



Item 7.1: Questions from Members of the Public

Full Council – 22 November 2021

1. Question from Martin Francis to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment

In the light of the increased prevalence of extreme weather events as a result of climate change and recent flooding in the borough, as well as a large number of new developments and increasing numbers of paved over gardens, does Brent Council:

(1) Intend to work with partners including the Environment Agency and Thames Water to review and revise Brent Council's

(a) Flood Risk Management Strategy

(<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16406897/flood-risk-strategy-sept-2015.pdf>)

(b) Surface Water Management Plan

(<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/3501160/W8.3%20Brent%20Surface%20Water%20Management%20Plan.pdf>)

(2) Advise property owners and developers on mitigation measures?

Response:

Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, Brent Council is responsible for reducing the risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses as a Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA). To continue to meet our responsibilities we:

- Develop, maintain, regularly update and apply a local Flood Risk Management Strategy. The overarching aim of the strategy is to enable the long-term management of flooding arising from rivers, surface water and groundwater in the borough and to communicate the risks and consequences of flooding to our residents and businesses.
- Maintain a register of flood risk management assets (structures that have an effect on flood risk management). This includes all flood risk management assets such as culverts, watercourses and holding tanks. All drainage assets, including the Council maintained and maintained by Thames Water and Environment Agency are logged on Flood Station.

- Provide overall management for highway drainage (road gullies) on designated public highway. As Highway Authority, we manage the 20,700 road gullies within the borough via a cyclical cleansing regime, and also respond reactively to any defect or blockages on the network.
- Implement small scale schemes to address localised flooding problems such as broken gullies or gully pipes, or localised gully capacity problems. Larger scale capacity problems are within the remit of Thames Water who are responsible for the main drainage system.
- Respond to planning applications - As lead local flood authority, we are a statutory consultee for major developments and in accordance with the GLA plan for Sustainable drainage we ensure that a significant betterment (i.e. improved drainage arrangements) is incorporated into new developments. This in turn reduces the risk of surface water flooding on our public highways.
- Produce and maintaining a flood risk asset register - All of our drainage assets are located on an asset register, which includes all non-tributary watercourses, culverts and attenuation tanks.
- Issue land drainage consents on ordinary watercourses and carry out enforcement - All works undertaken non-statutory main rivers must obtain consent from the council so we are able to oversee and audit all processes to ensure sustainable measure are undertaken.
- Investigate significant local flooding events - As a lead local flood authority, we investigate all major flooding incidences and record the data.

As LLFA the council works in partnership with utility companies, Environment Agency and others in order to ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to mitigate flood risk. Plans are regularly reviewed and updated as risks and other factors change.

As a Category One Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act, the council has a responsibility to warn, inform and advise the public before during and after emergencies have occurred. We publicise warnings of severe weather and provide advice and information for residents on the council website to assist them prepare for potential severe weather events such as those that may cause flooding. The information provided also outlines what assistance the council is able to offer as well as measures that people can take to protect their own homes.

2. Question from Rimal Shah to Councillor Margaret McLennan, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources & Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment

- (a) The latest edition of the Your Brent magazine includes reference to the Poverty Commission report and steps being taken to fight poverty. With this in mind, can you advise why Brent has already and is still looking to increase its Council Tax beyond the inflation rate given the detrimental impact this has and will have in hurting residents financially? As an alternative, should Brent not be seeking to cut its costs, just like its residents?
- (b) As part of the approach towards tackling poverty I would also like to know why Brent is also actively seeking to proliferate the use of ANPR cameras, which are catching out ordinary residents of the Borough who can least afford to pay the large fines imposed from the various parking and traffic restrictions being imposed, by the Council, which it appears are designed to catch out residents. These add to the financial burden on local residents at a time when they are already struggling to pay for food, heating, Council Tax etc? I'm aware of the Council's focus on the climate emergency but in my view these same restrictions are increasing pollution by causing traffic jams across the borough, as well as delaying emergency services, and isolating residents from friends, family, carers, workers, essential food deliveries etc with people nervous of incurring these additional fines.

Response:

(a) From Councillor McLennan Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources

The Council has had to increase Council Tax above the prevailing rate of inflation in recent years to help balance its overall budget. Despite this increase, the Council has also had to make significant savings to reduce the budget gap each year. These include cost reductions, efficiency savings, raising additional income and other initiatives to reduce expenditure. The main reason for these budget decisions is the significant reductions in funding from central government since 2010. For context, the main grant from central government, Revenue Support Grant, has reduced by £92m since 2013 and since 2010 the Council has had to deliver savings of £185m. In addition, since 2016 at least 2% of the increase in Council has been earmarked for providing Adult Social Care services to residents, which has experienced a significant increase in demand.

It is acknowledged that increasing Council Tax will be difficult for some households. Therefore, the Council continues to invest in the Council Tax Support scheme which provides over £30m of support for around 28,000 households in the borough who are financially vulnerable. In addition, the Council's Resident Support Fund has made available additional funds for residents who are having difficulty due to unforeseen financial circumstances as a result of COVID-19.

(b) Response from Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment

ANPR cameras have been installed at road junctions to deter motorists from contravening traffic restrictions. The restrictions themselves, such as box junctions and banned turns, are in place to reduce traffic congestion and improve road safety. When a motorist contravenes such restrictions they block traffic and add to traffic congestion, and such unpredictable behaviour increases the risk of an accident. Similarly, bus lanes are in place to ensure that buses carrying many passengers are not delayed by lines of private vehicles with often just the driver present.

Effective enforcement of these restrictions provides a significant deterrent, reducing the number of contraventions in some case by up to 75%. As a result, delays caused by motorists blocking box junctions, taking banned turns or driving illegally in bus lanes are considerable reduced. As traffic congestion reduces for all road users, journey times are shortened and vehicle pollution reduced. This benefits all highway users and residents.

PCN charges have been set to deter contraventions, but are proportionately small in comparison to the annual cost of keeping a private vehicle. The law is clear that motorists are responsible for any PCNs issued to them for illegal driving. By far the best way to avoid PCN charges is to drive legally and with consideration for other road users at all times.

3. Question from Julia Lafene to Councillor Shama Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning

Every time I go through Wembley & Wembley Park I see another huge high rise building going up. I really appreciate the need for more affordable housing & the efforts you're making to provide this but am quite worried about the capacity of ageing infrastructure, especially sewers to cope with the enormous increase in sewage & other waste. I would therefore:

- (1) like an assurance that the council, in approving the relevant planning applications will have taken steps to ensure the infrastructure can cope; and
- (2) like to know what percentage of the new homes being provided are intended to provide housing for the local population as opposed to being offered on the open market

Response:

Infrastructure capacity is considered at both the planning policy making and planning application stage. Brent's Local Plan is supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan which sets out what is required to support development. The planning system also incorporates a range of measures to ensure that development takes place where capacity exists or can be provided. Planning obligations and Community Infrastructure Levy ensure that the impacts of development are managed and where necessary financial payments are made to secure necessary improvements to infrastructure. For example, money can be allocated to improving roads, public transport, schools or secure health facilities. This also requires the Council to work with a range of partners such as NHS and Utilities providers. On sewerage, we work with Thames Water to ensure that they are aware of and can plan for any required improvements to their sewerage network necessary to serve the homes that are required in the borough.

On the question of housing for local people Brent has a housing target which reflects the need to provide enough homes for the number of households projected to be living within the borough: so in that sense all of the housing sought/required is for local people. In London the housing market is clearly not limited by borough boundaries and people do move between areas and that freedom of movement is not regulated in any particular way. A proportion of all housing is secured as affordable and this is subject to nomination agreements which prioritise people defined as in need and living in Brent. For the Wembley wards (Wembley Central and Tokyngton) there are over 2,500 homes currently in the pipeline and just under a third of these would be affordable and subject to such nominations.

4. Question from Philip Grant to Councillor Shama Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning

Brent Council has an urgent need for new Council homes, and has accepted the Brent Poverty Commission recommendation that more social rented housing should be a priority.

Brent Council owns the vacant former Copland School site at the corner of Cecil Avenue and Wembley High Road, and since February 2021 has had full planning permission to build 250 flats and maisonettes on this site.

Yet, at its meeting on 16 August 2021, Brent's Cabinet approved a 'preferred delivery option' that included only 39% affordable housing for this development, with less than a quarter of the total homes being rented at London Affordable rent levels (not Social rents), the balance of the affordable housing being at Intermediate rent levels or for shared ownership. Under this 'preferred delivery option', the majority of the homes at the Council's Cecil Avenue site would be sold privately by a 'developer partner'.

At the same meeting, Brent's Cabinet also resolved: 'To delegate to the Strategic Director of Regeneration & Environment, in consultation with the Lead Member for Regeneration, Property & Planning, the decision on alternative development scheme proposals and procurement routes, if procurement of the preferred option was unsuccessful in relation to the Sites.'

My questions are:

- (1) Given Brent's urgent need for social rent housing, why is Brent Council not proposing to build all 250 of the homes at Cecil Avenue as affordable rented Council housing?
- (2) As, since 16 August, the GLA has approved a grant to Brent Council of around £111m under its 2021/26 New Affordable Homes programme, to be used mainly for social rent housing, will the Lead Member, in consultation with the Strategic Director of Regeneration & Environment, now recommend that Cabinet changes its mind, and approves alternative proposals to make the Council's Cecil Avenue scheme 100% affordable housing?

Response:

Brent Council's redevelopment of council-owned Cecil Avenue and Ujima House sites as part of the Wembley Housing Zone programme together proposes 50% affordable housing. However, because it is vitally important to ensure the long term sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account (which ultimately would be responsible for repaying loans secured to deliver new housing) it is not financially viable to deliver all 250 homes at Cecil Avenue as socially rented housing.

Brent Council's £111.7m GLA grant under the 2021-26 New Affordable Homes Programme is separate from the Wembley Housing Zone programme, and allocated to deliver an additional 701 socially rented homes across the Borough.



Item 7.2: Questions from Brent Youth Parliament

Full Council – 22 November 2021

1. Question from Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Mili Patel, Lead Member for Children’s Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care

What action has been taken by Brent Council following Ofsted’s Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges which described some forms of sexual harassment and abuse as ‘normalised’.

Response:

In March, Ofsted undertook a national rapid review of sexual harassment and harm in schools and colleges. The findings of this national review were published in June 2021. The review found that sexual harassment has become ‘normalised’ for many pupils across England and that in some schools Relationships, Sex and Health Education did not give pupils relevant information and advice.

As well as identifying recommendations for schools and colleges, the Ofsted review made recommendations for statutory safeguarding partners – the NHS, the Metropolitan Police and Councils - to engage with schools of all types in their local area, to agree local school based approaches to respond to the risks to children and young people in their local area. In Brent, we have well established and strong engagement with local schools and we have used these to support Brent schools prior to the Ofsted national review and since the review to develop their individual response to the findings of the Ofsted review.

Brent Council developed with Brent schools a Brent framework for Relationships Sex and Health Education, to help schools implement government-led changes to the Relationships Sex and Health Education curriculum. Following the publication of the Ofsted review, Brent Council has worked with Brent schools, developing a survey so that each Brent school can understand what the experience of their pupils is and providing information and training to schools on how to respond when there are incidences of sexual harm. Brent Council will continue to work closely with schools to ensure pupils are able to raise any concern and to help respond to any concerns raised.

It is very important that children speak out if they experience harassment or harm. It is not normal, it is not okay and will not be tolerated in any Brent school or setting. Any pupil who has experienced harassment should speak to their school and raise their concern.

If anyone has a concern regarding the risk of harm to an individual child, I would ask them to contact Brent Family Front Door on 020 8937 4300 or on the contact details on the Brent Council website.