



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Minutes of the ORDINARY (BUDGET SETTING) MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held in the Conference Hall on Thursday 23 February 2023 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Abdi Aden

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Orleen Hylton

COUNCILLORS:

Afzal	Agha
Ahmed	Akram
Begum	Benea
M Butt	S Butt
Chan	Chappell
Chohan	Choudry
Collymore	Conneely
Dar	Dixon
Donnelly-Jackson	Ethapemi
Farah	Fraser
Gbajumo	Georgiou
Grahl	Hack
Hirani	Johnson
Kabir	Kansagra
Kelcher	Kennelly
Knight	Long
Lorber	Mahmood
Matin	Maurice
Miller	Mistry
Mitchell	Moeen
Molloy	Nerva
Patel	M Patel
Rajan-Seelan	Rubin
Shah	Ketan Sheth
Krupa Sheth	Smith
Southwood	Tatler

1. **Mayors Introductory Statement**

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

2. **Mayors Statement - Order of Business**

Before consideration of the formal agenda, the Mayor informed members of a change to the order of business. Given the online attendance of Ciaran McLaughlin (Grant Thornton) as the Council's External Auditor for the External Audit Annual Report, he advised of the intention to move that report (listed as Item 7 on the agenda) so it was considered in advance of the main Budget and Council Tax report for 2023-2024.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- (1) The business to be considered at the meeting be re-arranged in the following order:
 - Agenda Item 6 – Auditors Annual Report on the London Borough of Brent

The remaining items of business to then follow in the same order as listed on the agenda.

3. **Procedural Motion - Conduct of Business**

The Mayor advised that as this meeting had been designated as the Council's formal budget and Council Tax setting meeting, he would be inviting Councillor Afzal (on behalf of the Majority Group Chief Whip) to move a procedural motion, in accordance with Standing Orders, relating to the conduct of the debate on the budget report.

As a result, it was **RESOLVED** that the following procedural motion be agreed:

- (1) That the Leader of the Council be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes in presenting the report to the meeting and setting out the Cabinet's proposals for the budget, after which, the following arrangements be agreed for the purpose of debating and voting upon the Budget and Council Tax:
 - (a) The Leader of the Conservative Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals;
 - (b) The Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals for up to 10 minutes;
 - (c) The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes;
 - (d) The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes;

- (e) A general debate follow during which the usual rules for debate will apply as set out in Standing Orders (save as set out in this procedural motion);
- (2) At the end of the general debate, the Leader of the Council be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes to submit his closing remarks.
- (3) Following the close of the debate, recorded votes on any amendments to the budget proposals and then the final substantive budget proposals be taken in turn with the recommendations taken *en bloc*.

4. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Bajwa and Crabb.

5. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the following meetings be approved as a correct record:

- (a) Monday 21 November 2022.
- (b) Extraordinary Council meeting held on Monday 23 January 2023

6. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

7. **Mayor's Announcements**

Prior to his announcements, the Mayor asked all members to join him in observing a minutes silence in memory of all those who had lost their lives as a result of the recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

All those present at the meeting then stood to observe a minutes silence.

The Mayor then made the following announcements:

- (i) Kings New Years Honours List 2023

The Mayor began his announcements by congratulating all those associated with Brent who had received an honour in the Kings New Year Honours list for 2023. He was pleased to announce this had included Margaret McLennan, as former Deputy Leader of the Council, who had received an MBE for services to digital inclusion and the community in Brent.

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

- (ii) Pride of Brent Youth Awards

The Mayor advised he had been delighted to have taken part in the Pride of Brent Youth Awards in December in order to celebrate and recognise the achievements of young people across Brent making a difference in their communities.

(iii) Holocaust Memorial Day event 2023

The Mayor advised he had been privileged to attend the commemoration event for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day. The theme had focussed on "ordinary people" with the event highlighting many moving and inspirational stories.

In reflecting on the human tragedy, the Mayor urged everyone to consider how they could stand against hate and discrimination in order to ensure it was no longer tolerated and to prevent such atrocities from happening again in the future. Thanks were extended to all those involved in organising the event.

(iv) Death of Former Councillor Tom Bryson

The Mayor informed members that it was with regret he had to advise of the sad death of former Council Leader and Brent Councillor Mr Tom Bryson.

Speaking on behalf of the Council, the Mayor took the opportunity to express his sincere condolences to Tom's family and to highlight how much he would be missed by all those who knew him.

In addition to the Mayor's comments, Councillors Nerva & Long also took the opportunity to pay tribute and offer their condolences to former Councillor Bryon's family, remembering the way he had worked to develop the Council and represent his party and constituents during his time in office.

(v) 100th Birthday Celebration

The Mayor took the opportunity to celebrate and congratulate Mr Peter Adkins on reaching the milestone of his 100th birthday.

(vi) Coronation "Big Lunch"

Moving on, the Mayor advised he was pleased to announce that he would be hosting a Mayors Coronation lunch on Sunday 7 May 2023 as part of the "Coronation Big Lunch" initiative. This would be held in the Grand Hall, Civic Centre with the aim of encouraging communities to come together as part of the coronation celebrations. It was hoped that as many Members as possible would be able to attend, with invites shortly due to be issued.

(vii) Tributes to Chief Executive

Prior to ending his announcements the Mayor, in marking what he felt was a significant change for both Brent and the Council, reminded members that the meeting would be Carolyn Downs final Full Council as Chief Executive, pending her retirement at the end of April.

In paying personal tribute to Carolyn, he took the opportunity to thank her for the support provided during his time as Mayor along with what he regarded as her

significant and far reaching impact on Brent and advised he would be happy to provide an opportunity for other members wishing to pay tribute to do so at this stage in proceedings.

A summary of the comments made were as follows:

Councillor Muhammed Butt, the Leader of the Council, opened the tributes by thanking Carolyn for her dedication to Brent, highlighting how everyone had benefitted from the hard work and leadership provided during her tenure. As specific examples he referred to the role Carolyn had played in leading the Council's response to the covid pandemic as well as Brent being awarded London Borough of Culture and the Council also being selected as the LGC's Council of the Year, which it was felt would all contribute to her legacy and the commitment displayed to serving residents of the borough.

Following on from the Leader's comments, Councillor Afzal also took the opportunity to thank Carolyn for the support provided to all councillors and the work undertaken to support residents across Brent.

Councillor Georgiou, as the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, then spoke to thank Carolyn on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group, highlighting what he felt had been the fair way in which she had treated and supported members of the Opposition to ensure their voices were heard and for the leadership provided during the challenges in responding to the pandemic.

Councillor Kansagra, as Leader of the Conservative Group, also spoke in tribute to Carolyn remembering his role as a member of the Senior Staff Appointments Sub Committee who had recommended her initial appointment. He also took the opportunity to commend the fairness and pragmatic approach adopted in the way she had treated the Opposition Group(s) during her time in office and wished her all the best for whatever followed her retirement.

Other members who spoke to pay tribute and wish Carolyn a happy retirement were as follows:

- Councillor Ethapemi, who expressed his gratitude for the support and advice Carolyn had provided when he had first been elected and to all other councillors.
- Councillor Collymore, who took the opportunity to praise Carolyn for her work to support the community champions network and Brent Health Matters programme.
- Councillor Dixon, expressing appreciation for what she felt had been Carolyn's dedication, energy, openness and transparency and the outstanding leadership and collaborative support provided, particularly in terms of the response to the Grenfell tragedy and pandemic.
- Councillor Nerva, as Cabinet Member for Public Health and Adult Social Care, who commended Carolyn for the work undertaken to develop Brent as a borough and deliver for all residents.
- Councillor Ahmed, who thanked Carolyn for her knowledge, experience and commitment to Brent as well as the personal support and guidance she had provided during his time as Mayor.

- Councillor Dar, who in echoing the sentiments expressed by other colleagues, also took the opportunity to wish Carolyn and her family all the best for the future.
- Councillor Miller, who commended Carolyn for what he felt had been her inspirational leadership, ownership, clarity of vision, compassion, integrity and challenge in seeking to support members addressing the various needs and issues identified across the borough during her time in office. He also took the opportunity to wish Carolyn a happy retirement.
- Councillor Grahl, as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, who was keen to praise Carolyn as an advocate and role model for women across the Council and local government in general and for her work to protect the most vulnerable as well as engage with children and young people across the borough.
- Councillor Maurice, who also took the opportunity to personally thank Carolyn for the support and work undertaken on behalf of the Council and to wish her well in her retirement.
- Councillor Farah, as Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Public Protection, who praised Carolyn for her public service and engagement with residents and advised that she would be missed by all.
- Councillor Long, who in supporting the previous comments wished Carolyn a long and happy retirement.
- Councillor Fraser, who also thanked Carolyn for the way she conducted herself and delivered in her role as a female Chief Executive.
- Councillor Moeen, who commended Carolyn's strong leadership and advised she would be missed by all those that had worked with her during her time as Chief Executive.

As a final contribution, Councillor Johnson felt it important to recognise and commend Carolyn's integrity and grace in the way she had delivered her role as Chief Executive. This was not only in terms of the support provided for members but also to officers across the Council and residents. He ended by highlighting how much she would be missed and wishing her all the best in her retirement.

The Mayor thanked all members for their contributions and kind tributes.

(viii) Petitions

To conclude his announcements, the Mayor then referred Members to the list of current petitions tabled at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Orders which also detailed the action taken to deal with them.

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

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

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

- (1) Councillor Kennelly to replace Councillor Dar as a full member of the Brent Pension Fund Sub Committee (NB: Members noted this would be subject to confirmation by General Purposes Committee on 13 March 2023).

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

Having agreed to the change in the order of business, the Mayor invited Ciaran McLaughlin (online participant representing Grant Thornton) as the Council's External Auditor to introduce the report from the Chief Executive presenting the External Audit 2021-22 Annual Report on Value for Money (VFM).

In introducing the report, Ciaran McLaughlin summarised the approach towards the VFM audit and drew Members attention to the positive nature of the process and key findings detailed within the Annual Report. As part of the auditors work, members were advised that no significant weaknesses had been identified in terms of the Council's VFM arrangements. Whilst a small number of improvement recommendations had been identified, it was pointed out these had been designed to enhance existing processes rather than in response to any weaknesses identified. In commending the report to Council, he once again highlighted the positive outcome of the audit and expressed thanks to all those involved in supporting the process.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel, as Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform, to respond to the Annual report on behalf of the Council. In welcoming the report, she felt it important to recognise the positive nature of the independent audit opinion and findings identified in relation to the Council's VFM arrangements, particularly given the Council's challenging budgetary position. Highlighting the improvement in terms of the overall number of recommendations identified, compared to previous years, confirmation was provided that all recommendations had been accepted with management responses provided, as detailed within the report. Highlighting what she felt to be the Council's prudent, financially sustainable and resilient approach towards management of its finances, Councillor Mili Patel ended by thanking Ciaran McLaughlin and his team for the work undertaken on the audit.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to note the External Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money as part of the 2021-22 audit of the year end accounts.

10. **Budget and Council Tax 2023/2024**

The Mayor then moved on to receive the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources setting out the Council's budget proposals for 2023-24. Included within the report were the results of the budget consultation, scrutiny and equalities processes along with a summary of the overall financial position, risks, issues and uncertainties facing the Council over the medium term.

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

Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking members, officers, the public and other stakeholders for their involvement in the consultation and preparation of the budget. Highlighting that the proposals presented another balanced budget he felt they not only set out a fair and responsible approach but also one that would continue to make a difference for residents across Brent. This was not only in terms of seeking to protect them from the current challenges arising from the cost of living crisis and Governments approach towards the delivery of public services, but also in terms of the aspirations for continued growth, fairness and opportunity over the coming year and beyond.

Recognising the difficult nature of decisions needing to be made in terms of the budget proposals presented to Council, he felt it important to highlight the ongoing impact of the Government's programme of austerity and funding restrictions imposed on public services, which he pointed out had resulted in a cumulative impact for Brent totalling approx. £200m worth of cuts. Despite this context and the challenges identified he felt it important to outline the Administration's commitment to continue protecting those relying on services provided by the Council's and most vulnerable in society in order to avoid anyone being left behind as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

In thanking Carolyn Downs, the Corporate Management Team and all officers involved for their leadership and support in development of the budget proposals in such challenging circumstances, Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined the extent of work undertaken to ensure that the proposals presented for consideration had been subject to detailed consideration and consultation and represented a reasoned and rational financial judgement which reflected the careful stewardship of funds, as identified through the independent external audit assessment. In thanking the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for their input into the process and recommendations made as a result, he compared that to the approach taken by both Opposition Groups, in terms of the presentation of their alternative budget proposals, highlighting the risks identified in terms of seeking to protect the Council's finances and avoid ending up in similar positions to other authorities who found themselves on the brink of insolvency.

Referring in more detail to the budget proposals set out within the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt was keen to highlight the difference in approach between the Administration and both Opposition Groups in terms of addressing the barriers in seeking to support residents and ensure no one was left behind. Whilst unwelcome, it had been difficult but necessary to propose a 4.99% increase in Council Tax reflecting that until central government changed the way in which local government was funded, this remained the council's primary source of funding in order to ensure residents were able to continue receiving the services they relied upon, including essential support for adult social care. Given the ongoing challenges identified and increasing pressure on front line services it had also been necessary to include an additional £13.5m worth of savings for 2023-24 and further £4.5m to be delivered the year after which he pointed out it was important to recognise would further impact on the level of service available to residents.

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

future access to services. As a result, he was proud to highlight the additional and ongoing support being provided through the Council Tax Support Scheme and Resident Support Fund to fill the gaps created as a result of the ongoing funding restrictions being imposed by central government and of the following ambitions included within the budget designed to support and improve the lives of Brent residents. These included:

- Securing a further £1m of funding to support families experiencing food poverty;
- The provision of funding to support the Community Shop pilot in Stonebridge;
- The provision of £15m to support the programme of investment and repairs on Brent's priority roads and pavements and create a rolling plan following the winter season;
- Proposals to democratise the way grant funding available to the Council would be structured to bring communities closer together;
- Ongoing support being made available to continue the extensive programme of regeneration and harness the potential of local people with funding being provided to support local businesses and provide opportunities for Brent residents to access education, training and qualifications skills alongside jobs across the borough;
- Continuing delivery of the New Council Homes Programme involving the provision of safe, secure and affordable homes and measures to tackle homelessness and reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation, in recognition of which the Council had received one of the highest new homes bonus in the country;
- Investment of £44m to create 427 new places for Special Educational Needs Children in the borough.

Alongside the work also being led by the Mayor for London in seeking to tackle air quality through the expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone and food poverty through the introduction of universal free school meals for Primary School pupils, Councillor Muhammed Butt was also keen to highlight the continued ambition within the Council's Capital Investment Strategy utilising funding available through the Community Infrastructure Levy to led effective change and growth making a positive impact on residents. These plans included support for the delivery of new medical centres across the borough, the provision of a new home for the College of North West London, provision of a state of the art Adult Education Centre at Morlands Gardens, new pedestrian bridge across the Grand Union canal in Alperton, new community facilities in Stonebridge along with development of Preston Community Library, the Learie Constantine Centre and Brent Indian Community Centre.

Turning then to focus on the alternative budget proposals submitted by the Opposition Groups Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined his disappointment at what he felt to be the lack of responsible and reasonable alternative proposals submitted by the Conservative Group for consideration. Particular concern was expressed in relation to the proposal to remove the funding set aside to support ongoing provision of the Resident Support Fund within the Conservative Groups alternative budget, which it was felt demonstrated how far the Group were out of touch with the impact of the current cost-of-living crisis on local residents along with the

programme of austerity and funding restrictions being imposed by the Conservative Government. Whilst supportive of the need to focus on the current Youth Offer, concerns were also highlighted in relation to the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals, given the position they had adopted in terms of opposing the accessibility upgrades to the customer service areas within the Civic Centre and also in relation to changes to the waste management and household recycling contract.

As an alternative and in summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised that the Administration in presenting its budget proposals had recognised and sought to match the realism of the financial challenges with a radical desire to do more in responding to the needs and aspirations of local residents across Brent which would not only protect crucial services but also fuel ambition and deliver opportunities and a fairer future for all. On this basis he urged members to oppose the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals and commended the budget, as set out in the report, to all members for approval.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Kansagra, as Leader of the Conservative Group, to respond to the budget proposals.

In presenting the alternative proposals, Councillor Kansagra began by highlighting concerns regarding the basis and fairness of the proposed 4.99% increase in Council Tax included within the Labour Administration's budget proposals. Commenting on the impact arising from the increase in Council Tax within Brent since 2016, he also felt it important to recognise the additional funding support provided by Central Government, particularly in response to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. Referring to the proposals presented at the meeting Councillor Kansagra queried the justification for retaining the increase in Council Tax at the same level as originally proposed given the better than anticipated local government funding settlement and additional support made available by the Government through initiatives such as the Cost of Energy grant, New Homes Bonus and Social Care Discharge Grant. In highlighting the impact on household budgets during a cost-of-living crisis, he felt this would also be exacerbated by the additional precept to be applied by the Mayor for London. In maintaining their stance as the party of low taxation, the Conservative Group had therefore proposed a lower alternative Council Tax increase of 2% which would be ring fenced for Adult Social Care. In order to fund this measure and secure a balanced budget he then outlined the additional proposals being recommended by the Conservative Group, which included:

- Removal of the landlord incentive scheme to achieve a saving of £1.1m. In commenting on this proposal, Councillor Kansagra highlighted the Conservative Groups concern at the impact of the scheme on the housing rental market and at incentivising landlords to provide accommodation for those who ordinarily would have been unable to afford to live in the borough. Given that many ordinary working households had needed to move out of the borough in order to find somewhere affordable to live, he queried the nature of the scheme in seeking to subsidise landlords in this way.
- The deletion of two Cabinet Member posts and reversing the planned increase in members allowances, saving £0.08m. In presenting this proposal, Councillor Kansagra highlighted the reduction in number of members on the Council and cross over between certain Cabinet Member remits through which it was felt the savings could be achieved.

- The proposed discontinuation of the Resident Support Fund, achieving a saving of £3m. In noting the discretionary nature of the Fund, Councillor Kansagra felt it important to recognise the Fund had originally been established in response to the covid pandemic with the Government having made significant funding support available which had not been fully utilised by the Council. Whilst recognising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis he pointed out that the Government had also provided additional support and subsidy to assist in mitigating the associated pressures. Given the alternative sources of funding support available the Conservative Group were therefore recommending discontinuation of the Resident Support Fund.

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

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

In presenting the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals, Councillor Georgiou began by thanking the Corporate Director and Deputy Director of Finance for their assistance in the process of developing a set of proposals designed to provide a balanced and realistic budget which it was felt would enhance the offer from the Council to local residents without the need to remove much needed support for the most vulnerable in society. In recognising the complexity and volatility of local government finance along with ongoing pressures which had been compounded by the current Government and Mayor for London, it was felt that as local residents were asked to pay more (given the increase in Council Tax being sought) they would expect to see improvements in local standards of service.

Highlighting the balanced and costed nature of their amendments Councillor Georgiou outlined the following as key alternative budget proposals being recommended by the Liberal Democrats Group:

- An increase in the capital budget provision for highways and footways upgrades and repairs to £20m designed to focus and prioritise repairs on major roads such as Beresford Avenue, Ealing Road and Harrow Road and bus lanes as well as address the backlog of remedial works in order to enhance and maintain the public realm and safety concerns;
- The allocation of £2m as an investment to create safe, well connected cycle routes and infrastructure across Brent;
- Reflecting on concerns highlighted in response to the new street cleansing and waste management/recycling contract arrangements and trial of the new recycling collection service, to allocate funding for the provision of recycling wheelie bins to households who requested them and limiting the use of sacks

- for paper and cardboard collections. In addition to re-establish the current service of weekly street cleansing in roads up to 50 metres from a junction connected to main shopping areas and Town Centres along with the identification of funding to support the re-installation, service and cleaning of bins on local streets. In addition, the proposals also included provision for an apprentice programme to support the Neighbourhood Managers in their role;
- The allocation of £1.5m for investment in a new ring-fenced “Youth Offer” provision which would be used to offer targeted support in order to address cuts to youth provision across the borough and enhance young people’s positive development and future;
 - Whilst welcoming the commitments made by the Council in relation to tackling the climate emergency the Liberal Democrats were also proposing the allocation of £500k specifically for the planting of new or replacement of trees across the borough as a means of enhancing the green canopy and assisting with the work to improve air quality, recognising the lack of dedicated budget for this and priority placed by residents on green spaces and access to nature especially following the pandemic;
 - The transfer of £2m of funding from the New Homes Bonus to specifically deal with the backlog of remedial works and waiting list for the provision of accessible and adapted Council housing. This would be focussed on meeting the cost of specific adaptations and/or the acquisition of new properties with a view to reducing current waiting lists and addressing current levels of housing need across the borough.

In highlighting the additional detail provided within the proposals included as part of the agenda papers, Councillor Georgiou ended by outlining the important role members had in representing residents and local communities, which he felt the budget amendments presented by the Liberal Democrats had been designed to reflect in a balanced and pragmatic way that would enhance the offer from the Council recognising priorities being identified locally. As such he hoped all members would be able to collectively support the amendments outlined and commended the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals to Council.

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

Councillor Mili Patel began by thanking all residents who had contributed towards the budget consultation process along with the Finance Team and all other officers involved for their efforts and support in preparing the budget proposals, which she advised would not only continue to ensure value for money but would also meet the needs and aspirations of residents across the borough. The opportunity was also taken to thank scrutiny for their detailed review and the challenge offered in development of the final budget proposals.

In commenting on the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals Councillor Mili Patel was keen to begin by focussing on the historic context to the funding of local government provided within the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals and impact created in terms of the Council’s financial position. Highlighting the sustained period of economic growth which had been delivered by the Labour Government prior to 2008 and impact of the global economic crash that

year she felt there was a need to recognise the effect of the economic mismanagement since the election in 2010 starting with the programme of austerity introduced during the Conservative & Liberal Democrat coalition Government. This had included cuts not only with a disproportionate impact on local government but which had also decimated public services including the police & probation as well as the health service. The pressures and challenges on the economy had been further compounded by Brexit and the impact arising from the fiscal policies more recently introduced by Liz Truss during her premiership. Councillor Mili Patel expressed concern that the cumulative of these measures had also been reflected within the alternative budget proposals moved particularly by the Conservative Group, in relation to the potential impact on the most vulnerable in society through their proposal to discontinue the Resident Support Fund and Landlord Incentive Scheme. Similar concerns were expressed in relation to the impact of the Liberal Democrats proposals to suspend the proposed investment to improve customer access and support the generation of additional income at the Civic Centre.

In contrast, Councillor Mili Patel outlined what she felt had been the carefully planned approach undertaken in formulating the budget proposals and in terms of managing the Council's finances by the Labour Administration based on the values of community, sustainability and security, despite the challenges identified as a result of the Government's current approach towards the funding of local government. As an example she referred members to the support being provided within the budget for those families facing food poverty, through the Family Food Fund; funding being spent on providing vital social care support to over 6,000 elderly and vulnerable residents along with the funding allocated towards one of the biggest new council home building programmes in London. In addition, members were advised of the investment allocated to waste and recycling collections in order to keep the borough clean and of the funds allocated towards public health initiatives designed to tackle health inequalities.

In commending the budget to Council, Councillor Mili Patel ended by reminding members of the detailed consultation and scrutiny which the budget proposals had been subject to, along with the prudent approach adopted by the Administration in order to protect the provision of essential services, growth and investment for residents across the borough.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mili Patel for her comments and as the final contribution prior to opening up the debate then invited Councillor Conneely, as Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, to present the key themes within the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report, which had been included as an appendix to the Budget and Council Tax 2023-24 report.

Councillor Conneely in introducing the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report began by highlighted that whilst trying to be as objective as possible in their review, it had not been possible to ignore the impact of the Government's programme of austerity over the last decade and piecemeal approach towards the funding of local government which had made it more difficult for local authorities to be able to plan financially. Highlighting concern at the damaging legacy created as a result of the Government's programme of austerity over the last decade for Brent residents, specific reference was made to the impact of the cost-of living crisis, current levels of inflation and wage stagnation which had exacerbated the financial challenges and uncertainty in which local authorities were having to operate.

In recognising the challenging financial environment in which the Council was having to operate, particularly when compared to the incentives being provided for business in the private sector (as evidenced through the recent scrutiny of Thames Water's performance in delivery of a public service) Councillor Conneely highlighted the extensive nature of the review and recommendations which had been identified by the Task Group in relation to the budget proposals, as detailed within section 2 of their report. In terms of the issues highlighted, particular reference was made to the following:

- The need to continue managing expectations, recognising the challenging financial environment in which the Council was operating given the long-term reduction in Government funding and ongoing level of savings needing to be achieved in order to deliver a balanced budget, which it was felt required careful use of language. The Task Group had felt it should be clear that the budget reductions having to be delivered were clearly identified (where appropriate) as cuts and clearly distinguished from service reductions, efficiencies or service transformation.
- Despite the significant cuts to local government funding, the Task Group had recognised and were supportive of the efforts being made to continue protecting services for those most vulnerable in society including choosing not to cut home care visits, to invest in council owned temporary accommodation in order to improve housing standards for those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness and to provide financial support to tackle food poverty, particularly amongst children (supported by the Mayor for London extending the provision of free school meals to all primary school pupils).
- The Task Groups recommendation and support for the additional advice and support being provided for the voluntary and community sector, including the welcome review and development (as outlined at a recent scrutiny meeting) of a policy to manage community space and facilities within Brent.
- Having highlighted concern at the Government's delay in delivery of Local Government funding reform and regressive nature of the Council Tax, the Task Group had been keen to support the proposals relating to provision of additional financial support for those residents most in need. This had included the Council Tax Support Scheme and additional investment identified in relation to the Resident Support Fund.

Highlighting the cross party nature of the Task Group, Councillor Conneely expressed disappointment that (with the exception of investment in Highways Infrastructure) many of the alternative budget proposals moved by the Opposition Groups had not been identified for consideration during the scrutiny review process enabling a wider assessment to be undertaken in relation to the impact of the budget proposals and their context in relation to emerging budget pressures and the future needs of local communities.

In thanking all members, officers and other stakeholders who had supported the review and wide variety of engagement undertaken, Councillor Conneely ended by highlighting the need to recognise the cumulative impact of funding cuts across the public sector and local government given the significant and ongoing financial challenges and pressures identified and ability to be able to financially plan and deliver a balanced budget according to demand rather than being driven by the need to manage funding cuts as a result of austerity.

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

Councillor Knight, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, opened the debate by outlining her support for the budget proposals introduced by the Leader commending the way in which they sought to provide continued investment and stability in terms delivering the Council's ambitions and commitments towards the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing across the borough. This included continued support and investment towards delivery of the New Council Homes programme, with a particular focus on larger properties to meet demand for families. In addition, investment had also been committed in support of the programme of housing repairs and to improve housing standards. Councillor Knight also commended the proposal to increase temporary accommodation provision in response to the cost-of-living crisis and stressed the need for transformation to maintain service levels. In recommending the budget to Council, Councillor Knight ended by re-iterating that despite the government's ongoing restrictions in funding the Council had continued, through its effective approach towards financial management, to deliver a programme of housing investment providing long term positive outcomes for local residents with inactivity in this respect not an option.

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

Councillor Kabir, in supporting the budget proposals, began by thanking all those involved for their work in being able to produce a balanced budget in such challenging circumstances. Taking the opportunity to focus on proposals relating to the Council's library provision she felt it important to recognise the impact of the Government's programme of austerity in terms of library closures across the UK, over the past decade and significant effect this had had on local communities and cultural provision. Despite the significant financial challenges identified, Councillor Kabir was pleased to recognise the way in which the budget proposals had sought to protect Brent's libraries and home delivery service, given the important community service and focus they provided, which included their use as venues for Brent Hubs in addition to the various community groups and activities hosted and the cost-of-living crisis having also emphasised the significance of libraries in their respective communities, providing a welcoming, warm, and safe space. In concluding, Councillor Kabir expressed her pride at the way the budget proposals were seeking to not only support but also enhance the Council's library provision with a focus on the convenient multi-service offer that they provided to residents and also took the opportunity to wish Carolyn Downs all the best for her retirement.

Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, then spoke to highlight the extent of the financial pressures currently faced across the Children and Young People service, which she felt had been exacerbated as a result of the stance taken by the Conservative Government in relation to funding provision. Expressing particular concern at the inadequacy of school funding, provision for social workers and impact of spiralling inflation along with the overall shortfall of funding across children's social care, Councillor Grahl highlighted the importance of the Council's budget proposals in seeking to provide a 'safety net' for all children and their families in Brent. Despite the financial challenges and cuts in

funding identified she pointed out how the proposals included continued investment in Family Wellbeing Centres, a £1 million commitment to establish a Family Food Fund, investment to provide over 200 SEND school places through the provision of a new school, the provision of a Post-16 Skills and Resource Centre as well as funding to support the Young Brent Foundation in the provision of youth facilities across the borough. This approach was, she felt, in direct contrast to the cuts imposed by Central Government over the previous decade which had led to the abolition of Sure Start, raising of tuition fees, and significant increase of children and young people living in poverty. In summing up, Councillor Grahl expressed concern at the impact of the proposed discontinuation of the Resident Support Fund moved as an alternative budget proposal by the Conservative Group, praised the Mayor of London's universal offer of free school meals for primary pupils as a means of tackling food poverty and urged all members to support the budget as moved by the Leader given the way they had been designed to support children, young people and their families at each stage in their life.

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, was next to speak and also felt it important to recognise the impact of austerity experienced over the last decade as well as the cost-of-living crisis in providing the context within which the budget had needed to be set and in requiring the Council to do more with less. Despite the financial pressures identified, the opportunity was taken to reflect on the programme of work delivered over the last year alongside the investment identified within the current budget proposals to continue the programme of Highway & Footway maintenance and repairs, maintain and enhance parks and open spaces across the borough and deliver the new arrangements for household waste collection, recycling and street cleansing which had all been designed to keep the borough clean and green. In addition, Councillor Krupa Sheth highlighted the additional investment identified to support and enhance town centre management along with the work being undertaken to address fly-tipping and other environmental crime, including support for CCTV provision and insourcing of the Education, Outreach and Communication Team under the Integrated Street Cleansing & Waste Collection contract. Further activity funded within the budget proposals included continuation of the community skips initiative, as well as the installation of electric vehicle charging points and bike hangars. The engagement and growth of the Brent Environmental Network alongside the work being funded to support the Council's ongoing efforts in tackling the climate emergency was also highlighted, which included the Green Neighbourhood pilots and school street initiatives. In commending the budget proposals to Council, Councillor Krupa Sheth ended by thanking all members and officers involved for their support in delivering the commitments outlined which had been designed to protect residents and vital services and also took the opportunity to thank Carolyn Downs, for her leadership and in making Brent a borough that people were proud to live and work in.

Moving on, Councillor Mahmood also took the opportunity to pay tribute to Carolyn Downs, before outlining the hardship and challenges being faced by many residents as a result of the cumulative impact of cuts which had been imposed across the public sector by the Government and cost-of-living crisis. Reflecting on the budget proposals, Councillor Mahmood felt it important to highlight the way in which they would continue to continue protect the most vulnerable in society and urged members to reject the alternative budget proposal moved by the Conservative Group seeking to discontinue the Resident Support Fund (RSF) given the level of

assistance being provided for those residents most in need during such challenging times. In expressing his support for the budget Councillor Mahmood ended by thanking all officers and members for their continued work to support Brent residents despite the challenging financial climate, adding that he was proud to commend the proactive, secure and resident focused budget that the current Administration had proposed.

Councillor Miller then spoke to highlight his opposition to the alternative budget proposals moved by both Opposition Groups, which he felt had failed to recognise the associated risks and remained unclear in terms of their costing. Focussing on the Conservative Group proposals he felt these failed to offer any credible alternative he expressed disappointment at the approach which had been adopted and challenged the validity of the statement made regarding the strategic reduction of council tax in election years. Whilst recognising the challenges associated with any proposed increase in Council Tax, Councillor Miller pointed out this had been an approach permitted and encouraged by the Government at the same time as they continued to reduce the level of funding available for local government and had failed to deliver reform of the funding system, particularly in relation to the unfair and regressive nature of the Council Tax regime. As a result, he highlighted the ongoing importance in maintaining financial support for the Council Tax Support Scheme and Resident Support Fund and expressed his support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader as an alternative to the fiscal approach adopted by the Conservative Government.

Councillor Kennelly, in also supporting the budget proposals, felt it important to recognise the way in which the proposals had been designed to stand up for local residents and maintain the provision of essential local services despite the ongoing funding restrictions imposed by central government and ongoing impact of austerity, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis. Referring specifically to the investment in housing and also to the enhancement of the customer experience and facilities at the Civic Centre he went on to highlight the importance of the current Administrations on-going commitment to improving the lives of residents and queried the Conservative Group's assumption, given the Government's current fiscal approach, that they remained the party of low taxation. As an alternative he highlighted what he regarded as the progressive nature of the budget proposals moved by the Leader, which he advised he would be fully supporting.

In recognising the economic challenges faced by many residents as a result of the fiscal approach adopted by the Government and extending his support to those members of the public sector taking industrial action to secure a better deal, Councillor Rubin also commended the budget proposals moved by the Leader given the measures included to respond to multiple emergencies in housing, energy and food poverty. In welcoming the ongoing financial commitment to the Council Tax and Resident Support Funds, tackling food poverty, ongoing delivery of the new Council homes programme and investment in programme of school holiday activities he also commended the recent announcement by the Mayor for London regarding the provision of free school meals for all primary school pupils. Highlighting the way in which the proposals had been designed to enable everyone to move forward together and ensure no one was left behind, he also commended the budget to Council.

Councillor Hack, highlighting the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and austerity in forcing many more families into hardship and poverty also expressed concern at the increased reliance on food banks which he regarded as an indicator of the failed approach towards the welfare state by the Conservative Government. In contrast, he was pleased to support the Labour Administrations approach and belief in maintaining a strong welfare state as he felt had been evidenced by the ongoing support for the Resident Support Fund, which the Conservative Group were seeking to discontinue, and efforts being made to support community kitchens and tackle food poverty. As Food Justice Champion Councillor Hack commended the work of the voluntary and community sector and Council in seeking to address food poverty and in highlighting his support for the budget proposals was keen to recognise the way in which they sought to mitigate against the challenges created by the Conservative Government and support those most vulnerable in society in moving forward together.

Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Adult Social Care, also speaking in support of the budget proposals, began by expressing his thanks to all carers, including those unpaid, across the borough for their efforts before praising the work undertaken through Public Health and Brent Health Matters in seeking to address the range of health inequalities exposed as a result of the pandemic. In commending the work being undertaken across Brent's Adult Social Care service he outlined the achievements in relation to health prevention and awareness initiatives, including measures to tackle diabetes, the level of care assessments and support commissioned (with providers now required to offer the London Living Wage) and safeguarding investigations undertaken. This had been supported by a range of initiatives designed to support hospital discharge and independent living and enable more residents to be cared for at home, including the handy-person service. Councillor Nerva felt this was in direct contrast to the lack of action being taken by the Government in seeking to address the challenges identified in relation to the provision and funding of Adult Social Care, which he felt had been compounded by the impact of Brexit on the recruitment and retention of care staff. As a result of the difference in approach identified in relation to Adult Social Care, he also urged members to support the budget proposals moved by the Leader.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Culture, in echoing the concerns previously highlighted in relation to the impact of austerity, cost-of-living crisis and Government's approach towards the funding of local government and public services, felt it important to recognise the cumulative impact on the Council's budget and local residents, as evidenced by the level of support being sought through the Brent Hubs and Resident Support Fund. Recognising the way in which support provided through the Resident Support Fund offered a lifeline to those struggling as a result of current economic pressures, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson was also keen to outline the funding commitments within the budget towards upgrading Brent's libraries, who continued to offer warm and welcoming spaces across the borough, as well as towards the ongoing provision for cultural activities and grant support for community projects designed to enhance partnership working and empower local communities to further improve their neighbourhoods. Reflecting on previous comments made, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson also highlighted the support being provided for Brent's diverse range of local community groups and the voluntary and community sector who she also took the opportunity to praise. In concluding her comments, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson commended the budget proposals, which she felt reflected the

Councillor's ongoing commitment to support and protect residents from a Government which she felt had run out of energy and ideas.

Councillor Choudry, in supporting the budget proposals, took the opportunity to praise the continued commitment towards the Council Tax and Resident Support Funds and to support the concerns expressed in relation to the proposed discontinuation of the Resident Support Fund within the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals, given the detrimental impact on those being supported who were most in need. Concern was also highlighted in relation to the omission of reference to austerity during the coalition Government period within the context provided to the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals along with what he felt to be their over reliance on the use of reserves as an unsustainable approach. Reflecting on growing up during austerity, Councillor Choudry felt it important to highlight that austerity remained a political choice which given the impact identified now required a transformative approach and government to address. In support of this approach, he ended by commending the budget proposals moved by the Leader, highlighting the protection they continued to provide for the most vulnerable and their progressive, pragmatic and sustainable nature.

Councillor Collymore, also speaking in support of the budget proposals, and as a representative of the black community within Brent highlighted her strong opposition to the discontinuation of the Resident Support Fund included with the alternative budget proposals moved by the Conservative Group. Referring to her role in supporting community health education, Councillor Collymore highlighted the level of mistrust in the current Government and essential support being provided through the Fund for local residents on low income and suffering with long long-term illness, who would otherwise experience additional financial hardship. She therefore urged all members to reject the alternative budget proposals and support the budget, as moved by the Leader.

Councillor Southwood, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Economy and Citizen Experience, began by expressing her support for the budget proposals, which sought to provide a fair and inclusive approach in responding to the impact of austerity and Government's poor economic performance whilst also offering support for all communities. In expressing her support for the budget, Councillor Southwood highlighted a number of key successes achieved by the current Administration in Brent and commitments within the budget proposals which included ongoing support for the Resident Support Scheme (including a significant commitment not funded through Central Government) support for Brent Hubs and the community shop pilot. Support was also expressed for the investment to enhance the customer service space within the Civic Centre, which it was pointed out had been designed to ensure the building continued to adhere to modern accessibility standards as well as preserving the dignity and privacy of those residents needing to attend in order to access services in person. Highlighting what she felt to be the Government's ineffective response to the current cost of living crisis she ended by outlining her support for what were regarded to be the sustainable and inclusive nature of the policies contained within the budget, recognising the challenges created as a result of the Government's single year financial settlement for local government. In commending the proposals to Council, as a means of supporting all residents in moving forward together Councillor Southwood also ended by paying tribute to Carolyn Downs.

At this stage, Councillor Kansagra in raising a point of personal explanation felt it important to clarify that the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposal to discontinue the Resident Support Fund had been based on the assessment it was no longer required, given the range of support already being provided through alternative financial initiatives and packages provided through central Government in direct response to the cost-of-living crisis. It was not, therefore intended as a measure to reduce the support available to local residents.

Speaking in support of the budget proposals, Councillor Begum also highlighted the increasing reliance on food banks and financial difficulties being experienced by residents across her ward, which she felt demonstrated how out of touch the Conservative Group were in terms of the potential impact and risks arising from their proposed discontinuation of the Residents Support Fund. Commenting on the number of residents she had witnessed experiencing financial hardship and requiring support, Councillor Begum praised the support being provided through the Resident Support Fund, community groups and food banks and ended by also taking the opportunity to pay tribute to Carolyn Downs in advance of her retirement.

Speaking in support of the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals, Councillor Maurice advised he had no objection to the Mayor for London's proposal to extend the provision of free school meals to all primary school pupils but queried the stance being taken by the national leadership of the Labour Party on the proposal. Support was also expressed for the investment proposed in refurbishment of the Civic Centre, which (in addition to the accessibility issues to be addressed) he recognised would promote and sustain future commercial use of the Civic Centre. Commenting on the lack of recognition for the financial support being provided through Central Government, he advised he would be voting against the budget proposals moved by the Leader and in support of the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals.

In recognising and praising the values and work being undertaken by community groups across the borough, Councillor Dixon expressed support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader, which she felt best reflected residents priorities. Councillor Dixon advised she was confident residents understood and supported the rationale behind the proposals, which sought to shield those most in need whilst working to sustain and ensure the borough continued to thrive. The work of Brent Hubs and support being provided through the Resident Support Fund were both commended along with the approach being led by the Council in terms of the delivery of more affordable housing despite the financial challenges and constraints being experienced. In concluding, Councillor Dixon advised that she would also be voting in support of the budget proposals, emphasising the moral responsibility under which she felt the Council were acting.

Councillor Afzal, as initial context to his comments on the budget, began by highlighting his concern and frustration at the financial challenges faced by Brent as a result of what he felt had been central government's continued underfunding of vital public services, poor handling of the economy, pandemic and cost-of-living crisis and indifferent approach to the most vulnerable members of society. Despite the significant challenges faced and scale of savings already delivered, he felt it important to recognise how hard the Council had worked to fill these gaps and support residents in accessing key services, recovering from the pandemic and

tackling the impact of the cost of living crisis making specific reference to the efforts being made to increase the supply of affordable housing across the borough and support for the Council Tax Support Scheme along with continued provision of the Resident Support Fund as examples. In supporting the budget proposals, Councillor Afzal also felt it important to recognise the wider support being provided in relation to the climate emergency which he felt served to contrast the difference between the prudent and compassionate approach of the Council in seeking to support local residents and those more vulnerable members of society, despite the constraints in resources, with the approach of the Conservative Government.

Moving on, Councillor Lorber then spoke to highlight his support for the alternative budget proposals moved on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group, which he felt presented both a balanced and affordable series of amendments to the proposals moved by the Leader. In querying the approach adopted by the current Administration in relation to the amount of funding allocated as part of the creation of an inflation risk reserve, Councillor Lorber highlighted the Liberal Democrats view this could be reduced (whilst still seeking to mitigate any risks) in order to fund additional investment in the programme of highway and footway maintenance and address the backlog of repairs along with re-establishment of a tree planting programme as part of an approach designed to value open and green spaces. The proposals had also been designed to address concerns relating to the new contract arrangements for street cleansing, household waste collection and recycling with provision also made to utilise the New Homes Bonus to address the level of need in relation to the acquisition and adaptation of new build or existing properties for those requiring accessible properties. In commending the alternative proposals moved by the Liberal Democrats Group Councillor Lorber ended by highlighting what he felt had been the reasonable approach adopted given concerns being expressed by residents relating to the impact of the proposed increase in Council Tax and level of services being provided locally, with the proposals assessed as affordable and providing a balanced budget. In concluding, he also took the opportunity to pay tribute to Carolyn Downs and wish her a happy retirement.

In echoing the previous comments in support of the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals, Councillor Matin highlighted the concerns being raised by residents regarding the fact they were having to pay more for less (in terms of Council Tax) but at the same time also recognised the additional financial strain being placed on local authorities as a result of the Government's approach in now seeking to fund provision for Adult Social Care through a ring fenced element of the Council Tax. In outlining the fully costed and balanced nature of the Liberal Democrats proposals, Councillor Matin highlighted their key commitments in terms of service improvements and priority areas, which included a focus on making Brent cleaner and greener as well as enhancing the youth offer available for young people. The proposals also included additional investment designed to address safety concerns relating to the maintenance and repair of footways across the borough with the current level of investment felt to be inadequate in terms of seeking to mitigate the risks posed, particularly for more vulnerable residents or those with mobility issues. In seeking to achieve a level of consensus on the collective need for the budget to deliver improved outcomes and living standards for all across the borough, Councillor Matin commended the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals to Council.

In contributing to the debate, Councillor Chappell also took the opportunity to express his support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader, highlighting the ongoing impact and difficulties being created for an increasing number of residents as a result of the Governments approach towards managing the economy and cost-of-living crisis. Despite the significant challenges and pressures on public services created as result of the cuts imposed by the Government since 2010 and specific impact on Brent, Councillor Chappell highlighted his pride at the way in which the current Administration had sought to protect key services and support those most in need, which had included the commitment to continue supporting delivery of the new Council homes programme, additional support for the Resident Support Fund, social care, public health and libraries. Whilst acknowledging that the budget proposals would require difficult decisions to be made, Councillor Chappell was keen to commend the compassionate approach adopted in seeking to protect the most vulnerable as an alternative to the approach adopted by the Government.

Councillor Kelcher felt it was important to draw attention to the challenging nature of the budget, in light of the current economic context, increased levels of inflation and the general cost-of-living crisis. He went on to express concern that the alternative budget proposals moved by the Conservative Group only appeared to compound the struggles being faced by many residents, whilst those moved by the Liberal Democrats had been based on what he regarded as an expedient and short term approach. Reflecting, in contrast, on the values of Brent Labour and contained within the budget proposals moved by the Leader, he outlined the prudent approach adopted and sustainable nature of the commitments identified, which included the schools streets initiative, support for the provision of local community facilities including the Picture Palace and the African Community Heritage Centre. In seeking to protect those most in need the investment in libraries and community Hubs was also welcomed. Whilst recognising the difficult nature of choices within the budget proposals, Councillor Kelcher felt they needed to be assessed against the impact of the reduction in funding for the Council and public sector in general imposed as a result of Government austerity and in supporting the budget proposals moved by the Leader, felt that the alternative proposals presented by the Opposition Groups offered no credible alternative..

Having raised a point of order regarding a comment made during the previous contribution about the appropriateness of an item of clothing he was wearing Councillor Lorber clarified this had been in support of a local artist. As a result, the comment made was withdrawn at the meeting. Councillor Lorber then moved a procedural motion under Standing Order 42 (o) that given the remaining time available the “question be now put” in relation to the recommendations within the budget report and alternative proposals moved by both Opposition Groups. On being put to the vote the procedural motion was declared **LOST** with the Mayor then inviting those remaining members who had indicated they wished to speak as part of the debate to continue.

Councillor Benea, as the next contribution to the debate, again highlighted the adverse impact the cost-of-living crisis was having on local residents, with the Council (in seeking to support those most in need) therefore having to rely on an increase in Council Tax to provide the funding required to maintain and improve services given the current way in which local government was funded and level of cuts imposed by the Government as a result of austerity. Despite the pressures and challenges identified Councillor Benea, in supporting the budget proposals

commended the approach taken by the Administration to support ongoing investment in community projects, recognising the value of community engagement as well as in libraries and culture, which she felt should not be regarded as discretionary.

Councillor Mistry then spoke to highlight her support for the alternative budget proposals moved on behalf of the Conservative Group, drawing members attention not only to the increase in funding support being provided by the Government for individual households in response to the cost-of-living crisis but also the better than anticipated local government financial settlement for the Council along with access to additional funding to support investment in communities and local businesses, people and skills, and education. Rather than seeking to oppose the alternative budget proposals, Councillor Mistry felt there was a need to recognise the impact which the proposed increase in Council Tax (including the precept to be applied in relation to the Mayor for London) would have in worsening the financial pressures being faced by many families across the borough especially when coupled with proposals such as the expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone by the Mayor for London. As a result, Councillor Mistry advised she would be opposing the budget moved by the Leader in favour of the Conservative Groups alternative proposals.

At this stage in proceedings, the Mayor advised that as the remaining time available for the meeting was shortly due to expire he would be moving the suspension of Standing Order 44 (Council Guillotine Procedure) in order to extend the time of the meeting by twenty minutes and enable the conclusion of the budget debate and other items on the agenda to be dealt with. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **CARRIED**.

Continuing the debate and in echoing the previous comments made, Councillor Jayanti Patel also spoke in support of the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals. In supporting investment in street cleansing and the environment he also took the opportunity to highlight concerns regarding the issue of overgrown gardens and called upon the Council, as part of the budget, to ensure sufficient funding was provided to enforce the maintenance of these areas by property owners and landlords as had been implemented in other local authority areas.

Moving on Councillor Tatler, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning then spoke to outline her support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader highlighting that despite austerity the Council's effective and prudent management of its budget had enabled continued investment in services making a positive impact on residents and their aspirations. Highlights included the support being given to continue delivery of new safe, secure and affordable social housing along with the successful programme of support being provided through the Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) to fund infrastructure development and community projects across the borough. This was alongside the wider initiatives in seeking to address issues such as the climate emergency. In commending the budget to Council, Councillor Tatler ended by comparing this approach with that of the Conservative Government and Liberal Democrats, re-iterating that despite the government's ongoing restrictions in funding and difficult decisions which had needed to be taken the Council had continued, through its effective approach towards financial management, to deliver a programme of investment providing long term positive outcomes for local residents, including young people.

Referring to the progress being made in delivery of the Council's net carbon zero target, Councillor Hirani then spoke to query the way in which the budget proposals moved by the Leader would contribute towards this ambition as well as in tackling concerns relating to pollution (including within the boroughs waterways) and air quality, with calls made for additional funding to address these issues. In addition, Councillor Hirani highlighted the need to ensure sufficient funding was provided to support the Council's biodiversity commitments as well as to maintain and improve parks and green spaces in seeking to protect and improve residents health and wellbeing. In challenging the progress and funding available to support the Councils biodiversity policy, Councillor Hirani ended by advising she would also be voting against the budget moved by the Leader and in support of the alternative budget proposals moved on behalf of the Conservative Group.

As a further contribution Councillor Fraser felt there was a need to recognise that the limited financial support being provided by the Government was infact taxpayers money which the Council was seeking to reinvest (alongside funding available through sources such as the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy) prudently and constructively in support of the local community. Regarding use of Council's reserves, Councillor Fraser reiterated the need to be cautious due to rising costs and the impact of a decade of austerity with the Government, she felt having abdicated its responsibility in seeking to protect the most vulnerable in society. In concluding, Councillor Fraser commended the budget proposals which she felt demonstrated the Councils commitment to continue prioritising the protection of frontline services and those with complex needs.

Councillor Chohan, in expressing his support for the budget, highlighted the need to ensure that the Council continued doing all it could to effectively support residents given the ongoing impact of the government's programme of austerity and current cost of living crisis. Despite the challenges identified he felt the current Administration remained best placed to deliver the long term and stable support required to ensure Brent continued to prosper and residents would be protected. In ending, Councillor Chohan also took the opportunity to thank Carolyn Downs, in advance of her retirement, for the hard work undertaken during her time at Brent.

As a final contribution to the debate Councillor Moeen ended by also expressing her support for the budget and in so doing praised the aspirations of the Labour Administration in seeking to support local residents and maintain local services despite the financial challenges created through the Conservative Government's approach towards austerity and in managing the cost-of-living crisis. Amongst the commitments highlighted the support provided in relation to youth provision, community grants, provision of additional SEND school places and Brent Health Matters were commended as a means of addressing the funding gaps identified in response to the budget cuts imposed by Central Government. In commending the proposals to members she highlighted her pride at being part of an Administration seeking to protect and provide a fairer future for all in Brent.

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

In response to the debate, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking all members for their contributions at the meeting and support provided to their local residents. In summing up, he felt that the debate had demonstrated the passion and commitment amongst councillors to deliver for their residents. In responding to the Conservative and Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals he expressed concern at the approach adopted given the associated risks which had been identified in relation to both their impact and unviable way in which it had been proposed to fund them. He therefore urged all members to reject the alternative proposals. In contrast, he felt the Administration's budget proposals not only demonstrated an understanding of the challenges faced by residents but also recognised their aspirations for building a positive and fairer future. As such he highlighted how the proposals had been designed to protect and support residents in the borough by delivering affordable housing, a programme of regeneration and growth along with support for those most in need through the Resident Support Fund and Council Tax Support Scheme and in delivering commitments in relation to the green economy and climate action as well as addressing concerns in relation to poverty and health inequalities. Furthermore, he outlined how the budget proposals had been designed to enhance community safety and support the aspirations of young people as well as celebrate local culture and communities. Responding to comments regarding climate action he also highlighted the approach recently agreed in relation to the introduction of Green Neighbourhood pilots. In concluding, whilst recognising the difficult nature of decisions which had needed to be made, he outlined his pride that despite the challenges highlighted during the debate the Labour Administration had been able to present a balanced budget that continued to defend and protect services for local residents whilst also seeking to meet the needs and aspirations of communities across the borough. On this basis he ended by once again commending the budget to Council and advising members that although Councillors Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Bajwa and Crabb had sent their apologies for the meeting, they had also confirmed their support for the budget proposals.

Having thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for his closing comments, the Mayor advised that this now concluded the debate on the budget and he would therefore be moving to the vote on the alternative budget proposals and then (subject to any amendments agreed) the recommended budget moved by the Leader of the Council. As the recommendations to be considered related to the budget setting process he reminded Members that, in accordance with Standing Order 43, these would all need to be subject to a recorded vote.

Prior to moving to the vote, the Mayor invited the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources to provide a brief update for members on the recommendations within the report.

Minesh Patel (Corporate Director of Finance & Resources) advised members that during the course of the meeting confirmation had been received from the Greater London Assembly on the precept set in relation to the Mayor for London's budget (as detailed within recommendation 2.16). As a result this would enable the Council to consider and set the Council Tax for 2023- 24 without requiring a meeting of the Council Tax Setting Committee, meaning recommendations 2.19 – 2.20 within the report could now be withdrawn from consideration.

The Mayor thanked the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources for the update provided and having noted the advice then moved on to put the budget and alternative proposals to the vote.

On a recorded vote being taken the budget proposals, as moved by Councillor Muhammed Butt were declared **CARRIED**.

Accordingly Council **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Agree an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2023/24, with 2% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 2.99% general increase.
- (2) Agree the General Fund revenue budget for 2023/24, as summarised in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) Agree the savings proposals for 2023/24 and deferral of savings to 2024/25, as set out in Appendix C (i) of the report
- (4) Note the Equalities Impact Assessments on the budget proposals, as set out in Appendices C (ii) and C (iii) of the report.
- (5) Note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in Appendix D of the report.
- (6) Agree the HRA budget and business plan for 2023/24, as set out in section seven and appendix Q of the report.
- (7) Agree the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section eight of the report.
- (8) Agree the changes to the existing Capital Programme in relation to additions of new schemes and reprofiling, as set out in section 10 and Appendix E of the report and note the Capital Pipeline Schemes in Appendix F of the report.
- (9) Agree the Capital Strategy, the Investment Strategy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendices G, H, I and J of the report.
- (10) Agree the Reserves Strategy and schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendix K of the report.
- (11) Note the action plan to implement CIPFA's Financial Management Code and conduct a Financial Resilience Assessment, as set out in Appendix L of the report.
- (12) Agree the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix M of the report.
- (13) Note the results of the budget consultation, as set out in section six and detailed in Appendix N of the report.

- (14) Note the legal advice from the Corporate Director of Governance, as set out in Appendix O of the report.
- (15) Agree the Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix P of the report.

Council Tax recommendations

- (16) As a result of confirmation having been received on the final GLA precept in advance of the recommendations being put to the vote at the Council meeting it was agreed in relation to the Council Tax for 2023/24:

That the following amounts be now calculated as the Council's element by the Council for the year 2023/24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended:

- (a) £1,061,792,345 being the aggregate of the amount that the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act.
- (b) £910,992,347 being the aggregate of the amounts that the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
- (c) £150,799,998 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year.
- (d) £1,490.31 being the amount at (c) above, divided by the amount for the tax base of 101,187, agreed by the General Purposes Committee on the 12 December 2022, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

(e) Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
993.54	1,159.13	1,324.72	1,490.31	1,821.49	2,152.67	2,483.85	2,980.62

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

- (17) That it be noted that for the year 2023/24 the proposed GLA precept issued to the Council on 23 February 2023, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, in respect of the GLA, for each of the categories of dwellings are as shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
289.43	337.66	385.90	434.14	530.62	627.09	723.57	868.28

- (18) That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at paragraph 16(e) and 17 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for the year 2023/24 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1,282.97	1,496.79	1,710.62	1,924.45	2,352.11	2,779.76	3,207.42	3,848.90

- (19) That it be noted that the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources has determined that the Council element of the basic amount of Council Tax for 2023/24 is not excessive in accordance with the principles approved under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (a) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be and is hereby authorised to give due notice of the said Council Tax in the manner provided by Section 38(2) of the 1992 Act.
- (b) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be and is hereby authorised when necessary to apply for a summons against any Council Tax payer or non-domestic ratepayer on whom an account for the said tax or rate and any arrears has been duly served and who has failed to pay the amounts due to take all subsequent necessary action to recover them promptly.
- (c) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be and is hereby authorised to collect revenues and distribute monies from the Collection Fund and is authorised to borrow or to lend money in accordance with the regulations to the maximum benefit of each fund.

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

The voting recorded on the alternative budget proposals moved as an amendment by the Conservative Group was as follows:

For the Amendment (5): Councillors Hirani, Kansagra, Maurice, Mistry & J.Patel.

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

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Aden (Mayor), Hylton (Deputy Mayor).

The voting recorded on the alternative budget proposals moved as an amendment by the Liberal Democrats Group was as follows:

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

Against the Amendment (49): Councillors Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Akram, Begum, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chan, Chappell, Chohan, Choudry, Collymore, Conneely, Dar, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Grahl, Hack, Hirani, Johnson, Kabir, Kansagra, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Mahmood, Maurice, Miller, Mistry, Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, J.Patel, M.Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Shah, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth, Smith, Southwood and Tatler.

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Aden (Mayor), Hylton (Deputy Mayor).

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

For (44): Councillors Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Akram, Begum, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chan, Chappell, Chohan, Choudry, Collymore, Conneely, Dar, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Grahl, Hack, Johnson, Kabir, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Mahmood, Miller, Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, M.Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Shah, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth, Smith, Southwood and Tatler.

Against (8): Councillors Georgiou, Hirani, Kansagra, Lorber, Matin. Maurice, Mistry and J.Patel.

Abstentions (2): Councillors Aden (Mayor), Hylton (Deputy Mayor).

11. **Borough Plan 2023-2027**

Having concluded consideration of the budget, the Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Communities and Regeneration, seeking approval to the new Brent Borough Plan 2023-27. In introducing the report the Leader outlined how the new Borough Plan had been structured to capture the achievements delivered over the

previous four years and to set out the context, narrative and Administrations new strategic priorities, commitments and desired outcomes moving forward. In concluding his introduction the Leader thanked all officers involved for their efforts and support in development of the 2023-27 Borough Plan.

As no members indicated they wished to speak and Councillor Muhammed Butt had confirmed he did not need to exercise his right of reply the Mayor then put the recommendation in the report to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to endorse and approve the new Brent Borough Plan 2023-27 for adoption, including the following accompanying suite of supporting documents:

- Borough Plan Engagement and Consultation Findings 2023-27 (attached as Appendix A) to the report
- Brent Borough Plan 2023 – 27 (attached as Appendix B to the report)
- Borough Plan evidence base (attached as Appendix C to the report)
- Equality Impact Assessment (attached as Appendix D to the report)

12. **Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2022-2023**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform, to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources updating members on Treasury Management activity for the first half of the 2022-23 financial year. Members noted that the report had also been considered and agreed by the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee on 7 December 2022 and Cabinet on 16 January 2023 who had agreed to refer it on to Council for consideration in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

In introducing the report, Councillor Mili Patel confirmed that the Council was continuing to operate in compliance with the Treasury Management Indicators for 2022-23, as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak, and Councillor Mili Patel had confirmed she did not need to exercise her right of reply the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were unanimously declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to note the 2022-23 Mid-Year Treasury report in in compliance with the Council's Treasury Management indicators and CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management (the Code).

13. **Members' Allowance Scheme Annual Review**

Moving on, the Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Governance which sought approval to the proposed Members Allowance Scheme for the 2023-24 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Leader outlined the background to the proposed inflationary uplift in the level of basic, special responsibility and civic allowances for

2023-24 recommended as an outcome of the current review along with the proposal to undertake a further review of allowances payable under the Scheme, following the outcome of an additional review being undertaken by the Independent Remuneration Panel over the course of the next year.

As no members indicated they wished to speak, and Councillor Muhammed Butt had confirmed he did not need to exercise his right of reply the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were unanimously declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the Members Allowance Scheme in the proposed terms set out within the report for the 2023-24 Financial Year.
- (2) To authorise the Corporate Director of Governance to comply with the statutory requirements to publicise the Council's Members' Allowance Scheme.

14. **Amendments to the Constitution**

As the final item of business to be considered, the Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce a report from the Corporate Director of Governance outlining a number of proposed changes to the Constitution, which it was confirmed had been subject to consideration and approval by the Constitutional Working Group.

As no members indicated they wished to speak, and Councillor Muhammed Butt had confirmed he did not need to exercise his right of reply the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were unanimously declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To agree the amendments to the Constitution set out in the report and Appendix 1 relating to Agreeing Grant Criteria; Bidding for Grants; the approval of Supplementary Planning Documents; delegation of powers to approve fees and charges and the thresholds for officer decision-making relating to contract and procurement matters.
- (2) To note that, to the extent that the changes set out in the report related to executive functions of the Council, they had been approved by the Leader.
- (3) To authorise the Corporate Director, Governance to amend the Constitution accordingly, including making any necessary incidental or consequential changes.

15. **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 Annual Council and Mayor Making meeting on Wednesday 17 May 2023.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

COUNCILLOR ABDI ADEN
Mayor