



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CABINET

**Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 8 September 2025
at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: Councillor M Butt (Chair) and Councillors Benea, Donnelly-Jackson, Farah, Grahl, Knight, Nerva, Rubin and Krupa Sheth.

Also present: Councillors Dar & Hack (as online participants for item 10)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources).

Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) also took the opportunity to welcome Jehan Weerasinghe to his first Cabinet meeting as the newly appointed Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Regeneration.

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 28 July 2025 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 7 (Developing a new Brent Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy), Agenda Item 9 (Relocation of Islamia Primary School) and Agenda Item 10 (2025-26 Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL)

Projects over £100k) he intended to change the order of the agenda to enable Item 9 and 10 to be considered following Agenda Item 7.

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

8. Developing a new Brent Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy

Prior to considering the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) welcomed Mr John O'Donnell (speaking on behalf of residents from the Lynton Close Travellers site) who was accompanied by Nancy Hawker (London Gypsy & Travellers Association) to the meeting who he advised had requested to speak in relation to the investment in Lynton Close site improvements, rent arrangements, search for additional Traveller sites in Brent and new allocations policy referred to as part of the proposed Strategy being presented for consideration.

In addressing Cabinet, Mr John O'Donnell began by highlighting the progress made in terms of the relationship between residents on the Lynton Close Travellers site and Council and efforts made to ensure the site remained opened, including the installation of heat detector fire alarms and identification of funding and land to support further improvements to address overcrowding. In expressing support for the proposals within the strategy, Mr O'Donnell outlined a number of questions on which additional assurance was being sought as part of the ongoing plans relating to the Lynton Road site, which were as follows:

- (1) Written confirmation was sought that the eviction process had now been paused, following the issuing of original notices to residents on the site.
- (2) The potential for families to remain on the Lynton Close until new sites were available along with the availability of a deadline for the process to identify and deliver the new sites.
- (3) The plans to provide enough sites/plots to accommodate all the residents that had been required to move off Lynton Close due to the fire hazards identified.
- (4) The deadline for refurbishment of Lynton Close being completed along with timescale for recruitment and appointment of the Lynton Close site manager (including an outline of the job description).

In responding to the comments and questions raised, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (as Cabinet Member for Housing) also welcomed the more positive and meaningful process of engagement with the Traveller community at Lynton Close and highlighted the Council's commitment to celebrating diversity and ensuring Brent remained an inclusive place for all communities.

As part of this approach, reference was made to the work undertaken with residents on the Lynton Close Traveller Site to address overcrowding and fire safety risks, alongside the clearance of unwanted bulky waste, a dilapidated playground and portacabins that were no longer fit for purpose. It was pointed out these efforts had also been supported by a series of resident meetings (chaired by the Council's Chief Executive) covering a range of wider issues, which had also resulted in the

organisation of two community support days involving teams from the Council's Housing, Brent Health Matters, Hubs and Council Tax services with residents (along with the wider community) being kept updated through regular, accessible communications.

Turning to development of the new Strategy, it was highlighted that this reflected the engagement undertaken to date in partnership with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities underpinned by an understanding of the needs being identified. In developing the proposals and working to improve engagement, it was highlighted that the Council had also involved interest groups like London Gypsy & Travellers Association as well as other local authorities to ensure the approach outlined was based on recognised best practice.

As part of the process of engagement and in seeking to develop a better understanding of need, it was recognised that the Irish Traveller community had highlighted access to suitable accommodation and the opportunity to meaningfully shape support services as important in supporting residents' health and wellbeing, as well as their ability to thrive in education and employment with data from the latest Census and other sources also supporting the need to improve outcomes in these areas. This had also resulted in additional cross Council work being undertaken to ensure ownership and consistency in the approach being developed with the aim being to not only improve communication but also engage and listen, enabling residents (with the Council's support) to shape their futures as well as increase wellbeing and reduce marginalisation and stigma.

In terms of the questions which had been raised, an assurance was provided that these would be responded following the meeting with initial confirmation provided that the liaison role for the Lynton Close site was already in the process of being recruited. In support of the response provided, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director of Residents & Housing Services) also took the opportunity to provide assurance regarding the identification of funding to support development of the strategy and proposals relating to the Lynton Close Travellers Site with work continuing at pace in relation to delivery.

Having thanked Mr O'Donnell and Nancy Hawker for their attendance and representations made at the meeting, the Leader then invited Councillor Donnelly-Jackson to formally introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Residents & Housing Services outlining the Council's approach towards developing a new Brent Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy along with the progress made in developing specific components of the strategy including a new Pitch Allocation Policy, search for new sites and plans to reduce pitch rent at Lynton Close as part of the Council's ambitions and commitments to the Gypsy, Roma & Travellers communities.

