible impact on general oral/dental health. A public health approach, that is effectively targeted is long overdue to ensure users are fully aware of the effects of this habit with the cost burden this habit places on the NHS also highlighted.

It is time that Brent Council got to grips with the issue of chewing tobacco in our borough – before even more damage is done to our area and residents.

The Council resolves to:

- Take the issue of chewing tobacco far more seriously and recognise the need to pursue targeted anti-chewing tobacco campaigns that reach members of the community who engage in this addictive habit.
- Immediately convene a special task group consisting of local councillors, Brent Council Officers, Enforcement teams and key members of the community, to devise a strategy to combat chewing tobacco that involves greater enforcement action, a public health approach and seeking to limit the supply.
- Urge the Labour Government to bring forward legislation that seeks to ban harmful chewing tobacco on health and environmental grounds.”

10.3 3rd Motion (Labour Group) – Brent Twinning with Nablus

Prior to considering the motion, the Mayor took the opportunity to remind everyone present at the meeting that one of the things he was most proud about as Mayor was the diverse nature of the borough and peaceful relationships that existed between its many different communities enabling them to live side by side in peace and harmony. In focussing on the need to continue encouraging and fostering strong community cohesion he asked members to ensure these efforts were maintained and supported during the conduct of the debate on the motion due to be considered for which he thanked everyone in advance.

Following the statement made by the Mayor and prior to the motion being formally moved, Councillor Georgiou raised a Point of Order highlighting what he felt to be the divisive nature of the first Labour Group motion which had been put forward for debate. Given the important role councillors played in seeking to maintain and encourage community cohesion within their local communities he queried the basis on which the motion and subsequent amendment submitted by the Conservative Group had been accepted for debate and called for both to be withdrawn.

In response Debra Norman (as Corporate Director of Law & Governance) advised that the motion and subsequent amendment received had both been assessed as meeting the relevant legal and constitutional requirements enabling them to have been submitted for debate and to remain on the agenda. At this stage, the action being sought within the motion and amendment was to explore the potential twinning opportunities identified with a further report to be provided at a future Council meeting once these had been assessed against the Council's overall approach towards twinning and necessary equality impact assessment.

Following advice from the Corporate Director Law & Governance, a further comment raised by Councillor Lorber in relation to the basis of the statement made by the Mayor preceding consideration of the motion, was ruled out as a Point of Order.

Councillor Afzal was then invited to introduce the motion, which he felt provided a further opportunity for the Council to demonstrate the moral and ethical principles on which it stood including justice, freedom and solidarity with those marginalised or most in need. In recommending Nablus for consideration as an appropriate twinning opportunity for the borough, given its status as one of the oldest cities in the world with a long and rich history of culture, diversity and dynamism, it was felt

the proposal would also reflect Brent's long history of internationalism. The proposal had also been designed to recognise that Brent was currently home to the second highest Arab diaspora in England and Wales, which included a significant number of residents of Palestinian heritage. The potential twinning arrangement was therefore also seen as an opportunity to enhance bonds and improve relations between communities through a process of collaboration and shared learning focussed on the respective cultures, history, traditions and experiences amongst communities living in Nablus and Brent. In recognising the links already being established with organisations across Brent, he advised the motion sought to support the establishment of a "Brent-Nablus Twinning Project" in order to explore the potential of a formal twinning arrangement through a process of community engagement, recognising the wider potential benefits a successful twinning relationship would also be able to promote in terms of educational collaboration, sport and heritage preservation. On this basis, Councillor Afzal advised he was honoured to have been able to move the motion with the potential twinning arrangement seeking to create a long-term connection between local communities, cultural organisations and leaders as a means of creating unity and expressing solidarity across both twinned regions.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Afzal for moving the motion and then drew members attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Maurice on behalf of the Conservative Group, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Maurice (having congratulated Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor and thanked the Mayor for his comments relating to the conduct of the debate at the start of the item) took the opportunity to remind members that the Council already had a long standing twinning relationship with South Dublin. In welcoming the diverse nature and mix of multi-cultural communities living within Brent, he advised that the amendment being moved also sought to recognise the links between Brent and various communities and faiths across Israel. As such, it was felt any opportunities being explored for a twinning arrangement in the region should be undertaken on a cross party basis and involve a process of community engagement including the potential to encourage collaboration with Israeli's as well as Arabs, including Palestinians. The amendment therefore suggested Ramla as an alternative suitable location for consideration as a twinning opportunity, given its location, cultural mix and historical significance at the crossroads of an ancient route between Jaffa and Jerusalem and between Damascus and Cairo and which it was felt would better reflect the diverse mix of communities across of Brent. The amendment moved by Councillor Maurice was therefore as follows:

To add the wording underlined and delete the wording indicated:

"Brent Town Twinning with Nablus

This Council notes:

- That Brent currently has a single twinning relationship, that with South Dublin, established in 1997, at a time when Brent had the largest Irish-born population in mainland Britain.

- That Brent currently has the second highest Arab diaspora in England and Wales, within which there is a significant number of residents of Palestinian heritage. a rich and diverse, multi-cultured community including Christians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Jains and Sikhs amongst others.
- That like Brent, Nablus in Palestine – as one of the oldest cities in the world – Israel has a long and rich history of culture, diversity and dynamism, ranging from historical architecture, a lively economy and a youthful population.
- That Brent has a long history of internationalism, including conferring on Nelson Mandela the Freedom of the Borough.
- That a growing number of community and charitable organisations, including Brent Trades Union Council, Brent NEU and Brent Friends of Palestine have developed productive relations with Palestinian organisations and diaspora, further strengthening bonds to the city of Nablus. have developed ties and relationships with Israel which include Jews, Arabs, Bedouins and Christians alike.
- That through the joint work of Brent Trades Union Council, Brent NEU and of Brent and Harrow PSC, CADFA and the Palestinian Forum in Britain, opportunities have been provided to young Palestinians to meet Brent young people, Councillors and MPs, and share and develop a bond over their experiences in education, sports and culture. Opportunities for visits to Palestine by young Brent residents are being planned. That this Council should provide an opportunity for all the young people in Brent to visit and work with Israeli's and Arabs including Palestinians.
- That Ramla could be considered as a suitable town in Israel to twin with. Ramla is between Tel-Aviv And Jerusalem and was the crossroads of the ancient route between Jaffa and Jerusalem and between Damascus and Cairo.
- That the establishment of the “Brent-Nablus Twinning Project” organisation provides an opportunity for Brent to explore the potential of a formal twinning arrangement with Nablus through community engagement.
- That community organisations and official representatives in Nablus Israeli towns and cities would welcome have shown a desire to develop a more formal arrangement of partnership with Brent. and have communicated this desire with their partners in Brent, leading to this proposal.

This Council believes:

- Twinning enhances bonds and improves relations between communities, creating friendships through what we have in common, as well as learning from other cultures, traditions and experiences.
- Twinning allows avenues for growth through togetherness, improving understanding and ability to tackle issues through collaboration, knowledge and skill shares.

