



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Minutes of the ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held in the Grand Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Wednesday 14 May 2025 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Ryan Hack

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Kathleen Fraser

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Afzal
Agha	Ahmadi Moghaddam
Ahmed	Akram
Bajwa	Begum
M Butt	S Butt
Chan	Chappell
Choudry	Clinton
Collymore	Conneely
Crabb	Dar
Dixon	Farah
Gbajumo	Grahl
Hirani	Hylton
Kabir	Kansagra
Kennelly	Knight
Long	Lorber
Matin	Maurice
Miller	Mistry
Mitchell	Moeen
Molloy	Rubin
Shah	Ketan Sheth
Krupa Sheth	L.Smith
T.Smith	

1. Welcoming Statement

Prior to formally opening the meeting, the outgoing Mayor Councillor Dar took the opportunity to welcome all councillors and guests to the Annual Council meeting. He then invited Kim Wright (as the Council's Chief Executive) to provide a brief outline of the arrangements for the conduct of the meeting and Mayor Making ceremony. Having noted the outline provided, the Mayor then formally opened the meeting.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor advised that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Benea, Chohan, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi. Johnson, Kelcher, Mahmood, Nerva, J Patel, M.Patel, Rajan-Seelan and Tatler.

An apology for lateness was received from Councillor T.Smith.

3. **To elect the Mayor of the Borough for the Municipal Year 2025 - 2026**

Prior to handing over to the Chief Executive for the conduct of the election process, Councillor Dar began by asking members for nominations to the office of Mayor of the London of Borough of Brent for the 2025 - 2026 Municipal Year.

Councillor Muhammed Butt proceeded to nominate Councillor Ryan Hack. In moving the nomination, he firstly took the opportunity to thank Councillor Dar for his hard work and dedication whilst serving as Mayor and commitment in seeking to represent local community groups and organisations. The Leader then moved on to advise how pleased he was to be able to nominate Councillor Hack for the position, recognising the qualities he would he bring to the role as the youngest Mayor in Brent's history and in seeking to represent a wide range of local causes and provide strong civic leadership across the borough.

Councillor Gbajumo then seconded the nomination of Councillor Hack for the office of Mayor of the London of Borough of Brent for the 2025 – 2026 Municipal Year also taking the opportunity to highlight what she felt would be his dedication and commitment to local communities across Brent.

There were no other nominations, and it was therefore **RESOLVED** that Councillor Ryan Hack be elected Mayor of the London Borough of Brent for the 2025 - 2026 Municipal Year.

Councillor Hack then proceeded to sign the statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office of Mayor.

4. **To appoint a Councillor of the Borough to be Deputy Mayor**

Councillor Hack, as newly appointed Mayor, thanked members for his nomination and appointment as Mayor. He then announced the appointment of Councillor Kathleen Fraser to serve as Deputy Mayor for the 2025 - 2026 Municipal Year.

At this stage in proceedings the Mayors Chain of Office and robes were exchanged between the outgoing and newly appointed Mayor.

Councillor Hack then formally returned thanks for his appointment. Starting by welcoming all guests, he highlighted his pride and personal honour in being nominated as Mayor and thanked all members for their trust, confidence and faith in appointing him to take on the role as first citizen of the borough.

Highlighting the privilege he felt in being appointed as Mayor, Councillor Hack began by outlining his family history and welcoming his great grandparents as guests. Expressing pride at his strong Irish heritage, Councillor Hack advised he

had lived in Brent all his life, having studied at Preston Park Primary School Claremont High School and then St Dominic's Sixth Form College with his family's first home being a council property in Harlesden prior to them settling in Neasden. Referring to growing up in Brent, he outlined the strong sense of community and compassion he had experienced involving people from all walks of life which he hoped to be able to replicate during his time as Mayor.

Paying tribute to his family and mother Councillor Hack advised that, as a result of the support he had received, he had been the first person in his family to attend university where he had graduated with a Masters Degree from University College London. Whilst being the youngest Mayor in Brent's history, he hoped his story and journey in terms of perseverance over struggle and hardship along with similar experiences shared by many other across Brent would help to provide a sense of hope and aspiration to future generations.