In presenting the report Councillor Donnelly-Jackson once again welcomed the more positive and meaningful process of engagement with the Traveller community at Lynton Close along with the progress made in addressing fire safety issues on the site. In terms of the report presented for consideration at the meeting, it was highlighted that this reflected the commitment to continue seeking to improve on a longer term basis not only in terms of the Traveller community at Lynton Close, but also in terms of the wider Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities within the borough, with the objective to not only listen, and engage but also to work to understand Gypsy Traveller and Roma residents' needs, and shape services in

order to meet them. In addition to the work undertaken to address the fire safety risks on the Lynton Close site Councillor Donnelly-Jackson advised she was also pleased to report on the work undertaken following feedback from residents to clear unwanted waste along with structures that were no longer fit for purpose as well as hold two Community Support Days supported by a series of resident meetings (chaired by the Council's Chief Executive).

Turning to development of the new Strategy, this was also felt to underline the Council's commitment to ongoing collaboration, through the development of a new Pitch Allocation Policy, aimed at creating a transparent and fair system for allocating pitches on permanent and temporary sites; proposed reduction in weekly pitch rent at Lynton Close Traveller Site (to bring charges in line with the London average, in an effort to prevent residents getting into debt); proposed investment of up to £500,000 for site improvements at Lynton Close, with a commitment to allowing residents to shape how the funds were used; consultation on a new long-term strategy for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and ongoing work to identify new sites to tackle overcrowding on Lynton Close working closely with the community to understand their needs.

In highlighting the Council's ongoing commitment to listen, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson ended by advising of the ongoing need to continue working to reduce marginalisation of the Gypsy, Roma & Traveller communities in order to improve their wellbeing and shape future services to better meet their needs.

In considering the report, Cabinet welcomed the approach outlined in terms of the development of the Strategy and key components included in seeking to provide a clear framework and build stronger and more sustainable relationships with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across Brent whilst also addressing the challenges identified by residents located on the traveller site at Lynton Close.

In recognising and supporting the efforts being made to continue and develop the process of engagement and in seeking to provide the foundation for a fairer future designed to enable Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to flourish in Brent Cabinet **RESOLVED**, having noted that progress in the development and delivery of the Strategy would remain under ongoing review, to:

- (1) Endorse the proposed direction of travel to develop the Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy. This included:
 - The skeleton outlined in paragraph 3.2.5 of the report.
 - The consultation and engagement approach as captured in paragraphs 3.2.24 – 3.2.27 and detailed within Appendix A of the report.
- (2) To note progress made, and endorse next steps to develop key components of the strategy (as detailed in 3.2.10 – 3.2.23 of the report), including:
 - Draft Pitch Allocation Policy as detailed in Appendix B of the report.
 - Site search – with a report detailing to be provided for Cabinet in 2026.

- Site management approach.
- (3) To endorse the use of up to c.£500,000 capital investment from 2026/27 through the usual capital governance processes (Capital Programme Board and Cabinet) for site improvements as part of our improved approach to site management. This would be invested in priorities identified through consultation and engagement with the residents.
- (4) To endorse a reduction in the weekly pitch rate from £185.13 to £138.96.

9. **Relocation of Islamia Primary School**

Prior to considering the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) welcomed Jitu Patel (as Chair of the Board of Trustees representing BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir - Neasden Temple) accompanied by Girish Patel (as a separate Trustee) and Zafar Ashraf (Executive Director - Yusuf Islam Foundation) to the meeting who he advised had requested to speak in advance of the proposals on the relocation of Islamia Primary School being considered by Cabinet.

In highlighting the position of the Board of Trustees representing BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (Neasden Temple) Jitu Patel, as the first representative to speak, outlined their interest in the Gwenneth Rickus site as a key component in a long-term vision for the area highlighting their status as a leading Hindu organisation which represented all members of the UK Hindu community and which already owned a large part of the surrounding estate including The Swaminarayan School and the 'Tennis Courts' which adjoined the Gwenneth Rickus site. Having highlighted the interest expressed in acquiring the Gwenneth Rickus site, should it become available, over many years Jitu Patel advised the Board of Trustees had therefore been disappointed about the notice provided in relation to the proposed transfer of the site to the Yusuf Islam Foundation. In light of that, the Board had made detailed representations in response to the statutory consultation along with the submission of an alternative offer to acquire the site from Brent Council and grant a medium-term lease to Islamia School with the Board of Trustees disappointed that despite the representations made these had not been accepted for consideration. In recognising the strong nature of the relationship established with the leadership of both Brent Council and the Yusuf Islam Foundation, the Board had therefore sought to continue proactively engaging with all parties in a way that sought to respect and acknowledge the obligations and aspirations of each organisation and agree a solution that would represent a favourable outcome for all concerned.

