



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 9 February 2026 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor M Butt (Chair), Councillor M Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Benea, Grahl, Knight, Moeen, Nerva, Rubin and Krupa Sheth.

Also present: Andrew Hudson (Chair of the i4b & First Wave Housing Ltd Board) and Councillor Conneely (Chair of Budget Scrutiny Task Group)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing).

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made during the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Cabinet **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 19 January 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

4. **Matters Arising (if any)**

None identified.

5. **Petitions (if any)**

There were no petitions presented at the meeting.

6. **Reference of item considered by Scrutiny Committees (if any)**

There were no items referred from either the Community Wellbeing or Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committees.

7. **Change in Order of Business**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Chair) advised that as he had accepted requests to speak in relation to Agenda Item 9 (Brent Creates – A Cultural Strategy for Inclusion, Wellbeing & Growth 2026-31) and Agenda Item 10 (Approval of proposal for First Wave Housing to offer Supported Exempt Accommodation) he intended to change the order of the agenda to enable Items 9 and 10 to be considered in advance of the remainder of the agenda.

The minutes therefore reflect the order in which items were considered at the meeting.

8. Brent Creates - A Cultural Strategy for Inclusion, Wellbeing and Growth: 2026-31

Prior to considering the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) welcomed Bethany Haynes (Senior Producer at Punchdrunk Enrichment) to the meeting who he advised had requested to speak, as a representative of ViBrent (a consortium of 9 cultural organisations within Brent, funded by the Arts Council England's Place Partnership Programme) in support of the Brent Cultural Strategy 2026-2031.

In addressing Cabinet, Bethany Haynes began by outlining the role played by the network represented through the ViBrent partnership, in seeking to strengthen collaboration across the sector, build capacity and create inclusive cultural opportunities for all (from early years to early careers) increasing equity of provision across Brent. As such, Bethany Haynes advised she was speaking on behalf of the network to advocate for the new cultural strategy given the challenges faced across the cultural sector and in support of what was felt to be the critical role played that would be played by the strategy in safeguarding the future of culture in Brent through advocating for investment, measuring and championing impact and bringing people together.

As examples of the work already being delivered through the ViBrent programme and its close alignment with the wider strategic goals set out in the Brent Creates Cultural Strategy, reference was made to the fully-funded programme of cultural activities for schools (BrentBackpack) being delivered in collaboration with the Brent Cultural Education Partnership, designed to increase schools' knowledge of cultural offers within the borough as well as the work being undertaken through the Bootcamps programme (led by the Awareness Tap and Garden Studios) and four paid training placements in supporting young people across Brent to pursue creative careers. Members were also advised of the work being undertaken through ViBrent to develop research around best practice, offer training opportunities on race equity and environmental sustainability as well as provide training and networking opportunities to share skills amongst grass root creatives and organisations across Brent.

In summing up Bethany Haynes expressed her full support for the strategy emphasising the partnerships aim to continue collaborating with the Council on cultural initiatives given the wider impact it was felt these would generate in terms of improving social and economic outcomes for the whole borough.

Having thanked Bethany Haynes for her comments, the Leader then invited Councillor Promise Knight (as Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support & Culture) to introduce the accompanying report from the Corporate Director Housing & Residential Services presenting the Brent Cultural Strategy 2026–31 as a roadmap for the next stage of the borough's cultural development following the legacy of Brent's year as London Borough of Culture.

In introducing the report, Councillor Knight began by thanking Bethany Haynes for her comments in support of the strategy and the leadership being provided through

the ViBrent partnership in seeking to advocate for the ongoing provision of inclusive cultural and creative opportunities across Brent which was felt to exemplify the basis upon which the strategy had been built. The opportunity was also taken to thank Councillor Donnelly-Jackson in her previous role as lead member covering culture for the support she had provided in initiating development of the strategy. In presenting the strategy, members were advised of the way it had been designed to recognise culture as a serious driver of economic growth, community strength and long-term opportunity for the borough given the significant contribution made towards Brent's economy. In highlighting this point, it was pointed out that Brent's cultural sector had been estimated to generate an estimated £238m annually to the local economy with major venues, grassroots organisations and creative businesses supporting jobs, skills, tourism and local enterprise as well as the range of various events adding vibrancy and supporting the ongoing circulation of wealth across communities within the borough.

