

 Brent	Cabinet 8 September 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Resident and Housing Services
	Lead Member – Cabinet member for Customer Experience, Resident Support and Culture (Councillor Promise Knight)
Inter Authority Agreement Brent, Barnet and Harrow Mortuary Service	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	One Appendix 1: Inter Authority Agreement Shared Mortuary Service 2025
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Mandy Brammer, Head of Registration & Bereavement Services, Superintendent Registrar / Designated Individual 020 8937 1766 mandy.brammer@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. Brent Council operates a public mortuary located within the grounds of Northwick Park Hospital as a shared service arrangement with Barnet and Harrow Councils, all of which are within the jurisdiction of the North London Coroner.
- 1.2. This report proposes the continuation of the shared service and seeks Cabinet approval for Brent to enter an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) with Barnet and Harrow for a new shared service arrangement at Northwick Park from October 2025 – October 2040 with a Break Clause after 10 years.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Agrees that a public mortuary service should continue to be provided by Brent Council at Northwick Park on behalf of Brent, Barnet and Harrow Councils.
- 2.2 Approves to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Residents and Housing Services in consultation with the Chief Legal Officer and the Chief Finance Officer to agree and finalise the terms of the Inter Authority Agreement (see Appendix 1 - IAA 2025), and to take all necessary action to implement the proposed shared service arrangement.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1.1 As part of the Council's shared commitment to providing dignified, efficient, and compassionate services to all residents, this proposal details the arrangement for a continued cross-borough agreement on mortuary services.
- 3.1.2 The sensitive nature of mortuary services demands the highest standards of professionalism, respect, and resource management. With Brent's provision of this statutory service, our boroughs can ensure that these essential services are delivered with consistency, efficiency, and the utmost care during some of the most difficult moments families face.
- 3.1.3 A collaborative approach allows us to pool resources, share expertise, and streamline operations, ultimately enhancing the quality of service while managing costs responsibly. This agreement reflects our dedication to working beyond borders for the well-being of our communities and sets a foundation for future partnerships across other vital public services.
- 3.1.4 This cooperation will foster stronger bonds between our boroughs and improve outcomes for residents, staff, and stakeholders alike.
- 3.1.5 This IAA will ensure every individual is treated with dignity and respect, upholding the values that define our public service ethos.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 The Public Health Act 1936, Section 198, places a duty on local authorities to provide mortuary and post-mortem facilities for H.M. Coroner. Brent Council meets this duty by providing a mortuary at Northwick Park Hospital (the Site). This service sits within the Resident and Housing Services Directorate. In the event of a mass fatality incident, the Site is designated as a disaster mortuary for North London.
- 3.2.2 Brent and Harrow Councils jointly hold the Site under a 99 year lease from the Secretary of State which expires on 25 December 2080. A formal agreement, from 1983, was entered between both Councils setting out the joint

arrangements for the management, finance, governance and termination. Barnet Council, following a review of their mortuary arrangements, joined the consortium in October 2015 (cabinet paper 16th March 2015)

The three councils entered into an updated shared service agreement dated 13th October 2015 for a duration of ten years. Brent Council has continued to manage the shared service on behalf of the three councils on the terms agreed and that is to expire on 12 October 2025.

