



Item 7: Questions from Members of the Public

Full Council – 21 September 2022

1. **Question from P.Firmin to Councillor Knight, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Renters Security**

Why does Brent take so long to carry out basic upkeep of its estates?

Response:

Managing estates well is a priority for Brent Housing Management and we deliver a number services to estates to ensure that they are properly maintained; this includes cleaning, waste collection, grounds maintenance and communal repairs.

For each of these services we have set standards and we monitor performance using these standards as well as resident feedback.

In August 99.89% bins were successfully collected across the borough, 82% of all communal repairs reported were completed within target and 205 inspections undertaken by our dedicated estate inspection team who monitor cleaning standards and proactively raise issues identified on estates.

The Council is committed to improving services where standards are not being met. This is demonstrated by the in-source of the Caretaking Service following resident feedback that the service was poor. Since transferring back into the Council, performance and satisfaction with the service has improved significantly, with issues now being responded to within 24 hours of problems being reported, compared to 75 days when outsourced.

This commitment to improve is ongoing. A recent mapping exercise of all Brent Council Owned and managed estates to capture all landscaping and planting was completed. The purpose of this exercise is to improve a new grounds maintenance service which will go live in April 2023.

If a service has not been delivered to the standard or within the timescale expected residents should report this and we will investigate immediately.

The quickest and easiest way to report a problem is through our website, just visit www.brent.gov.uk/myaccount or call **020 8937 1234**.

2. Question from A. Ghuwalewala to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action

As a resident of Brent living in a multi-story block of flats on North End Road near Wembley Park Station, can you please explain:

1. Why the Council has decided not to collect food waste from my community. This makes absolutely no sense to me. What are we supposed to do with the food waste that we have? Food waste is an important source of bio-methane, which can be used to generate green energy. It seems we are doing the planet, UK, Brent, and my community a big disservice as a result of this policy.
2. Why we, unlike neighbouring communities, do not have the privilege of on-street parking. This is because a faceless corporation somehow has the right to negotiate these things on our behalf, before we become part of the community. Whilst I understand there is a need to limit the number of private vehicles on our streets to manage congestion, and pollution, I believe this to be wholly unjustified. Is there no room to allow us to park electric vehicles? Are we expected to move out of the borough when our families grow and we have a need to own and operate a private passenger vehicle? On what basis are some residents included and others wholly excluded?

Response:

1. All blocks on North End Road that are served by the Council and have bins emptied by Veolia should have a food waste collection system in place as we recognise the importance of collecting food waste from all properties. However, some properties on North End Road may be served by third parties directly and have separate waste collection arrangements. Further detail on the block in question and the exact location will help establish what might be possible in terms of food waste collection.
2. The Council introduced a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) on North End Road to protect parking for local residents and businesses that are eligible for parking permits. Some developments are designated 'Car Free' when planning permission is granted and there is good accessibility to public transport. The opportunities for future residents to apply for on-street parking permits were withdrawn as a legal obligation on the developers, owners and landlord responsible for the development, and attached to the planning permission for the building. The reason is prevent the surrounding streets becoming overwhelmed with parked cars from such development.

3. Question from N. Ireland to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action

Why is Brent lagging so far behind other Councils in the introduction of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods?

Response:

Brent introduced the Brent Eleven Streets scheme in the Kilburn area over a decade ago, which like Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, reduced through traffic in the area. Following the publication of the Government's statutory guidance in May 2020 in response to the pandemic, the Council trialled 5 Healthy (Low Traffic) Neighbourhood schemes introducing these schemes in a short timeframe, with consultation during the trial period. The aim of these schemes was to change the way in which people travel by reducing motor traffic on residential streets, creating safer, quieter, cleaner, healthier and more pleasant neighbourhoods that encourage walking and cycling.

Like in many other London boroughs, these schemes were controversial and concerns raised by residents were considered at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Full Council in October 2020 where it was recognised that whilst these schemes can provide benefits there were concerns about the engagement and consultation process, which was a result of the way in which central government sought to quickly introduce trials.

Living Streets, were commissioned to provide expert advice and engage inclusively with local people to determine the reasons why current schemes may not be supported, and to provide advice on measures that could be introduced that would provide benefits and be supported by the community. In January 2022, the Council's Cabinet considered a report on the Active Travel programme taking into consideration consultation and community engagement, agreeing that 1 Healthy Neighbourhood (Stonebridge and Harlesden with the exception of the Mordaunt Road closure) and 26 School Streets should be made permanent, previously we only had 2 school streets.

The report also made recommendations about the future approach to introducing these schemes, including a focus on community engagement and collaborative design before any further trials. The development and implementation of future schemes will depend on future funding being made available. From September 2022, CCTV cameras will be installed for the 26 new school streets.

4. Question from P. Maguire to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action

Why has traffic management for Event Days become so problematic? Given the impact local residents have had enough.

Response:

The majority of the event day road closures have not changed since they were introduced in 2007. In recent years following the terrorist attacks in London, the Metropolitan Police requested councils to introduce more stringent measures for event day road closures.

Brent Council installed a number of Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) measures on Fulton Road, Engineers Way and South Way to prevent vehicle intrusion and thus providing a safe environment for fans attending the stadium. Once these measures are deployed, the responsibility for the security of the event footprint falls on the Police Event Commander. Access and Egress of vehicles into and out of the secure area requires the Event Commanders authority. During the event, authority is normally refused even for Police vehicles.

More recently, Police have requested additional HVM measure on South Way between the Pink car park and the Poppins building with additional measures on First Way by the East Gate. These closures are made under an Anti-Terrorist Regulation Order (ATTRO), which is written and signed by the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Counter Terrorism Policing.

Brent as the Highway Authority has no power to override the Police Events Commander's decision to allow vehicles in or out of the HVM closure points.

Wembley Park Estate/Quintain state that post Covid the demand for onsite parking has increased significantly, as people are reluctant to use public transport. The increase in event traffic has generated more demand on the road network thus leading to congestion.

5. Question from R.Rajar to Councillor Tatler, Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Planning

Brent Council, Quintain and others signed a s106 on 24.11.2011 relating to the Wembley North West Lands. Under paragraph 14, regarding affordable housing units, clause 7.2 states that the service charge should be increased based on CPI or above with the Council's approval once in a 12 month period.

Residents at block NW06 have reported and provided evidence to Brent Council that the Housing Association is in breach of the above condition, which was confirmed in May 2021.

Since we have not yet received a resolution to this problem which is affecting the residents in many ways including their mental health and financially, we would like to know what Brent Council has done to enforce the s106 Agreement in order to ensure that these Affordable housing units don't become unaffordable?

Response:

The Council has been in direct communication with Network Homes to try and resolve this situation since January. We are still waiting for the information we requested to justify each Service Charge increase each year above the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and also why the percentage increase is not even across all the flats. We are extremely disappointed that this information is still yet to be provided by Network Homes.

Whilst we do still expect to receive this information, we are prepared to seek litigation to ensure that this information is provided so it can then be scrutinised.

6. Question from M.Francis to Councillor Knight, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Renters Security

What steps have the Council taken to:

1. Appoint an Accountable Person under the Building Safety Act 2022?
2. Set up Residents' Panels as stipulated in the Building Safety Act?
3. Publicise the role of the Accountable Person and the Residents' Panels to residents' and residents' and tenants associations?
4. Please give a timeline for completion of these statutory duties.
5. Identify those of its tenants who are vulnerable in the event of a fire?
6. Issue Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) to those tenants?

Response:

The Building Safety Act received Royal Assent in April 2022 and the Government has published a transition plan. This plan sets out the timeline for implementation, including when to expect the supporting secondary legislation.

The Council is working to this timeline plus any further information published by Central Government. The Council is committed to publishing a Brent specific timetable for residents' information once dates have been confirmed.

Under the Act, the Accountable Person refers to the organisation or person who owns or has responsibility for residential high-rise buildings. This will therefore be 'the Council'. The Council has in anticipation of the Act reviewed officer roles to ensure new duties are appropriately fulfilled and officers, once confirmed, will provide residents living in council owned and managed high-rise blocks the relevant information including contact information.

The Government committed to establishing the Residents Panel with the Building Safety Regulator within the first 12 months following the Act's Royal Assent. Once information is released on this, the Council will publicise this opportunity to residents' in the Borough through a range of channels.

Brent Housing Management already has a live Resident Engagement Framework in place. This Framework will be reviewed to account for the need to deliver the following for high rise blocks the Council owns or manages:

- Provide residents with information they need to understand safety measures in their building, who is accountable and how to report safety concerns.

- Develop and implement a residents' engagement strategy, setting out how they will promote engagement with residents on building safety decisions, and how residents can get involved.
- Establish a complaints procedure for residents to raise safety concerns and handle complaints consistent with this.

Dates have not yet been confirmed for when this work will be completed, but the Council is committed to ensuring residents are involved in how these duties are introduced and communicated.

The Council has already, prior to the Act being introduced, worked to collect relevant information on vulnerable tenants.

All Brent Council owned high-rise blocks operate a stay put policy in the event of a fire, in line with advice from the London Fire Brigade. This means residents are advised to stay in their home unless they are directly affected by heat, flame or smoke.

In the unlikely event that the London Fire Brigade identify the need to evacuate the building, the Council ensures there are secure records held within each high rise block that identify anyone who requires assistance to evacuate. This means the London Fire Brigade would know who to prioritise and help to evacuate the building.

Council tenants living in high rise blocks are encouraged to report any changes to their circumstances that would affect their ability to self-evacuate by emailing Housing.Management@brent.gov.uk or calling **020 8937 1234** and asking to speak to the duty housing officer who will update their record.

7. **Question from M Etukudo to Councillor Knight, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homeless & Renters Security**

Brent Council is proposing to build 7 new homes opposite existing flats at Newland Court. Residents living at Newland Court (a few of whom are elderly pensioners and disabled residents) have signed a petition and are totally opposed to this proposal.

In view of the concerns expressed, is Brent Council still prepared to go ahead with this proposal at the expense of the health and mental wellbeing of the existing residents who are already at breaking point as it is, given the strain being created by the current cost of living crisis.

Response:

The council has brought these proposals forward in response to the chronic shortage of genuinely affordable housing in Brent. There are over **1,700** families currently living in temporary accommodation and a further **240** families in priority need for a transfer because of issues such as overcrowding. Every home we develop is an opportunity for a family to have the security of a permanent home that meets their needs.

Whilst building council homes is a priority for us, so is ensuring that any new council development also works for people who already live in the area. That's why we are committed to engaging with neighbouring residents early on in any new scheme to hear their views and create proposals that work for everyone. Our team has met with residents living at Newland Court as part of the pre-planning stage of this development. This enabled residents to directly feed into the design of privacy, parking and trees.

Many new and proposed schemes also seek to benefit the wider community by improving green spaces and community infrastructure.

A formal planning application has not yet been made however, at this stage, residents will have the opportunity to submit formal objections as part of the standard planning process for consideration. When reviewing the application, planning officers will consider planning policies, consultation responses and public representations.

The cost of living crisis is impacting many households across Brent and the Council is here to help. For anyone in need of support, visit our dedicated webpage for help and advice. Go to www.brent.gov.uk/costofliving

Examples of the type of support available are:

- The Resident Support Fund which is available to Brent Residents who can apply for support with energy bills and other household expenditure, including grants, loans, and a digital inclusion package.

- Fuel and supermarket vouchers for residents in urgent need of support with food and energy costs.
- Wellbeing services, help and advice through the Brent Wellbeing Hub <https://brentwellbeing.org.uk/>

8. Question from J.Poole to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action & Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Adult Social Care

Given the statement read out at the Full Brent Council Meeting on Monday 11th July 2022 by Kenton resident John Poole regarding the ongoing problems of the untreated raw human sewage in the Wealdstone Brook as it runs through Brent and the report by the UK Health Security Agency that the poliovirus has been detected in Brent waterways, what action has been taken by Brent Council to:

1. deal with the raw untreated human sewage problem in the Wealdstone Brook; and
2. what information has Brent Council obtained from the UK Health Security Agency and the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) at the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) with regards to the spread of the poliovirus in Brent waterways?

Response:

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action

1. We (Brent Council) manage the small tributary watercourses and have no remit regarding the sewer infrastructure, which falls under Thames Water or, the designated main rivers i.e. River Brent, which falls under the Environment Agency. However, we do act as a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and we are fully aware of the ongoing issue of pollution spills into the River Brent from the Thames Water combined sewer overflows (CSOs) located in Harrow.

We are pressing the Environment Agency to take action against Thames Water to resolve the issue and for Thames Water to implement incremental improvement measures whilst they explore options for a comprehensive permanent solution.

Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Adult Social Care

2. The UKHSA undertakes routine sampling of sewage as part of its surveillance of infectious diseases, testing for a number of pathogens which are shed in faeces. This wastewater surveillance routinely detects isolated incidents of vaccine derived polioviruses as these are shed by people who have received oral polio vaccine outside the UK. (Oral polio vaccine contains an attenuated form of the polio virus which is excreted in faeces. It is not routinely given in the UK). Wastewater sampling is from sewage works and does not therefore provide information with regard to Brent waterways

In this incident the length of time over which the polio virus was found in wastewater from North and Central London, and the particular form of virus found, suggested that the virus was being spread between people in the communities served by the sewage works from which positive samples were obtained. This community spread of poliovirus from person to person via the faeco-oral route poses a particular risk for those who are incompletely vaccinated.

For this reason the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation advised that targeted inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) booster should be offered to all children between the ages of 1 and 9 in all London boroughs. Brent Council is supportive of this action and has developed a page with a summary of the information and links to the UKHSA for further information and details on obtaining Polio vaccination, which can be accessed here

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/adult-social-care/health-and-wellbeing/polio>.

The Council will continue to support the work of the Polio programme under the advice of the UKHSA and the NHS in North West London. The Council is facilitating access to Polio vaccination for local children at the Civic Centre.

For the public, the most important actions currently are to check their immunisation status and to ensure that all eligible children aged 1-9 are taken for the vaccination when offered by the NHS.