In outlining the Board's original proposal, Jitu Patel advised that if Cabinet were minded to proceed with the transfer of the site to the Yusuf Islam Foundation, this should at the very least consider as an alternative the inclusion of a mechanism allowing for possible future acquisition of the site by BAPS, should it no longer be required for educational purposes, (subject to the necessary legal consents being obtained). In seeking a way forward, it was hoped Cabinet would therefore consider deferring a final decision to enable more detailed consideration of the alternative proposal outlined, with it confirmed that the Board of Trustees remained committed to working collaboratively with the Council and the Yusuf Islam Foundation to create a model of co-operation, and to promote and protect faith-based educational provision and community use.

Having thanked Jitu Patel for the representations made on behalf of the Board of Trustees BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (Neasden Temple), Councillor Muhammed Butt then welcomed Zafar Ashraf (Executive Director - Yusuf Islam Foundation) to the meeting who he advised had also asked to speak in advance of the report being considered.

In terms of the position outlined on behalf of the Yusuf Islam Foundation, Zafar Ashraf began by reminding members of the long running and extensive work undertaken to identify options for future provision of Islamia Primary School (as the only Muslim faith voluntary aided school in the borough) with the proposal, as set out in the report, therefore supported as a viable solution that would meet the needs and approval of key stakeholders. Whilst aware of issues raised by the Board of Trustees representing BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir it was felt that these could be addressed working in collaboration including an invitation for a representative of the Board to join the Schools Governing Body as a Foundation Governor and confirmation that the new premises (subject to approval) would be made available for local community use outside of school hours. Confirmation was also provided that the Foundation would be willing to engage with the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir regarding any needs they may have in this respect, and on this basis the Foundation hoped that Cabinet would be willing to accept the proposal to relocate the school as recommended.

In thanking Zafar Ashraf and Jitu Patel for their comments, Councillor Muhammed Butt assured both that the issues raised would be taken into account during consideration of the report. Councillor Grahl was then invited to formally introduced the report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, which provided a summary of the informal and formal consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of Islamia Primary School (IPS) in relation to the schools proposed relocation to the Gwenneth Rickus site on Brentfield Road as a 2 Form Entry (2FE) school from September 2027.

In presenting the report, Councillor Grahl began by acknowledging Islamia Primary School's status as Brent's only Muslim state funded primary school along with the long running efforts made to secure a new home for the school, recognising the uncertainty faced since receipt of the eviction notice from its current site on Salusbury Road. Members were reminded that that school currently served over 400 pupils and remained oversubscribed with a long history of serving the community across Brent and the wider region and without action being taken would face closure. As a result, it was pointed out the proposals presented for consideration had been designed to address the uncertainty and ensure Islamia Primary School could continue to thrive at a new home on the Gwenneth Rickus site from September 2027 with, it was felt, a clear case having been outlined in support of relocation.

Members were advised this had involved parents, staff and residents having identified the current split site arrangement as being overcrowded and unsuitable with limited outdoor space and facilities that were recognised as falling short of modern standards. In contrast, it was pointed out the proposed move to the Gwenneth Rickus site would offer access to purpose built classrooms, more space for play and sport as well as improved provision for children with special

educational needs in order to provide the schools pupils with a safe, high-quality environment.

In highlighting that the Gwenneth Rickus site had become available in 2027 due to falling pupil numbers in the area and recognising the significant catchment area of Islamia Primary School, the approach identified in terms of the relocation proposals was also felt to demonstrate the Council's focus in seeking to use its assets as wisely as possible and to make best use of available space and facilities, whilst also protecting educational choice for families in Brent, strengthening the diversity of the school system and supporting the borough wide priority of giving every child the best start in life.

Reference was also made to the thorough nature and outcome of the informal and formal consultation process relating to the proposed relocation, which had resulted in support being expressed from families and the wider community highlighting the move as long overdue and with parents also supportive of the way in which the new site would bring children together under one roof, improve learning conditions and safeguard the unique educational offer of the school. At the same time, however, it was also recognised that concerns had been raised, on which the Council would continue to listen, with a commitment provided to continue working with local schools, residents and community groups to manage the impact of the relocation, from travel and traffic issues to community cohesion in an effort to continue building stronger communities through dialogue and partnership.

