



**MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Tuesday 27 February 2024  
at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Conneely (Chair), Councillor Long (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aden, Ahmadi Moghaddam, S Butt, Georgiou, Miller, Mitchell and Molloy.

Also Present: Councillor M Butt (Leader of the Council)

**1. Apologies for Absence and Clarification of Alternate Members**

Apologies were received from Councillors Akram, Jayanti Patel and Shah, with Councillor Molloy attending on behalf of Councillor Shah.

**2. Declarations of Interests**

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

**3. Order of Business**

The Chair agreed to vary the order of business on the agenda to allow the deputation from Action for the Climate Emergency (ACE) Brent to be considered prior the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Update. The minutes therefore 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 meetings held on 24 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**5. Matters Arising (If Any)**

None.

**6. Draft Property Strategy**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) introduced the report, which set out the vision and objectives of the Draft Property Strategy that officers had developed in conjunction with Avison Young, independent consultants, and a range of stakeholders. The Committee was advised that the Strategy had been informed by the previous comments of members, as the topic had been considered by the Committee last year, and further suggestions and recommendations were welcomed prior to expected Cabinet adoption later in the year. Following the initial introduction of the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined the Strategy's Strategic Objectives:

- Manage by robust processes, good data, and insights.

- Create a leaner, compliant, and financially sustainable portfolio.
- Dispose, repurpose, or redevelop properties no longer required.

In concluding, the Leader emphasised the importance of ensuring that community, economic and social value was being delivered from commercial properties to maximise the benefits provided to both residents and the Council. Furthermore, it was reiterated that due to the relatively small size of the Council's non-residential property portfolio, the income generated from increased rents or repurposing properties would not be sufficient enough to ease the Council's overall financial pressures. In adding to the Leader's comments, Tanveer Ghani (Director of Property and Assets, Brent Council) explained that if no action was taken regarding the Council's commercial properties, the portfolio would become unsustainable. Moreover, both Tanveer Ghani and Minesh Patel (Corporate Director of Finance and Resources, Brent Council) stated that key stakeholders had been engaged prior to formal adoption to ensure that the Strategy was fit for purpose and well challenged. Members also noted that the final version of the Strategy would be more succinct, ideally 5-6 pages, however officers wanted to provide a holistic view of the Strategy to the Committee to ensure appropriate scrutiny.

During the consideration of the agenda item, the following key points were discussed:

- Given that many Brent Housing Management (BHM) non-housing assets, such as community centres, were said to be underused, members queried whether the Strategy included these assets and if not, why was this the case. In response, the Committee noted that the Strategy did not include these assets as it focussed on the general fund, not the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Nevertheless, it was explained that the Strategy would feed into the HRA to ensure that non-residential assets were being treated in a uniform manner.
- Regarding the omission of the Council's approach relating to the acquisition of properties, the Committee was advised that the Council was not currently exploring the acquisition of commercial property that would strive for a traditional 'return on investment'. Therefore, it was not included in the Strategy's vision. Moreover, it was explained that a sustainable business case was needed prior to any acquisition to ensure that expected revenue generated would sustainably fund the purchase and maintenance of the property, which was always considered on a case by case basis.
- Concerning the management of i4B and First Wave Housing (FWH) assets, members heard that they both had their own annual business plans which required Cabinet approval. These business plans focussed on affordable housing and therefore the remit of i4B and FWH was limited. The Committee also noted that further information outlining i4B and FWH voids could be provided as a written response.
- Officers reiterated that the Strategy was concerned with commercial and non-residential assets, therefore housing related assets were not applicable.

