



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 16 September 2019

1. Question from Cllr Anita Thakkar to Cllr Eleanor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing:

Of the three constituencies that form Brent, more than 5,000 households have enrolled on Universal Credit. In time, the remaining 29,740 households that remain on legacy benefits are likely to face so-called “managed migration” onto universal credit. The National Audit Office has indicated in reports that ‘it is not clear that Universal Credit will cost less to administer than the existing benefits system’.

The nationwide roll-out of universal credit has been beset with complications, with vulnerable residents facing real hardship, with widely documented delays lasting weeks, sometimes months before the first payment of Universal Credit is awarded. This can lead to cash flow crises, spiralling debt, rent arrears and ultimately eviction.

Will the Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform re-affirm that the Council will not evict its tenants, when they face rent arrears; owing to delays in receiving universal credit?

Response:

The roll out of universal Credit started in Brent almost a year ago. Already we have seen an increase in the number of council tenants in rent arrears. We work closely with anyone who is struggling because of the roll out of Universal Credit and would encourage any resident who is concerned to contact us as early as possible.

We’re also working with partners across the voluntary sector, as well as funding an employment support programme through our Housing Revenue Account, to help residents access opportunities.

A well-managed and humane welfare system is part of a civilised society – there for any of us if we fall on hard times and providing dignity for anyone who cannot work. Our residents deserve better than the chaos and chronic failures in the current system and I can reaffirm that we will not be evicting any of our tenants who fall into rent arrears as a result of a delay in the payment of Universal Credit.

2. Question from Cllr Parvez Ahmed to Cllr Shama Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning:

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy scheme (NCIL) is a key plank in fulfilling Brent Labour's manifesto pledge to create a borough of shared prosperity. It acknowledges that major developments cause significant disruption to local communities; and that where wealth is created, we should enshrine the principle that local people feel the benefit.

Will the Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning clarify, since the inception of the NCIL scheme in 2017, to date how much money has been allocated to voluntary groups, residents and other stakeholders, for the purpose of community infrastructure projects?

Response:

The overall allocation to NCIL projects (excluding the most recent round, so 2017/18 R1 – 2018/19 R2) is **£4,650,376**

The breakdown is set out below:

	2017/18 R1 (£)	2017/19 R2 (£)	2018/19 R1 (£)	2018/19 R2 (£)	Total (£)
To voluntary/community groups, including churches*	404,313.78	712,431.00	517,557.00	816,266.16	2,450,567.94
To schools/academies	0	0	66,500	130,200	196,700.00
To companies (companies limited by guarantee/shares, private limited companies)	0	0	37,678.50	283,102	320,780.50
To housing associations	0	36,702.00	0	0	36,702
To not for profit organisations/CICs	0	0	12,000	0	12,000
To council-delivered projects (e.g. public realm improvements, street trees, play equipment)	326,300.00	589,878.15	360,087.00	357,360.00	1,633,625.15
Of which was bid-for by residents/community groups (as opposed to council staff)	73,000.00	327,126.00	60,000.00	172,860.00	632,986.00
Of which was bid-for by Brent councillors	7,500.00	1,250.00	0.00	0	8,750.00

*where an organisation is both a charity and a registered company, it has been listed under voluntary/community groups (e.g. sickle cell society, CAB, Global Skills Centre)

In addition to the above, approximately £3m has been allocated for projects in the 2019/20 R1 funding round, of which approximately £1.8m has been allocated to voluntary/community groups, including churches, and approximately £400k of which has been allocated to projects to be delivered by Brent Council that were bid for by Brent residents/community groups. As funding for projects of value >£100k is subject to approval at Cabinet and all awarded funds are provisional until the funding agreements for the projects are signed, these figures are provisional.

To clarify, no monies would be allocated directly to residents through NCIL. Residents and unregistered groups can apply for funds but in this case the Council or a Brent school must deliver the project.

3. Question from Cllr Elliot Chappell to Cllr Margaret McLennan, Deputy Leader of the Council:

Each year the council has the ability to ameliorate the effects of business rates by apportioning rates relief, in order to protect charities, non-profit making bodies and small businesses.

Will the Lead Member for Resources highlight the total financial value of this policy, over the last financial year?

Response:

The Council provides Non-Domestic Rates relief to small businesses and non-profit making organisations who qualify for reductions under specific criteria that are set either nationally or locally. The table below shows the amounts granted during the last financial year, 2018/19.

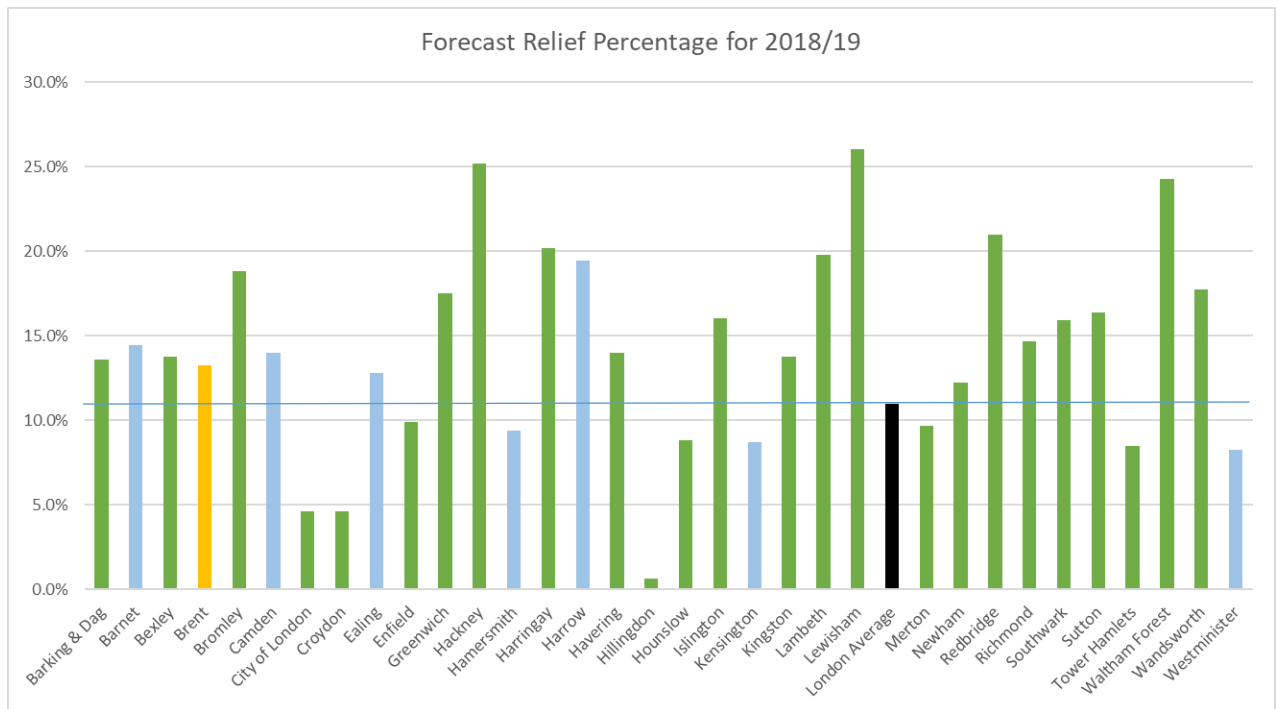
	£m
Mandatory Reliefs	
¹ Transitional Revaluation	1.43
Small Business Rate	6.30
Mandatory Charity / Community	9.32
Unoccupied Property	3.66
Total Mandatory	20.71
 Discretionary Relief	
Non-Profit Making Organisation top -up	0.45
Other Small Business Discretionary *	0.54
Hardship	0.04
Total Discretionary	1.03
Total Reliefs Granted	21.74

*Includes Pubs and retail businesses

The total relief granted represents a reduction of 15% on the overall Gross Rates Payable for the year (£148m).

At the beginning of the year the percentage rate of relief Brent forecast would be granted to local organisations was above the London average (11%) and amongst our 7 neighbouring boroughs was estimating a percentage level at the mid-point across the range from 8.3% to 19.4%.

¹ NB. Transitional Revaluation relief supports businesses affected by the 2017 revaluation increase from the previous year and will be available until 2021.



Source: NNDR1