Councillor Grahl also felt it important to acknowledge the representations made in advance of the report being considered on behalf of the Board of Trustees representing BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir - Neasden Temple, with the opportunity highlighted for these to be considered as part of the wider regeneration proposals being developed across the Neasden area, whilst also recognising the nature of the Gwenneth Rickus site as a valuable educational asset which the proposals had been designed to secure the continued use of. As such the proposals outlined in the report were felt to demonstrate the Council taking responsibility and acting decisively to protect and secure the future of a popular school ensuring that both current and future pupils were able to continue benefiting from the education it was able to provide, with the Council also committed to working with the wider community (including BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir-Neasden Temple) in order to ensure a successful relocation of the school in a way that would also strengthen community cohesion.

Following on, Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Community Development) also took the opportunity to welcome the collaborative approach outlined by the Yusuf Islam Foundation in seeking to work with the Board of Trustees at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir - Neasden Temple including the offer of a position on the School Governing Body and wider use of the premises for local community use outside of school hours. Concerns which had been raised by local schools in the area surrounding the site regarding the potential destabilising impact on pupil numbers were also acknowledged, although it was felt these were not likely to materialise given the much wider catchment area covered by Islamia Primary School. An assurance was, however, provided that demand for school places in the Primary Planning area would continue to be monitored and addressed as part of the School Place Planning Strategy.

Technical advice and assurance was also sought from officers at the meeting regarding the issues raised as part of the representations received in relation to future use of the site, should it no longer be required for educational purposes and alignment with Brents Borough Plan, Local & London Plan policies as part of any wider regeneration and development of land surrounding the Neasden Temple complex. In clarifying the legal position regarding the proposed relocation of the school and transfer of the site, it was noted that this had complied with the necessary statutory provisions with it not possible to provide any commitment about future use of the site, should it no longer be required for education purposes, on the basis that any disposal of the land would need to be considered and made in accordance with the relevant statutory processes. Confirmation was also provided that the proposed relocation of the school had been subject to all necessary statutory processes enabling a final decision to be taken by Cabinet and reflecting the statutory duty on the Council to ensure there were sufficient school places available to meet the needs of the local population. In terms of the wider conceptual masterplan which had been referred to by the Board of Trustees in relation to development of the area surrounding the Temple, members were advised these proposals would need to be considered as part of the standard masterplan development process involving engagement with key stakeholders (including the Temple) and assessment against the relevant planning policy framework.

In considering the report, members recognised the extensive nature of the process undertaken in seeking to identify a suitable site for relocation of the school and balance needing to be maintained in seeking to secure the future of the school whilst also maintaining a strong sense of community cohesion through a process of collaboration and inclusive engagement. In welcoming the approach outlined as a means of removing the uncertainty and securing the ongoing provision of the school and in recognising the schools existing site as no longer fit for purpose, members were also keen to ensure that work continued to encourage the Yusuf Islam Foundation, Temple and other local stakeholders to work collaboratively in seeking to develop a strong relationship in support of the wider community benefit including areas such as development of an active travel plan for pupils accessing the new site.

In taking the opportunity to thank all officers for their efforts in development of the proposals and once again recognising the exhaustive nature of the process undertaken in seeking to identify a suitable site for relocation of the school alongside the representations received, contents of the report, outcome of the consultation and technical advice provided during the meeting regarding the issues raised as part of the representations received, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note the outcome and analysis from the formal consultation.
- (2) To approve the proposal to relocate Islamia Primary School to the Gwenneth Rickus site on Brentfield Road as a 2FE school from 1st September 2027.
- (3) To note that the Gwenneth Rickus site would be transferred into the name of the Yusuf Islam Foundation, who would be required to hold the site for the benefit of the Islamia Primary School. Further details in terms of ownership would be set out in a Trust Deed. This would ensure that the primary school would be protected from eviction in future.

10. **2025-26 Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) - Projects over £100k**

Prior to considering the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) advised that he accepted a joint request to speak at the meeting from Councillors Hack & Dar in support of the Brent Beats and Roots project recommended for inclusion within the proposals set out in the report.

Addressing the meeting as online participants, Councillors Hack and Dar outlined their support of the Brent Beats and Roots project which had been recommended for inclusion as one of the projects for funding, recognising the community driven nature of the cultural initiatives outlined and specific focus within Cricklewood in celebrating the borough's Irish Heritage as a means of creating a vibrant celebration of Brent's musical legacy, cultural diversity and public spaces.