- In response to a question regarding the expansion of the proposed Corporate Asset Board to include highways assets such as kerbside space, members were informed that this could be explored, but a review of highways assets would be required and therefore an implementation timeline could not be provided. Furthermore, members and officers were keen to manage expectations given the constrained resources that the Property and Assets Team were working with and therefore emphasised that further resources and revenue streams would be required to enable this work.
- In highlighting the importance of ensuring that new buildings were built according to the necessary high standards to prevent depreciation, the Committee questioned how the Strategy joined up planning and building control processes. In response, members were reassured that the Property Team actively collaborated with the Regeneration department to actively manage properties to prevent depreciation and ensure that the Council did not acquire new properties that may be detrimental to Council operations. As a follow up comment, the Committee referenced recent changes in building safety legislation that could be utilised to ensure that Council assets were safe and suitable. Therefore, it was requested that the Strategy included a commitment to explore all legal avenues to sufficiently maintain assets.
- Regarding the capacity to deliver the Strategy and ensure proactive asset management, the Committee was reassured that the Council did have the necessary capacity to deliver the Strategy as a result of a review of resourcing and objectives. Additionally, further staff could be hired if the posts were justified by a sustainable business plan funded by additional income.
- In response to a query seeking further assurances that members enquiries would be allocated to the relevant team, the Committee noted that officers would ensure that members enquiries were suitably addressed and that the Property Team was more visible, although it was outlined that officers had engaged with key stakeholders, members and tenants on the Strategy.
- Members highlighted that BHM and i4B assets were not listed in the Strategy and queried who was responsible for these properties. In response, it was detailed that the Council's landlord function was shared across directorates as HRA and commercial assets were separated. However, it was stated that the Strategy would inform the Council's approach to all assets where relevant.
- Concerning the reference to the requirement of an additional commercial property consultant team in the Seed Funding section of the Strategy, the Committee was advised that to successfully implement and receive market rate rents would require significant resources to conduct investigations, liaise with tenants and review potential impacts of the proposals. However, no commitments had been currently made and it was explained that alternative resource models could be explored. Nevertheless, officers emphasised that many tenants would struggle to pay market rate rents and therefore it would take a long period of time to actually receive market level incomes.

- The Committee recommended that the proposed implementation timeline for the Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology should be revised as it was deemed imperative to understand and define social value prior to introducing rent discounts related to social value criteria.
- In discussing written off rent arrears and the outstanding arrears at Quarter 3 2023/24, members were informed that the pandemic had a substantial impact on tenants' ability to pay rent and therefore much of the arrears were defined as uncollectable leading to debt being written off by the Council. It was explained that moving forward the emphasis would be on prevention and early support, such as repayment plans, informed by ongoing dialogues to understand the difficulties faced by tenants accruing arrears. The Committee also noted that the £700k outstanding arrears had been accrued over the lifetime of the assets and was not just for the current financial year. Nevertheless, despite recognising the need to treat voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations differently to commercial tenants given the social value often provided by VCS tenants, it was explained that the new Strategy provided the mandate to better achieve the right balance between ensuring sufficient value and generating required income through rents, in turn ensuring the sustainability of the Council's commercial portfolio.
- Members sought a commitment to publish the criteria that tenants must meet in order to qualify for discounted rent and how the Council judged applications, framed as a 'decision-making framework', as currently this process was not publicly available. In response, the Committee was advised that options for 'social leases' and 'agreements' were outlined in section 6.7 of the Strategy, with the preference being to pursue either Option 1 or Option 2. Moreover, it was explained that defining and ranking social value was a corporate decision rather than something in which Property and Assets could unilaterally decide. Nevertheless, once the required policies had been agreed corporately, officers stated that they would explore the creation of a publicly available decision-making framework for discounted rents.
- Regarding the Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology that would attempt to quantify the social impact delivered by tenants, members noted that implementation would take time and therefore it was expected that, in the best case scenario, the Methodology would start to be used in early 2025. However, it was explained that some measures quantifying social impact could be utilised earlier, such as how many grants tenants were applying for and securing, how many residents were being supported by the tenant and collecting references from ward councillors regarding their overall impact on the local community. In light of this information, members expressed concerns regarding the capacity of VCS organisations to adapt to new demands and emphasised that the Council would need to provide support to organisations if required.
- In highlighting the importance of conducting rent reviews given the financial pressures faced by all local authorities across the country, the Committee queried what had caused the delays in rent reviews and how much the delays had cost the Council in unrealised income. In response, members were advised that many organisations had accrued debt due to disruption caused by the pandemic and therefore it did not make sense to review rents