Focussing beyond economic value, members were also reminded of the wider impact provided through culture in terms of creating a sense of belonging and pride in place as well as reducing isolation, demonstrated through the success of events such as the Kilburn Music Mile. In recognising this, members were advised that a key component of the strategy included development of the Brent Cultural Compact, as a borough-wide alliance bringing together public, private and community partners to align cultural activity with the Council's wider priorities, including health, education, regeneration and sustainability as well as creating a network of cultural partners and local businesses in an effort to open up micro-business networks with cultural producers across the borough. In addition, work would continue with partners to campaign for the introduction of a ticket levy for venues over a 5000 capacity, in line with national conversations being led by the Department Culture, Media, and Sport in relation to the protection of local cultural infrastructure. This was designed to ensure that the significant income being generated by ticket providers and large-scale venues through major events were able to support sustained investment in grassroots culture and development of the future generation of artists and Brent's strategy therefore seeking to ensure everyone in Brent had access to culture regardless of their background.

Acknowledging the role of all cultural partners who had engaged and collaborated in development of the strategy, the opportunity was also taken to thank the organisations, artists and community leaders for their time and insight to ensure the strategy had been designed to reflect the real strengths and challenges faced across the cultural sector in Brent.

In welcoming the report, members were keen to commend the focus of the strategy in seeking to embed culture across health, education and regeneration and sustainability recognising the wider social, economic and public health benefits of cultural participation and growth being sought across priority audiences including children and young people involving the Young Brent Foundation, Brent Music Service and also in relation to the collaboration with Brent Start in terms of wider employment and skills development initiatives. Support was also expressed for the long-term vision within the strategy, not only in seeking to build on Brent's creative legacy as a means of supporting community cohesion and celebrating the borough's rich diversity, but also in terms of the recent investment in cultural infrastructure, creative spaces and community led programmes as a means of creating opportunity and contributing towards inclusive growth.

Expressing support for the value of the culture sector as a driver of social equity, resilience, economic opportunity and community pride, members also noted the development of the measurable outcomes and performance indicators relating to participation, skills development, health and wellbeing and economic value which had been identified to ensure accountability in terms of delivery of the strategy.

Having welcomed the support expressed and the collaboration from all partners involved in the development of the cultural strategy along with clear, partnership led framework for delivering economic value, strengthening communities and positioning Brent as a confident, inclusive cultural borough Cabinet therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the Cultural Strategy 2026–2031 as detailed within the report having agreed:

- (1) To approve the Brent Cultural Strategy 2026- 2031 as the guiding framework for cultural development across the borough.
- (2) To endorse the establishment of a Brent Cultural Compact, bringing together council teams, cultural, health, education, business, and community partners to coordinate delivery.
- (3) To commit to working collaboratively to embed culture in wider council plans, including health and wellbeing strategies, regeneration projects, and cross-departmental initiatives, including enabling small-scale community-led activity through mechanisms such as a council-supported micro-grants programme.
- (4) To endorse the creation of an Impact Framework to measure cultural outcomes across wellbeing, participation, economic growth and environmental sustainability with this framework being developed in conjunction with Public Health in Q4 2025/6.
- (5) To endorse the publication of an Annual Cultural Impact Report, measuring progress against KPIs across wellbeing, inclusion, economic growth and environmental sustainability with the aim being to assess effectiveness, inform future investment and ensure transparency and accountability across partners.
- (6) To support advocacy for fair contributions from the visitor economy, including exploration of ticket levy or visitor tax mechanisms, in partnership with major venues and sector stakeholders, with options brought back to Cabinet for future consideration.

9. **Approval of proposal for First Wave Housing to offer supported exempt accommodation**

In Councillor Donnelly-Jackson's absence (as Cabinet Member for Housing) Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) invited Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Resident & Housing Services) to introduce a report seeking approval for the proposed use of First Wave Housing (FWH) Ltd as a provider offering supported exempt accommodation (SEA) to help care experienced young people, residents in supported living arrangements, and residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

In presenting the report, Tom Cattermole advised that the proposal had been designed to take advantage of an opportunity identified for Brent to both reduce costs and improve the quality of supported housing in Brent. Members noted that the aim behind development of the model had been focussed around the provision of value and high quality support whilst also ensuring this was based on a financially sustainable approach over the long term in a way that would also join up services so care-experienced young people, adults in supported living, and residents at risk of homelessness could all benefit from a more seamless, person centred offer. It was confirmed that the approach identified had followed detailed engagement with residents with lived experience as well as best practice and followed detailed consideration and approval by the First Wave Housing Board.

In terms of the approach outlined, members were advised that the initial focus would be on making supported living more financially sustainable and trialling new provision for care experienced young people. Subject to the outcome achieved, this would then be extended to residents in temporary accommodation or at risk of homelessness with the aim by 2028 to deliver over 100 units and support more than 300 residents. In highlighting the £2m worth of savings already achieved in relation to the SEA budget, it was pointed out that the proposal had also been designed to ease pressure on commissioning and temporary accommodation budgets as a means of reducing costs, with the scheme also providing an opportunity to move people out of temporary accommodation and prevent homelessness where support needs were present in a way that would not only offer better value for residents but also enable the design and provision of a holistic, person centred support offer from the ground up.