Having thanked both councillors for their comments in support of the scheme, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) then invited Councillor Rubin (as Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power) to introduce the report from the Corporate Director Service Reform & Strategy detailing the projects which had been recommended to receive Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding awards over £100k in value. The report also outlined the recommended projects that required a capital funding contribution, for which approval to the capital budget allocation was also being sought, as well as detailing the projects under £100k which had been approved under delegated authority (in accordance with the process approved by Cabinet in June 2025).

In presenting the report, Cabinet was advised that the £5 million investment programme outlined within the report reflected the new approach adopted towards the distribution and allocation of NCIL funding. Recognising the opportunity provided to respond directly to the priorities being highlighted by residents and focus on fairness in relation to the NCIL process, the approach adopted was also identified as reflecting the benefits of local development in terms of providing a means to reinvest in the everyday services and spaces that mattered most to residents. Members were reminded that the programme of proposed investment would cover each Brent Connects area and included a focus on investment that would deliver cleaner streets, greener spaces, safer neighbourhoods, and renewed opportunities for culture, learning, and community life.

In highlighting key elements of the programme, members were advised that it included over 60 individual projects with schemes designed to deliver around £1m of investment into cleaner, safer neighbourhoods through expanded patrols, new street bins, pothole repairs, and secure cycle parking and over £1.5m of investment into greener spaces, including major tree planting, new rain gardens, and green corridor schemes in Church End and Kingsbury. Other projects included almost £600,000 to support communities directly, with cost-of-living programmes, new learning spaces, and initiatives designed to make a real difference to families alongside over £200,000 into culture and identity through Brent Beats & Roots, as a borough-wide celebration of Brent's unique music and cultural heritage (for which the support expressed by Councillor Hack and Dar was welcomed) and more than £200,000 for community safety, including new patrols and targeted crime-reduction projects.

Taken together, it was felt the projects identified would transform the everyday experience of living in Brent enabling work to continue in tackling the impact of austerity, investing in shared spaces and restoring pride in the borough.

Members in welcoming and commending the proposed use of NCIL funding and investment programme outlined within the report, were keen to recognise and support the focus included on projects designed to benefit local communities in terms of not only enhancing the borough's public realm, physical infrastructure (including parks and green spaces) and cultural and heritage offer but also in seeking to address demand identified in relation to cost-of-living pressures, supporting employment and that would contribute towards the delivery of safer neighbourhoods through the tackling of crime and anti-social behaviour.

In acknowledging the extent of the proposed investment, which it was noted would also include a project focussed around the Freeman Family Centre as well as support for cycle and other active travel measures, members also commended the success achieved in terms of the generation and collection of CIL receipts, which was recognised as a further benefit of the efforts being made to deliver the ambitious programme of regeneration across Brent.

In support of the approach towards the use of NCIL and thanking all those involved for their focus in seeking to bring forward and deliver at pace the investment programme outlined, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To approve the projects set out in Appendix A of the report for NCIL funding.
- (2) To note the projects that required a capital budget requirement as set out in Appendix A and Appendix B of the report.
- (3) To approve a capital budget funded from NCIL totalling £5,088,231.
- (4) To note the projects in Appendix B that had been approved under delegated authority by the Corporate Director Service Reform and Strategy.

11. Inter Authority Agreement - Brent, Barnet, Harrow Mortuary Service

Councillor Knight (as Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support & Culture) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Resident & Housing Services seeking approval for the continuation of a shared service arrangement with Barnet and Harrow Council's for operation of the public mortuary service located within the grounds of Northwick Park Hospital (under the jurisdiction of the North London Coroner) and for Brent to enter a new Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) covering the shared service arrangement.

In presenting the report, members were reminded of the deeply human as well as statutory nature of the service given the importance in ensuring a focus on treating people with dignity and respect (often at the most difficult of times) and doing so in a way that reflected the longstanding values of compassion, efficiency and fairness. In recognition of the fact that Brent, Harrow and Barnet Council's served one of the most diverse communities in the country, the opportunity was also taken to outline the way in which the service had been shaped to respect cultural and religious

traditions across all communities, which it was noted had been reflected within the new agreement presented as the basis for continuation of the current service.

Members were also reminded of the mortuary's role as the designated disaster mortuary for North London, with the agreement ensuring that in the event of a major incident the necessary infrastructure would be in place to respond swiftly and with professionalism. As further progress, members were reminded that under Brent's leadership a major refurbishment of the facility was also underway designed to extend capacity by 2027, including not only refrigerated and freezer spaces but much needed bariatric units designed to provide future resilience on a forward planned basis. The approach outlined was also, from a financial and value for money perspective, highlighted as an example of councils working together to deliver better outcomes at lower cost involving the shared pooling of costs and resources (as opposed to each borough facing rising infrastructure bills alone) and with the facility being maintained at a peppercorn rent lease until 2080, which it was felt represented an efficient and prudent use of public resource.

Highlighting the approach outlined as reflecting best practice in terms of collaboration, innovation and delivering for people in ways that were both compassionate and financially sustainable it was felt (in commending the report to Cabinet) that members should take pride in the fact that Brent had led the partnership from the very beginning with the leadership provided making the service one of the most respected of its kind in London.

In acknowledging the professionalism, expertise and quality in terms of the mortuary service being provided and benefits outlined in relation to the proactive and collaborative nature of the cross borough approach identified (under the leadership of Brent) in relation to future resilience and efficiency whilst also seeking to build on the outcome of the most recent Human Tissue Authority inspection of the service and maintain the highest standards of care, Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To agree that a public mortuary service should continue to be provided by Brent Council at Northwick Park on behalf of Brent, Barnet and Harrow Councils.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Residents and Housing Services in consultation with the Director Law (Chief Legal Officer) and Corporate Director Finance & Resources (Chief Finance Officer) to agree and finalise the terms of the Inter Authority Agreement (as outlined within Appendix 1 of the report), and to take all necessary action to implement the proposed shared service arrangement.

12. **Tri-Borough Leisure Contract Procurement**

Councillor Nerva (as Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Leisure) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Service Reform and Strategy seeking approval for Brent to withdraw from the current Tri-Borough leisure procurement with Ealing and Harrow and commence a standalone procurement for Vale Farm Sports Centre based on a five-year agency agreement.

In introducing the report, members were advised of the key objective in terms of the approach outlined which had been designed to ensure residents would retain

access to high quality leisure services while also enabling Brent to take control of the procurement process in terms of future delivery. Reflecting on the previous decision taken in 2024 to participate in a Tri Borough procurement with Harrow and Ealing for the provision at Vale Farm Leisure Centre, Cabinet was reminded this had been felt to represent the best option at the time in terms of achieving the required economies of scale. In developing the process, however, members were advised it had become clear that the Tri Borough approach for the specific nature of service being sought would not provide Brent with the certainty or flexibility required given the barriers the contract would present in enabling the Council to bring together all of its major leisure sites from 2031, linked to the Willesden PFI coming to an end and new Bridge Park facility being opened and limited control over pricing, programming and investment in Council facilities.

As a result, the revised approach presented had sought a different pathway with it recommended that the Council consider withdrawing from the Tri Borough process and running its own standalone procurement for Vale Farm Sports Centre in a way that would not only secure continuity of service from 2026 but also strengthen local control over price, programming and investment. Members were advised that, subject to approval, the new contract would be based on a five-year agency agreement designed to keep future options open while providing certainty over current provision and also representing the first step towards delivery of a single, borough wide Active Wellbeing model from 2031.

The adoption of the agency model approach was also highlighted as being able to deliver additional benefits to residents in terms of greater oversight of income and costs, and a clearer line of sight on reinvestment with the example provided of funding secured from Sport England to install solar panels at Vale Farm as a demonstration of the kind of practical improvement it was felt a Brent led approach would be able to deliver. As further assurance in support of the move towards a broader Active Wellbeing approach, members were advised that the approach would also involve use of the Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (SOPM), including Sport England's Leisure Services Delivery Guidance (LSDG) in order to provide further evidence and ensure all future delivery models (including insourcing) could be fully appraised enabling Members to take an informed decision on the best long-term operating model from 2031 for Brent's residents and communities.

In considering the report, members welcomed the approach outlined as a means of not only ensuring continuity of service but also strengthening local control and in supporting the move towards a transformation in how leisure and wellbeing was being delivered across the borough alongside an assessment of longer-term options in terms for future provision.

Having thanked all officers involved for their support in developing the revised approach outlined Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To approve withdrawing Brent from the current Tri-Borough leisure procurement with Ealing and Harrow.
- (2) To commence a standalone procurement for Vale Farm Sports Centre, based on a five-year agency agreement model until 2031.

- (3) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Service Reform and Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Leisure, to finalise the procurement process and award the contract, subject to legal advice and the Council's governance procedures.

13. Council Homes Acquisition Programme Delivery

Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Regeneration seeking approval to proceed with the Council Homes Acquisition Programme (CHAP) for which a Greater London Authority (GLA) grant of up to £1.8m had been secured, including authority to complete the contracts for the acquisition of up to 15 properties by 31 March 2026 or thereafter, subject to the relevant agreements having been obtained.

In presenting the report, Cabinet was advised of the focus in seeking to take forward the next phase in the Council's Council Homes Acquisition Programme with Brent, as part of the GLA's Affordable Homes Programme, having secured £1.8m of grant funding to acquire up to 15 properties for use as good-quality temporary accommodation. Although recognising the modest number this represented within the overall context of London's housing crisis the importance of the transformational impact on those families able to benefit from the properties being acquired was also highlighted in terms of supporting their move from hotel and B&B accommodation into more stable and secure homes.

Whilst recognising the scale of homelessness in London and impact on Brent the opportunity was also taken to remind members of the ongoing approach being taken by the Council to confront the housing crisis guided through the Borough Plan pledge to deliver 5,000 genuinely affordable homes by 2028, including 1,700 directly delivered by the Council. Alongside new-build schemes members were also reminded of the vital role and importance of acquisitions in delivering the safe and secure homes required whilst also reducing the cost pressures of relying on the private market and ensuring that vulnerable families could be supported with dignity and respect.

In welcoming and supporting the ongoing efforts being made to tackle homelessness and to keep investing in the homes so urgently need, members were also keen to commend the work undertaken with the GLA in order to secure the required uplift in the Council Homes Acquisitions Programme grant rate, which had enable the acquisition programme to proceed as a viable option recognising the impact this would have in supporting the provision of good quality temporary accommodation for families in need and in reducing associated cost pressures. The opportunity was also taken to highlight the impact of the lobbying also being undertaken in support of the Renters Reform Bill as an additional measure in relation to addressing the housing crisis focussed on challenges within the private rented sector.

Recognising the positive nature of the measures outlined in seeking to utilise all forms of available funding Cabinet **RESOLVED**, having noted the information contained within the exempt appendix of the report:

- (1) To approve delivery of the Council's Council Homes Acquisition Programme (CHAP) to acquire 15 homes for temporary accommodation.
- (2) To approve the total capital budget of £11,733,750 required to complete the acquisition and refurbishment of 15 properties.
- (3) To delegate authority to the Director, Property & Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Property to complete the acquisition of purchases above £1m.

14. Brent Development Plan Documents Review

Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Regeneration regarding the provision of additional budget to support the review of the Brent Local Plan and seeking approval for the necessary delegations to address the stages prior to submission of development plans for examination.

In introducing the report, Cabinet noted the vital importance of the Local Plan in terms the framework provided to guide new development across the borough in order to ensure that it was able to deliver the homes, infrastructure and spaces needed reflecting current challenges whilst also protecting the character of the area. As such, the need to ensure the Plan remained current and avoided becoming out of date was highlighted as a key consideration in any review to avoid shifting power away from local decision makers and the loss of the associated protection for local residents.

In recognising the impact over recent years of building safety rules, viability pressures and the challenging housing market, the Council was therefore seeking to act proactively in terms of the timing of the review. Members were advised that by acting now the Council would ensure it had the tools required to help shape growth positively, fairly and sustainably for decades to come and in a way that was able to respond to continued population growth in a sustainable way, providing new homes, particularly affordable ones, while protecting Brent's businesses, enhancing green spaces and ensuring Brent's rich heritage continued to be safeguarded.

As an additional element, it was pointed out the review would also enable the Council to strengthen its response to the climate emergency, embedding higher environmental standards and supporting the ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 whilst also providing the ability to strengthen policy where residents had raised concerns, whether that was limiting the over concentration of student accommodation or tackling the gambling harms linked to adult gaming centres.

In seeking to tackle the housing crisis, members were reminded that Brent had over recent years delivered more homes than almost any other borough in the capital with Councillor Benea outlining the determination to go further. Whilst supporting the delivery of national housing targets, members were, however, assured that the approach would be based on a plan developed for Brent to ensure growth and development was targeted in the right places, around transport hubs and growth areas enabling new schools, parks, GP surgeries and other associated infrastructure to also be delivered in a way designed to use available land responsibly while protecting the character of the borough.

In addressing concerns regarding the scale and density of development, including the use of taller buildings, members were advised of the way in which the Plan was also designed to ensure the type of development reflected the nature and status of an area, including those designated as growth areas, enabling them to be matched with supporting infrastructure and also employment opportunities.

In recognising the focus of the review around responsibility, ambition and fairness members welcomed the approach outlined as a means of ensuring the Council retained the necessary tools to plan for the future not only in relation to meeting housing need but also protection of the borough's heritage, social and cultural infrastructure and in seeking to safeguard its environmental and economic infrastructure whilst also strengthen community life. On this basis Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To approve £880,000 to be added to the Local Plan budget reserve to be used for the processes to support delivery of a review of the development plan documents.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member Regeneration, Planning and Property to approve Development Plan consultation material to be issued in the stages prior to any final draft plan proposed to be submitted for examination.

15. Complaints Annual Report 2024 - 2025

In Councillor Mili Patel's absence (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources), Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Finance & Resources detailing the Council's complaints performance for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The report focused on the nature of complaints and the learning they could provide to inform Brent Council's future approach to service improvement as well as including details on complaints performance relating to Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, as detailed in Appendices A & B of the report, which it was noted were governed by separate statutory complaint procedures. Members noted the report also contained (as Appendix C) a comparison of the Council's performance with other London boroughs provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman alongside the Council's Housing Management Service Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for 2024-2025 (Appendix D) which was now a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Cabinet noted the key headlines relating to complaints performance in 2024-25 along with the outline of the root causes identified and service improvements which had been implemented as a result of the nature of complaints received. In welcoming the focus on the effective management of performance in relation to complaints, members were also keen to ensure that the outcomes continued to inform development of key corporate strategies and Council priorities, recognising their value as important learning points.

In thanking officers for their efforts in monitoring and managing complaints performance (including increased monitoring of compensation cases in order to reduce unnecessary escalations and an improvement in the timeliness of complaint responses), members felt the issues and areas highlighted as key concerns reflected the nature of current challenges being experienced by many local residents requiring support and also the Council in being able to manage the increased level of demand for key services, especially in relation to housing. As such the report was welcomed as a means of continuing to focus on the approach towards service improvement for residents.

Whilst acknowledging the prevalence of complaints focussed on housing related issues and increase in level of compensation associated with complaints involving the housing needs service, members felt it important to recognise the impact of the ongoing housing crisis as an underlying reason involving the unavoidable length of stay being experienced by some families in unsuitable accommodation. Although not primarily indicative of a failing on the part of the Council and reflecting pressures created as a result of a London-wide shortage of suitable and affordable accommodation, an assurance was provided of the work being undertaken with the Housing Needs Service to identify cases where more careful monitoring of actions identified at the first stage of the complaints procedure was needed to ensure that they were promptly implemented, in an effort to prevent, where possible, unnecessary escalation. This had been supported more widely by a range of service improvements across the Housing Management Service (including the introduction of updated procedures, training and a new case management tool alongside established of a Housing Improvement Advisory Board) designed to address feedback and issues identified through the complaints process with officers thanked for their efforts in seeking to embed and drive the improvements identified.

Having considered the report and work being undertaken jointly by Cabinet Members with their relevant Corporate Directors to continue challenging performance it was **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note Brent's performance in managing and resolving complaints.
- (2) To note and endorse Brent's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint handling Code as detailed within Appendix D of the report.
- (3) To approve the report being referred, as required, to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

16. **Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024-25**

In Councillor Mili Patel's absence (as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources), Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Finance & Resources presenting the outturn for the Council's Treasury Management activities 2024-25, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Capital Financing and Accounting) Regulations 2003.

In considering the report, Cabinet noted the economic background in relation to the current outturn position which included the continuing economic volatility and

challenges arising as a result of ongoing global geo-political tensions. In recognising the importance of the Treasury Management function in managing and planning for the level of funding required to support the Council's activities, services and affordability of the capital programme members noted that the activity looked to optimise the effect of borrowing costs and investment income whilst managing the associated risks in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators, which had been approved by Full Council in February 2023 and in accordance with relevant professional codes and legislation.

In commending what members felt to be Brent's prudent financial stewardship the commitment made in seeking to ensure the Council continued to borrow in as sustainable a way as possible to deliver on key infrastructure projects without compromising the longer term stability of the debt portfolio and to ensure its investment portfolio remained as diversified as possible was also recognised given the continued nature of pressures faced.

Cabinet thanked officers for their work in relation to managing the Council's Treasury Management activity and having considered the report **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To note the overall financial performance for 2024-25, as set out within the report.
- (2) To approve submission of the report to Full Council for approval in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice.

17. Exclusion of Press and Public

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

18. Any other urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

Prior to ending proceedings, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) took the opportunity to formally thank Alice Lester (as Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Regeneration) for the support provided to Cabinet and all members more widely during her time at Brent. In recognising this would be her final Cabinet meeting prior retiring from the Council he, along with the rest of Cabinet, wished her all the best for the future and thanked her for the legacy left in terms of the programme of regeneration delivered during her time at Brent.

The tribute paid by the Leader was supported by Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) who also took the opportunity to personally thank Alice Lester for her support and to wish her all the best in her retirement.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair