



Brent

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Conneely (Chair), Councillor Long (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Ahmadi Moghaddam, Akram, Bajwa, S Butt, Georgiou, Maurice, Miller, and Shah.

Also Present: Councillors Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council), Mili Patel (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform), Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change) and Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Culture).

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mitchell and J.Patel, with Councillor Maurice attending as an alternate member on behalf of Councillor J.Patel.

2. **Declarations of interests**

Councillors Ahmadi Moghaddam and Long declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 as members of Brent Friends of the Earth. Councillor Georgiou also declared a personal interest due to his close association with Brent Friends of the Earth.

3. **Order of Business**

The Committee agreed to vary the order of business on the agenda to allow items that required a response from the Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture to be heard first. As a result of the change in order the Scrutiny Progress Update - Recommendations Tracker was the first substantive item discussed by the Committee. The minutes reflect the order in which the items were dealt with at the meeting

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 22 February 2023 be approved as a correct record.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

6. **Scrutiny Progress Update - Recommendations Tracker**

The Committee was invited to consider the progress and updates provided in relation to the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny recommendation and information request tracker. The Chair invited Committee members to ask officers questions relating to the progress of the previous recommendations, suggestions and information requests made by the Committee as detailed in Appendix A of the report. The following queries were raised by the Committee:

6.1 Multi Agency Flood Planning – 22 February 23

In relation to the recommendations made on Multi Agency Flood Planning the Committee were advised that updated responses were available in full on the revised report link in Appendix A of the Tracker.

Officers clarified that confirmation was being sought in liaison with Thames Water to ensure that all areas of the borough that fell within Thames Water's remit were accurately reflected in Thames Water's flood plans. An update would be provided at a future Committee meeting.

6.2 Brent Council Grants Programme – 8 November 22

Following an update provided on the You Decide participatory budgeting scheme, the Committee sought further details on why the decision had been taken to introduce a revised model of Community Grants, given that when the Committee had reviewed the scheme in November 2022, it was felt that it had been a successful pilot.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson, Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture, advised that following the comments made at the previous Committee it was felt that despite the successes noted from the scheme it was important to recognise and respond to the issues raised in relation to the governance of the process, with particular reference to the concerns in relation to the voting system. Following the knowledge acquired from the pilot, a revised model of Community Grant Allocations with increased robust governance arrangements was submitted and accepted by Cabinet on 17 April 2023. It was hoped that the model going forward would build on the success of the You Decide pilot in harnessing community participation whilst providing a more transparent robust system in grant allocations.

The Chair thanked Councillor Donnelly-Jackson for clarifying the rationale behind the decision to introduce an alternative community grant scheme to the You Decide programme, however added that the Committee felt strongly about being involved in the decision making process on items that had been brought to the Committee for scrutiny. This was in view of the need to ensure that scrutiny recommendations were retained and actively considered to support and continue informing policy direction.

The Committee looked forward to receiving a further update on Brent Council's Grants Programme at a future Committee.

6.3 Re-defining Local Services – 15 December 22

The Committee were pleased to note the feedback provided following previous recommendations and information requests made, however there were some outstanding points that the Committee felt required further exploration. The following points were discussed:

- The Committee appreciated the feedback provided in relation to the community communications and engagement plan, however sought further

detail as to how the focus groups to seek community feedback would be undertaken. Oliver Myers, Head of Environmental Strategy & Climate Change, advised that to ensure as broad a level of feedback was obtained as possible from Brent residents, a market research company would be brought in to undertake the focus groups. It was re-iterated to the Committee that officers recognised the value in community engagement as an opportunity to educate the local community as well as including the community in the development of the programme.

- Internal engagement from members was welcomed to support slogans and branding ahead of the suggestions being put to the wider focus and engagement groups.
- The Committee were advised that officers would liaise with private landlords to proactively work together to support the new campaign and to educate residents.
- It was confirmed that the revised zone classifications were being finalised with the support of officers and Veolia employees working together to ensure that the zones were classified correctly using their specific local expertise.
- It was clarified that the zone classifications were to support officers and contractors in their operational planning and would have no direct impact on the service to residents.
- In response to a Committee query in relation to the resident reporting system for street cleaning, officers confirmed that there was no specific grading system in use and that residents should report concerns when they felt it was appropriate, officers would then use their judgement to decide what operational intervention was needed.
- The Committee felt that the planned pilot of wheelie bins for approximately 6000 street level households in September 2024 was too far away and would be misleading for residents selected for the pilot who were already accustomed to the new sack systems by this point. The Committee acknowledged that implementing the pilot in September 2024 would support greater research and assessment of the new systems, as more data would have been collected by this point, however felt that if it was possible, the pilot scheme should be brought forward.
- Following resident dissatisfaction with the sacks used in the pilot, the Committee were assured that the concerns raised in relation to the size and quality of the sack had been acknowledged and as a result the sack was being re-designed to respond to the issues raised.

As no further issues were raised, Councillor Conneely thanked members and officers for the responses and updates provided and it was **RESOLVED** to note the Recommendations Tracker Update.

7. Deputations (if any)

Councillor Conneely welcomed Sheila Simpson from Brent Friends of the Earth to make a deputation in person to the Committee. The deputation related to Item 8 on the agenda - Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Update: 2022-2024 Delivery Plan & Green Neighbourhoods. The following key points were shared:

- Ms Simpson explained that on behalf of Brent Friends of the Earth she wanted to raise awareness of the grave concerns they had in relation to the urgency

- of the climate and ecological crisis at both a local and national level, parallel to the work Friends of the Earth were doing to encourage a prompt effective response from local and central government.
- It was hoped that good local progress could be made with positive partnership collaboration.
 - In terms of the Council's approach, Brent Friends of the Earth recognised the rationale for a narrower focus of resources on the selected Green Neighbourhoods to maximise impact and test solutions, however it was felt that this may not be the most effective use of time, given the scale of the emergency as well as leaving the majority of the borough without significant environmental intervention.
 - It was felt that Brent's commitment to consulting with residents to create a sense of community ownership in terms of projects going forward to reduce carbon emissions was positive, however it was not clear which projects would be prioritised and how they would cohesively work together to support both short and longer term impacts. The example shared was that supporting active travel through the increased provision of bicycle hangars would be of practical immediate help to some, whereas the longer-term vision of creating safe cycle/pedestrian friendly Green Corridors would support longer term sustained change.
 - It was suggested that there was further scope for quick wins with wider long term impacts, such as increased installation of solar panels on school roofs and supporting schools to encourage plant based diets amongst their pupils to address the over consumption of meat and dairy products as a major source of emissions. It was noted that this had been successfully carried out in other local authorities and there were several organisations that were already set up to support this.
 - Ms Simpson thanked the Committee for the opportunity to represent Brent Friends of the Earth and welcomed the future collaboration with Brent Council to offer support in achieving Brent's climate ambitions.

The Chair thanked Ms Simpson for making her deputation and advised that the Committee would have the opportunity to respond to the points raised as part of the consideration of the following item on the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Update: 2022-2024 Delivery Plan & Green Neighbourhoods. It was therefore **AGREED** to note the deputation and thank Sheila Simpson and Brent Friends of the Earth for their participation in the scrutiny process.

8. **Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Update: 2022-2024 Delivery Plan & Green Neighbourhoods**

Following on from the deputation, the Chair then invited Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action to introduce the report that updated the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee on the current key focal points of the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme. This included the 2022-24 Delivery Plan which had been adopted by Cabinet in June 2022, and the new, localised, Green Neighbourhoods Action Plan. Having introduced the Delivery and Action Plan, Councillor Krupa Sheth thanked Sheila Simpson for highlighting the urgency of the climate issues faced both nationally and locally, as well as drawing attention to the necessity of a collective rapid response from the community, local government and central government to

ensure significant impacts could be made swiftly. The Chair then invited the Committee to raise any questions, comments or points of clarity in relation to the report and the accompanying deputation from Brent Friends of the Earth. The following issues were discussed:

- The Committee noted that Brent had ambitious plans to tackle the climate emergency and acknowledged that despite the magnitude of work that was needed, Brent was in a strong position to make good progress in reaching net zero by 2030 as a result of the strategies and plans in place.
- The impact of the social housing rent cap applied by central government in relation to funding of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) on progress with decarbonisation of Brent's social housing stock, given the significant funding identified as required to progress the works needed.
- The Committee expressed thanks to Sheila Simpson for highlighting Brent Friends of the Earth's concerns and actions they felt were required to effect positive steps forward in achieving Brent's climate ambitions, with particular reference to the importance of seeking wider community and specialist stakeholder engagement to support the most effective plan.
- In recognising the proactive work being undertaken in the borough, the Committee felt that in order to measure success it would be helpful to have benchmarking in place to support a greater understanding of Brent's starting point, how Brent measured against other boroughs and to enable the public to track the progress being made. The Committee were advised that at present there was no national or pan London benchmarking data available, however there were various professional networks across London that Brent were involved in where the development of this type of benchmarking data and performance indicators were being discussed.
- The Committee noted the challenges in obtaining comparable data given the number of variables in different boroughs in respect of difference in wealth, political priorities and emission sources. The Committee were, however, keen for Brent to take an active role in the ongoing development and advancement of a benchmarking framework. Officers recognised the value a benchmarking framework would add to the support and monitoring of Brent's progress in achieving net zero and agreed to take this as a forward action.
- The Committee were re-assured that in Brent there was a focus on empowering residents to support their understanding of the necessity to make changes to support sustainability. It was felt by bringing residents on the journey to net zero with the local authority, there was a greater chance of successful implementation of strategies that would support the Council's climate targets.
- The Committee felt it was important to recognise that public opinion had progressed, with residents' keen to learn more about how they could be involved in supporting positive climate change actions.
- In noting the value of securing engagement and support from residents in terms of the ongoing development and implementation of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Committee queried how the community were kept updated in relation to schemes within the borough that aimed to progress the plan. In response officers advised that the main channel to communicate information to the public was via the Brent Environmental Network which provided regular newsletter updates and information to individuals and groups who had subscribed.

- Following concerns highlighted as part of the deputation by Brent Friends of the Earth relating to the number of different initiatives in the Plan that did not appear to be joined up, the Committee acknowledged the importance of the Council implementing comprehensive and integrated strategies. This led the Committee to query how the Council intended to bring the initiatives together to provide a more cohesive response in achieving the target of reaching net zero by 2030.
- Officers acknowledged the issues raised and advised that it remained a challenge deciding where to focus the limited resources available to provide the most effective impact. The Committee were informed that the selection of projects underway across Brent, focused on the pilot Green Neighbourhoods, would provide valuable information moving forward on how best to progress the plans and what strategies would provide the biggest impact, ahead of all strategies being rolled out on borough wide basis.
- In response to a Committee query regarding the rationale behind the selection of the two Green Neighbourhood pilots (Church End & Roundwood and Kingsbury), officers advised of the specific criteria used which had included the areas representing a good comparison between the north and south of the borough.
- The Committee queried when Green Neighbourhoods would be extended to additional wards across the borough, given the urgency of the work required. It was felt that a discussion was needed within the Council to agree a suitable budget plan to provide the appropriate level of resourcing to successfully action the changes needed borough wide.
- It was noted that increased “School Streets” and the expansion of the ULEZ zone would be a welcome support in reducing emissions in the borough.
- The Committee queried what liaison had taken place between Brent officers and other primary landlords in Brent to encourage the decarbonisation of rental properties. In response the Committee were advised that although the Council had no direct influence over private housing providers, action planning was underway with the support of the Affordable Housing team to produce a charter to clarify Brent’s expectations of the parallel work required to collectively move the borough towards net zero.
- Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, re-assured the Committee about the Council’s support of Brent’s climate ambitions and the active engagement of the planning department in seeking to ensure that new build developments were environmentally sustainable.
- The Committee queried the implications of Brent’s consumption emissions being at 4 to 5 times the size of carbon emissions (as detailed in section 3.10 of the report). In response, officers advised the Committee that the impact was significant, particularly as it was felt that most members of the public were unlikely to be aware of the impact that their day-to-day consumption choices were having on carbon emissions. In recognition of this, officers had included consumption emissions as a key theme within the Climate Emergency Strategy.
- The Committee shared positive feedback regarding the Green Neighbourhood consultation events, with it noted that the Kingsbury event had been well attended by a broad representation of the local community.
- The Committee acknowledged the plans in place for collaborative working between the Public Health team and Climate & Healthy Street teams to increase Active Travel in the borough, however queried what more could be

- done and if these initiatives could be accelerated via Strategic CIL funding. In highlighting the commitment to encourage Active Travel initiatives across the borough officers outlined how funding was being sought to provide additional support, including as an example enhanced provision of bike hangars.
- In order to build upon the Active Travel plans in Kingsbury as a pilot area, recruitment was underway to appoint a school based co-ordinator to explore broader solutions and bring local schools together to foster a unified approach in efforts to increase and support active travel.
 - It was confirmed that where the report referenced “co – production” and “co-delivery” this was in relation to the overall success of the plan which would require a collective response and engagement from the community, voluntary organisations and partners in the development and delivery of strategies to effect positive sustained change.
 - In response to a Committee query in relation to the breadth of community engagement undertaken on the Green Neighbourhoods plan, officers confirmed that to support further development of the plan they felt it was important to seek a wide a range of feedback from the community, this included communication with youth engagement programmes, different faith and climate action groups, climate fairs and the Brent Climate Assembly, as detailed in Appendix D of the report.
 - The Committee were advised that the development of community gardening to support Brent’s green infrastructure and biodiversity was being utilised in specific areas throughout the borough and where green space was available for additional community gardening, this would be supported. The Committee noted the multiple benefits of community gardening as it provided opportunities for community co-delivery and social cohesion as well as the environmental gains.
 - A further Committee query was raised in relation to the trip hazards posed to pedestrians and cyclists from the charging cables on Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP). It was felt that although the increasing number of EVCP’s was positive in terms of supporting cleaner vehicles being used, this issue could have a detrimental impact in supporting wider forms of active travel. Officers acknowledged the issues raised and noted the challenges in balancing the needs of all modes of transport whilst encouraging green, active travel. The Committee were advised that when new footway upgrades were completed there would be opportunities to incorporate channelling the cables under the footway so that pedestrians were not inconvenienced by cables across public footways.

As the Committee had no further questions for officers, the Chair invited Sheila Simpson, on behalf of Brent Friends of the Earth to ask any specific questions in response to the information provided. In noting the update provided, Sheila Simpson queried the plans in place to communicate the Climate Emergency Strategy priorities to the public and how Brent Friends of the Earth could positively engage with the Council to support change. The following responses were provided in response:

- Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, advised that the Council would welcome an open dialogue with Brent Friends of the Earth to advise and support on revised plans and strategies that would positively contribute to Brent’s Climate Emergency

Action Plan. It was felt that the channels used for communication were effective, however any ideas to build upon what the Council was already doing would be welcomed.

- Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, followed up by advising how the Council's recently adopted Borough Plan also demonstrated the Council's commitment to respond to the Climate Emergency and achieve the net zero target by 2030. In acknowledgement of the lack of funding from central government to support local authorities in providing a rapid effective response to climate concerns, Councillor Butt outlined how funding opportunities were constantly being sought to support the changes needed, additionally there was widespread recognition across the Council that pulling resources together internally and with external partners would be key to resourcing delivery of the plan.
- Chris Whyte, Director of Environment & Leisure, also expressed thanks to Brent Friends of the Earth and offered to arrange a direct follow up meeting to explore how further collaborative work could be undertaken.

In closing the discussion, the Chair thanked Shiela Simpson (on behalf of Brent Friends of the Earth), officers and members for their contributions towards the important scrutiny on this item before summarising the outcome of the review and additional actions, which were NOTED and **AGREED** as follows:

Recommendations to Cabinet:

- (1) To continue to lobby central government and the Greater London Authority (GLA) for additional funding to strengthen our efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- (1) Introduce a 'climate implications' section into all cabinet reports to ensure that all key decisions are aligned with the Council's net zero targets.
- (2) Develop an accountability framework (such as a dashboard) for the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy 2021-2030 that is accessible on the Council's website to demonstrate to residents how Brent is performing on its climate ambitions for 2030 and 2045. This framework should also benchmark our activities/efforts with other local authorities for context.
- (3) Explore opportunities to use Strategic CIL (SCIL) monies to fund additional infrastructure projects that were directly aligned with the Council's climate commitments (set out in the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy 2021-2030).
- (4) Engage with Brent Friends of the Earth and other relevant community partners to support and improve the delivery of the Council's Climate Action agenda.

9. In Year Monitoring Update: Financial Forecast Q3 2022/23

Councillor Conneely welcomed Minesh Patel, Corporate Director, Finance and Resources to present a report that updated the Committee on the 2022/23 Q3 Financial Forecast report which it was noted had been presented to Cabinet in January 2023. Having presented the report, the following key points were discussed:

- The Committee felt that it would add value to the budget and scrutiny process if the timetable for the Committee to receive future financial updates was co-ordinated to allow time for scrutiny to consider them ahead of their presentation to Cabinet.
- Officers acknowledged the issues raised, however due to the tight timescales the Finance team were required to work within, it would be difficult to adjust the schedule of the reports coming to the Committee. The Committee were advised that as the reports were provided quarterly, there were opportunities throughout the financial year for the Committee to comment and make suggestions with regard to any key concerns identified.
- The Committee were advised that given the challenging economic climate, it was felt that the budget had been well managed and had incorporated key Budget Task Group recommendations to continue to provide services to support the most vulnerable residents.
- It was noted that the Children & Young People (CYP) department continued to show an overspend as it had done in previous monitor updates. The statutory and responsive nature of services provided by CYP was, however, recognised in this respect along with the increasing demographic demand driven by the numbers of families and children presenting to the service coupled with increased complexity, high inflation of care costs and post Covid recovery in creating exceptional financial pressures within the service.
- The Committee queried whether it was necessary to increase the CYP budget allocations to ensure that the vulnerable residents who required support services would not be detrimentally impacted due to spending concerns. In response the Committee were advised that increasing the CYP budget would create further budget deficits in other departments. It was felt that the service was given an appropriate budget allocation, however due to unprecedented external factors the service had faced increased financial challenges which plans were being developed to address.
- In response to a Committee query in relation to whether the General Fund could be used to support the delivery of the decarbonisation of the Council's housing stock, officers confirmed that this would not possible given the requirement for works to housing stock to be funded from within the Housing Revenue Account.
- The Committee noted the statutory override in place to allow the Council to hold the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit until 2025/26, however queried how the Council would address the deficit once the statutory override was removed. In response the Committee were advised of the plans to address the pressures in relation to managing the deficit on the DSG High Needs Block given the potential impact on the Council's budgetary position.

At this stage in proceedings, the Committee agreed to waive apply the guillotine procedure under Standing Order 62(c) in order to extend the meeting for a period of 15 minutes to enable the remaining business on the agenda to be completed.

In summarising the discussion, the Chair thanked all those present for contributing to the scrutiny process on the Financial Monitoring Update and with no further issues raised the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and approve the following suggestion for improvement:

- (1) Continue to lobby central government for the long-awaited local government finance reforms.

10. **Scrutiny Work Plan 2022/23 Update**

The committee noted that as this was the last meeting of the 2022-23 Municipal year, an updated Work Programme for 2023-24 would be presented to the Committee at the next scheduled meeting on 19 July 2023.

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 19 July 2023

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

COUNCILLOR RITA CONNEELY
Chair