Having thanked Tom Cattermole for introducing the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) then welcomed Andrew Hudson (as Chair of the First Wave Housing Ltd Board) to the meeting who he advised had been invited to attend in order to comment on the proposals from the perspective of the Board.

In addressing Cabinet, Andrew Hudson began by confirming FWH's willingness to play a key role in supporting vulnerable residents and seeking to achieve the dual benefits it was felt the proposal would deliver in terms of providing better quality support for tenants and also value for money for the Council. Cabinet was assured of the detailed level of scrutiny undertaken by the Board in developing the proposals to ensure the scheme was viable and would not create undue risk to the service provided for other FWH tenants. Having received those assurances, the Board was therefore confident in being able to deliver the scheme as outlined within the report, which it was noted would proceed in stages with a formal evaluation at the end of the first phase. This process would also be supported through the provision of necessary resourcing, recognising the change and level of co-ordination required with further assurance provided as a result of the Council's backstop guarantee designed to mitigate any risk in relation to FWH's financial position.

Concluding, Andrew Hudson confirmed that, having received the assurances required, the FWH Board were fully supportive of the scheme and committed to its successful implementation.

In considering the report Cabinet welcomed the clear and responsible nature of the proposal and approach outlined, given the way it had been designed to ensure the provision of a well-managed and properly regulated offer not only in support of care experienced young people but also residents with mental health needs, disabilities and those at risk of homelessness focussed on the quality of care and appropriate oversight rather than commercial gain. Support was also expressed for what members felt to be the more coherent, joined up and integrated nature of the model outlined in seeking to establish a trusted provider in a way that would support the health and wellbeing of more vulnerable residents to move into independent living whilst also reducing reliance on temporary accommodation, easing pressure on homelessness services and strengthening the Council's financial resilience.

Having welcomed the support and partnership with First Wave Housing Ltd, along with the cross-departmental approach being taken to deliver the scheme as a means of enhancing the quality of support for those residents in need, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To approve that First Wave Housing launches and operates a supported housing scheme and request that officers vary First Wave Housing's 2026-27 business plan accordingly when presented to Cabinet in March 2026.
- (2) To agree to work in partnership with First Wave Housing to provide supported exempt accommodation, including committing Council staff to meet the requirements of the proposal and signing a Memorandum of Understanding to that effect.
- (3) To approve the financial implications of the proposal as outlined in section 7 of the report, including staffing and legal costs.

10. **Budget and Council Tax 2026-27**

Prior to consideration of the main report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) welcomed Councillor Rita Conneely to the meeting who he advised had been invited to attend, as Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Task Group, in order to introduce the main findings and recommendations within the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report in relation to their review of the budget setting proposals for 2026-27, which had been included as Appendix D to the Budget and Council Tax report.

In introducing the report, Councillor Conneely began by thanking all members of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group along with everyone else who had participated in the evidence sessions as part of the scrutiny process. In welcoming the Government's reintroduction of multi-year funding settlements, which it was hoped would strengthen the ability for the Council to develop a longer term planning approach, the impact of the broader thematic nature of the budget proposals was also recognised in support of a more strategic approach and in breaking down departmental silos with the role of scrutiny also seen as key in continuing to monitor implementation along with their impact on residents to ensure no challenges arose that would require a change in strategy.

Although supportive of the recent changes introduced in relation to the Local Government Funding regime, the Task Group had recognised the number of

significant financial risks and pressures that continued to be faced by the Council and across local government as a whole, including rising demand for social care and the temporary accommodation crisis. It was felt these challenges had been further compounded by the increasing role of privatisation and private equity in publicly commissioned services, particularly social care, which the Task Group had felt continued to undermine quality and drive cost inflation highlighting the need for meaningful reform of commissioning frameworks.

In terms of specific areas of focus, Cabinet was advised that the Task Group had been particularly encouraged by the work being undertaken to address the challenges in relation to supported exempt accommodation, as a means of delivering value for money whilst enhancing the quality of support being provided and in ensuring the private sector was not taking advantage of the market. In addition, the Task Group had been keen to recognise and commend the work undertaken in relation to Children's Services to invest in early intervention and reduce the reliance on agency staff, with it hoped this approach would be adopted more widely as best practice.

In concluding, whilst recognising the work still to be done in delivering the proposals, Councillor Conneely once again thanked all those involved for their participation in the Task Group and commended the recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to Cabinet for consideration as part of the budget setting process.

In welcoming the contribution from the Scrutiny Budget Task Group, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) commended the thorough nature of the approach and robust challenge undertaken by the Task Group recognising the nature and extent of ongoing work that would be required to deliver the budget and importance of scrutiny in continuing to monitor progress. The Leader thanked all those involved for their contribution as a key part of the budget consultation process.

Having noted the comments received, the Leader then invited Councillor Mili Patel (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) to introduce the report from the Corporate Director Finance & Resources which set out the Council's budget proposals for 2026-27 along with the results of the budget consultation, scrutiny and equality processes and the overall financial position facing the Council for the medium-term.

In presenting the report, Councillor Mili Patel began by also taking the opportunity to thank Councillor Conneely and the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for their engagement on the budget, recognising the value of scrutiny as part of the wider budget review and consultation process. In highlighting the way the budget proposals had been shaped by values of fairness, equality and financial prudence it was also felt important to recognise the impact which the Government's recent announcement of a new funding settlement for local councils across England over the next three years would have in providing greater stability when compared to the previous approach adopted by the coalition and Conservative government which it was felt had systematically undermined fairness in local government funding and failed to reflect increasing pressures in terms of demand and social need leading to significant cuts to vital services. The challenges created as a result had been compounded by the imposition of single year funding settlements, making it difficult

for Council's to plan over the long-term creating further instability. In contrast, the new settlement model introduced by the current government was welcomed as providing a fundamentally different and fairer approach involving a multi-year settlement up to 2029, allowing more certainty in being able to plan ahead, and crucially the use of a new funding formula reflecting levels of deprivation as well as population size that allowed resources to flow to those areas most in need. This had included Brent, with the Fair Funding Review having recognised the significant pressures faced leading to a net benefit of £22.9m in additional core funding for the Council. This additional financial support was welcomed, given the increasing levels of demand being experienced as a result of the homelessness and the social care crisis which had resulted in serious cost escalation across the sector and shortfalls in funding and with the need to address the resulting gaps identified as a top priority. As a result, it was pointed out the budget proposals had been designed to achieve a deliberate and careful balance in seeking to protect frontline services whilst also supporting the most vulnerable, stabilising core care provision and maintaining long-term financial resilience.

In continuing, Councillor Mili Patel also felt it was important to recognise the way in which the fiscal discipline, established as a fundamental value by the current Administration in Brent, had ensured the foundations on which the Council stood remained strong. Whilst not taken lightly (given current pressures on household budgets), members were advised that in order to safeguard and achieve the priorities identified in relation to social care, homelessness prevention and other essential public realm and core services the Council had been left with little choice but to recommend a 4.99% increase in Brent's element of Council Tax, including the 2% Adult Social Care precept. In acknowledging the impact, however, the efforts being made to protect those most in need were also highlighted including the continuation of Brent's Council Tax Support Hardship Fund as a means of supporting an estimated 14,500 residents needing help with their bills.

Whilst recognising the efforts being made to continue the delivery of high quality services and to manage, in as prudent a way as possible, the ongoing pressures in relation to the Council's financial position members were also advised of the work being undertaken as part of the overall approach outlined in seeking to manage the rising demand on services in as sustainable a way as possible, including the focus on prevention. In terms of Adult Social Care, this had involved investment in early intervention, community-based support and preventative services designed to support residents living independently for longer, avoiding the far higher costs of late-stage, complex care. Similarly, in homelessness services, this had involved expanding the range of prevention initiatives designed to prevent or relieve the level of homelessness applications, reducing the need for expensive emergency accommodation in an effort to not only protect residents wellbeing but also ease the financial pressures created in terms of ongoing demand.

As a further example of the Council's commitment to delivering not just essential services but those that mattered most to residents whilst also seeking to ensure maximum value for taxpayers and deliver service improvements reference was also made to the level of investment which had been included within the budget proposals and made possible as a result of the robust, disciplined financial management established across the Council. Members were reminded that this programme had enabled the delivery of £3m for visible improvements to street cleansing and the public realm; £10.5m to modernise libraries, leisure centres, and

family wellbeing centres; £16.3m to strengthen digital services and cyber security; more than £4.3m being invested annually in roads, pavements and street lighting as well as £23.1m to progress the Wembley Housing Zone and deliver 291 new homes, £45.6m to regenerate Bridge Park (including the provision of a new leisure centre) alongside significant investment in youth facilities, SEND places, parks, CCTV, energy efficiency, and regeneration across the boroughs town centres. These projects were ones identified as delivering real benefits for local residents and only possible as a result of the careful financial stewardship and approach adopted by Brent which had avoided the need to seek Exceptional Financial Support from the government.