to increase income whilst the Council was attempting to reduce debt. However, the Committee was reassured that reviews were actively being undertaken and, in most cases, the reviewed rents could be backdated to ensure that the Council was not at a loss. Furthermore, it was detailed that most new rents would be linked to the CPI uplift and therefore the increase in rent would differ on a case by case basis. Nevertheless, officers stated that a total figure comparing income generated pre and post rent reviews could be provided once all reviews had been completed.

- In response to a question regarding the urgency of improving the EPC ratings for properties with certificates below E and whether the Council was currently in breach of regulations, members heard that this workstream was a priority as the regulations changed in April 2023 which required all properties to have a rating of E or above. However, it was detailed that currently officers could not comment on whether the Council was in breach of regulations as more information was required but given that 50% of properties had an EPC rating of E and above and that void properties were exempt, the risks associated with the new regulations were not deemed significant. Despite the reassurance provided, there was speculation that new regulations could be introduced in 2028 to raise the requirement for properties to have an EPC rating of B or above and thus the Council was actively monitoring the situation.
- In discussing the possibility of charging tenants for the necessary works required to improve EPC ratings to ensure regulations were met, and whether the Council had calculated cost savings as a result of improving the energy efficiency of assets, it was detailed that there would need to be a provision in the lease agreement that enabled the Council to charge tenants for works. Additionally, members noted that it was difficult to monitor long-term energy efficiency and therefore cost savings were hard to estimate. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that decisions relating to improving the energy efficiency of properties would be made on a case by case basis using cost-benefit analysis as it would be unsustainable to carry out the required works for certain properties.
- The Committee was advised that conducting accessibility audits was a priority and were already underway as an operational matter. Whilst it was explained that the audits should not take a significant amount of time, implementing any required improvements may do. In addition, the Council would have to engage tenants to understand the requirements of visitors, staff and service users to get a holistic understanding of accessibility requirements.
- In response to a query regarding the lessons learned from previous asset management strategies and the difficulties faced ahead, members were informed that the Council's commercial portfolio was historical which inherently created contemporary issues such as depreciation. Concerning future challenges, officers detailed the requirement to complete accessibility audits, meet new EPC regulations and further understand the potential income generated from rent reviews. Additionally, cost-benefit analysis and viability assessments would need to be undertaken for each property to determine the required next steps.

- Regarding the disposal of assets and safeguarding the interests of the community, members heard that the Council's work on social value would feed into any decisions regarding the disposal of assets to protect the interests of communities. Furthermore, the Committee was reassured that disposal was a last resort, requiring a strong business case, and the default approach would be to retain assets if it was clear that social value was being generated. Lastly, officers stated that members, stakeholders and residents would be engaged regarding any negative impacts if the Council was exploring the possibility of disposing of an asset.
- In highlighting the possible negative impacts arising as a result of certain decisions, such as the disposal of assets, which had been omitted from the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), members reiterated the importance of linking decision-making to social value and equality frameworks to ensure that specific demographics were not disproportionately impacted by decisions relating to the Council's commercial property portfolio. In response, the Committee was advised that each case would be judged on its own merits, however social value and equality would be a consideration in all decision-making processes and officers stated that the Strategy could make this clearer in relation to potential actions that were likely to have negative impacts on local communities.
- Concerning voids in properties that were scheduled for demolition, it was explained that the Strategy addressed meanwhile use to enable wider regeneration and redevelopment, but once again each case would need to be supported by a cost-benefit analysis.

In closing the discussion, the Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions towards the scrutiny of the item, before summarising the outcomes of the discussion and additional actions, which were **AGREED** as follows:

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

*Please note that both the suggestions for improvement and information requests were finalised following the Committee meeting and therefore may slightly vary from the general discussion above.*

- (1) For the final version of the Strategy to be shared with housing colleagues for best practice in respect of HRA, I4B and first wave non-housing assets for potential alignment purposes.
- (2) To condense the final strategy into a short, easily digestible format for the benefit of residents.
- (3) To conduct rent reviews in line with lease agreements.
- (4) To actively explore additional opportunities for energy efficiency upgrades (e.g., solar panels, insulation etc.) in existing properties to generate additional income and cost savings.

- (5) To liaise with the Legal department to ensure the utilisation of all legal powers in the pursuit of developers building substandard properties in the borough.
- (6) Upon completion, sight the Committee on the draft Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology for feedback.
- (7) Upon completion, publish the final Corporate Social Benefits Assessment Methodology for the benefit of residents, businesses, and community organisations.

### **Information Requests**

- (1) To provide the forecasted figure of additional income that could be generated (subject to lease provisions) as a result of the rent reviews scheduled.
- (2) To provide information regarding the number of i4B and first wave (commercial/non-housing) voids.

## **7. Deputations (If Any)**

Prior to the consideration of the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy, the Chair welcomed Mr Ian Saville and Ms Sheila Simpson to the meeting, who were in attendance on behalf of Action for the Climate Emergency (ACE) Brent, to present a deputation regarding Brent's response to the climate and ecological emergency. Mr Saville began by acknowledging the efforts of the Council and the Committee, despite the difficult circumstances and financial pressures faced due to reduced central government support and austerity. Nevertheless, the Council was called upon to establish a more coherent and ambitious approach to ensure that the objective of 2030 net neutrality was achieved, particularly given that the impact of climate change was said to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable residents. In reiterating the need for further urgency and attention on the matter, Ms Simpson outlined the following requests:

- To establish a two-way decision making process that enabled greater resident input and community discussion, due to dissatisfaction with the current community forums. It was stated that ACE Brent could support in recruiting members for such a forum and the development of the 2024-26 Climate & Ecological Strategy Delivery Plan was identified as a unique opportunity to introduce new forms of community participation.
- Although welcoming the inclusion of climate considerations in all corporate reports, concerns were raised that many reports stated that there were no implications. Thus, it was suggested to introduce more training for officers to effectively identify the climate implications relating to their proposals and to enable policies to be amended to strive for positive climate implications.
- To further commit to establishing Healthy Neighbourhood areas, given that four out of five schemes had been withdrawn, and to explore the adoption of more in-depth consultative processes.

- Despite commending the new Brent Climate Action Data Dashboard and the commitment to publishing more information on the Council's website, it was felt that estimating carbon reduction impacts was integral to prioritise the most impactful work. Furthermore, Ms Simpson suggested collecting more comparable data for all Climate & Ecological Strategy themes.
- The Council was called upon to refresh the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy to ensure it was comprehensive, consolidated all green strategies and encompassed all of the Council's workstreams. Moreover, ACE Brent recommended the establishment of a dedicated climate scrutiny committee to ensure appropriate oversight.
- Officers were urged to commit to actions relating to transport, retrofitting, fiscal divestment, planning, regeneration, renewable energy, tree planting, the protection of green spaces and the encouragement of plant-based food consumption.

In concluding, Ms Simpson and Mr Saville thanked the Committee for providing time at the meeting to discuss the above matters and hoped for further cooperation and progress on the climate and ecological emergency.

Following the deputation, the Chair invited members to ask two questions to Mr Saville and Ms Simpson, with questions, comments and responses summarised below:

- In highlighting that ACE Brent represented 14 groups across the borough, the Committee questioned the commitments that the organisation could make to further support the Council's efforts regarding the climate emergency. In response, members were advised that, although specific commitments could not be made at the meeting, ACE Brent could coordinate volunteers and access expertise in various climate-related areas.
- Members stated that the Healthy Neighbourhood schemes were withdrawn as a result of the consultation processes rather than a lack of commitment to change. In response, Mr Saville suggested that public consultations required alterations to ensure that one section of the community did not hold disproportionate influence. However, the practical difficulties of running public consultations and ensuring all voices were heard was recognised.

Following the conclusion of the deputation and additional questions, Mr Saville and Ms Simpson returned to the public gallery and the Committee turned to consider the next agenda item.

## **8. Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Update (Winter 2024)**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) presented a report that updated the Committee on the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme, which included updates on both the borough-wide 2022-24 Delivery Plan and specific Green Neighbourhoods action plans. Firstly, the Leader thanked Mr Saville and Ms Simpson for presenting their deputation and provided reassurance that their deputation would be received by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action. In emphasising that the Climate Emergency



Programme remained a priority for the Council, Councillor Muhammed Butt outlined the actions contained within the Delivery Plan and highlighted the implementation of a previous Committee recommendation of creating a Climate Data Dashboard. Moreover, it was detailed that the Council was ensuring that the climate and ecological emergency resonated across the Council by including climate considerations in all corporate reports and by pursuing the utilisation of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) funds where possible to support the climate programme. However, the Leader emphasised the importance of partnership working to meet the Council's goals and ambitions, given that one agency could not deliver the required interventions and resources would need to be efficiently pooled and targeted.

Following the initial overview of the report, contributions, comments and questions were sought from the Committee, with the subsequent discussion summarised below:

- Members noted that the Food Strategy was currently in development and consultation, with officers explaining that an update would be provided at the appropriate time.
- In response to a query regarding changes introduced to the Council's investment strategy, supply chains and procurement models to reduce the Council's carbon emissions, the Committee was advised that a sustainable procurement model was developed as part of the 2021-22 Delivery Plan which provided the Council with greater influence over local supply chains. Members also noted that the Council's procurement strategy was due to be refreshed, with sustainable procurement being a key pillar in the new strategy. Furthermore, it was detailed that every contract bidder had to supply the Council with comprehensive climate related information and the West London Coalition, in which Brent were members, had developed a Climate Commitment Charter in which bidders had to agree to. Concerning the Council's investment strategies, it was explained that the Pension Fund had recently altered its Investment Strategy to better consider the carbon emissions of investments. However, the Committee heard that the Pension Fund was restricted to investing through the London CIV, the London pension fund pool, although at the time of the meeting London CIV were investing in line with the Council's climate commitments.
- Members noted that a response could be provided which detailed the monetary amount that the Brent Pension Fund had invested in water companies.
- The Committee questioned the omission of themes addressing renewable energy, food and investment strategies. In response, it was explained that these topics, whilst not having dedicated themes, were covered in the five themes of the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy. For example, renewable energy was covered in Theme 3 'Homes, Buildings and the Built Environment', discussed under the latter phases of retrofitting. Regarding food, it was recognised that communications relating to the Food Strategy required improvement, but members were informed that projects such as the Community Cook Book and food webinars had been successfully delivered.