- A successful twinning relationship would promote initiatives like educational collaborations, sports programmes, and heritage preservation workshops, creating long-term connections between residents and institutions and engages with local communities, cultural organisations, and leaders in both twinned regions to support the establishment of the partnership.

This Council resolves to:

- Consider a formal twinning agreement between Brent and a city or town in Israel which has a mixture of Arab and Jewish citizens the city of Nablus, which sits under the governance of the Palestinian National Authority, and receive a report considering the proposal at a future council meeting.
- Explore immediate steps to foster connections, such as cultural exchange programmes, student and school collaborations, and shared community projects, to create a foundation for future growth.
- Engage with the “Brent-Nablus Twinning Project” organisation to develop a framework for the potential twinning, whilst engaging with local communities, cultural organisations and leaders in both Brent and Nablus to support the establishment of this partnership.
- Engage with the diverse communities living in Brent, so that everyone can have a say in where we should consider twinning. Any process must be with cross party engagement and support to establish a partnership with suggested towns and cities.
- That Brent should establish a “Brent-Ramla Twinning Project” to provide an opportunity for Brent to explore the potential of a formal twinning arrangement with Ramla through community engagement.”

The Mayor thanked Councillor Maurice for moving the amendment and then opened the debate for contributions from other members in relation to both the original motion and amendment.

Councillor Nerva, having also congratulated Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, opened the debate by echoing the Mayor’s earlier sentiments in valuing the diverse nature of Brent as a borough and importance of the Council’s role in seeking to promote community cohesion. He therefore felt any proposal in relation to twinning needed to reflect this approach and Council’s values in terms of communities being able to move Forward Together rather than in conflict. The need was also highlighted to ensure that any consideration towards extending the current twinning arrangements was based on a clear policy and set of criteria with the necessary resources also having been identified to ensure the process was properly managed. In concluding, Councillor Neva felt that at this stage in the process it was more important to focus on ways in which Brent could best work to support local communities with links across both Israel and Palestine in seeking a viable solution to the current conflict in the region rather than it being about the identification of specific locations, recognising the positive cases made in support of both alternatives options.

Councillor Grahl then spoke in support of the original motion, highlighting the links already being established with schools in Palestine which had included a delegation visiting Brent supported by local charities and organisations. Whilst it was pointed out that for many, events in the Middle East might seem to have little impact on Brent, a large number of looked after children in the borough had actually originated from the region with the UN Secretary General having also recognised the disproportionate effect of global conflicts on children, including those in Gaza, Syria and Afghanistan. In highlighting the devastating impact these conflicts had not only in terms of the number of civilians (including children) lost but also on the mental health of those survivors and refugees Councillor Grahl ended by outlining the importance in Brent's role as a safe haven for those (including children) seeking refugee from conflict.

As a final contribution Councillor Mitchell, also speaking in support of the original motion, highlighted the opportunity she felt the proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus would have to extend the opportunities to share learning and cultural experiences in a way that recognised the varied heritage and lived experiences (including climate change) and interconnectivity between communities across both regions whilst also supporting the values of justice and equity.

At this stage, the Mayor advised that the time limit allocated for debate on the motion had been reached. In drawing the debate to a close, he therefore invited Councillor Afzal (as mover of the original motion) followed by Councillor Maurice (as mover of the amended) to exercise their right of reply.

In exercising his right of reply Councillor Afzal, thanked those who had spoken in support along with other colleagues and members of the local community for their assistance in bringing the motion forward. Highlighting the community backed nature of the proposal he hoped all members would be willing to support the motion as a means of reflecting the values which Brent, as borough, was recognised to stand for.

Councillor Maurice in closing the debate and exercising his right of reply on the amendment outlined what he felt to be the divisive nature of the original motion given the way it had failed to reflect the multi-cultural and diverse mix of communities and strength of community cohesion across the borough. On this basis he advised that the Conservative Group would be supporting the amendment rather than original motion which had been moved.

Having thanked councillors for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion starting with the amendment moved by the Conservative Group. The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive motion, as originally moved and set out below, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

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

"Brent Twinning with Nablus"

This Council notes:

- That Brent currently has a single twinning relationship, that with South Dublin, established in 1997, at a time when Brent had the largest Irish-born population in mainland Britain.
- That Brent currently has the second highest Arab diaspora in England and Wales, within which there is a significant number of residents of Palestinian heritage.
- That like Brent, Nablus in Palestine – as one of the oldest cities in the world – has a long and rich history of culture, diversity and dynamism, ranging from historical architecture, a lively economy and a youthful population.
- That Brent has a long history of internationalism, including conferring on Nelson Mandela the Freedom of the Borough.
- That a growing number of community and charitable organisations, including Brent Trades Union Council, Brent NEU and Brent Friends of Palestine have developed productive relations with Palestinian organisations and diaspora, further strengthening bonds to the city of Nablus.
- That through the joint work of Brent Trades Union Council, Brent NEU and of Brent and Harrow PSC, CADFA and the Palestinian Forum in Britain, opportunities have been provided to young Palestinians to meet Brent young people, Councillors and MPs, and share and develop a bond over their experiences in education, sports and culture. Opportunities for visits to Palestine by young Brent residents are being planned.
- That the establishment of the “Brent-Nablus Twinning Project” organisation provides an opportunity for Brent to explore the potential of a formal twinning arrangement with Nablus through community engagement.
- That community organisations and official representatives in Nablus have shown a desire to develop a more formal arrangement of partnership with Brent and have communicated this desire with their partners in Brent, leading to this proposal.

This Council believes:

- Twinning enhances bonds and improves relations between communities, creating friendships through what we have in common, as well as learning from other cultures, traditions and experiences.
- Twinning allows avenues for growth through togetherness, improving understanding and ability to tackle issues through collaboration, knowledge and skill shares.
- A successful twinning relationship would promote initiatives like educational collaborations, sports programmes, and heritage preservation workshops, creating long-term connections between residents and institutions

and engages with local communities, cultural organisations, and leaders in both twinned regions to support the establishment of the partnership.

This Council resolves to:

- Consider a formal twinning agreement between Brent and the city of Nablus, which sits under the governance of the Palestinian National Authority, and receive a report considering the proposal at a future council meeting.
- Explore immediate steps to foster connections, such as cultural exchange programmes, student and school collaborations, and shared community projects, to create a foundation for future growth.
- Engage with the “Brent-Nablus Twinning Project” organisation to develop a framework for the potential twinning, whilst engaging with local communities, cultural organisations and leaders in both Brent and Nablus to support the establishment of this partnership.”

10.4 4th Motion (Labour Group) – Brent’s commitment to care experienced people

The Mayor then invited Councillor Moeen to move the second and final motion submitted by the Labour Group. Councillor Moeen began by highlighting her pride in being able to move the motion, given the way it reflected Brent’s commitment to care experienced people across the borough. In recognising their levels of resilience, Councillor Moeen outlined how the motion was also designed to highlight the significant challenges faced by many care leavers, especially as they transitioned into work and independent housing. With systemic failures often meaning care leavers were more likely to experience homelessness, poor mental health, and involvement in the criminal justice system the motion supported the need for action to be taken (recognising the role of local authorities as a Corporate Parent) to address the concerns highlighted. In welcoming and supporting the longstanding commitment in Brent towards safeguarding care leavers Councillor Moeen felt it important to recognise the essential support already being provided in terms of housing, finance and personal development with the next step outlined within the motion, aimed at enshrining this approach in every decision taken as a council through support of the Care and Support Alliance’s ‘Show Us You Care’ campaign, Council becoming a signatory of the Kinship Care Alliance manifesto and care experience being classified as a protected characteristic providing a voice to those who may not otherwise have had one.

In commending the renewed Care Leaver Local Offer which had also been introduced by the Council (in conjunction with care leavers), Councillor Moeen hoped all members would support the motion in seeking to ensure all children and young people were provided with the best start in life.

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

Having congratulated Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, Councillor Dixon opened the debate by welcoming the focus on the challenges faced by so many care leavers at the start of their life and way these could impact

on them moving forward as they entered adult life with children being placed into care some of the most vulnerable in society. As a result, Councillor Dixon highlighted the importance, given her professional experience working in the criminal justice system, of the support being made available for those transitioning from care in being able to move forward and thrive and therefore ended by commending the motion which she advised she was pleased to support.

Councillor Gbajumo also spoke in full support of the motion welcoming what she felt was the Council's demonstrable commitment to youth support provision and positive feedback provided by care leavers through the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to Council backed programmes of support. Concern was, however, also expressed at the need to avoid discrimination and stigmatisation of those placed in care. As an example, reference was made to the tone of opposition expressed at the conversion of a local property into a residential care facility for children which had been subject to a call-in by members of the Conservative Group. In concluding, Councillor Gbajumo outlined her commitment and support for the stance being taken by the Labour Administration in seeking to eliminate discriminatory and safeguard the interests of care-experienced young people.

Formally responding to the motion, Councillor Grahl also expressed support for the action being sought which she felt would underscore Brent's unwavering commitment to care experienced children and young people. In recognising the significant challenges often faced by care leavers in relation to housing, health, education, employment, or within the criminal justice system the responsibility and role of the Council as a Corporate Parent was highlighted as a crucial element in ensuring that children and young people who had faced disrupted family experiences received the support needed to lead fulfilling, healthy lives and reach their full potential with the approach also supported in the Council seeking to become a fully accredited UNICEF Child Friendly community. In expanding on this approach, Councillor Grahl referred to the renewed Care Leaver Local Offer, alongside adoption of the Care Leavers Charter which were both felt to represent a significant steps forward not only in terms of enhancing existing support but also with the introduction of key resources such as free internet access for those claiming Universal Credit, access to the Digital Resident Support Fund for essential devices, and mentorship for skills such as CV writing and tenancy management with access also available to a rent deposit scheme and financial support to assist in purchasing other essential items for their first homes. The adoption of care experience as a protected characteristic was also supported as a key step for Brent in formally supporting the Children and Young People Alliance's 'Show Us You Care' campaign which it was hoped the Government would also recognise as part of their review of children's social care and in advocating for a sustainable, long-term funding settlement to support these efforts. In commending the motion to members, the opportunity was also taken to support Brent seeking to become a signatory of the Kinship Care Alliance manifesto, given the support provided to residents who step up to care for children when their parents were unable to do so.

As a final contribution Councillor Hirani, also speaking in her capacity as a member of the Corporate Parenting Committee, expressed support for the motion and highlighted what she felt was the need to seek additional financial support as part of the package of measures identified for care leavers being able to access public transport.

As the time limit for debate had been reached, the Mayor then invited Councillor Moeen to exercise her right of reply. In summing up, Councillor Moeen thanked members for the cross-party support expressed in support of the motion taking the opportunity, at the same time, to acknowledge and thank the care experienced young adults who were attending the meeting to follow the debate.

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

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

“Brent’s commitment to care experienced people”

Brent Council notes:

- According to the Local Government Association, English councils need £2.7bn more in funding for children’s social care by 2025.
- Despite the resilience of many care experienced people, they often face challenges, discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships employment, and in the criminal justice system.
- As corporate parents, we have a special responsibility to make sure that children and young people who may have had disrupted experiences of family life get the support they need to live the happiest and healthiest lives possible, so that they reach their potential.
- The positive work of Brent’s Corporate Parenting Board in improving the lives and experiences of our children looked after and care leavers, supported by the voices and lived experiences of our children and young people, working in partnership to embed a corporate parenting culture within Brent.
- Our renewed Care Leaver Local Offer and adoption of the Care Leavers Charter, which, alongside existing support with education, housing, and employment, includes:
 - Free internet access for those claiming universal credit
 - Access to the Digital Resident Support Fund for a device
 - Support from mentors with things like writing a CV, handling tenancy documents
 - Access to a rent deposit scheme
 - Up to £3,250 to purchase essentials for their first home
- The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, such as councils, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation of people with protected characteristics.

Brent Council believes that:

- Brent’s children and young people deserve the best start in life.

- The voices, needs, priorities and rights of children and young people should be at the heart of everything we do, informing our work in becoming a fully accredited UNICEF Child Friendly community. Ensuring experience of care is a protected characteristic in our work as a council is crucial to this.
- Care experienced people are a disadvantaged group who face challenges and discrimination, and Brent has a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making.
- Key council policies and changes in policy should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience.

Brent Council resolves:

- To formally support the CSA's Show Us You Care campaign, and write to Government calling for care experience to be made a protected characteristic as part of the Government's review of children's social care and for a sustainable, long term funding settlement for Children Social Care.
- To become a signatory of the Kinship Care Alliance manifesto, supporting residents who step up, often during an unexpected crisis, to care for a child when their parents aren't able to."

11. Reports from the Leader and Cabinet

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

In congratulating Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking all members of the Cabinet for the work being undertaken across their portfolios to continue supporting and safeguarding local residents in line with the Council's core strategic priorities, recognising the ongoing nature of the financial pressures faced by the Council. In commending the work being undertaken to manage demand and address the pressures identified members were assured that the need for continued financial discipline and careful stewardship (often involving difficult decisions) had also been recognised in order to sustain and ensure the Council's financial sustainability.

The opportunity was also taken to formally thank Councillor Shama Tatler for the programme of regeneration activity delivered during her time serving on Cabinet following her decision to step down as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Growth in order to take up a new role with the Local Government Association.

As part of the update, members were also asked to note that no Executive decisions had been taken under the Council's urgency procedures, since the previous update provided for the Council meeting in September.

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

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

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

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

12.1 Councillor Kelcher thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth as Cabinet Member for Environment & Enforcement) for the written response regarding the effectiveness of Brent's School Streets programme in reducing emissions and in terms of encouraging more active modes of travel and wider public health, community and safety benefits. As a supplementary question details were sought regarding plans to further expand the programme to cover all schools across the borough in recognition of the associated benefits.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth confirmed that the roll out of School Streets remained a priority for the Council aligned with the Climate Emergency Strategy to reduce air pollution across the Borough. The Brent School Streets programme was in high demand, and the Council would continue to seek funding from TfL to ensure the programme could be implemented where there was a demand, thereby improving the lives of young children across Brent.

12.2 Councillor Choudry thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment and Enforcement, for the written response to his question seeking an update on the negotiations with Lime regarding the future operation of their dockless e bike scheme within Brent. As a supplementary question, details were sought on the plans being developed to continue holding Lime to account for the operation of the scheme in Brent (with specific concerns outlined in relation to issues being experienced across Willesden). Confirmation was also sought on the arrangements being made to host the first Resident Forum with the suggestion also made that a dedicated page should be established on the Council's website including responses to FAQs on the scheme and how to report to issues of concern.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth assured members of the Council's commitment to continue holding Lime to account for their performance in Brent with concerns raised (including those identified within Willesden) continuing to be addressed directly through the revised KPIs and regular operational meetings now established. The Council was in the process of scheduling the first Resident Forum, aiming for early January or February

2025, and was also working on creating a dedicated page on the Council's website for Lime's FAQs to facilitate easier navigation for residents.

- 12.3 Having thanked Councillor Mili Patel, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources, for her written response on the steps being taken by the Council to ensure residents were aware of the significant changes to the voting rights of EU citizens living in the UK introduced by the Elections Act 2022. In recognising the way in which the measures outlined in the response would assist in encouraging the fullest participation in future elections Councillor Benea, as a supplementary question, asked whether the Council would consider writing to the Minister of State for Local Government to request that the right to vote and stand as a candidate at local elections be extended to all residents in England and Northern Ireland?

In response, Councillor Mili Patel felt it important to recognise how the function of a successful democracy depended on citizens' engagement in politics with concern expressed at the decline in democratic participation in elections over recent years and increasing complexity of the franchise arrangements post-Brexit. Whilst trust and engagement in local government remained significantly higher than in many any other public sector institutions, the need to ensure residents were able to continue playing an active role was also recognised as key, particularly in terms of combating the rise of populism and extremism over recent years. As a result, Councillor Mili Patel confirmed that the Council would write (as requested) to the new Labour government presenting the case for electoral reform in advocating for greater, not lesser, resident involvement.

- 12.4 Whilst noting the written response provided by Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning & Growth, to her question regarding funding of the Private Sector Landlord Selective Licensing Scheme Councillor Hirani highlighted concerns regarding the forward planning for delivery and funding of the scheme. As a supplementary question, details were therefore sought on the figures provided as the basis for the schemes financing, availability of audited accounts and how members would be advised of any losses incurred through the scheme recognising the current economic challenges within the private rented sector.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt reiterated that the initial written response circulated with the agenda indicated the scheme was self-financing, with funding details having been provided in the response. In reminding members how the scheme was designed to protect and ensure the provision of high-quality, safe and secure accommodation for the increasing number of residents relying on the private rented sector across the borough the Leader also felt it important to outline the way in which responsible landlords were being engaged and rogue landlords held to account through the scheme in seeking to ensure that the quality of their accommodation met the highest standards.

- 12.5 Following on from the written response provided by Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment and Enforcement, regarding the progress in delivery of step free access at Alperton tube station Councillor Matin, as a supplementary question, sought further assurance regarding the Council's

commitment to provide match funding for the scheme and anticipated timeline for its implementation. These concerns were highlighted given the ongoing scale of development in the area and lack of specific commitment towards match funding within the response provided to date.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth advised that any decision regarding the Council's financial commitment towards the scheme would need to be taken once the current design stage of the scheme had been completed by TfL, which was currently scheduled for Summer 2025. The Council were continuing to engage with TfL on the project and whilst committed to the scheme Councillor Krupa Sheth advised that the match funding element for any provision would need to be reviewed once clarity had been obtained on the final project costs.

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

- (i) Councillor Kansagra in referring to the Leader of the Council's response on the written and supplementary question regarding the Council's Private Sector Landlord Selective Licensing Scheme sought further clarification on the scheme having been introduced on a self-financing basis. Given concerns relating to the impact on local landlords creating a potential disincentive in them seeking to make properties available and adding to current pressure on housing supply, he asked if the Council would re consider the self-funding approach.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt as Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning & Growth felt it important to highlight in response that the use and introduction of Selective Licensing Schemes had been supported by the previous Conservative Government. In restating the Council's commitment towards the schemes use in seeking to safeguarding residents, improve the standard and quality of housing in Brent and hold rogue landlords to account he advised there were no plans to therefore change the nature or self-funding status of the scheme.

- (ii) In noting the Leader's response to the previous question on holding rogue landlords to account, Councillor Georgiou queried whether similar measures were being taken against rogue developers. Concerns were expressed that developers, housing management companies, and housing associations were continually failing residents in terms of the standard and quality of accommodation provided, with views therefore sought on whether those bodies responsible for continued failings should continue to be granted approval for future development within the Borough.

In response to Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning & Growth, seeking to clarify the basis on which the question had been asked, Councillor Georgiou felt his position had been made clear with a response being sought on the issues raised. In terms of a response, Councillor Muhammed Butt then confirmed how the Council

was continuing to hold landlords to account including regular meetings being held between the Council, housing associations and developers. Members were advised that, where notified, the Leader would be willing to ensure issues highlighted continued to be raised at these meetings in an effort to seek appropriate resolution.

- (iii) Councillor Johnson regarding the significant challenges being created by the current pressures in relation to the delivery of social care and approach being adopted to ensure the Council was able to continue monitoring and addressing levels of need across the borough.

In response Councillor Nerva, as Cabinet Member for Community Health and Wellbeing, assured members of the focus in relation to delivery of social care across the borough. As an example, he reported that he recently joined members and a number of adult social care professionals at Chalkhill Community Centre, where Brent was piloting one of the first community assessment days in the country. The event was felt to demonstrate the Council's ongoing commitment to adopting a proactive approach towards addressing the pressures identified involving collaboration with social workers, occupational therapists, Brent Health Matters, Citizens Advice Bureau, and the Sure Trust to provide a one-stop service, which had been well received by residents who were eager to utilise the service. Occupational Therapists had also been present on-site to offer assessments with Artificial Intelligence having also been successfully used to assist the process. Lessons learnt were now being assessed by officers in preparation for further roll out of the initiative with the next assessment day scheduled in South Kilburn for December 2024.

- (iv) Councillor Jayanti Patel seeking further details on the frequency and adequacy of eligibility reviews for those currently claiming Single Person Council Tax Discounts, number of single persons claiming the benefit and removed from the scheme where identified as ineligible. In addition, details were also sought on the number of empty properties currently being charged in Brent with the request made for these details to be provided on a ward by ward breakdown to assist local ward councillors.

In response Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning, and Growth, advised that if further details could be supplied he would arrange a detailed response on the figures being sought following the meeting. Whilst recognising the benefits of support being provided in assisting residents living alone, members were advised of the wider review being undertaken in relation to the Council Tax Support Scheme which would incorporate all elements of the discounts currently available as part of the overall budget process. In terms of empty properties, the opportunity was taken to remind members of the work being undertaken by the Council in seeking to encourage property owners and landlords to bring empty properties back into use with the impact of probate also identified as an issue in this respect. Members were also being encouraged to identify any empty properties within their wards to ensure appropriate checks and measures were undertaken, with the Council having also approved changes in Council Tax charges on empty properties to act as a further incentive to bring them back into use.

- (v) Councillor Lorber relating to a former retail property located along Ealing Road (Alperton) on which planning permission for a housing developed had lapsed but was now being used for late night music and entertainment related activities without any subsequent change in use being approved. In noting that the activities referred to had been subject to the necessary licensing approval and acknowledging the distinction between planning and licensing regulations, concerns were highlighted in terms of venue safety and risk assessment and fact that events had been allowed to proceed without the applicant or user of the premises obtaining what was felt to be relevant planning permission. This was considered an anomaly in the legislation, prompting questions around whether this issue could be reviewed and addressed, given that licenses were being granted to applicants who had not secured relevant planning permission beforehand.

In response Councillor Muhammed Butt as Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning, and Growth, felt it important to recognise (as had been acknowledged within the question) the distinction between the planning and licensing regimes and regulations. In terms of a more detailed response relating to the position regarding the specific premises, guidance would need to be sought from officers although the Leader advised he would support the move towards a more joined up system. It would not, however, be possible to comment in any more detail on the specific site to avoid the potential for predetermination should any further relevant applications subsequently come forward for consideration.

- (vi) Councillor Kansagra relating to concerns being raised by local residents about significant delays continuing to be experienced in seeking the necessary supporting assessments from GPs as part of the blue badge scheme application process and requesting a review of the procedure moving forward.

Whilst initially addressed to Councillor Nerva, as Cabinet member for Community Health & Wellbeing members were advised that the blue badge scheme actually fell within the Customer Service remit. In seeking to respond, however, Councillor Nerva advised that the blue badge scheme was a national programme with the application process and requirements therefore outside the direct control of the Council. The concerns relating to GP access were, however, acknowledged with the opportunity therefore extended for Councillor Kansagra to meet with both himself and officers involved in administering the scheme to consider how best to address the issues highlighted.

- (vii) Whilst not treated as a formal question for response, clarification was provided in response to query raised by Councillor Mahmood on the position regarding the list of petitions which had been presented and noted under the Mayor's Announcements.
- (viii) Councillor Mistry highlighting a number of concerns relating to implementation of the "Don't Mess with Brent" initiative across Queensbury ward given the level of fly tipping, litter and poor state of repair of the pavements and grass verges across the area along with concerns relating to the impact of pann spitting and pigeon droppings particularly in the area adjacent to Kingsbury

Underground station. Clarification was also sought on the engagement of a consultancy company to support development of the Kingsbury Green project.

In response Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment and Enforcement, advised that she would be willing to arrange a comprehensive response on the issues raised if details were provided following the meeting. As part of a more general update, members were advised of the efforts being made to increase the level of enforcement activity across Brent in support of the Don't Mess with Brent campaign with fly-tipping recognised as an issue affecting not only Brent but London and the UK as a whole that required a concerted effort to address. In ending her response, Councillor Krupa Sheth encouraged members to continue reporting defects or areas of concern and advised that she would be willing to visit the area with local ward councillors as an opportunity to focus these discussions and review any action required.

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

13. Report from Chairs of Scrutiny Committees

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

Councillor Ketan Sheth was then invited to introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, with the following issues highlighted:

- Issue considered at the last meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee had been focused around Children and Young People including an overview of SEND provision in Brent and Early Years Provision and progress being made towards meeting the expansion of childcare entitlements. Both items had provided an enhanced understanding on how the Council continued to deliver services for children and young people along with the pressures schools and other providers were facing both financially and in relation to resources as they prepared for the planned expansion of childcare entitlements.
- The review of SEND provision across the borough had highlighted current levels of need in terms of the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and associated pressure on the Council to assess each child and ensure the appropriate packages of support were available, recognising the increasingly complex nature of need being identified. Despite the challenges identified, the Committee had also been pleased to recognise the work being undertaken to maximise the support available to children and young people with SEND, including both inclusive and specialist educational provision along

with the progress in delivery of the SEND capital programme which aimed to provide more than four hundred local SEND places. Areas for improvement identified had included the gap for post-sixteen provision, which members were advised the new post-sixteen skills and resource centre in Welsh Harp would help to address, and the continued work being carried out to reduce the waiting times for families applying for an EHCP on which the Committee had agreed to continue monitoring developments and progress.

- In terms of Early Years provision and progress being made towards meeting the expansion of childcare entitlements the Committee had received an update on the borough-wide response focussed around the provision by independent nurseries or childminders and Council's supporting role. The Committee had been pleased to note the range of excellent provision already on offer along with the contribution early years providers made to the borough, with members reassured that Brent had prepared for the expansion and was supporting providers and the parent carer experience. The review undertaken by the Committee also included evidence from a voluntary agency nursery manager and an early years childminder who both not only thanked the Early Years Team and the Inclusion Team for their support but also explained what additional support they required moving forward and provided suggestions to make Brent's offer even more comprehensive.
- The focus of the next meeting on Housing as a theme, with updates including the performance and resident satisfaction of i4B and First Wave Housing, an annual update from Brent Housing Management and the current status of the Temporary Accommodation and Homeless Prevention services.
- The ongoing and active engagement of the Committee in the work of the North West London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee Brent, which Councillor Ketan Sheth continued to Chair. This had included a review of proposals relating to Palliative Care, a new Mental Health strategy for North West London and a continued focus around Primary Care Access with upcoming reviews including the North West London NHS Winter Campaign and Health Equity Programme.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Ketan Sheth for his update and then invited Councillor Conneely as chair of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by that Committee. Having congratulated Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, the following issues were highlighted as part of the update:

- The wide-ranging nature of scrutiny activity undertaken by the Committee since the last update, with key reviews including:
 - Ongoing monitoring of Brent's overall financial position based on a detailed review of the current 2024-25 financial forecast. This had highlighted a total forecasted overspend of £14.8m, consisting of £0.4m against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and £14.4m against the General Fund revenue budget with the main pressures identified related to ongoing spending pressures in demand-led services such as social care and costs associated with homelessness and provision of Temporary Accommodation. Members had also sought further clarification on a newly identified budgetary risk for 2024-25 related to

‘Supported Exempt Accommodation’ with the Committee keen to maintain an overview on the action being taken to mitigate against the pressures identified and effectiveness of control mechanisms as part of their ongoing monitoring process.

- The collection, allocation, and spend of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) and Section 106 Agreement contributions. Having received an update on the allocation process, further clarification had been sought on the effectiveness of the process given concerns highlighted in relation to the utilisation of available funds in meeting borough plan priorities and addressing local needs. Whilst recognising the current constraints on use of SCIL and S106 funding, the Committee had been keen to encourage a more proactive and creative approach towards the use of available and unallocated funding with members supporting ongoing lobbying to allow for a more flexible use of the funding being generated.
- The ongoing focus and work of the Committee in seeking to encourage, where identified as required, change and improvements in the way services were being delivered for local communities across the borough involving all relevant stakeholders including a focus in the new Year on the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report and People Strategy.
- The thanks expressed to members and other key stakeholders for their engagement to date in the Scrutiny Budget Task Group which Council was advised had now commenced its review of the Councils draft budget proposals 2025-26.

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

Following the updates provided, the Mayor advised that the remainder of time available would be open for questions from non-cabinet members to the Scrutiny Chairs. As no questions were raised, the Mayor thanked the Scrutiny Chair’s for their contribution and moved to the next item.

14. **Report from the Vice Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee**

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

In terms of issues highlighted Councillor Chan, having also congratulated Councillor Hack on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, drew members’ attention to the important role and work undertaken by the Committee in relation to monitoring and advising on various governance matters relating to audit activity, the Council’s finance, accounting and regulatory framework and members standards of conduct.

The importance of the Committee’s role was also highlighted in terms of the wider financial challenges, risks and pressures being faced by the Council with a focus provided in relation to delivery of the Internal Audit Plan and Council’s risk management structure and strategic risk management process including not only the effectiveness of governance processes but also Council’s financial resilience

given the ongoing financial pressures faced. Members were advised this had also been identified as a significant risk by the External Auditors within their 2023-24 Annual Value for Money Report with the Council having already recognised the challenging nature of decisions required to address the position and ensure the Council was able to continue delivering a balanced and financial sustainable budget. In outlining the range of other work being undertaken in relation to issues such as delivery of a more flexible and agile risk based Internal Audit Plan, the Council's emergency planning arrangements and development of the Strategic Risk Register, Councillor Chan concluded his update by reminding members of the Committee's continued focus on the adequacy of the Council's governance, risk and control arrangements in order to provide assurance and confidence on compliance and control of the Council's key governance, financial management and accounting arrangements.

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

15. **Non Cabinet Members' Debate**

In accordance with Standing Order 34, the Mayor advised that the next item on the agenda was the non-cabinet member debate, with the subject chosen for consideration being guaranteeing new builds were safe and free of dangerous defects.

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

The Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to introduce the motion which had been submitted as the basis for the Non-Cabinet Member debate. In moving the motion, Councillor Georgiou began by highlighting the significant increase in residential developments across the borough over recent years, which it was felt had changed the landscape of Brent particularly in terms of the concentration of large tower blocks around Wembley Stadium, Wembley Central and Alperton. Recognising the need for residents to be able to live in safe buildings free from defects, Councillor Georgiou advised that the subject put forward for debate was seeking to highlight not only the negative impacts associated with the scale of these developments on existing residents in Brent but also the poor standard of many of the new builds and effect on those living within the developments. As examples, reference was made to issues which had been highlighted by residents relating to dangerous and faulty lifts in high rise blocks, water and waste leaks, damp and mould and unsafe balconies and outdoor communal space. Whilst developers at the planning stage were keen to highlight how seriously they took building standards with commitments given to the construction of good quality and safe developments. these were not always delivered with concerns also highlighted at the way they were subsequently being held to account by the Council. As a result, the motion was seeking a tougher line being taken with developers who consistently failed to meet the required standards in terms of building safety and construction with a need identified to better hold developers, construction companies and housing management companies to account for the speedy resolution of safety issues and defects, where identified, to minimise the impact on residents. Given the concerns highlighted, Councillor Georgiou hoped that all members would support the motion

submitted as the basis for the debate and action being sought to ensure the Council became a leading voice in calling for better regulation and accountability from developers who were failing residents living in their buildings.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Georgiou for introducing the motion and then opened up the debate for contributions from other members.

In providing an initial response to the debate and motion, Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration Planning & Growth, thanked Councillor Georgiou for highlighting the issues raised and implicit recognition within the motion that devolving more powers, to local government would be a beneficial thing to improve building safety. In support of this position the Leader advised he would be willing to write to the new Government making the Council's view clear on the need for improvements in relation to governance around building safety with examples sought on where it was felt the current regulator had failed to act in this respect. Whilst supporting the view that every resident had the right to live in good quality, well maintained homes and recognising the key role which the Council had in securing the provision of those homes, both in terms of commissioning building and also in attracting the private sector into the borough through the framework of the Local Plan, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised there were a number of issues and recommended actions within the motion which it would not be possible to support.

As a starting point, attention was drawn to the limited number of criteria which could be considered as material planning considerations with development applications needing to be assessed and considered against these on the basis of the plans submitted by the applicant and site in question, rather than on the history of their previous developments with any deviation from this approach likely to result in costly legal challenge. Until there was any change in the law local authority building control departments had limited responsibility for dealing with issues that arose in buildings after their construction had been completed. In clarifying the Council's responsibility, it was pointed out that jurisdiction for any issues following construction fell within the remit of the Building Safety Regulator who would need to work with the building owner, principal contractor and designer responsible for the development in order to ensure they were addressed. Given this position Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to recognise that the Council was not therefore resourced (either legally or financially) to be able to take on the additional responsibilities being sought which, it was pointed out would also duplicate support and resource already available from specialists such as the Housing Ombudsman and Building Safety Regulator. In terms of reference to the potential use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to fund the additional actions being sought, members were reminded (as had been highlighted at a recent scrutiny meeting) that the use of CIL remained tightly regulated and would not support the proposed use outlined within the motion.

In concluding his response, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to highlight the extent and nature of the housing and homelessness emergency currently faced across the borough, which he felt supported the need for the Council to continue encouraging further development with an urgency that reflected the current levels of demand for the supply of housing. With the Council already committed to providing the services they had the powers to deliver he therefore advised that the Labour Group would not be able to support the motion moved as the basis for the debate.

As a further contribution to the debate Councillor Jayanti Patel also felt it was important to recognise the current restrictions on the use of CIL, which he understood would not be available for use on revenue schemes or in seeking to rectify existing building defects as proposed within the motion. He also felt it was important, in considering the issues highlighted within the motion, to ensure that private sector and registered social housing landlords (including the Council) and developers were held to account for addressing safety concerns within the properties they owned or were responsible for maintaining with use of existing legal powers or the Housing Ombudsman rather than seeking to place additional duties on the Council.

Continuing to focus on CIL and Section 106, Councillor Kansagra felt there was a need to recognise the significant balance currently held by the Council in their CIL reserve. Whilst supporting efforts being made to lobby for more flexible use of the funds generated, he felt the Council should be making more effort to utilise the funds available in order to improve and enhance the infrastructure in areas surrounding major development sites across the borough including highway and broader neighbourhood improvements.

As a final contribution, and in seeking to move the debate away from CIL and refocus on building safety, Councillor Lorber felt that the key issue remained the ability and responsibility for holding developers to account for the quality and standard of building construction within the schemes they were delivering and in rectifying safety defects (including cladding issues) following completion. Whilst recognising the pressure on funding, Councillor Lorber felt the current development system required reform with developers able to speculate on the acquisition of development sites and then contract out responsibility for the construction and management of the site making it more difficult to hold them to account for the quality and standard of build being delivered and the remedy safety issues and defects once completed. In order to ensure residents were able to live in safe buildings, Councillor Lorber advised he would therefore be supporting the motion in seeking reform of the development system and provision of powers enabling local authorities to step in and act when issues in new buildings had been identified.

As there were no further contributions, the Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration, Planning & Growth to summarise and close the debate.

In closing the debate, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to remind members of the current financial challenges faced by the Council, which made supporting the unfunded proposals within the motion unviable to achieve, including the proposed use of CIL. Whilst unable, therefore, to support the proposals within the motion Councillor Muhammed Butt assured members that the Council (using the existing powers available) would continue seeking to hold developers and landlords to account in as robust a way as possible for the maintenance of their properties. For the reasons identified during the debate he therefore reiterated that the Labour Group would not be supporting the motion moved as the basis for the debate.

Having thanked members for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion moved as the basis for the Non-Cabinet Member debate which was declared **LOST**.

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

“Guaranteeing new builds are safe and free of dangerous defects.”

The number of new residential buildings in the borough has increased substantially in recent years. New buildings have changed the landscape of our borough, with the vast majority of large towers blocks around Wembley Stadium, Wembley Central and Alperton.

Brent’s Labour Cabinet, particularly the Leader and former Cabinet Member for Regeneration, often point to significant building in the borough as their proudest achievement – but they always fail to recognise its negative impact on existing residents in Brent and those who end up living in these buildings.

A worrying number of new buildings in Brent have significant defects. The standard of some new builds is shockingly poor – issues include dangerous, faulty lifts in high-rise blocks, water and waste leaks, unsafe balconies and outdoor communal spaces.,

At the Planning stage, developers are keen to highlight how seriously they take building standards and commit to building good quality, safe new homes. Sadly, some fail to do this and very little is done to hold them to account. Brent Council has little involvement after the planning stage and Council Officers are on record as effectively stating it is not the local authority’s responsibility to do anything if there are issues in new buildings once built.

All residents deserve to live in safe buildings, free of defects. When issues arise, developers, construction companies and housing management companies must do a better job of resolving these issues quickly to minimise the impact on residents.

Brent Council should have a much tougher line on developers who consistently fail residents by building unsafe buildings with significant defects and should be a leading voice in calling for better regulation and accountability from developers who are failing residents in their buildings.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- Create a borough-wide log of issues in new builds to get a better picture of the type of problems faced and urge the Labour Government, as part of their planning reforms, to enable decisions about whether to allow developers, who have issues in their existing stock, to continue building in our borough to be treated as a material planning consideration
- Urge the Labour Government to make it possible for local authorities to step in and act when issues in new buildings occur. Currently Brent’s Building Control Team are only responsible for ensuring that the construction of any new building is undertaken in line with building regulations. This needs to be

extended to when building is completed and when issues present after the construction phase. Additional costs associated with increasing responsibilities for the Council should be permitted to come directly from CIL contributions made by developers.

- Create a dedicated helpline for tenants and leaseholders in new blocks across the borough, for them to be able to report issues so that the Council can assist in guaranteeing action from the relevant bodies and when necessary to support residents in raising complaints with the Housing Ombudsman.”

16. **Statement of Licensing Policy**

The Mayor invited Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment & Enforcement, to introduce a report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Regeneration presenting the outcome of a review of the Council’s Statement of Licensing Policy and updated Policy being recommended for formal adoption following that review.

In moving the report, Councillor Krupa Sheth advised members of the duty placed on the Council, in its role as a Licensing Authority under the Licensing Act 2003, to determine, publish and keep under review a Statement of Licensing Policy covering a five-year period. Members were advised that as the current Policy was due to expire on the 5 January 2025 the report presented the outcome of the current review and changes identified as a result, which had been designed to meet statutory requirements and the evolving needs of local communities across the borough. As such, members were advised the Policy was as a key document not only in terms of defining the approach adopted towards the way licensing the sale of alcohol, late-night refreshments, and licensed venues was managed but also in providing guidance to applicants and license holders and in setting out the Council’s (as Licensing Authority) expectations on compliance, community safety, and the integration of the licensing approach with broader council strategies. Members were advised that, subject to formal approval and adoption, the new Policy would become effective from January 2025 with the content having been designed to carefully align with the Borough Plan priorities in terms of supporting Prosperity and Stability in Brent, a Healthier Brent, and Thriving Communities.

The new Policy had also included a number of updates, which had reflected an evidence based approach towards their development as well as feedback from Responsible Authorities with the changes designed to address key issues such as alcohol-related crime, health impacts, and nuisance affecting local communities based around 32 specific policies . These included measures for twelve cumulative impact zones (based on areas identified as facing challenges due to high levels of street drinking and alcohol-related incidents) seeking to limit the growth of new off-licences and other alcohol-serving establishments in an effort to reduce cumulative impact on local residents. In addition, the Policy had also sought to address a number of critical and emerging areas and priorities including (in preparing for the introduction of Martyn’s Law) measures for enhanced event and venue safety, including risk assessments and emergency preparedness; introducing targeted measures to improve safety and reduce harm for women and vulnerable populations focussed around the nighttime economy; provide enhanced oversight of delivery services and dark kitchens to ensure they meet (given the growth of these type of businesses) the same standards as traditional licensed premises and

the introduction of clear expectations for licensees to prevent and respond to drink spiking. Members attention was also drawn to the additional background papers circulated for reference purposes alongside the main report in relation to the Equality Assessment and consultation responses received as part of the review process and agreement by Cabinet (who had considered and approved the Policy for reference to Council on 12 November 2024) that the Policy and any subsequent associated feedback would continue to be subject to ongoing review.

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

Speaking in support of the Policy, Councillor Chan took the opportunity to outline the extent of nuisance for local residents and businesses and public health related harm being created as a result of the sale of low cost and high strength alcohol across the borough and specifically within Harlesden. The decision to retain the policy on a voluntary Minimum Unit Price was therefore welcomed as a positive measure arising from the review with the overall approach outlined within the Policy commended.

As a further contribution, Councillor Lorber also spoke reiterating the concerns highlighted during the councillor question time session earlier in the meeting regarding the balance and relationship between licensing and planning objectives in the considering of applications relating to specific premises. As an example, reference was again made to a former retail property located on Ealing Road (Alperton) for which late night music and entertainment related activities had been licensed despite the building not having what was felt to be relevant planning permission. This had led to concerns being raised in terms of venue safety and was felt to highlight an anomaly in the legislation and need for a more co-ordinated approach between the licensing and planning regime.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor thanked members for their contribution and invited Councillor Krupa Sheth to exercise her right of reply. In closing the debate, Councillor Krupa Sheth took the opportunity to specially thank Councillor Chan and other members for their ongoing support in relation to the Policy and the Mayor then moved on to put the recommendations in the report to the vote which were declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED** following its referral by Cabinet on 12 November 2024 to approve the revised Statement of Licensing Policy (5 January 2025 – 4 January 2030) for adoption as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report.

17. **Statement of Gambling Principles**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment & Enforcement, to introduce a report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Regeneration detailing the outcome of a review of the Council's Statement of Gambling Principles.

In presenting the report, Councillor Krupa Sheth advised that the review had been undertaken as a result of the current Statement of Principles expiring on the 31 January 2025 with the requirement to produce a Statement of Gambling Principles established under the Gambling Act 2005 and required to cover a three-year period.

Each Statement was designed to outline the principles to be applied in exercising the Council's functions as the Licensing Authority under the Act which included the issuing of premises licences for casinos, bingo halls, betting shops, adult gaming centres and licensed family entertainment centres as well as permits for gaming machines in pubs, clubs, and other alcohol licensed premises. Whilst the Statement had been subject to a comprehensive review during 2023, the current review had been designed to ensure it was brought in line with the Gambling Commission review timetable and involved amendments to website links as well as changes reflecting the outcome of the consultation process which had been undertaken to support the review. In noting the key role the statement fulfilled in terms of outlining local priorities and way in which gambling was managed and regulated in response to local concerns, based around the key licensing objectives, members were also reminded of the work currently being undertaken to develop a Joint Strategy Needs Assessment that would include an estimate on the scale of potential risk that gambling posed to the health of Brent resident. In commending the report to Council, Councillor Krupa Sheth ended by highlighting the additional work being undertaken by the Council, working in partnership with a variety of stakeholders, to ensure the new government was aware of the level of shared concern regarding the harm being caused by gambling and particularly around the approval of new gambling premises.

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

Speaking in support of the Statement, Councillor Nerva highlighted concerns identified in relation to the public health impact and harm on local communities arising from gambling, specifically in the areas where this activity was focussed. Frustration was expressed at the restrictions on issues that could be included as matters for consideration in terms of the wider approach adopted towards regulation under Gambling Commissions guidance, with the efforts being made to work with the new Government to address the focus on the harm and public health impact caused by gambling welcomed and endorsed.

As a further contribution to the debate, Councillor Kelcher echoed the concerns raised reminding members of the significant blight being caused in his ward (Harlesden & Kensal Green) by the cluster of adult gaming centres and gambling premises located in that specific area. Referring to the motion agreed at the last Council meeting in September 2024 on the Council's approach in seeking to address the harm being created by the proliferation of gambling premises across Brent Councillor Kelcher advised that following the Council having written to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to outline the Council's priorities for reform he had been invited to address an All Party Group of MPs in Parliament set up to focus on the issue of gambling related harm using Harlesden as a case study. In outlining the significant and harmful social, economic, and public health impacts of gambling the difficulties in being able to oppose and prevent the opening of further premises were highlighted, particularly given the addictive nature of the different types of gambling machines available and harm identified as a result, with the premises often being placed in areas of high deprivation with the most vulnerable residents. Expressing concern at the limited powers currently available for local authorities to restrict the opening of gambling premises and their clustering in specific areas along with the resources available to operators seeking to appeal against any attempts to oppose or challenge new applications, Councillor Kelcher

ended by supporting the need for wider reform of the Gambling Act and for enhanced regulation of the gambling sector in order to protect vulnerable residents and address the concerns identified.

Also speaking to highlight the Conservative Group's support for the revised Statement of Gambling Principles, Councillors Mistry & Kansagra took the opportunity to recognise the concerns previously highlighted in relation to the harm associated with gambling, particularly in relation to public health, families and young people and as such advised they would be supporting the recommended approval of the Statement.

As a final contribution to the debate, Councillor Grahl also spoke in support of the concerns highlighted during the debate in relation to the harm being caused by gambling, particularly where those premises were located in close proximity to schools, given the way in which the areas in which gambling premises were located tended to experience increased levels of crime and community safety issues. Recognising the level of social and public health harm caused by gambling to families and across local communities, Councillor Grahl also supported the need to address what she felt to be the outdated nature of the permissive approach within the current legislation under the "Aim to Permit" and provide local authorities with the necessary powers to be able to refuse these types of establishments in view of the impact and harm being caused.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor thanked members for their contribution and invited Councillor Krupa Sheth to exercise her right of reply. In summing up, Councillor Krupa Sheth drew members attention to the additional background papers circulated for reference purposes alongside the main report in relation to the Equality Assessment and consultation responses received as part of the review process and agreement by Cabinet (who had considered and approved the Policy for reference to Council on 12 November 2024) that the Policy and any subsequent feedback would be subject to ongoing review.

Having thanked members for their contributions the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore unanimously **RESOLVED** to approve the revised Statement of Gambling Principles (31 January 2025 – 31 January 2028) for adoption as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report.

Prior to the following item being considered Debra Norman (as Corporate Director Law & Governance) withdrew from the meeting with Marsha Henry (Deputy Director of Law) taking over as her representative.

18. **Voluntary Redundancy Scheme 2024**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources to introduce a report from the Chief Executive in respect of the Council's 2024 Voluntary Redundancy Scheme and seeking approval to make ten severance payments, consisting predominantly of actuarial strain costs relating to the release of a pension, on the basis that the employees' posts were redundant.

In moving the report, Councillor Mili Patel confirmed that as the pension strain costs the Council would be required to bear under the Pension Scheme rules amounted to over £100,000 for each of the proposed severance payments, Full Council approval would be required for each of them.

As no members indicated they wished to speak on the item and Councillor Mili Patel advised she would not, therefore, be seeking to exercise her right of reply the Mayor advised that he would move straight to the vote.

Having noted the exempt information contained in the appendix, without the need to exclude the press and public from the meeting and move into closed session, the recommendations in the report were then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Approve the severance payments set out in the exempt appendix to the report.
- (2) Note that all payments contained within the report had been calculated in line with the council's Managing Change Policy and the pension strain payments that would arise under the Local Government Pension Scheme which were required to be paid.
- (3) Note the overall outcome of the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme run during 2024.

19. **Exclusion of the Press & Public**

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

20. **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 he looked forward to seeing everyone again in person at the next Full Council which would be the Council budget setting meeting taking place at 6pm on Thursday 27 January 2025.

As this was the final Full Council meeting prior to the Christmas and New Year holiday period the Mayor closed the meeting by thanking all members for their support over the year and wished everyone happiness for the festive season.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm

COUNCILLOR TARIQ DAR MBE
Mayor