- 3.2.3 The three councils, under the current shared service agreement, agreed that each council would contribute a modest proportion of the revenue savings each year to a refurbishment reserve fund that is intended to provide sufficient funds for future capital refurbishment costs. However, given that the current agreement is about to expire officers are proposing for a new tri-borough Inter authority agreement (IAA) to commence from 13 October 2025 so services can continue to be provide following the end of the current agreement on 12 October 2025, and carry out the works set out below.
- 3.2.4 The Northwick Park Mortuary, originally built with foresight to accommodate potential increases in post-mortem demands is now nearing a critical stage of expansion and therefore, Officers have begun a major refurbishment (to be completed by Autumn 2027) that will increase storage capacity by 80 refrigerated and freezer spaces. This expansion is expected to also address the shortage of larger bariatric storage units, ensuring we continue to meet the diverse needs of our communities.
- 3.2.5 Officers have discussed the need for the councils to share the capital costs of this expansion between them as it will provide a significant financial benefit, reducing the burden of infrastructure investment that would have otherwise been borne individually. In addition, each council will contribute a portion of the revenue savings to a refurbishment reserve fund, designed to secure the long-term sustainability of the service and provide for future capital works.
- 3.2.6 Under the new IAA, Brent Council will continue the management of the shared service on behalf of Harrow and Barnet councils, overseeing coordination, staffing, and operational responsibilities. As part of this arrangement, a percentage of Brent's management costs will be allocated to the shared revenue budget, ensuring that resources are effectively deployed to maintain operational excellence.
- 3.2.7 This cross-borough collaboration represents a proactive approach to ensuring the future resilience and efficiency of mortuary services, while maintaining the high standards of care and service our residents deserve.
- 3.2.8 In agreement with Harrow, Brent and Barnet's preference is that service governance is through quarterly review meetings between commissioning officers for each borough.
- 3.2.9 HM Coroner for North London, Mr Andrew Walker, continues support for the tri borough arrangement at Northwick Park.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 Brent convenes a quarterly Strategic Monitoring Board meeting with Barnet and Harrow Council representatives. These proposals have been considered regularly at that Board Meeting.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 The 99 yrs lease is held on a peppercorn rent. This is a nil cost.
- 5.2 The financial responsibility for operating a statutory mortuary service is shared by the three Councils. This includes not only the day-to-day running of the service and contributions to capital costs for future expansion of mortuary capacity, but also the shared burden of unexpected additional expenditures. These may include exceptional and unforeseen capital costs for storage equipment, which are funded without recourse to borrowing.
- 5.3 Initially, each authority contributed to the running costs on a per capita basis. However, this approach was disproportionately weighted towards Barnet, which is the most populous but only the second-highest user of the facility. It was also overly lenient towards Harrow, the least populous and without a major receiving hospital. Currently, costs are apportioned by borough and based on facility usage from the previous year.
- 5.4 For the financial year 2025/26, the full-year forecast stands at £556,800. This forecast includes all mortuary (and related) operational Costs for year (inc. Establishment posts, space rental for Contingency Freezers).
- 5.5 The 2025/26 administration recharge has been calculated as £24,356, the management recharge is £36,613 and the operations recharge is £341,227. These figures are recalculated each year based on current costs. The terms of the IAA state that 95% of the total due for the year is payable in the first invoice (month 1), the remainder (5% - assuming no overspend) is payable in Month 13 following the final outturn.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 Section 198 of the Public Health Act 1936, places a duty on local authorities to provide mortuary and post-mortem facilities for H.M. Coroner.
- 6.2 Such an establishment must hold a mortuary licence issued by the Human Tissue Authority, for which the maintenance of standards of tissue control, disposal, documentation and systems are required, in addition to standards around the facilities and competencies of staff.
- 6.3 The recommendation in this report is for the Council to enter into an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) with Barnet and Harrow Councils. The Council is able to enter into an IAA pursuant to section 1 of the Local Authority (Goods and Services) Act 1970 ("1970 Act") which provides that local authorities may enter into contracts to provides goods and services to other public bodies. Barnet and Harrow both fall within the meaning of 'public bodies' as defined by the 1970 Act.

- 6.4 Officers are required under Contract Standing Order 87, and before entering into any arrangement, to comply with the relevant requirements of Financial Regulation in Part 2 of the Council's Constitution; seek the advice from the Director of Law and the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources and obtain Cabinet's (or if appropriate the General Purposes Committee) approval where:
- (ii) the gross cost to the Council of providing the relevant goods, services or works under the contract is estimated to exceed £1m per annum calculating the full costs over the term of the contract (including any period of extension(s) anticipated by the contract); or
- 6.5 The shared service arrangement will operate under an Inter Authority Agreement to be entered into by the three councils. This will set out the financial arrangements, as well as the legal and contractual obligations applicable to the parties.
- 6.6 The mortuary building is held in the joint names of Brent Council and Harrow Council under a 99 year lease granted at a nominal rent by the Secretary of State on 10th June 1982. The new consortium agreement made Barnet Council a party to the lease. As there is a prohibition against a disposal of the lease it has to be varied by the freeholder, London North West Healthcare NHS Trust, in conjunction with the Lessees to enable the mortuary lease to be held jointly with Barnet Council.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1 The Parties to this Agreement recognise the paramount importance of ensuring that all mortuary services are delivered in a manner that respects and upholds the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Each Party commits to providing services that are accessible and culturally sensitive to the diverse populations served, including but not limited to individuals of varying cultural, religious, spiritual, linguistic, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Respect for cultural and religious death practices are integrated into service protocols to honour the dignity of deceased individuals and the bereaved families.

- 7.2 Mechanisms for receiving and addressing concerns related to equity, diversity, or inclusion will be established and maintained to uphold accountability and continuous improvement. The Parties also commit to engaging with diverse community stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples and faith leaders, to guide and inform culturally responsive practices. Regular review of EDI outcomes will be conducted collaboratively to identify and address any barriers to equitable access, thereby ensuring that mortuary services remain inclusive, respectful, and responsive to the needs of all communities within the scope of this Agreement.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 All three boroughs recognise the importance of minimizing the environmental impact of mortuary services and commit to integrating sustainable practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve resources, and promote environmental stewardship.
- 8.2 This includes adopting energy-efficient operations, responsible waste management, water conservation, and exploring eco-friendly technologies and alternative methods such as green burials. The Boroughs collaborate to ensure compliance with environmental regulations, continuously review practices to align with climate change mitigation goals, and support innovation to deliver environmentally responsible mortuary services under this Agreement.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

- 9.1 The provision by Brent of the Service to Barnet and Harrow through the Shared Service from the Commencement Date are Brent employs. The Employees shall be entitled to be members of the Local Government Pension Scheme ("LGPS") during the Term.

Brent is responsible for all remuneration, benefits, entitlements and outgoings in respect of the Employees, including without limitation, all wages, holiday pay, bonuses, commissions, payments of PAYE, national insurance contributions, pension contributions and otherwise, from the Commencement Date to the expiry or termination of this Agreement.

10.0 Communication Considerations

None

Report sign off:

Tom Cattermole

Corporate Director of Resident and Housing Services