- In response to a comment questioning the proactivity of the Climate & Ecological Emergency Programme, the Committee noted that the Council had a dedicated Funding and Bid Writing Manager who explored external funding opportunities to ensure a sufficient funding stream to support the Council's efforts and therefore it was stated that officers were being as proactive as possible given the resources available.
- In discussing the support provided to businesses to assist them with improving their sustainability and adapting and mitigating poor climate practices, members were informed that organisations could benefit from signing up to the Brent Climate Charter and Brent and Camden Climate Challenge, which both provided access to carbon emissions foot printing tools to identify the most polluting elements of the business and offered grant funding to carry out the necessary changes to reduce emissions once carbon foot printing had been completed. However, it was detailed that only 15 businesses had received grant funding to operationally reduce carbon emissions, which was attributed to a lack of funding. Nevertheless, other schemes such as the Cargo Bike Business Scheme and events such as the Business Summit held in November 2023 were highlighted as successes. Although commending the efforts of the Council, the Committee outlined the steps the Council could take that did not require funding, such as coordinating business and community groups and providing more in-depth climate information, with a suggestion to implement an information hub to further support businesses to reduce their emissions.
- Concerning planning restrictions which increased the difficulty of retrofitting properties in certain areas, such as conservation areas, it was reiterated that the Council wanted to upgrade and retrofit as many properties as possible, however planning conditions were needed to ensure quality control. Nevertheless, the Committee was advised that Local Plan policies were scheduled for review at the end of 2024, in which reviews of planning restrictions could be considered.
- In response to a query regarding the accountability and measurability of the Delivery Plan, the Committee heard that the newly introduced Data Dashboard was designed to address hard to measure outcomes and updates were provided to both the Committee and Cabinet in efforts to be transparent regarding progress.
- The Committee sought further information regarding the current state of the Brent Environmental Network, in particular whether regular meetings were being held. In response, it was detailed that the Council had attempted to convene a representative Network drawn from all communities within the borough. However, the desired community engagement was not achieved as many residents did not identify with Brent but rather their local areas. Thus, officers were now exploring the possibility of holding regular local meetings based on the Green Neighbourhoods areas.
- In discussing the lack of involvement from faith communities, members were advised that work to improve engagement had commenced a number of years ago through the Faith Climate Exhibition in which officers met with community leaders who expressed a degree of uniformity in wishing to

protect the environment. The feedback collected via the Exhibition formed part of the Faith Climate Action Plan that was intended for faith organisations to use to conduct climate audits of their operations, with a Faith Leaders Roundtable currently scheduled to further discuss the Action Plan. Given that 82% of Brent residents stated that they followed a faith, the importance of improving engagement from faith communities was emphasised.

- Concerning the identification of those most at risk from the impacts of climate change and the assistance provided in response, members were advised that the holistic Equality Impact Assessment for the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy, which identified key characteristics most at risk, was used as a reference point for projects, actions and delivery plans. Moreover, it was explained that another review of equalities impacts was jointly undertaken with Public Health a couple of years ago in which the latest Delivery Plan was centred on, attempting to address disproportionate impacts as a result of the cost of living crisis through schemes such as Brent Well and Warm and The Library of Things. In concluding, officers reiterated that, for a variety of reasons, climate change often disproportionately impacted children, disabled, older people and ethnic minorities.
- In response to a question that asked whether the Council would meet its 2030 target of net neutrality, members heard that the Council relied on central government support and therefore the Council was doing what it could within its dedicated remit and financial restrictions. Despite the difficulties presented as a result of cumulative budget cuts, inflation and a poor performing economy, the Committee noted that schemes such as School Streets and Green Neighbourhoods had been implemented and the Council was actively applying for grant applications in an effort to increase capacity.
- In highlighting that some community campaigns and initiatives were labelled as 'inactive' and 'unlikely to complete' in the Progress Update attached as Appendix B of the report, members sought further information on the reasoning for these labels, especially given that the role of communities in achieving the Council's goals had been emphasised. In response, members were informed that the action to promote the GLA Solar Together Scheme was labelled as inactive as the Scheme had been stopped by the GLA. Furthermore, it was explained that the Environmental Street Champion was unlikely to be completed due to a lack of resources and capacity, the net zero new build was unlikely to be completed due to increased costs in the housing sector and the community growing scheme in Kingsbury was unlikely to be completed within the current Delivery Plan due to the significant length of time required to implement the scheme.
- In addressing the language used in paragraph 7.7 of the report regarding the changes to the waste and recycling service, officers reassured the Committee that the Council still expected the changes to achieve the predicted results, with a further update to be provided at the appropriate time.
- The Committee detailed that 65% of the borough's carbon emissions related to transport and housing and therefore members called for greater focus to

be placed in this area given that delivering transport and housing carbon reductions would make the biggest difference in addressing the climate emergency. Furthermore, members queried why Brent did not make a higher bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) seeing as housing was attributed to such a large percentage of the borough's carbon emissions. In response, it was explained that the SHDF required match funding and thus £1.3m was the maximum that the Council could commit to investing. However, members noted that officers were exploring alternative ways to fund decarbonisation projects, such as the use of municipal bonds.

- Regarding the political will and ambition of the Council to reduce carbon emissions and combat the climate emergency, the Leader of the Council acknowledged the need to have further conversations surrounding issues such as controlled parking zones, but it was reiterated that many schemes required a whole borough review and the procurement of consultants which further reduced the already stretched climate budget. Moreover, the Committee emphasised the influence that the Council had regarding the travel choices of residents and visitors through setting parking prices, implementing school streets and installing bike hangars, which opposed the view taken in the paper which stated that the Council had 'limited direct influence' over travel choices. Nevertheless, it was recognised by both parties that the negative equalities impact of any proposed change would need to be mitigated prior to implementation and further conversations on the issue were welcomed.
- In discussing controlled parking zones in more detail, members suggested that car-free developments would mitigate some negative impacts of the scheme as it would mean that all residents were impacted equally. Furthermore, the Committee indicated that resident appetite for controlled parking zones was larger than currently thought. In response, members heard that there was a large disparity between the number of controlled parking zones in the south of the borough and the north, with more parking pressures present in the south resulting in more controlled parking zones. Members also commented that previous decisions, such as taking a lenient view regarding the paving of driveways, also contributed to the situation in which the Council found itself in today. In concluding the discussion on controlled parking zones, the Committee was advised that there was a legal basis that allowed local authorities to introduce variable parking charges related to the size, weight and engine size of vehicles.
- The Committee noted that any expansion of free bus passes would need to be funded from increased revenue streams and that officers would need to be satisfied that the passes would be sufficiently used.
- Members highlighted that Brent had a relatively low percentage of car owners compared to other London boroughs and therefore stated that privileging car owners meant that a small percentage of the population would receive the benefits stemming from the absence of suitable measures discouraging car usage.
- The Committee referenced the Mayor of London's 'Retrofitting vs Rebuild' report from February 2024 that outlined that 68% of London's carbon

emissions were related to buildings, which included emissions arising from construction and development. Consequently, it was suggested that to meet the Council's net zero target, properties would need to be retrofitted at a much faster rate and the Council was called upon to support the Mayor of London in lobbying central government to adopt the recommendations outlined within the report. In response, it was detailed that the Council had introduced a Sustainable Environment and Development Supplementary Planning Document which ensured that developers both understood and committed to reducing climate-related implications of developments. Furthermore, members were advised that the Council had been undertaking retrofitting work where possible, such as installing heat pumps and upgrading insulation. However, it was emphasised that the Council would need to invest £60 million to upgrade housing stock to the highest standards which would ultimately fall upon residents to fund through the Housing Revenue Account. Thus, reservations were held regarding the feasibility of conducting this work. In light of this information, the Committee requested that officers focussed on securing external grants where possible to generate the necessary income to deliver the required works.

- Regarding the EPC ratings of schools, it was explained that the Council had data concerning EPC ratings, although it was explained that it was the responsibility of schools to ensure that certificates were renewed.
- In discussing stock condition surveys, the Committee was informed that surveys could not all be completed at once and therefore surveys were continually being conducted. It was explained that stock conditions surveys were valuable as they provided information such as EPC ratings, with the Council utilising the SHDF to assist with undertaking surveys.
- In response to a query relating to the delays in awarding Carbon Offset Funds to organisations, members were advised that it had become a much longer process than officers had originally anticipated due to the need to procure contractors and sub-contractors, conduct surveys and establish legal agreements. Moreover, the implementation of the Fund had been further complicated as a result of some organisations leaving the cluster. Nevertheless, the Committee was reassured that some organisations were close to completing scheduled works and officers were working to resolve issues which were blocking progress. Overall, members noted that the Council had learned from the current iteration of the Carbon Offset Fund, which would inform any future versions of the programme.

At this stage in proceedings, the Committee agreed to 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 considered.

- The Committee questioned when the last bin audit was conducted and how the Council addressed issues concerning the supply of bins. In response, it was detailed that bins were distributed in line with the Council's understanding of demand during the waste collection refresh undertaken a few years ago. However, officers, in conjunction with the Veolia, were reviewing the supply of bins on a week by week basis to counter contamination and redistribute any excess bins. Additionally, members heard

that residents could report issues via the Council's app, which was supported by proactive work taken by the Council to further understand the differing needs across the borough, which included reviewing data on the number of tenants per property and adjusting the supply of bins in response to flat conversion applications.

- Members noted that the Council could explore utilising landlord licensing to introduce requirements regarding improving the energy efficiency of properties and retrofitting.
- In discussing instances in which Brent Housing Management owned estates did not have a sufficient number of bins, members were advised that, whilst officers could revisit areas of specific concern, the Council were actively looking to plug any gaps in provision, which included blocks served by communal bins. Moreover, It was explained that some bins may have been removed due to misuse, however steps were being taken to replace bins where necessary.

In bringing the consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions towards the scrutiny of the item, before inviting Mr Saville and Ms Simpson back to the meeting to provide any closing comments. In highlighting that the Committee felt rushed during the consideration of the item, Mr Saville reiterated the benefits of establishing a devoted climate scrutiny committee, which would allow the necessary time to sufficiently scrutinise the Council's response to the climate emergency. Additionally, Mr Saville stated that many organisations in ACE Brent could support the Council with implementing ideas, emphasising that community groups should be seen as a resource. Finally, although expressing concern regarding the likelihood of the Council achieving its net zero target, Ms Simpson praised the Committee for speaking on the need to have greater ambition to effectively respond to the climate emergency.

Following the conclusion of the agenda item, the Chair summarised the outcomes of the discussion and suggestions for improvement, which were **AGREED** as follows:

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Please note that both the suggestions for improvement and information requests were finalised following the Committee meeting and therefore may slightly vary from the general discussion above.

- (1) To update the Brent Climate Action Data Dashboard to include comparable benchmarking for Theme 4, Nature and Green Space. Additionally, to identify additional data points that illustrate a more complete picture than a comparison between Inner and Outer London, to include Healthy Streets Scorecard measures such as the number of 20mph zones, and include the number of schools meeting EPC targets.
- (2) To explore whether the current controlled parking zones (CPZs) are assisting the Council to achieve its climate commitments, and if not, explore whether an expansion to the zones could in fact help achieve these goals.

- (3) To Explore whether an expansion to the CPZs in the borough is likely to result in additional income that could be used to fund freedom passes.
- (4) To explore ways to reduce the timeframes of implementing CPZs in the borough/
- (5) To Review parking charges and, if possible, introduce variable charging that accounts for the size, weight and emissions of vehicles to encourage sustainable travel.
- (6) To explore options to amend planning restrictions that minimise obstructions (e.g., solar panel restrictions in conservation areas) in installing climate-friendly housing upgrades.
- (7) To develop an information hub for local businesses to support them in becoming more sustainable and eco-friendlier. This hub should be promoted widely, including through the town centre management operations.

### **Information Requests**

- (1) To provide detail on the Council's pension fund investments in water companies (if any), and information on whether these investments are considered worthwhile.

## **9. Scrutiny Progress Update - Recommendations Tracker**

The Committee noted the Recommendations Tracker without comment.

## **10. Committee Work Programme 2023/24**

Members noted that Committee Work Programme without comment.

## **11. Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 21:15

COUNCILLOR RITA CONNEELY  
Chair