Since being elected to serve on the Council, Councillor Hack advised that he had sought to use the platform to coordinate and campaign for improvements for many causes including residents access to food, mostly in areas of deprivation, which he advised had included working to open and support community kitchens as well as surplus food markets in order to support significant numbers of residents across Brent.

Councillor Hack then outlined the aims for his Mayoralty in terms of continuing to support the Council's overall vision and objectives. In this role he advised that he also intended to support the Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS) which had been formed in 1978 in response to the welfare needs of the Irish community and continued to work to improve the well-being of the Irish community across North London and beyond. Highlighting comments recently made by Colum Maloney, as one of the founders of BIAS and first Irish Mayor of Brent, as part of the St Patricks Day celebration at the Learie Constantine Centre, he supported the description of Brent being a borough "united as one", which he also believed represented the aspirations of those who had worked so hard to achieve the creation of Brent as a borough back in April 1965. Highlighting the important work undertaken through the Advisory Service he hoped all members would support him with his fund raising efforts during his year in office.

Highlighting his commitment and focus on the future driven by the belief that better days were ahead, Councillor Hack advised of the intention to use his role as Mayor to celebrate Brent as a welcoming borough bursting with pride, culture and diversity as well as to continue his support for refugees and those families seeking asylum particularly those living in temporary accommodation often with no access to their own kitchen facilities. This included work he had undertaken with a local community activist named Matilda in South Kilburn to expand the "In the Mix" social hub which provided support for refugees and asylum seekers in coming together to cook and socialise with the local community. As a result, he was proud to advise that the food provided for the reception following the Mayor Making ceremony had been prepared by the same organisation with the principle that "everyone was welcome at our table" felt to reflect modern Brent with its rich and diverse mixture of communities, nationalities and opportunities.

Recognising the effort required to ensure the aspirations and opportunities outlined were also delivered for the next generation, Councillor Hack advised he was keen

to use his time in office to support and encourage the work already being undertaken across neighbourhoods throughout the borough building on the success achieved by many communities in creating safe sanctuary within the borough from Ealing Road to “Little Brazil” in Willesden (areas recognised for their creativity and commerce) and Kilburn & Cricklewood Broadway. Taken together he felt the rich tapestry of different communities and faiths living side by side within the borough represented a spirit that was stronger than ever, including the tranquillity of areas such as Barnhill Pond and Mapesbury Dell, the volunteers supporting work to maintain the boroughs parks, green spaces and waterways, members of the local community supporting foodbanks, teachers running breakfast clubs alongside the cultural offer available through venues such as the Kiln Theatre and reggae singers from the BBMC family.

Reflecting on the goodness, justice and talent he felt was demonstrated by so many across the borough, the Mayor ended by taking the opportunity to once again thank his family and wider community for their support over the coming year and by once again highlighting how proud he was to have been elected as Brent’s First Citizen with Brent identified as a beacon of hope and his intention to continue using the role to support the work being undertaken by communities across the borough in a renewal of friendship.

5. Vote of thanks to the outgoing Mayor

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to propose a vote of thanks to all co-opted and other members serving on the Council’s committees.

Councillor Muhammed Butt in once again congratulating Councillor Hack on his appointment as Mayor then moved on to highlight the valued work of the Council’s co-opted and independent committee members, given the core role they played as critical friends in the Council’s democratic process. In passing on his thanks, he advised how their independence and objectivity were seen as integral to the role of the bodies on which they served including Scrutiny, Audit & Standards and the various health and education bodies. Recognising the challenges which local government continued to face, he ended by thanking all of the co-opted and Independent Members for their work in supporting the Council’s democratic processes and drive towards continuous improvement.

The Mayor then invited the Leader of the Council to formally propose a vote of thanks for the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Dar. In doing so, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by highlighting the honour in serving as First Citizen of the Borough and in being able to advocate and serve as a champion for Brent. These were roles he felt Councillor Dar had worked hard to fulfil during his time as Mayor. Recognising the integrity, dedication, compassion and commitment demonstrated by Councillor Dar in serving the people of Brent during his time as Mayor, the Leader praised Councillor Dar for his warmth and the valued contribution made in representing the borough during his Mayoralty, which he advised had been appreciated by all members.

The Mayor then invited comments from other members in recognition of the role undertaken by the outgoing Mayor.

In response, Councillors Hirani, Maurice, Grahl, Lorber, Kabir, Choudry, Afzal. Saqib Butt, Agha, Clinton, Kennelly and finally Councillor Hylton all spoke to congratulate the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor on their appointment and thank Councillor Dar as outgoing Mayor for the dedication, compassion and commitment demonstrated in undertaking his civic role. Recognising his appointment as the youngest Mayor of Brent, members were keen to commend Councillor Hack on the dedication and commitment he had already displayed in seeking to stand against social injustice and challenge inequalities being experienced by local communities across the borough, which it was felt would continue to be demonstrated during his time as Mayor.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Dar to return thanks and review his time in office.

Councillor Dar, in returning thanks, began by expressing his pride at having been elected as Mayor and being able to serve the people of Brent during the previous year. Reflecting on the honour in being able to serve the borough, particular thanks were extended to all members for their support along with Kim Wright, as Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, Amira Nassr and Fatema Limbada within Democratic Services along with Kim Gordan & Brian Kennedy in the Mayor's Office, which had been much valued. The opportunity was also taken to thank Councillor Grahl for her specific support as fellow Cricklewood and Mapesbury ward councillor as well as the management committee of the Pakistan Community Centre for their work whilst his attention had been focussed on Mayoral duties over the past year.

Reflecting on his time in office, Councillor Dar highlighted what he regarded as the privilege in being able to attend such a vast range of official community events (totalling nearly 1,100) which had involved him being able to meet so many inspiring, talented and generous local individuals, all of whom, he advised, had made him proud to call Brent home. Thanking everyone for the warmth in which he had been welcomed and received, Councillor Dar felt this represented the true heart of the borough reflecting on the diversity, unity and deep compassion he had had the opportunity to experience during his time in office.

Moving on to review his fundraising activities over the year, Councillor Dar reminded members of his pledge to support and raise the profile of the Pakistan Community Centre as his chosen charity during his year in office. As part of his fundraising activities he had welcomed the opportunity to highlight the important work and support the organisation provided to some of the most vulnerable people in the borough which he reminded members included the provision of food banks, homeless support, care for the elderly, disability services for children, health initiatives as well as community advice surgeries all being delivered as part of the centre's foundational work dating back to 1965. In thanking the community elders who had provided the platform to serve, Councillor Dar offered a blessing to the souls of those who had passed. All members then joined Councillor Dar in a round of applause to recognise the work undertaken by the Centre and all those who had supported his fundraising activities.

Highlighting the privilege he felt at having been able to serve as Mayor, Councillor Dar ended by advising how much he had enjoyed his time in office also taking the opportunity to thank his wife (as Mayoress) and family for their patience and support along with members, council staff, local community groups and residents for their kindness and service. In recognising the honour in being able to serve

Brent thanks were also expressed to Councillor Hack for his support as Deputy Mayor and to wish him and his family, along with Councillor Fraser as his deputy, all the best for his coming year as Mayor which he was sure he would serve with distinction.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Dar for his comments and highlighted how much he had enjoyed working with him during his time as Mayor. He ended by wishing him well for the future and then advised that as this now concluded the ceremonial part of the meeting, he would move on to deal with the remainder of the agenda.

Prior to moving on to deal with the remaining items on the agenda, the Mayor advised that the presentation of the Councillor Development Charter Plus Award, which had initially been scheduled for the meeting would now be undertaken as part of the Mayor's Announcements at the next Full Council meeting in July.

6. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared by Members at the meeting.

7. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 27 February 2025 be approved as a correct record.

8. **Annual Review of Constitution**

The Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources. In presenting the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised this detailed proposed changes to the Constitution as a result of its annual review including changes to the Terms of Reference for the North West London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Part 5 of Constitution) and a change to the Members Code of Conduct (Part 5 of Constitution) relating to the acceptance and registration of gifts and hospitality classified as "exceptional items" valued at £500 or more, with both changes commended as reasonable and sensible in terms of strengthening the Council's overall governance arrangements.

As no other members indicated that they wished to speak on the item the Mayor put the recommendations straight to the vote and they were declared unanimously **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To agree the changes to the Constitution set out in Appendix A of the report.
- (2) To note that the list of Cabinet Members and Portfolio Holders in Part 1 of the Constitution would be updated to reflect the appointments of, and allocation of functions to Cabinet Members by the Leader.
- (3) To authorise the Director of Law to amend the Constitution accordingly, including making any necessary incidental or consequential changes.

- (4) To note that, to the extent that the changes related to executive functions of the Council, they had been approved by the Leader.

9. **Representation of Political Groups on Committees**

The Mayor then moved on to invite Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources which the Leader advised fulfilled the Council's duty to review and determine the representation of different political groups on certain Committees at its annual meeting. It was noted that no changes to the existing allocation of seats had been proposed reflecting the fact that there had been no change in the overall composition of political groups since the previous review.

The Mayor then opened the debate inviting other members to speak on the report, with the following contributions made.

In response to clarification sought by Councillor Lorber regarding the current size of the Labour Group, Marsha Henry (as Director of Law) confirmed that this remained as set out in the report with their currently being no members of the group identified as serving in an independent capacity.

As no other members indicated that they wished to speak on the item and the Leader of the Council advising he did not wish to exercise any right of reply the Mayor put the recommendations to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To agree the size of each Committee, as detailed within the report.
- (2) To approve the allocation of seats on Committees to each of the Council's political groups (where the rules of political balance applied) as set out within the report and to make appointments to those committees (under agenda item 9 on the agenda) giving effect to the wishes of the political group allocated the seats.
- (3) To note that the political balance on Council Sub-Committees would be reviewed at the first meeting of the General Purposes Committee and Licensing Committee to be held following the Annual Council Meeting.

10. **Appointment to Committees and Outside Bodies including the appointment of Chairs & Vice-Chairs**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources. In introducing the item, the Leader advised that the report set out the nominations for appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and nomination for Chairs and Vice Chairs as well as co-opted members, where necessary, for the 2025 - 26 Municipal Year, with the nominations having been made (where required) in accordance with the political balance of the Council and requirements in relation to political proportionality.

The Mayor then opened the debate inviting other members to speak on the report, with the following contributions made.

In opening the debate Councillor Lorber highlighted his concern at the current arrangements relating to the allocation of Chairs on the Councils Scrutiny Committees. In referring to the importance of scrutiny as a key element in a healthy functioning democracy he felt there was a need to ensure, in seeking to deliver a strong, credible and effective scrutiny function, that it remained as independent as possible from the Executive. In order to safeguard the effectiveness, democratic accountability and independence of Brent's scrutiny function and reflect what he regarded as good practice elsewhere, he advised the Liberal Democrats were seeking to move an amendment to the proposed allocation of seats outlined within report requiring that the Chairs of the existing Scrutiny Committees should be Opposition Group appointments.

In response to clarification sought by the Chief Executive on the precise nature of the proposed amendment, Councillor Lorber advised the Liberal Democrats were seeking to amend the relevant Standing Order (49ii) within Part 2 (Procedural Rules) of the Constitution in order to provide that the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees should be Opposition Group appointments.

Speaking in support of the proposed amendment, Councillor Clinton referred to a recent press article expressing concern at reported changes being introduced by a number of Labour led London Councils, which were felt to have impacted on the ability of opposition councillors to effectively scrutinise executive decisions within those authorities. Highlighting the importance in being able to safeguard the ability of all councillors to be able to meaningfully undertake their representational role and engage in the way scrutiny was being led, he urged all councillors to support the proposed amendment in seeking to ensure scrutiny remained as independent and democratically accountable as possible.

In raising a Point of Order, Councillor Kabir sought details on whether the proposed change had been subject to prior consideration at the Constitutional Working Group, which she felt would be the more appropriate body to review the proposal at this stage.

As a final contribution, Councillor Kansagra also speaking in support of the proposed change, as Leader of the Conservative Group, highlighted the concerns his Group had also previously raised in relation to impact which removal of the vice-chair roles on scrutiny from the Opposition Groups had had in undermining the independence and democratic accountability of the scrutiny function. As a result, he felt the amendment moved in relation to the arrangements for securing more effective and democratic scrutiny was reasonable, and proportionate and would deliver improved scrutiny along with better outcomes for all. He therefore advised the Conservative Group would be supporting the amendment and more detailed consideration of the proposals through the Constitutional Working Group.

As no further members indicated they wished to speak and having clarified the nature of the amendment moved during the debate, the Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt to exercise his right of reply in relation to the report and amendment moved at the meeting.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt queried the nature of the amendment which had been moved in relation to the report under consideration, which he felt was more of a constitutional issue rather than one impacting on the membership nominations for specific bodies. Recognising the democratic mandate of the current Administration, he felt this also covered member's participation in scrutiny and the wider democratic process highlighting the opportunities which were already available for members of the Opposition to fully participate and engage in the way scrutiny was being delivered. As such Councillor Muhammed Butt advised that the Labour Group did not feel any further changes were required to the current arrangements and were not therefore minded to support the proposal moved by Councillor Lorber during the meeting in relation to the chairing arrangements for scrutiny.

Councillor Lorber, in exercising his right of reply in relation on the amendment felt that the current report did provide an appropriate opportunity to move the proposal and with no further comments, the Mayor thanked members for their contributions during the debate.

Having confirmed that the amendment was valid, the Mayor then moved to put the amendment and recommendations within the report to the vote.

On putting the amendment moved by Councillor Lorber regarding the chairing arrangements for scrutiny to the vote this was declared **LOST**.

The substantive recommendations, as set out in the report and detailed below, were then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the appointments of members and substitutes as well as the continuing appointment of co-opted members to Council Committees and Outside Bodies for the 2025-2026 Municipal Year, as detailed within section 3.2.4 and Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) To approve the appointments of Chairs and Vice Chairs to Council Committees for the 2025-2026 Municipal Year, as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report.
- (3) To note the appointments:
 - (a) To the Cabinet, Cabinet Committees and Joint Executive Committees and their respective Chairs and Vice Chairs for the 2025-2026 Municipal Year, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.
 - (b) to be confirmed by the General Purposes Committee for the 2025-2026 Municipal Year, as detailed in Appendix 3 of the report.
 - (c) to be confirmed by Licensing Committee for the 2025-2026 Municipal Year, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report.

(The full list of appointments can be found as part of the appendices to the main report republished prior to the meeting)

11. **Calendar of Council Meetings for the 2025 -2026 Municipal Year**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources which the Leader advised detailed the calendar of meeting dates for Full Council and other meetings during the 2025 - 26 Municipal Year.

As no members indicated that they wished to speak on the item the recommendations in the report were put straight to the vote by the Mayor and were unanimously declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the dates for Full Council and other meetings to take place during the 2025-26 Municipal Year, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) That the Deputy Director Democratic & Corporate Governance be authorised to make any alterations deemed necessary to the Municipal Calendar during the course of the year having consulted with the Leader of the Council, Leaders of the Opposition Group(s) and Chair of the affected meeting.

12. **International Partnering Arrangements**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to introduce the final report on the agenda from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources. In introducing the item, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised that the report outlined the work undertaken to review and develop an International Partnering Protocol (IPP) for adoption by the Council designed to recognise Brents role as a diverse, dynamic and globally connected borough and as a basis for building partnerships with communities around the world. As such, he advised the IPP had been designed to provide a clear framework for developing future international partnership arrangements including appropriate review periods. The report also included, as has been agreed following the motion approved by the Council in November 2024, a review of a proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus, which had been subject to assessment in accordance with the protocol.

Referring to the proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised members that the proposal had been subject to detailed review and, as set out within the report, was now felt to have met the threshold to take forward based on the criteria within the protocol and level of support identified and the partnership representing an opportunity to share and learn through a programme of community led active engagement. As such the proposal was felt to reflect the diverse nature of the borough whilst also celebrating the contributions made by the many different communities across the borough in seeking to foster and encourage a spirit of respect and understanding and the recommendations moved on that basis.

With the report having been moved, the Mayor then opened the debate inviting other members to speak on the report, with the following contributions made.

In opening the debate Councillor Kansagra, having taken the opportunity to thank Councillor Dar for his time as Mayor and ongoing service to the local community and to congratulate Councillor Hack on his appointment as Mayor for which he wished him very success, whilst not objecting to the spirit of the International Partnership Protocol felt there was a need to reflect on the process and priority relating to the proposed arrangements with Nablus. Whilst recognising the value of global exchange, he advised the Conservative Group believed that any partnership arrangements needed to be approached with transparency, balance and most importantly local consent. Reflecting on Brent's status as a proudly diverse borough with a range of long standing and well-established communities from nations across the world who all had made an important contribution to the boroughs identity, he felt there was a need to carefully reflect about the basis on which any future twinning or partnership arrangements was proposed and selected. Reminding members of the borough's longstanding twinning arrangement with South Dublin as a partnership grounded in significant cultural and historic links, he queried the basis on which Nablus had been selected as a further partnership. Whilst recognising the proposal would resonate with sections of the local community, he also highlighted the nature of other familiar cultural and community links with cities and regions across the world which he felt also needed to be considered as part of the process.

Whilst advising that the Conservative Group were not opposed to adoption of the protocol, Councillor Kansagra felt that was a need to ensure that any partnership arrangements coming forward were as inclusive, locally driven and representative as possible having been shaped and developed through local communities and based on international links forged through culture, education and exchange rather than more costly, civic delegation or top down symbolic gestures.

In highlighting the Conservative Groups support for more locally driven solutions and any international partnerships to be built from the ground up, Councillor Kansagra ended by advising it was his view that in order for any arrangement to be meaningful and bring clear benefits and value to the boroughs residents it would need to be community led in order to reflect the full spectrum of Brent's identity.

Having also congratulated the Mayor on his appointment, Councillor Maurice then spoke to raise a number of concerns in relation to the proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus. Highlighting that the Conservative Group had sought to move an amendment to the motion approved at the November 2024 Council meeting on the proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus, he reminded members of the alternative suggestion made that consideration be given to twinning with a town incorporating a broader mix of population and that was outside of an immediate conflict zone in order to better reflect the borough's diversity and local community links. Specific concerns were also raised in relation to the current governance arrangements within Nablus along with advice from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office about the need for extreme caution for anyone considering travel to Nablus at the current time and current restrictions in being able to access the region. As a result, Councillor Maurice felt there was a need for careful reflection on any decision to proceed with the proposed twinning arrangement given the potential consequences and reputational damage associated with what he regarded as the divisive and discriminatory nature of the current proposal on certain sections of the community in Brent. As a final issue in concluding his contribution, Councillor Maurice also highlighted concerns relating to

the financial costs in supporting any twinning arrangements given the challenging nature of the Council's current financial position.

As a further contribution to the debate Councillor Mistry, having also congratulated Councillor Hack on his appointment as Mayor, advised that she also echoed the concerns raised in relation to the proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus. Whilst not seeking to reject the spirit of the proposal she also supported the need identified for careful reflection about the basis of the proposed arrangement with Nablus, having considered the accompanying protocol and views previously expressed relating to the diverse range of other communities within Brent which, it was felt, appeared not to have been identified for consideration in offering potential alternative twinning or partnership opportunities despite other regions across the world to which they were linked facing similar challenges in relation to conflict, poverty, education and climate. Highlighting reservations which Councillor Mistry advised had been raised by members of other communities across Brent regarding the safety of potential exchange visits being undertaken to Nablus at the current time, she felt there were opportunities to apply the principles within the protocol to potential twinning arrangements in other parts of the world that would also recognise the diverse nature of other well established communities across the borough and be better able to provide a more stable and secure basis for the range of engagement activity included as part of any partnership arrangement. In ending, Councillor Mistry advised that she would be keen to ensure a process of wider engagement with the local community prior to any final decision of the way forward being made.

Councillor Afzal, speaking in support of the proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus felt it was important, in rejecting the concerns identified relating to the governance of Nablus, to highlight the momentous nature of the decision for which approval was being sought in seeking to take forward the twinning arrangement between Brent and Nablus as a mean of confirming the boroughs commitment to solidarity, shared values and unity across borders and legacy in the journey that would follow. Recognising the Irish heritage of the new Mayor and existing twinning arrangement with South Dublin, Councillor Afzal reflected that the Irish and Palestinian stories shared a strong connection with the arrangement with Nablus designed to support the sharing of culture and history through a process of collaboration and exchange involving knowledge, skills and experience focussed around young people and local communities across the borough and to provide shared opportunities to grow together in building a strong and lasting partnership. As such, he felt the twinning process represented an opportunity to provide those growing up and living under the challenges faced in the region with a brighter future and one of freedom. Highlighting that the proposal had been supported by nearly 2,000 residents and several grassroots Brent organisations, Councillor Afzal concluded by pointing out that in his view twinning was about more than symbolism and represented a commitment to shared values, mutual understanding, and global solidarity. At a time when he was concerned so many were looking away, Councillor Afzal highlighted his pride that Brent was seeking to stand up and show what it meant to build peace and cooperation from the ground up in the name of peace, equality and solidarity.

Speaking next, Councillor Kennelly took the opportunity to commend the detailed nature of the report and protocol which had been developed given the appetite identified to develop further twinning arrangements and international partnerships

that reflected the level of diversity, equality and inclusion offered by Brent for promotion elsewhere. At the same time, however, he highlighted a need to ensure that any arrangements were designed to safeguard the rights of all groups moving forward, including the LGBTQ community to ensure they were truly reflective of the borough's inclusive values. Recognising concerns raised in relation to the stance of the Palestinian authorities in this respect, he felt it important to ensure these issues were addressed and the necessary assurance provided in relation to the safeguarding of these values, particularly in relation to the LGBTQ community.

As a final contribution, Councillor Lorber thanked Councillor Kennelly for the comments raised which he also felt was an issue that needed to be addressed. Expressing concern at the way in which the protocol had been developed following the initial decision to seek a partnership arrangement with Nablus rather than in advance of the process, he felt this highlighted a need for lessons to be learnt moving forward to ensure a meaningful partnership was established recognising the lack of twinning activity associated with the current arrangement involving South Dublin. In terms of the protocol developed he felt it important to ensure that all communities across the borough, as opposed to those with political backing, were given the opportunity to contribute towards the identification of any future twinning proposals with a clear limit set on the number of arrangements the borough would consider entering into to avoid devaluing the process. The concerns raised in relation to safeguarding the rights of all groups living in the area covered under the arrangement, including the LGBTQ community, were also shared with the need identified to ensure, in advance of any agreement being signed, that the rights of every citizen irrespective of their race, faith or sexual orientation would be valued and protected and undertakings therefore sought regarding the stance of the governing authorities in Nablus in respect of the Council's wider EDI objectives. Subject to these being obtained, Councillor Lorber ended by advising the Liberal Democrats would not object to pursuing the arrangement but, if not, he advised they would have no option but to oppose the proposal.

As no other members had indicated they wished to speak the Mayor thanked those who had participated in the debate for their contributions and then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt to exercise his right of reply in relation to the comments made on the report.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to highlight that the protocol detailed within the report included a clear framework governing establishment of the proposed and any future twinning arrangements, including a limit on the number of twinning arrangements permitted to come forward under each Administration and clear requirements relating to the community and equality impact assessments that would be required in support of any proposal. In recognising the contributions made by all communities across Brent, members were assured of the opportunities available for representations to be made regarding any future twinning arrangements, once again highlighting the support which had been expressed for the proposal relating to Nablus as a community driven initiative involving a range of partner organisations across the borough. Referring to the extent of work undertaken to assess the proposal, Councillor Muhammed Butt ended by once again highlighting the rigorous nature of the process which he assured members had been designed to ensure the arrangements reflected the Council priorities and would not place any strain on Council resources. As such he commended the report to members for approval.

Having thanked the Leader for his closing remarks the Mayor then moved on to put the recommendations in the report to the vote which were declared **CARRIED**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Adopt the International Partnering Protocol as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) Note and endorse the Community and Equalities Assessment contained in Appendix 2 and 3 of the report.
- (3) On the basis of (1) & (2) above to agree that a Twinning Agreement be established with the city of Nablus.

13. **Urgent Business**

As there was no urgent business to be transacted the Mayor declared the Annual Meeting closed and advised that he looked forward to seeing all members at the next Council meeting on Monday 7 July 2025. He then invited all members and guests to join him at his reception.

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm

COUNCILLOR RYAN HACK
Mayor