In concluding her introduction, Councillor Mili Patel once again highlighted how challenging development of the budget proposals had been given the damage created by austerity and demand led pressures, which the Council continued to face, and it was noted would continue to require careful management. Cabinet Members, officers, partners, residents and other key stakeholders were thanked for their diligence and support in the process with the insights gained having been reflected within the report and it noted that despite the significant pressures identified the budget proposals had been designed to stabilise and build for the future with the Council remaining committed to supporting local residents across the borough, protecting the most vulnerable, and investing in Brent's future. As such, the budget proposals as presented were therefore commended for approval and reference on to Council for formal adoption as a responsible, forward-looking and fair financial plan for Brent in 2026-27.

In supporting the budget proposals, contained within the report, Cabinet Members recognised the ongoing nature of the challenges and financial pressures identified and also took the opportunity to thank the finance team for their work in developing the budget proposals whilst also seeking to safeguard, as far as possible, key services and support for local residents and businesses focussed around the Council's core strategic priorities. In terms of specific pressures and priorities identified these had included:

- The continued support for children and young people reflecting the efforts being made by the current government to address the pressures identified in relation to school budgets, increasing demand for SEND provision and costs of residential placements, which it was felt highlighted the contrast in approach adopted by the previous Conservative Government. In welcoming the move towards a Multi-Year Financial settlement and outcome of the Fair Funding Review along with the Government's ongoing commitment towards covering the cost of the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) override and more sustainable model for SEND provision anticipated within the forthcoming SEND White Paper, support was expressed for the way in which the Council's budget proposals had also sought to protect and prioritise children's services. As part of this approach, specific reference was made to the £110.8m included as core funding for children and young people which represented an £11m growth over the previous year (including an additional £4.2m as a direct result of the reforms introduced to the funding model for local government). Members were also reminded of the additional £4m investment in SEND provision aimed at delivering an additional 212 specialist places on top of the 400 already provided along with the £4m infrastructure investment in local youth facilities. Reflecting on the challenges identified, it was felt these

measures alongside wider welfare reform involving removal of the two child benefit cap, ongoing provision for breakfast clubs and Free School Meals, continued funding for Family Wellbeing Centres and efforts being made internally to reduce the reliance on the use of agency staff across the service, would continue to build on the priority and positive way forward identified in relation to the provision of services for children and young people.

- The focus in relation to the protection of children and family services as well as in seeking to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety. In highlighting and welcoming the recognised value of preventative work in relation to early support and intervention being provided for those families in need, the enhanced focus on enforcement activity and also in seeking to address the underlying causes of crime and anti-social behaviour were also commended as part of the budget proposals in seeking to build for the future and deliver safer neighbourhoods and protect families in hardship whilst restoring dignity, opportunity and hope.
- The investment and support being provided for cultural provision across the borough including the refurbishment and upgrade of library facilities as well as importance of the ongoing provision in relation to the Council Tax Support Scheme and Hardship Support Funds as a key programme of support for residents across the borough facing financial hardship supported through the Brent Hubs model.
- The ongoing programme of work and investment in key highway, environmental and public realm infrastructure across the borough to ensure the borough remained clean, green and safe including the Don't Mess with Brent campaign focussed around tackling fly-tipping and enhancing enforcement activity, provision of additional CCTV, programme of investment supporting visible improvements across parks, public realm and street cleansing, extension of EV infrastructure and additional enforcement officers. In recognising the difficult nature of decisions required in order to address the challenges identified the investment outlined was supported as a means of improving services and continuing to build for the future.
- Members also welcomed the aim to continue prioritising the most vulnerable in society whilst also seeking to protect essential services particularly in relation to health and adult social care with support expressed for the outcome of the Fair Funding Review and way in which the ongoing impact relating to inflationary cost pressures and increase in demand on both adult and children's care services had been reflected within the local government financial settlement and Council's budget. As a result, the focus in seeking to support residents requiring care to live as independently as possible and avoid residential placements or extended stays in hospital as well as minimising the need for extended support following hospital discharge was highlighted supported by efforts to expand opportunities for the provision of care in community settings. In addition, the opportunity was also taken to highlight the investment to deliver improvements in the model for leisure provision across the borough including the enhancements at Vale Farm Leisure Centre and commitment to the Bridge Park development.

- As a final contribution, reference was also made to the significant impact of the investment included within the budget proposals focussed around tackling the climate emergency (including the investment in Green Corridors and District Heat Network in South Kilburn), supporting digital transformation and the ongoing programme of community grants. As a further key area of focus, members were also reminded of the work being undertaken in support of the review of the Council's commissioning and procurement function, which included proposals to generate up to £3m worth of genuine efficiency savings that could then be deployed to support investment in other key priority service areas for local residents.

Prior to closing the debate, Minesh Patel (Corporate Director Finance & Resources) was then invited to update Cabinet on the current position relating to the final Local Government Financial Settlement, with it confirmed that no material changes were anticipated in relation to the provisional settlement on which the budget proposals set out in the report had been based.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it important to once again highlight the challenging nature of the budget setting process given the ongoing impact of the legacy created by the previous government. As a result, he welcomed the approach taken by all Cabinet Members and officers in seeking to review all aspect of their services to ensure budgets could be managed whilst delivering core strategic priorities and protecting the most vulnerable residents in the borough. Despite recognising the significance of the financial challenges identified and the level of funding cuts already delivered by the Council, he commended the approach adopted and measures outlined within the report which, despite the difficult nature of decisions required, had been designed to ensure the Council was able to operate in a financially sustainable and resilient way whilst also seeking to delivery on key priorities and provide essential support for residents across the borough.

The opportunity was also taken to welcome the significant reform of local government funding introduced by the government which had been designed to recognise the pressures facing local councils, including areas such as Brent where housing costs, deprivation and inequality were inextricably linked and with the net additional funding for Brent received as a direct result of the Fair Funding Review being directed in a responsible and balanced way to address immediate service pressures, support vulnerable residents and to strengthen the Council's long-term financial resilience. Whilst recognising the importance of this additional funding, it was however acknowledged that the unprecedented demand being experienced in relation to social care and housing needs services had also required the budget to be built upon a 4.99% increase in Council Tax (including a 2% Adult Social Care precept) which, whilst not covering the true level of growth in costs, was felt to be unavoidable given the £12.2m of recurring funding this generated at a time when public services remained under real pressure and in order to ensure the Council avoided more severe outcomes, at a time when a growing number of councils nationally were requiring exceptional financial support

Whilst acknowledging the improved settlement and efforts being made to manage the Council's budget it was felt important to recognise, as background to the difficult and responsible decisions which had been required in setting the budget, the challenging nature of the operating environment and wider economic and social context which the Council continued to face given the range of support and services

being delivered. In recognising the tough financial conditions faced by many councils, the specific challenges arising from the sustained pressure needing to be managed in terms of rising demand, inflation, interest rates and increasing complexity in the delivery of services were highlighted with the most significant of these pressures already having been highlighted in terms of housing and temporary accommodation, Adult and Children's Social Care. Despite the challenging financial conditions outlined it was, however, also felt important to recognise the Council's continued financial resilience, careful management and collective discipline (including delivery of the package of savings identified in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy) with the Council, as a result, having continued to balance its budget, protect frontline services and invest in the borough, even as these pressures had intensified.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges identified, members were also reminded that the Council continued to seek opportunities to support investment in the development of services across the borough. This included a range of investments identified within section 3.15 of the budget report focussed around the public realm; modernisation and enhancement of shared public spaces including delivery of the Willesden Health & Wellbeing Hub; digital transformation; highway and transport infrastructure, CCTV and Public safety along with the provision of Green Corridors to support the creation of safer streets and healthier neighbourhoods; investment in Strategic and Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy projects along with the capital pipeline to support energy efficiency upgrades in Council buildings and leisure provision as well as investment in Wembley Housing Zone to deliver a further 291 new homes; Neasden Civic Partnership; West London Orbital; College of North West London and South Kilburn Regeneration schemes alongside the support for the creation of additional SEND provision and youth facilities. Given the pressures identified the investment in Housing Supply and Temporary Accommodation was also highlighted as a means in seeking to reduce reliance on costly temporary accommodation and provide more stable homes for families.

Whilst not exhaustive, it was felt the examples provided demonstrated how the Council was seeking to continue evolving and adapting to the challenges identified based on a clear set of priorities focussed around the protection of the services that mattered most, investing in Brent's future, and supporting people in need with members reminded that none of the investments would have been possible without the tough decisions taken over previous years to ensure the Council's finances remained on a strong and stable footing and positive approach adopted to development in the borough.

In commending the government for their longer-term commitment in relation to local government finance and all those who had engaged in the budget consultation process along with Cabinet Members and officers (with specific reference to the finance team) for their support, Councillor Butt ended by highlighting the aim to ensure the process remained as open and transparent as possible and was focussed on enabling the Council to deliver a balanced budget whilst also seeking to maintain the provision of key services and essential support for residents across the borough.

Having noted the comments provided, and welcomed and supported the approach outlined within the report, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To recommend to Full Council an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2026/27, with 2% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 2.99% general increase.
- (2) To recommend to Full Council the General Fund revenue budget for 2026/27, as summarised in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) To recommend to Full Council the savings proposals for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix C (i) of the report.
- (4) To note the Equalities Impact Assessments on the budget proposals, as set out in Appendices C (ii) and C (iii) of the report.
- (5) To note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group as set out in Appendix D of the report.
- (6) To recommend to Full Council the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and business plan for 2026/27, as set out in section 12 and appendix P of the report.
- (7) To approve the HRA rents for council dwellings, tenant service charges and garages as set out in section 12 of the report.
- (8) To approve the rents set under the Housing General Fund for Brent Housing PFI and traveller's site pitches and to note the rents for Hillside dwellings as set out in section 12 of the report.
- (9) To note the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section 13 of the report.
- (10) To recommend to Full Council the changes to the existing Capital Programme in relation to additions of new schemes and reprofiling, as set out in section 14 and Appendix E of the report, and note the Capital Pipeline Schemes as detailed in Appendix F of the report.
- (11) To recommend to Full Council the use of £2.9m of unrestricted right to buy receipts for capital works to improve HRA housing and enfranchisement (renewal of leaseholds approaching expiry).
- (12) To recommend to Full Council the Capital Strategy, the Investment Strategy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendices G, H, I and J of the report.
- (13) To recommend to Full Council the Reserves Strategy and schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendices K (i) and K (ii) of the report.
- (14) To approve, and where relevant agree to recommend to Full Council the Fees and Charges Policy and Schedule of Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendices L (i) and L (ii) of the report.
- (15) To note the results of the budget consultation, as set out in section 11 and detailed in Appendix M of the report.

- (16) To note the legal advice from the Director of Law, as set out in Appendix N of the report.
- (17) To approve the new Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) allocations as set out in section 14 of the report, which include an uplift of up to £4.7m to £11.2m for the College of North West London, £0.2m for a new pedestrian crossing at the junction of Willesden Lane, Cavendish Road and The Avenue and £1.8m for Carlton Vale Boulevard in South Kilburn.
- (18) To note and approve the recommendations identified for consideration by Full Council as detailed in section 2.18 – 2.38 of the report.

11. **Approval for the Disposal of Council-Owned Commercial Properties**

Councillor Benea (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Neighbourhood & Regeneration seeking approval to dispose of three surplus council owned General Fund property interests identified as necessary to reduce financial pressures, mitigate increasing asset liabilities, and support strategic priorities outlined in the Council's Property Strategy 2024–27 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

In presenting the report, Councillor Benea began by highlighting what she regarded as the prudent nature of the proposed disposals as a means of supporting the Council in being able to manage its resources responsibly, given the properties identified were either underused, vacant, or no longer required for council services, and in some cases continued to generate significant costs without delivering any demonstrable public benefit. Given the need to ensure every council asset was working in the interests of residents and maximising value, recognising the sustained nature of financial pressures being experienced by the Council, members were advised that the disposal of unproductive properties would not only allow the Council to reduce ongoing liabilities but also release capital that could be reinvested in other priorities and protecting services, supporting housing and regeneration, and strengthening the council's financial resilience.

As further assurance, members were advised that the proposals were fully aligned with the Council's Property Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy with any capital receipts generated to be retained within the General Fund and used in line with agreed plans to support long-term investments with officers being delegated authority to determine the most appropriate disposal strategy for each property, ensuring the council was able to meet its statutory duty to maximise best value and respond appropriately to market conditions.

In recognising and welcoming the prudent and responsible nature of the approach outlined as a means of ensuring the best use of Council resources in a way that would not only secure value for money but also enable council assets to actively contribute towards the provision of wider support and investment in key services for residents Cabinet, having noted the exempt information contained within the appendix to the report, **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Regeneration, in consultation with the relevant Lead Member, to:

- (a) Determine the most suitable disposal strategy for each property listed in this report, including the method of sale, timing, marketing approach, and disposal structure, taking account of the Council's Property Strategy, market conditions, and the goal of achieving the best consideration.
 - (b) Agree on the final terms of each disposal, ensuring compliance with the Council's statutory obligation to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable, and that the terms serve the Council's overall financial and strategic interests.
 - (c) Enter into and finalise all necessary legal agreements, contracts, and ancillary documentation required to give effect to the disposals.
- (2) To note that the net capital receipts, after deducting disposal and associated costs, would be retained within the General Fund and used in accordance with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme, as outlined in the Financial Implications section of the report.
- (3) Where the land to be disposed of constitutes, or forms part of, public open space, to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Regeneration to publish notices in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks in accordance with section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972, and to consider any objections received prior to a final decision being made.

12. **ICT Infrastructure Investment Programme 2026 -2028**

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Service Reform and Strategy which presented an updated Technology Roadmap 2026-2028 for approval based on a targeted, two-year plan focusing on investment in five core areas ensuring the council could continue to deliver responsive, joined-up public services.

In introducing the report, Councillor Mili Patel began by highlighting the roadmap as the next phase in the Council's ICT Infrastructure Investment Programme reflecting the ongoing commitment towards ensuring Brent's digital infrastructure remained secure, resilient and fit for purpose and recognising the crucial importance of ICT and secure technology infrastructure for services being delivered by the Council in a digital age.

Referring to the impact of recent cyber incidents on other neighbouring councils, members were reminded of the significant and operational risk which the failure to make the necessary investment would carry in relation to the secure provision of services relied on by residents, with the two-year programme outlined focused around five key areas: modernising data centres, strengthening cyber protection, enhancing cloud infrastructure, refreshing campus networks, and improving end user experience with the investment designed to protect residents' data and improve system reliability. Members were also advised of the way in which the programme had been aligned with the Council's Digital Roadmap 2026–2028 as a means of being able to support wider transformation and savings ambitions enabling the modernising of infrastructure and streamlining of how technology was

used to deliver maximum efficiency and value for money whilst also freeing up staff resource to provide more support for residents on a face to face basis.

In recognising the importance of the investment programme in terms of strengthening the Council's digital resilience and ethical framework, business infrastructure and safeguarding essential services whilst supporting the ongoing transformation in terms of delivery and access to essential Council services, Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the ICT Infrastructure Capital Investment for 2026-2028 totalling £6.7m.

13. **Authority to invite tenders for care and support at six supported living sites for adults with Mental Health Difficulties**

Councillor Nerva (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Leisure) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Service Reform & Strategy regarding the procurement of care and support for six supported living sites for adults with mental health difficulties.

In presenting the report, Councillor Nerva began by highlighting the importance of the service in terms of the support being provided for some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough given the protection and stability offered through the supported living sites. Members were advised that whilst the services were not designed as permanent placements, they offered an important stepping stone to ensure that vulnerable adults had safe, structured accommodation with professional support to manage their mental health and avoid crisis or unnecessary hospital stays as part of a Recovery Model. As part of this approach, it was pointed out that providers would be expected to work alongside residents to build confidence, resilience, and connections with the local community in order to support them in being able to move on and lead more independent lives.

In noting how the Recovery approach was designed to place the individual at the centre of their own progress and supporting them in developing the skills needed to maintain their wellbeing, members were also assured in relation to the focus on co-production which had been used to assist in shaping the way the services had been developed involving a process of engagement with residents, families, advocates and partners. As a result, the views expressed by service users in relation to the importance in being able to maintain independence, meaningful activity, community connection and appropriate night support had been used to directly inform the service model identified. In addition, the benefits of the approach outlined were also highlighted in terms of value for money, with supported living recognised not only as being more cost-effective than residential mental health placements in terms of reducing reliance on high-cost institutional care but also delivering better long term outcomes for residents through the provision of targeted, recovery-focused support in a community setting with residents supported to build independence, which in turn would reduce ongoing care costs and create capacity within the system.

In welcoming the assurance provided in relation to the co-production in design of the services and way in which it was felt the procurement would enable continuity in the provision, quality and long-term sustainability of essential mental health supported living services in Brent, Cabinet **RESOLVED** having also noted the need

to ensure the approach was reflected as part of wider partnership working with local health providers towards tackling health inequalities:

- (1) To approve inviting tenders for care and support services at six supported living sites for adults with mental health difficulties separated into 2 Lots on the basis of the pre-tender considerations set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report.

The 2 Lots are set out below:

Lot 1:

- Mental Health Supported Living Service at 54 Braemar Avenue, Wembley.
- Mental Health Supported Living Service at 18 Saint Gabriels Road, Cricklewood.
- Mental Health Supported Living Service at 69 Craven Park Road, Roundwood.

Lot 2:

- Mental Health Supported Living Service at 144 The Mall Kenton.
- Mental Health Supported Living Service at 33 Essex Road Roundwood.
- Mental Health Supported Living Service at 155 Walm Lane Cricklewood.

- (2) To approve officers evaluating the tenders referred to in (1) above on the basis of the evaluation criteria set out in paragraph 3.4 section (vi) of the report.
- (3) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Service Reform and Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Leisure to award the contract for each of the 2 Lots identified in (1) above for the provision of care and support services at the six supported living sites for adults with mental health difficulties for a term of five (5) years with the option to extend by two (2) years (on a 5+2).

14. Exclusion of Press and Public

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press or public.

15. Any other urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 11.15 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair