



## LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL  
Held in the Grand Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 11 July 2022 at 6.00 pm

### PRESENT:

**The Worshipful the Mayor**  
Councillor Abdi Aden

**The Deputy Mayor**  
Councillor Orleen Hylton

### COUNCILLORS:

Afzal	Agha
Moghaddam	Ahmed
Akram	Bajwa
Benea	M Butt
S Butt	Chan
Chappell	Chohan
Choudry	Collymore
Conneely	Crabb
Dixon	Donnelly-Jackson
Ethapemi	Farah
Fraser	Gbajumo
Georgiou	Grahl
Hack	Hirani
Johnson	Kabir
Kansagra	Kelcher
Kennelly	Knight
Long	Lorber
Mahmood	Matin
Maurice	Mitchell
Moeen	Molloy
Nerva	Patel
M Patel	Rajan-Seelan
Rubin	Shah
Ketan Sheth	Krupa Sheth
Smith	

#### 1. **Mayor's Introductory Statement**

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

## 2. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Begum, Dar, Miller, Mistry, Southwood & Tatler.

## 3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on Wednesday 18 May 2022 be approved as a correct record.

## 4. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

## 5. **Mayor's Announcements (including any petitions received)**

The Mayor made the following announcements:

### (i) **Mayoral Engagements**

The Mayor advised he had been pleased to attend a number of events since the start of the Municipal Year. Highlights had included:

- The lighting of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Beacon on 2 June on the steps of Wembley Stadium, which had included the Shree Muktajeevan Swamibapa Pipe Band, who were thanked for their performance in leading the celebrations. The Mayor reported he had also been pleased to have attended many of the street parties across the Jubilee weekend and seen so many residents enjoying the celebrations.
- Marking the start of Pride month with the LGBTQ+ Flag Raising ceremony, which he was pleased to report had been well attended by staff and other councillors.
- Attending the Brent Refugee Week celebrations at Newman College, where a number of local organisations had received sanctuary awards.
- Being invited to attend a celebration of achievement event for Brent Looked After Children which had recognised not only their achievements but also the ongoing commitment from Brent Council to support them towards fulfilling their individual aspirations and ambitions.
- Hosting the Rolling Stones fan club in presenting a bronze bust of the late Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts to the Council.
- The Mayor advised he had also been honoured to attend the Srebrenica Memorial Event, which had marked 27 years since the genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- The Mayor had also been delighted to attend the recent Pride of Brent Awards, where he had been pleased to be able to celebrate and recognise the many unsung heroes amongst Brent's staff and within the local community.

(ii) Death of former Councillor Angela Sheppard

The Mayor advised that it was with sadness he had to inform members of the death of former Councillor Angela Sheppard on 25 June 2022.

In remembering former Councillor Sheppard, members were advised that she had served as a Councillor in Preston ward during the 1980's and in the early 1990's had served as the Borough's Mayoress alongside Councillor Tom Taylor. The Mayor advised that she would be fondly remembered as someone focussed on serving her residents with a common sense approach and also as someone who served at a national level in the Towns Women's Guild, where she had been involved in the promotion of women and girls rights for over 50 years. In recognising how much she would be missed by her partner Craig, two sons David & Peter and four grandchildren, the Mayor ended by expressing condolences, on behalf of the Council to her family and friends.

(iii) Queen's Birthday Honours List

The Mayor then took the opportunity, on behalf of the Council, to congratulate those residents and local representatives who had received an honour in the Queens recent Birthday Honours list. These had included:

- Navin Shah the former Assembly Member for Brent and Harrow who had been awarded a CBE for his role in local politics and public service.
- Chunilal Kakad who had been awarded an MBE for four decades service to the community in Brent.
- Richard Webb-Stephens who had received the Queen's Ambulance Service Medal for Distinguished Service as the first deaf paramedic to work for London's Air Ambulance service.
- Christine Gilbert, the former Chief Executive of Brent, who (in addition to her CBE) had now also received the Order of the Companions of Honour distinction for services to young people and to charity.

The Mayor also took the opportunity to congratulate Councillor Eleanor Southwood in being awarded an MBE, which she had received earlier during the day. This honour had originally been announced in the Queen's Birthday honours list for 2021 in recognition of Councillor Southwood's outstanding services to charity and local government, as well as her leadership of, and campaigning with the Royal National Institute of the Blind.

All members joined the Mayor in a round of applause to congratulate Councillor Southwood in her achievement and well-deserved recognition.

(iv) 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration

The Mayor advised he had been fortunate to be able to attend two recent milestone birthday celebrations for two local residents. Firstly he had been pleased to join Bhuliben Patel, a resident at Network Homes, in celebrating her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Secondly he had joined Nel Jones, a resident at Lawnfield House to celebrate her 104<sup>th</sup> birthday.

(v) Changes to Council Management Team

The Mayor then moved on to highlight a number of key changes to the Council's senior management team.

- Members were advised that Gail Tolley, Strategic Director of Children and Young People, had decided to retire with her final date confirmed as 31st August 2022. In paying tribute, the Mayor advised that Gail had been at Brent since April 2014 during which time she had made such a significant contribution to children and young people's services within the borough. This included Brent's Children's Services having achieved an Ofsted rating of Good overall and Outstanding for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Members joined the Mayor in thanking Gail Tolley for what was recognised as her lasting legacy.
- In addition the Mayor advised members that Alan Lunt, Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment, would also be leaving Brent at the end of July. In paying tribute to Alan, the Mayor highlighted the part he had played in Brent's post-pandemic recovery alongside the work led in improving the experience for residents and visitors at event days in Wembley. In thanking Alan for his contribution the Mayor, on behalf of all members wished him well in his next steps.
- The Mayor also informed members that Shazia Hussain, Assistant Chief Executive, would also be leaving Brent in August, following her appointment as Deputy Chief Executive at Waltham Forest. In paying tribute to Shazia, members were reminded of the key role she had played in Brent's Covid response as well as in helping to drive the Council's equalities agenda and approach to participatory budgeting. In wishing Shazia success in her new role, the Mayor felt it important to recognise that this would make her one of the most senior women of Pakistani heritage in local government.

As a final change, the Mayor advised he was delighted to announce the appointment of Nigel Chapman as Brent's Corporate Director for Children and Young People. During his nine years working for Brent, the Mayor highlighted how Nigel had been able to develop significant experience along with a deep understanding of Brent's young people as well as the barriers that needed breaking down to help them achieve their full potential. Members congratulated him on his appointed and wished him well in his new leadership role.

The Mayor then invited comments from other members in recognition and tribute to those members of the senior management team who would be leaving the Council. He began by inviting Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to speak on behalf of the Labour Group.

Councillor Muhammed Butt opened the tributes by recognising and thanking Gail Tolley and her team for their efforts and hard work to ensure that services for children & young people in Brent had been left in such a good shape and strong position for Nigel to take over as her successor. Highlighting how much she would be missed, he took the opportunity to wish Gail well in her retirement and Nigel ever success in his new role. Referring to Shazia Hussain, he also took the opportunity to recognise and thank her for the important role played during her time at Brent, particularly in terms of the response to the pandemic and in supporting the essential partnership work with the Council's health and voluntary and community sector partners. In ending his tributes, the Leader also took the opportunity to thank Alan Lunt for his efforts, on behalf of the Council, recognising the work delivered to support communities and businesses as part of Brent's post-pandemic recovery and to improve the local environment and infrastructure. He ended by once again thanking all three officers for their service and wished them well for the future.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Kansagra to speak on behalf of the Conservative Group, who also thanked and paid tribute to Shazia Hussain and Alan Lunt for their work on behalf of the Council. He then took the opportunity to specifically thank Gail Tolley for her important and much valued work in support of children & young people within the borough and ended by also wishing her well in her retirement.

As a final contribution, the Mayor invited Councillor Georgiou to speak on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. In endorsing the previous comments made, Councillor Georgiou also thanked all three officers for their public service whilst at Brent and wished them well in their future plans and roles.

(vi) Petitions

Finally, the Mayor referred members to the list of current petitions tabled at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Orders which also detailed the action being taken to deal with them.

6. **Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and of an Independent Person**

The Mayor referred members to the list of changes circulated in relation to appointments to Council Committees, Sub Committees and other bodies.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the following changes in Committee and Outside Body membership:

- (1) To agree the following changes in appointments to Outside Bodies:
  - (a) Young Brent Foundation – to confirm the appointment of Councillor Grahl (as opposed to the 3 names listed - Councillors Afzal. Krupa Sheth & Kelcher at the Annual Council meeting).
  - (b) Old Oak & Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) Planning Committee – to appoint Councillor S.Butt as Deputy.

- (c) London Housing Consortium – to appoint Councillor Knight as Full Council representative and Councillor Farah as Deputy up to disbandment of the existing governance arrangements in December 2022.
  - (d) Capital Letters – to appoint Councillor Knight as the Council representative.
  - (e) London Councils Greater London Employment Forum – Councillor Muhammed Butt to replace Councillor Eleanor Southwood as the Council’s full representative.
  - (f) Edward Harvist Trust – to confirm the appointment of Councillor Afzal as the Council’s nominated Trustee having noted the clarification provided that the Council was only entitled to nominate one Trustee with no provision for substitute/reserve Members.
- (2) As a result of one of the Council’s three Independent Persons term of office having come to an end (following a one year extension) and successful completion of the resulting recruitment process it was agreed:
- (a) To confirm the appointment of Julie Byrom to fill the vacant position as an Independent Person until 2026.
  - (b) To note that the two existing Independent Persons (William Goh and Kier Hopley) would continue in post until 2025.

## 7. **Deputations (if any)**

The Mayor advised that he had accepted a request for a deputation to be presented at the meeting from Mr John Poole (as a local resident) relating to pollution in Wealdstone Brook and the action being sought by residents in response.

The Mayor advised that unless otherwise indicated by members, he intended to allow Mr Poole up to five minutes to present the deputation. He would then allow Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action, up to two minutes to respond to the deputation.

As no objections were raised on the approach outlined, the Mayor welcomed Mr Poole to the meeting and invited him to present his deputation.

Mr Poole began his deputation by reminding members about the course of the brook running through Harrow & Brent, and highlighted the detrimental impact on residents as a result of the current levels of pollution, including untreated sewage, within the brook. Highlighting the personal impact on his health as a result of the current levels of pollution and smell being created, he referred to the images provided as examples at the meeting. Concern was also expressed at what he regarded to be a lack of co-ordination between relevant agencies in seeking to tackle the issues and also that the Council had not sought to declare the current levels of raw sewage pollution as a major incident, given what he felt to be the detrimental impact on public health, safety and wellbeing. As a result he urged the Council to ensure those agencies responsible took the necessary steps to clean up the pollution within the brook and also rectify, as a matter of urgency, the cause of the problems.

In responding to the deputation, Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action advised that she recognised the frustrations and concerns expressed regarding current levels of contamination within the brook. As a result, she highlighted the work being undertaken with Thames Water and the Environment Agency (as the main regulatory bodies with shared responsibility for maintenance of the brook) in seeking to ensure the necessary action was taken to not only clear the pollution but also to detect and rectify the source, which it was understood had been linked to wrongly connected foul sewers and the unlawful discharge of toxic substances. In explaining the reasons for not seeking to declare a major incident, members were also advised of the work being undertaken with Public Health to monitor the impact on the local population, with no evidence of any specific associated health issues being highlighted to date. In concluding her response, Councillor Krupa Sheth thanked Mr Poole for his deputation with an assurance provided that work would continue with the relevant partner agencies to ensure the necessary action was taken to address and respond to the pollution within the brook.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth for her response and advised as this now concluded consideration of the deputation he would move on to the next item.

## **8. Questions from Members of the Public & Brent Youth Parliament**

### **8.1 Questions from the Public**

The Mayor advised that the following question had been received from a member of the public:

Question 1 from M.Whiteley to Councillor Donnelly-Jackson, Cabinet Member for Community, Engagement, Equalities & Culture regarding the Council's membership of the Stonewall Diversity Champions Scheme.

The Mayor advised that whilst the member of the public had been invited to the meeting in order to ask a supplementary question, they had unfortunately advised they were unable to attend. Members therefore noted the written response which had been provided, without further comment.

The Mayor then moved on to deal with a question submitted by Brent Youth Parliament.

### **8.2 Question from Brent Youth Parliament**

The Mayor advised that the following question had been received from Brent Youth Parliament:

Question 1 from Chris Mutombo-Ramazani (Brent's Member of the UK Youth Parliament) and Kenechi Ezeajughi (Brent Youth Parliament Media & Communications lead) to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools regarding the support and funding available to help with the continued development of youth engagement forums and youth spaces.

Members noted the written response provided on the question with the Mayor welcoming Chris Mutombo-Ramazani and Kenechi Ezeajughi to the meeting in order to ask a supplementary question. The supplementary question from Brent Youth Parliament was as follows:

**Supplementary Question from Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Gwen Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.**

Having thanked Councillor Grahl for the written response provided, further details were sought on the funding available, moving forward, for ongoing investment in youth services and to assist in development of the Brent Youth Strategy and youth engagement forums.

In response, Councillor Grahl took the opportunity to thank the Brent Youth Parliament for the important role they played in representing young people across the borough and began her response by outlining the ambitious nature of the youth strategy and practical steps already taken to support its ongoing delivery, as set out in her written response. Highlighting the Council's commitment to continue working with the voluntary and community sector to develop more spaces for young people, she advised that discussions were also ongoing with a national charity to consider how an Onside Youth Zone could also be established within the borough. Amongst other initiatives, reference was also made to proposals being developed for the provision of an additional youth centre, with potential sites currently being identified. Whilst recognising that the level of investment available would need to take account of the Council's current and future budget position, Councillor Grahl ended by advising that she would be willing to meet representatives of the Youth Parliament outside of the meeting to update them further on the work being undertaken and plans moving forward to continue supporting development of the strategy

Having noted the response provided, the Mayor thanked Councillor Grahl for her response and Chris Mutombo-Ramazani and Kenechi Ezeajughi for the question and attending the meeting. As there were no further questions the Mayor concluded the public question session.

**9. Petitions (if any)**

The Mayor advised that no requests for debates on any petitions had been received for consideration at the meeting.

**10. Reports from the Leader and Cabinet**

The Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to introduce the report updating members on the work being undertaken across each Cabinet portfolio in order to provide ongoing support and services to residents within the borough. As part of the update the Leader took the opportunity to thank the representatives from Brent Youth Parliament for their attendance and contribution at the meeting and to confirm the Council's commitment to continue supporting the work they were undertaking on behalf of young people across the borough. In addition, he highlighted the success and welcomed the level of local community engagement in the recent participatory budget process alongside the work being undertaken by the Council in terms of supporting those most in need with tackling the cost of living crisis.



In ending the update, members were also asked to note the list of Executive decisions tabled at the meeting which had been taken under the Council's urgency procedures.

The Mayor thanked the Leader for the report and it was **RESOLVED** to formally note the update provided.

## 11. **Questions from the Opposition and other Non-Cabinet Members**

Before moving on to consider the questions submitted by non-Cabinet members, the Mayor reminded Members that a total of 30 minutes had been set aside for this item, which would begin with consideration of the written questions submitted in advance of the meeting along with any supplementary questions. Once these had been dealt with, the remaining time available would then be opened up for any other non-Cabinet members to question Cabinet Members (without the need for advance notice) on matters relating to their portfolio.

The Mayor advised that five written questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting for response by the relevant Cabinet Member and the written responses circulated within the agenda were noted. The Mayor then invited supplementary questions on the responses which had been provided:

11.1 Councillor Long thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, for the written response in relation to her question regarding the criteria for the introduction of yellow lines, parking bays and pedestrian crossings. As a supplementary question, Councillor Long sought further details on the investment being made available to maintain and to improve the condition of these markings particularly where they had been worn or were in need of replacement given the impact in terms of safety and enforcement.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth highlighted the current assessment process undertaken in monitoring the condition of road markings and in maintaining line markings and signage in relation to controlled parking zones, parking bays and yellow lines. Where issues were reported in relation to worn or faded markings, these would be treated as a priority for stop lines, pedestrian crossings and mini roundabouts given associated safety issues with an annual road marking refresh programme also delivered as part of the Council's Planned Highways Maintenance work. Councillor Krupa Sheth advised she would be willing to arrange for concerns relating to specific sites to be investigated in more detail outside of the meeting in order for any necessary corrective action to be taken.

11.2 Councillor Mitchell thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action, for the written response in relation to her question on community and school engagement around healthy and safe streets and the installation of the accompanying CCTV. In welcoming the action outlined within the response, Councillor Mitchell, as a supplementary question, asked for further details on the work also being undertaken in partnership with other agencies, such as the NHS, to promote

more active modes of travel and engagement with families and schools to support the healthy and school streets initiative.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth highlighted the communication plan being developed in relation to the schools streets initiative and advised that she would liaise further with Councillor Nerva (as Cabinet member for Public Health & Adult Social Care) in order for a direct response to be provided outside of the meeting on wider partnership work with other agencies.

- 11.3 Councillor Choudry thanked Councillor Nerva, as Cabinet Member for Public Health & Adult Social Care, for the written response to his question regarding the work being undertaken with multi-faith organisations, charities and other community organisations in seeking to tackle the level of health inequalities identified across the borough. In welcoming the action highlighted in the response Councillor Choudry, as a supplementary question, asked what additional support it was felt could be offered to these organisations in seeking to tackle the level of health inequalities identified across the borough, with a particularly focus on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

In response, Councillor Nerva thanked Councillor Choudry for highlighting the issue and work being undertaken to tackle health inequalities, in which it was recognised voluntary and other community organisations would continue to have an important and key role to play. In terms of specific engagement with multi-faith organisations, this had been key in responding to the pandemic and vaccine roll out and Councillor Nerva advised he would be keen to explore how this level of engagement and involvement could be developed further which would initially be focussed around discussions with the Multi Faith Forum.

- 11.4 As Councillor Mistry had submitted her apologies for the meeting, the written response provided to her question on footway and highway repairs in Kingsbury was noted with no supplementary question being raised.

- 11.5 Having noted the response to his question, by Councillor Tatler, as Cabinet member for Regeneration & Planning, Councillor Georgiou as a supplementary question referred to two further fires in high rise blocks across London and (in view of the written response provided) sought further assurance from the Cabinet member regarding the fire safety of tall buildings and their suitability in relation to providing family accommodation and. In view of the ongoing concerns identified, he asked whether further consideration would be given to the Council's policy in relation to the placing of families (particularly with young children) in properties above the 5<sup>th</sup> floor level in tall buildings.

As Councillor Tatler had submitted her apologies for the meeting Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) advised he would respond on the question raised. In response he highlighted the strong stance and work undertaken by the Council to support enforcement of the building safety reforms introduced through the Building Safety Act and the Building Safety Regulator in ensuring the necessary building control regulations were being delivered by developers and building owners, which it was felt reflected the importance placed on building and fire safety by the Council and in seeking to

protect residents. At the same time, Councillor Muhammed Butt also felt it important to recognise the extent of the current housing crisis, which he advised the Administration were committed to addressing through the provision of new affordable homes for local residents including the use of tall buildings, where appropriate.

The Mayor thanked members for their written questions and Cabinet Members for the responses provided to the supplementary questions. He then advised that the remainder of the time available would be used for an open question time session to the Cabinet. As questions the following issues were raised and responses provided:

- (i) Councillor Chan seeking to recognise the success of the local community campaign in Harlesden and Kensal Green to oppose an application for an Adult Gaming Centre in the area and to reaffirm the Council's opposition to these type of centres within the borough.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (replying as Leader of the Council) thanked the ward councillors and local residents for their campaign to oppose the application. In reaffirming the Council's opposition to these centres within the borough, he felt it important to recognise the negative and harmful impact they created at a time when the Council was working hard to improve the quality of life for local residents across the borough.

- (ii) Councillor Kansagra regarding the decision made, as part of the changes to the Constitution approved at the Annual Council meeting, to remove the requirement for the Vice-Chair position on each of the Council's Scrutiny Committee's to be allocated to the opposition group(s).

In responding Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, reminded members of the comments made at the Annual Council meeting regarding the clear mandate provided for the current Administration following the local election, which he advised would continue to be exercised to its fullest extent. As a result he confirmed the Administration was not minded to reverse the decision made regarding the allocation of vice-chairs on each Scrutiny Committee, reminding the Opposition Groups of the seats already available to each of them on both Committee's which would ensure they continued to have the opportunity to actively engage in the scrutiny process.

- (iii) Councillor Kelcher seeking to recognise and congratulate the young people who had participated in the wayfinding competition run in Harlesden and Kensal Green for the posters they had produced for display to raise awareness around air quality and climate change and regarding the potential to extend the initiative in order to further engage young people across the borough.

In response Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action, took the opportunity to commend and thank the young people involved for their active engagement and contribution in raising awareness around such an important issue as air quality. In terms of the potential for extending the initiative she advised she would also be willing

to consider how the work undertaken could be used as an exemplar for other areas throughout the borough.

- (iv) Councillor Afzal regarding the difference between the Council's and Governments approach towards tackling the pandemic, cost of living crisis and policy in respect of refugees and asylum seekers and stance being taken by the Council in welcoming and supporting diversity across Brent and providing opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background, to succeed.

In responding, Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, began by expressing concern at the divisions within society which he felt had been created as a direct result of the current Government's approach and policies, especially towards refugees and asylum seekers. As a contrast he highlighted the approach taken by the Council in seeking to make Brent such a welcoming borough, reflecting and embracing its diversity and striving to meet residents ambitions and provide them with every opportunity to succeed, which he agreed was an approach the Government could learn from.

- (v) Councillor Mahmood regarding the provision of enhanced public realm cleansing services and update on the consultation regarding the Redefining Local Services procurement arrangements.

In response Councillor Krupa Sheth, as Cabinet member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action, confirmed that further details regarding the process and consultation arrangements would be provided as part of the ongoing member briefing and engagement process.

- (vi) Councillor Kennelly regarding the action being taken to address long standing concerns raised in relation to waste collection, repair and maintenance works on a local housing estate in Eskdale Close within Preston ward.

In responding Councillor Knight, as Cabinet member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security, also expressed concern at the apparent delays in the issues identified being fully resolved. Whilst highlighting the arrangements in place to address housing repairs and waste management issues Councillor Knight advised that she would be willing to follow up the issues raised outside of the meeting with the ward councillors in order to seek a resolution.

- (vii) Councillor Lorber seeking further clarification on consultation being undertaken in relation to the future use of Alperton Community Centre and engagement with local community representatives and ward councillors.

In responding Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, again highlighted what he regarded as the clear mandate provided for the current Administration following the local election with the Council, as a result, seeking to explore available options for the site which included discussions with a range of interested parties. As options were developed, he advised that local community representatives and ward councillors would be further engaged in order to ensure their views were also fed into the process for consideration.

At this stage in the proceedings, the Mayor advised that the time available for the open question session had expired. He therefore thanked all members for their contributions and advised that he would now move on to the next item.

## 12. **Report from Chairs of Scrutiny Committees**

Before being presented with the updates from each Scrutiny Committee, the Mayor reminded members the time set aside for this item was 12 minutes, with each Chair having up to three minutes in which to highlight any significant issues arising from the work of their Committees. Once these updates had been provided, the remaining time available would then be opened up for any other non-Cabinet members to question (without the need for advance notice) the Scrutiny Committee Chairs on matters relating to the work of their Committee.

Councillor Ketan Sheth was then invited to introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, with the following issues highlighted:

- Thanks were expressed on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee to both Gail Tolley and Shazia Hussain for their support of the Committee and scrutiny in general within Brent.
- The broad ranging nature of the Scrutiny Committee's work programme for 2022-23 which included items of strategic priority in terms of the Borough Plan; of concern to a significant proportion of the local community or which formed part of forthcoming policy reviews or new strategy being developed. The work programme also included sufficient flexibility to respond to other issues as they arose throughout the year. The first meeting of the new Municipal Year (held on 5 July 2022) had focussed on issues relating to adult social care including support for adult carers, updates on adult day care services and Brent's shared living schemes as well as a review of end of life care services.
- As part of its work programme for the year, members were advised that the Scrutiny Committee had also proposed to establish a Task Group focussed on social prescribing in health, on which a detailed scope was currently being prepared.
- Updates on progress against the work programme would continue to be provided, with reference also made on the positive impact which the recommendations agreed as a result of the Task Group reviews undertaken by the previous Committee in relation to GP Access and Transitional Safeguarding were also having in respect of the services and local community.
- Councillor Ketan Sheth ended by advising the Committee were looking forward to engaging with members across the Council as part of their work programme for the coming year to ensure scrutiny continued to add value and made a positive impact for residents across the borough.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Ketan Sheth for his update and then invited Councillor Connelly as the newly appointed chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to introduce the update report on the work being

undertaken by that Committee. The following issues were highlight as part of the update:

- In welcoming all new members serving on the scrutiny function, the broad ranging and dynamic nature of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny work programme was also highlighted along with the lead being taken in establishing the Scrutiny Task Group to review the Council's budget proposals.
- Key issues already identified for review as part of the Committee's work programme had included the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Digital Inclusion Strategy and Council's response to the cost of living crisis with updates to also be provided on implementation of the recommendations from the Baroness Casey review on managing events at Wembley following the UEFA Euro 2020 Final. As part of future reviews the Committee also planned to consider Flood Management as well as the ongoing impact and response in relation to Climate Change.
- Councillor Connolly ended by highlighting how the Committee were also looking forward and keen to encourage full participation and engagement in the scrutiny process as part of their work programme for the coming year.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Connolly and it was **RESOLVED** that the contents of both update reports be noted.

Following the updates provided, the Mayor advised that the remainder of time available would be open for questions from non-cabinet members to the Scrutiny Chair in attendance. The Mayor reminded members of the need to ensure that questions raised were focused on the updates provided or the work being undertaken by the relevant Committee. The following questions were raised and responses provided:

- (i) Following on from his earlier question Councillor Kansagra sought an assurance regarding the opportunities that would be made available to opposition group members on each Scrutiny Committee to contribute towards the scrutiny process.

In response, Councillor Ketan Sheth supported by Councillor Connolly, highlighted the intention to actively involve and engage all members on both committees (including those from the opposition groups) as part of the scrutiny process.

As no further questions were raised the Mayor thanked members for their contribution before moving on to the next item.

### 13. **Report from the Vice-Chair of the Audit Advisory Committee**

The Mayor invited Councillor Chan, as the newly appointed Vice-Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee, to introduce the report updating members on the work of the Committee.

In terms of issues highlighted, Councillor Chan drew members' attention to the important role and work undertaken by the Committee in relation to monitoring and advising on various governance matters relating to audit activity, the Council's

finance, accounting and regulatory framework and members standards of conduct. As one of their key responsibilities, members were advised that the Committee at its last meeting in June 2022, had reviewed and agreed to recommend adoption of the Council's Annual Governance Statement. At the same meeting an update had also been provided on the Council's Strategic Risk Register which had included the recent addition of the impact arising from the cost of living crisis.

Councillor Chan advised the Committee were looking forward to continue working with members and other key stakeholders to ensure the necessary focus was maintained in relation to compliance and control of the Council's key governance arrangements.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Chan for the update provided and it was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

#### 14. **Non Cabinet Members' Debate**

In accordance with Standing Order 34, the Mayor advised that the next item on the agenda was the non-cabinet member debate, with the subject chosen for consideration being the declaration of a cost of living emergency.

Members were advised that the motion submitted as the basis for the debate had been circulated with the agenda and that the time available for the debate was 25 minutes.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Moeen to introduce the motion. As context for the debate, Councillor Moeen highlighted the challenges that Brent and its residents were facing due to the cost-of-living crisis. Increases in National Insurance contributions, inflation and projected energy costs had already begun to impact on the Council's budgetary position and resident's household income with the position only predicted to worsen. In highlighting the essential role provided by local authorities and other public sector agencies in supporting residents during the current crisis, Councillor Moeen felt it important to recognise the struggles already being experienced by residents across Brent with at least 25% of those in work earning less than the real Living Wage for London. In addition, figures demonstrated that over 5,000 residents had presented at Brent Hubs in need of food aid between April 2019 to January 2022 with the Council, between December 2020 and March 2022, having distributed £5.5m through grants to Brent residents, supporting the families of approximately 12,000 eligible children and young people with supermarket vouchers during each of the school holidays. Since August 2020 members were reminded that the Brent Resident Support Fund (RSF) had also provided support for 2,658 applicants allocating a total of £5.2 million in cash grants.

Councillor Moeen expressed concern that given the lack of sustained funding from central government to support local authorities and other public services and the drastic increase in fuel, tax and food costs alongside the ongoing demand in relation to housing and health services there would undoubtedly be a detrimental impact upon residents. In recognition of the seriousness of the situation, Councillor Moeen urged members to support the council in challenging central government to act on the suggested initiatives detailed in the motion and in declaring a cost of

living emergency in order to enable the necessary practical support to be provided for local residents during such challenging times.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Moeen for introducing the motion and then drew member's attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Georgiou on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group in relation to the motion moved as the basis of the debate, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Having been invited to move the amendment, Councillor Georgiou advised that Councillor Lorber would be speaking on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group.

In moving the amendment Councillor Lorber advised that whilst the Liberal Democrat Group fully supported the need for urgent action to be taken in addressing the Cost of Living crisis by the Government, especially in relation to energy prices, he felt there was also a need for the Council to review its own level of fees and charges and use of reserves and contingencies alongside the increase in level of Council Tax which had been set. On this basis he advised that the amendment being moved by the Liberal Democrat Group was as follows:

To add as additional actions under the following section of the original motion:

"This Council therefore resolves:

- To reinstate the upgrading of the Personal Tax Allowance and the basic rate tax band with inflation to avoid lower paid people falling into the tax net.
- To reinstate the £20 pw Universal Credit payment to those on low incomes.
- To introduce a Windfall Tax on Supermarkets making exceptional profits as a result of rising prices.
- To resolve the issue of Fair Funding for London Transport to avoid further cuts in public transport and above inflation rises in fares."

To add as additional actions at the end of the original motion:

"As part of the Review into what the Council can do specifically:

- To consider the use of Reserves (such as the £5.2 million no longer required for meeting past London wide Pension liabilities) to mitigate a 2023/24 Council Tax Rise.
- To look at all Council Charges such as Parking Permits, Toobig for the bin, Green bin collections and others with a view to reducing any which are generating income beyond the economic cost of providing the service.
- To provide additional resources to those Advice agencies which provide direct advice and support to residents in managing their debts, which assist residents in claiming additional benefits such as pension Credit and those which advise on how to reduce the use of their cars through more walking, cycling and use of public transport and reduce their domestic energy costs by switching of unnecessary appliances and gadgets.



Finally:

The Council also agrees to suspend free parking for Councillors (except those registered as disabled) using the Civic Centre Car Park and allocates all additional income generated from freeing up paid for parking spaces to a fund to assist local residents in most need.”

The Mayor thanked Councillor Lorber for moving the amendment on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group and then opened the debate for contributions from other members.

Councillor Mitchell in expressing her support for the motion shared concern at the strain being placed on local residents as a result of the crisis forcing them to make difficult choices regarding their household income including, in many cases whether they were able to heat their home or buy food. It was felt that the continued lack of adequate public funding from central government had exacerbated the impact felt by residents, who were having to deal with rising costs alongside changes in welfare benefits and for many what amounted to a real term reduction in wages as a result of the increasing rate on inflation. Highlighting the particular impact on more vulnerable residents, it was felt the current pressures would only serve to exacerbate existing levels of inequality within society. As an example reference was made to the increased use of energy by 85% of families with disabled children and the disproportionate impact of the crisis on BAME communities and families. In summing up Councillor Mitchell hoped that all members would support the actions identified in order to effect positive change.

Councillor Jayanti Patel, whilst acknowledging the challenging times faced by residents also felt it important to highlight the global factors impacting on the current situation and action being taken by the Government to ease the burden and provide a package of significant financial support. This was both in terms of one off support in relation to energy bills for all households and more targeted support for those on lower incomes alongside the change in National Insurance thresholds and wider package of proposed tax relief.

Councillor Afzal, in supporting the motion shared his disappointment at the response to the crisis by the government to date. Highlighting the need for a more progressive tax system he felt more needed to be done, as part of the wider response by Government, to ensure a fairer distribution of wealth, properly fund public services and restrict any future increase in the energy price caps taking account of the additional profits being generated by large energy corporations as a result of the increase in energy prices.

Councillor Georgiou also took the opportunity to highlight the extent of the difficulties and challenges faced by so many local residents and range of factors involved in the current crisis which he felt supported the need to declare a cost of living emergency as he pointed out Eastbourne (under liberal Democrat control) had been the first local authority to do. In support of the amendment moved, Councillor Georgiou felt it was important, alongside the action needing to be taken by the Government, to also consider what additional measures the Council could take in an attempt to mitigate the impact of the current crisis. This included seeking to maximise the allocation of additional resources to support advice services that

worked directly with those residents most in need and to consider removing free parking for councillors at the Civic Centre in order to generate additional resources that could be used to support residents most in need, whilst also encouraging greater use of public transport.

As there were no further contributions, the Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to summarise and close the debate.

Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking Councillor Moeen for raising such an important issue for debate given the significant impact of the Cost of Living crisis on local residents as well as the Council. In addressing the amendment moved by the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it was important to highlight the financially prudent and sustainable approach adopted by the Administration in terms of managing use of the Council's limited resources alongside the direct and ongoing support already being delivered for those residents most in need, as evidenced through the ongoing support being provided by the Resident Support Fund, Council Tax Support Scheme and Community Hubs. In closing he urged all members to support the original motion moved as the basis of the debate, recognising the sensible and prudent approach adopted by the current Administration in relation to management of the Council's finances as opposed to the approach outlined in the amendment.

The Mayor thanked all members for their contributions and then moved on to put the amendment moved by the Liberal Democrat Group to the vote prior to seeking approval on the final substantive motion as an outcome of the non-cabinet member debate.

On being put to the vote the amendment moved by the Liberal Democrats Group (as set out above) was declared **LOST**:

As a result, the following substantive motion was put to the vote and **AGREED** as the outcome of the non-cabinet member debate:

### **“Leaving No One Behind: Declaring a Cost-of-Living Emergency**

This Council notes:

That Brent and its residents are struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis. For many residents this will have been the most difficult decade they have ever experienced.

In April 2022, the Government increased National Insurance by 1.25%; this is projected to cost the average Brent resident an additional £295 per year.

On 1 April 2022 Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54 per cent, with the average standard tariff energy bill set to increase by up to £693 per year.

Inflation is now confirmed at 9% with the fastest rate of increase for 40 years. Inflation has been higher in London than the national average.

In the meantime, at least 25% of the people who work in Brent earn less than the real Living Wage for London.

The LGA estimates that without adequate long-term funding the collective increase in inflationary costs faced by English councils this year will be £2.4bn, growing to £3bn in 2023-24 and £3.6bn in 2024-25.

Local councils up and down the country are the last line of defence in supporting residents during the cost of living crisis.

Figures show that over 5,000 residents presented at Brent Hubs in need of food aid between April 2019 to January 2022.

Between December 2020 and March 2022, the Council distributed £5.5m through grants to Brent residents, supporting the families of approximately 12,000 eligible children and young people with supermarket vouchers during each of the school holidays.

The Brent Resident Support Fund (RSF), has been in place since August 2020: it has supported 2,658 applicants with a total of £5.2 million in cash grants.

This Council believes:

Many of the services we all rely on are in a state of managed decline, starved of sustainable funding.

Inflation is not going to come down overnight and the impact on our local services could be disastrous. In Brent, our council has already cut nearly £200m from our budget, severely curtailing the services offered to residents.

In our local NHS Trust there are over 50k residents on the waiting list for care.

Residents are seeing tax hikes, energy bills soaring and petrol and food prices rising drastically.

Beneath the cost of living crisis, there is a mounting mental health crisis and a housing crisis that never went away.

The average home in Brent costs more than 16 times the average annual salary in the area, 9 times above the English average.

Given the seriousness of the situation this council believes it should speak with one voice to those in power and raise the alarm on behalf of residents across each and every one of our 22 wards and declare a “Cost of Living Emergency”.

This Council therefore resolves:

To declare a “Cost of Living Emergency”.

As part of this, to call on the Government to take the following practical steps in order to help our resident’s incomes stretch further.

- To stabilise the foundations of our economy by providing emergency support for business, reducing their costs and limiting the price rises they pass on to consumers.

- To reverse the planned increases to National Insurance, protect our residents by reducing the burden of VAT on everyday goods; and increase welfare support in-line with the rate of inflation.
- To immediately use revenue from a windfall tax on oil and gas producers to help Brent families with their energy bills.
- To provide security for the winter and beyond by providing the financial support necessary to retrofit and insulate homes, while looking to the future with commitments to utilise more renewable sources of energy in the National Grid.
- To put in place a longer-term approach to economic growth and security, under-pinned by an industrial strategy. “This Council notes:

To conduct a full review into what the council can offer Brent families struggling with the cost of living emergency and ensure that the voice of local people is at the centre of its response.”

#### 15. **Changes to the Constitution in relation to the Members' Allowance Scheme (Dependants' Carers' Allowance)**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce a report from the Director of Legal, HR, Audit & Investigations detailing a proposed update to the Council's provision for councillors with dependants within Brent's Members Allowance Scheme (Part 6 – Constitution). In introducing the report the Leader highlighted the Council's commitment to supporting councillors with caring responsibilities, with the proposed update designed to further enhance this approach by extending the ability to claim dependants' carers' allowance to cover “reasonable travel time to and from meetings up to the maximum of an hour each way”. In commending the change to Council the Leader advised that, subject to approval, the intention would be to apply the change retrospectively from the start of the 2022-23 financial year.

As no members indicated they wished to speak and Councillor Muhammed Butt had confirmed he did not need to exercise his right of reply the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were unanimously declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to approve, with effect from the start of the current financial year, the changes to the Members' Allowance Scheme proposed in Appendix 1 of the report which update and clarify the Council's support for councillors with caring responsibilities in relation to dependants' carers' allowance.

#### 16. **General Dispensations under the Code of Conduct**

The Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council, to introduce a report from the Director of Legal, HR, Audit & Investigations outlining the proposal to grant a general dispensation for all councillors in relation to a limited range of interests in matters coming before the Council's decision making bodies. In introducing the report it was noted that the dispensation would enable members to

participate in meetings where the interests were thought to arise but this position was shared with a significant proportion of other members of the council and/or community and the transaction of council business might otherwise be affected.

As no members indicated they wished to speak and Councillor Muhammed Butt had confirmed he did not need to exercise his right of reply the Mayor then put the recommendations in the report to the vote and they were unanimously declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to the dispensations contained in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of the report in respect of participation in discussion and voting at meetings, with effect until the annual meeting following the next full local elections.

## 17. **Motions**

Before moving on to consider the motions listed on the summons, the Mayor advised members that a total of 40 minutes had been set aside for the consideration of the four motions submitted for debate, based on an initial allocation of 10 minutes per motion. Should the time taken to consider the first motion be less than 10 minutes he advised that the remaining time available would be rolled forward for consideration of the remaining motions.

### **17.1 1<sup>st</sup> Motion (Conservative Group) – Pollution of Wealdstone Brook**

The Mayor invited Councillor Maurice to move the first motion which had been submitted on behalf of the Conservative Group. Councillor Maurice, in moving the motion, felt it was important to recognise the concerns being raised by local residents (as outlined during the earlier deputation by John Poole) in relation to the impact being caused by the significant levels of pollution within Wealdstone Brook. In view of what were felt to be the serious risks to public health and the health and wellbeing of the surrounding local community he queried why the issue had not been treated as a major incident and advised the motion was calling on the Council to take urgent action, working collaboratively with the Environment Agency and Thames Water, to address the issues whilst also examining the potential for any legal action to ensure that those agencies with responsibility for the Brook undertook the necessary action to clean it up and avoid any immediate rectification of the problem.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Maurice for moving the motion and then drew members' attention to an amendment submitted in the name of Councillor Krupa Sheth on behalf of the Labour Group in relation to the motion, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Krupa Sheth was then invited to move the amendment and having acknowledged the frustrations and concerns expressed earlier in the meeting regarding pollution within the brook once again highlighted the work being undertaken with Thames Water and the Environment Agency (as the main regulatory bodies with shared responsibility for maintenance of the brook) in seeking to ensure the necessary action was taken to not only clear the pollution but also to detect and rectify its source. In reminding members of the reasons for not seeking to declare a major incident, members were advised of the work being undertaken with Public Health to monitor the impact on the local population. Having

outlined the work being undertaken with the relevant partner agencies to ensure the necessary action was being taken to address the concerns identified Councillor Krupa Sheth ended by also highlighting the need, as set out within her amendment, to consider the current ownership model for water infrastructure and in seeking to enforce the principle that the polluter should pay. On this basis the amendment moved was as follows:

#### “Pollution of Wealdstone Brook

The Wealdstone Brook, which runs in open water, starts in Harrow, runs through Woodcock Park in Kenton and then into Wembley past all the new developments around the stadium before reaching the River Brent, has been heavily polluted with untreated human sewage and toxic chemicals for some considerable time.

The Wealdstone Brook has nothing living in it – it is effectively a dead river. The toxic smells which have come from liquids evaporating at low temperatures from the Brook water are nauseating and residents who live close to the Brook or have been walking close to the Brook in Woodcock Park, have been feeling physically sick as a result of these noxious odours.

Thames Water, who have been investigating the sources of the pollution, have admitted liability for cleaning up the pollution. They have agreed that the pollution of the Wealdstone Brook is one of the worst they have come across but as a result of the shared responsibility for the maintenance of the Brook as it passes through Brent, Brent Council and the Environment Agency must also share some of the responsibility.

As a result the residents living nearby have expressed their disgust at the state of the Brook and this Council considers that ~~Brent Council~~ Thames Water should have ~~declared this to be a “Major Incident”~~ acted with greater urgency once it had reports of untreated human sewage, toxic gases and smells vaporising from the water of the Wealdstone Brook.

This council notes that almost £19bn was paid out in dividends to shareholders in the none major water companies operating in England between 2010 and 2021.

This Council therefore resolves:

To do whatever is necessary and within the Council's power to ensure that the water in Wealdstone Brook is cleaned up.

To ask the Leader of the Council and the Leaders of the Opposition Groups to write to the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, to call for additional support for Brent Council to respond to the pollution in Wealdstone Brook and enforce the principle of the ‘polluter pays’.

To support the Labour Party pledge of common ownership of water services to unlock the desperately needed investment in water infrastructure and create services that are run on behalf of consumers, not shareholders profit.

To do what the Council can to ensure that the agencies concerned take the necessary steps to detect and rectify all wrongly connected foul sewers which run into the Brook and to put them right at no cost to Council tax payers, in Brent.

To seek legal opinion as to whether legal action can be taken against the agencies that have responsibility for ensuring that the Wealdstone Brook is free of pollution if there is no immediate rectification of the problem.

To ensure in light of a serious risk to public health and as a matter of urgency the necessary actions are taken as soon as possible to put the foregoing into practice.”

The Mayor then invited other members to speak on both the original motion and amendment, with the following contribution received.

Councillor Matin spoke to express support for the concerns identified in relation to pollution not only within the Brook but also within the River Brent, which ran through her ward. As a result she supported the calls being made for the relevant agencies, including Thames Water and the Environment Agency, to fully investigate, report back and undertake the necessary action to address the concerns identified.

As there were no further contributions, the Mayor then invited Councillor Maurice (as mover of the original motion) and Councillor Krupa Sheth (as mover of the amendment) to exercise their rights of reply.

In summing up, Councillor Maurice highlighted the serious public health concerns identified in relation to the current levels of pollution within the Brook along with the need (supported by local residents) for the Council to take urgent action in seeking to ensure that the relevant agencies were forced to address the issue and provide an appropriate response.

Councillor Sheth, in exercising her right to reply on the amendment assured members of work already being undertaken by the Council with Thames Water and the Environment Agency (as the main regulatory bodies for the Brook) in seeking to ensure the necessary action was being taken to identify and remedy the source of the pollution, with the amendment seeking to recognise and hold the relevant agencies to account.

Having thanked Councillors for their contributions, the Mayor advised that he intended to move straight to the vote on the motion starting with the amendment.

The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive motion, as amended and set out below, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

**“Pollution of the Wealdstone Brook**

The Wealdstone Brook, which runs in open water, starts in Harrow, runs through Woodcock Park in Kenton and then into Wembley past all the new developments

around the stadium before reaching the River Brent, has been heavily polluted with untreated human sewage and toxic chemicals for some considerable time.

The Wealdstone Brook has nothing living in it – it is effectively a dead river. The toxic smells which have come from liquids evaporating at low temperatures from the Brook water are nauseating and residents who live close to the Brook or have been walking close to the Brook in Woodcock Park, have been feeling physically sick as a result of these noxious odours.

Thames Water, who have been investigating the sources of the pollution, have admitted liability for cleaning up the pollution. They have agreed that the pollution of the Wealdstone Brook is one of the worst they have come across but as a result of the shared responsibility for the maintenance of the Brook as it passes through Brent, Brent Council and the Environment Agency must also share some of the responsibility.

As a result the residents living nearby have expressed their disgust at the state of the Brook and this council considers that Thames Water should have acted with greater urgency once it had reports of untreated human sewage, toxic gases and smells vaporising from the water of the Wealdstone Brook.

This council notes that almost £19bn was paid out in dividends to shareholders in the nine major water companies operating in England between 2010 and 2021.

This Council therefore resolves:

To do whatever is necessary and within the Council's power to ensure that the water in Wealdstone Brook is cleaned up.

To ask the Leader of the Council and the Leaders of the Opposition Groups to write to the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, to call for additional support for Brent Council to respond to the pollution in Wealdstone Brook and enforce the principle of the 'polluter pays'.

To support the Labour Party pledge of common ownership of water services to unlock the desperately needed investment in water infrastructure and create services that are run on behalf of consumers, not shareholders profit.

To do what the Council can to ensure that the agencies concerned take the necessary steps to detect and rectify all wrongly connected foul sewers which run into the Brook and to put them right at no cost to Council tax payers, in Brent.

To seek legal opinion as to whether legal action can be taken against the agencies that have responsibility for ensuring that the Wealdstone Brook is free of pollution if there is no immediate rectification of the problem.

To ensure in light of a serious risk to public health and as a matter of urgency the necessary actions are taken as soon as possible to put the foregoing into practice."

## **17.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Motion (Liberal Democrat Group) – Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers**



The Mayor then invited Councillor Georgiou to move the second motion, submitted on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group. Councillor Georgiou in moving the motion began by expressing strong reservations and concern at the Government's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, with particular reference to their Rwanda policy. In seeking support for the motion, Councillor Georgiou felt it was important to recognise the diverse and welcoming nature of Brent as home to people from all over the world who were able to make a valued contribution to the local community alongside the need to treat refugees and asylum seekers with compassion and respect. He felt this was in direct contrast to the hostile environment being created by the Government's current approach and, as a result, advised that the motion was seeking support in calling for the Government to provide a legal right of passage for asylum seekers into the UK as well as the right to work under defined and reasonable terms. In addition he was keen to recognise the crucial work being undertaken by a number of organisations within the community (some of whom were present at the meeting) and to ensure this continued to be supported by the Council across the borough. In concluding, Councillor Georgiou urged all members to support the motion in opposition to the stance being taken by the current Government.

Following the original motion being moved the Mayor advised members of an amendment submitted by Councillor Donnelly-Jackson on behalf of the Labour Group, which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson was then invited to move the amendment and advised that whilst supportive of the sentiment expressed in the motion felt there was also a need (as detailed within the amendment) to recognise the proactive approach already being taken by the current Administration supported by the voluntary and community sector across Brent to welcome and support refugees and asylum seekers in the borough. In supporting opposition to the Government's current approach, the amendment also highlighted and expressed support for the Labour amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act relating to unaccompanied child refugees as well as recognising the essential support being provided through Brent Start in relation to affordable training opportunities. On this basis the amendment moved was as follows:

"Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

This Council notes:

That refugees and asylum seekers are human beings who deserve our full respect and support.

The way in which Boris Johnson's government talks about and presents refugees, who face their plight through no fault of their own, is deeply un-British, offensive and shameful.

Our own borough is home to people from all corners of the world and all wish to make a valuable contribution to our international community.

Brent ~~must remain~~ is welcoming of refugees and asylum seekers, ~~and offer required leadership from a local government level by~~ The collective leadership of every

councillor is essential in ensuring that refugees who arrive in our community have access to needed support and are given the basic opportunities afforded to all in order that they can ~~make a contribution~~ contribute to society.

Organisations like Care 4 Calais, English for Action, Salusbury World, Young Roots, amongst others, are doing crucial work in our community to help settle refugees and offer basic support, whether through English classes that they run or by seeking to address the immense mental trauma many refugees have and are experiencing.

The Brent Labour Manifesto promised that under Labour leadership, Brent Council will stand “ready to support refugees fleeing war in any way we can”. With the help of our outstanding voluntary sector and local residents, Brent has already given sanctuary to 154 people under the Homes for Ukrainians Scheme.

This Council believes:

In the UN Refugee Convention statutes that give right to any individuals seeking asylum. We believe that Brent has a moral duty to help those fleeing war and persecution. We continue to support the Alf Dubs amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act to allow unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to reunite with family members here in the UK after Brexit.

This Council therefore calls on the government to:

1. Drop its shameful, un-British Rwanda policy. The Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has set out the Labour Party position that “it is not a long term plan; it is a short term stunt and government gimmick.”
2. End the hostile environment pursued by successive Conservative Governments that seeks to criminalise people who have been forced to flee their homelands through no fault of their own.
3. Reverse the cuts to legal aid that have disproportionately affected those on lower incomes, BAME groups and women as well as refugees. The legal aid and family reunion system requires urgent reassessment and significant reform, with refugees denied justice due to drastic legal aid cuts.
- 3.4. Acknowledge asylum seekers are making dangerous, tragically, all too often, fatal journeys across Europe to seek sanctuary and safety and therefore must allow asylum seekers the legal right of passage into the UK.
- 4.5. Give refugees and asylum seekers the ability to play a full part in our society and economy by giving those who arrive in the UK a right to work quickly under defined and reasonable terms.

This Council also resolves to:

1. Immediately establish and publish a directory of ESOL provision within our borough on the Council website and also provide easy access benefit and other advice to those who need it.

2. Continue the award winning work of Brent Start which provides affordable training, including ESOL and English Language courses to over 8,000 learners a year. This Council continues its commitment to investing £43m into creating a new state of the art adult education centre at Morland Gardens – enabling many more ESOL learners to benefit from the Brent Start service.

2.3. Make representations to London Council as the body responsible for the Freedom Pass, to consider Extend extending free bus travel to asylum seekers through the existing payment card system.

3. Organise a Brent Refugee Summit by the end of this year (2022), bringing together organisations, mainly in the voluntary sector, who are currently working to support refugees and asylum seekers locally. This will show a united and concerted effort from this Council that people who arrive locally are welcome here and that Brent will play our part in helping to settle people who given the tools will make hugely valuable contributions to our borough - as those who came before them always have.”

The Mayor then invited other members to speak on both the original motion and amendment, with the following contributions received.

Councillor Kansagra in responding to the motion, felt it was important to recognise the main countries from which a majority of asylum seekers were arriving and to not only address the main causes in them seeking refuge but also to tackle the criminal gangs involved in their journey to the UK. He felt this was an approach the Government had sought to adopt whilst also recognising international rules in relation to application for asylum and the pressures also being placed on local services.

Councillor Lorber, speaking in support of the motion expressed concern at what he felt was the lack of empathy and understanding demonstrated by the Government and Conservative Group towards the plight of refugees and asylum seekers along with the benefits and positive contribution they had made to society. In recognising the risks taken to reach safety, he felt this would only be as a direct result of persecution or fear of harm and as such there was a duty on the Government to act responsibly and with compassion in seeking to welcome and support asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the UK in search of safety.

Councillor Muhammed Butt, speaking in support of the amendment, highlighted his disappointment at the approach adopted by the Conservative Group in support of the Government, which it was felt demonstrated a clear lack of empathy and understanding in their attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees. In contrast, he was proud of the approach taken by the Council to make Brent a safe, welcoming and supportive destination for those fleeing persecution and harm with the Administration committed to continue providing this support in contrast to the hostile stance by the Government.

Following a brief exchange regarding a point of personal explanation from Councillor Kansagra and point of order raised by Councillor Georgiou on the conduct of the debate the Mayor ruled that as all members who had indicated they wished to speak had been heard he would move straight to the vote on the motion starting with the amendment.

The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive motion, as amended and set out below, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

**“Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

This Council notes:

That refugees and asylum seekers are human beings who deserve our full respect and support.

The way in which Boris Johnson’s government talks about and presents refugees, who face their plight through no fault of their own, is deeply un-British, offensive and shameful.

Our own borough is home to people from all corners of the world and all wish to make a valuable contribution to our international community.

Brent is welcoming of refugees and asylum seekers. The collective leadership of every councillor is essential in ensuring that refugees who arrive in our community have access to needed support and are given the basic opportunities afforded to all in order that they can contribute to society.

Organisations like Care 4 Calais, English for Action, Salusbury World, Young Roots, amongst others, are doing crucial work in our community to help settle refugees and offer basic support, whether through English classes that they run or by seeking to address the immense mental trauma many refugees have and are experiencing.

The Brent Labour Manifesto promised that under Labour leadership, Brent Council will stand “ready to support refugees fleeing war in any way we can”. With the help of our outstanding voluntary sector and local residents, Brent has already given sanctuary to 154 people under the Homes for Ukrainians Scheme.

This Council believes:

In the UN Refugee Convention statutes that give right to any individuals seeking asylum. We believe that Brent has a moral duty to help those fleeing war and persecution. We continue to support the Alf Dubs amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act to allow unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to reunite with family members here in the UK after Brexit.

This Council therefore calls on the government to:

1. Drop its shameful, un-British Rwanda policy. The Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has set out the Labour Party position that “it is not a long term plan; it is a short term stunt and government gimmick.”

2. End the hostile environment pursued by successive Conservative Governments that seeks to criminalise people who have been forced to flee their homelands through no fault of their own.
3. Reverse the cuts to legal aid that have disproportionately affected those on lower incomes, BAME groups and women as well as refugees. The legal aid and family reunion system requires urgent reassessment and significant reform, with refugees denied justice due to drastic legal aid cuts.
4. Acknowledge asylum seekers are making dangerous, tragically, all too often, fatal journeys across Europe to seek sanctuary and safety and therefore must allow asylum seekers the legal right of passage into the UK.
5. Give refugees and asylum seekers the ability to play a full part in our society and economy by giving those who arrive in the UK a right to work quickly under defined and reasonable terms.

This Council also resolves to:

1. Immediately establish and publish a directory of ESOL provision within our borough on the Council website and also provide easy access benefit and other advice to those who need it.
2. Continue the award winning work of Brent Start which provides affordable training, including ESOL and English Language courses to over 8,000 learners a year. This Council continues its commitment to investing £43m into creating a new state of the art adult education centre at Morland Gardens – enabling many more ESOL learners to benefit from the Brent Start service.
3. Make representations to London Council as the body responsible for the Freedom Pass, to consider extending free bus travel to asylum seekers through the existing payment card system.
4. Organise a Brent Refugee Summit by the end of this year (2022), bringing together organisations, mainly in the voluntary sector, who are currently working to support refugees and asylum seekers locally. This will show a united and concerted effort from this Council that people who arrive locally are welcome here and that Brent will play our part in helping to settle people who given the tools will make hugely valuable contributions to our borough - as those who came before them always have.”

### **17.3 3<sup>rd</sup> Motion (Labour Group) – A food Justice Strategy for Brent**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Hack to move the first motion submitted by the Labour Group. In moving the motion, Councillor Hack drew member’s attention to the continued increase in food poverty and food bank use that was felt to be a direct consequence of the Conservative Government’s programme of austerity and had predated the pandemic. Highlighting the launch of the Brent Right to Food campaign, Councillor Hack highlighted the impact of the current food poverty crisis, which he felt had been caused as a direct result of political choices made by the Government. As a result he urged all members to support the calls for a Food

Justice Strategy, which sought to enshrine the Right to Food in law and support the development of community gardens, social supermarkets, universal school meals and community kitchens for local residents as a means of ending food poverty and the reliance on food banks within the borough.

Following the motion being formally moved the Mayor opened the motion up to debate, with the following contributions received.

Councillor Grahl, as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools, thanked Councillor Hack for highlighting the issue of food poverty with particular reference to the impact this had on the health, wellbeing and educational attainment of children and young people in Brent. The issues highlighted had also been recognised by the Brent Poverty Commission and whilst aware that more action was required, she felt it important to outline the range of support already in place which included the provision of financial support to food aid groups and Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programmes. In supporting the motion, Councillor Grahl ended by assuring members of the work being undertaken in relation to assessing current levels of school meal provision and in seeking to ensure that the support being provided was making the necessary impact.

Councillor Afzal, also speaking in support of the motion, highlighted his own experience in relation to the impact of food poverty and expressed disappointment and concern at the lack of focus by the Government on the issue. It was noted that the limited action taken to date by the Government had only been as a result of a high profile public campaign. In contrast, Councillor Afzal commended the approach undertaken in Brent, working with mutual aid groups to support the most vulnerable families faced with food poverty and ended by urging all members to support the motion.

Councillor Choudry also spoke in support of the motion, and echoed the frustrations raised at the lack of Government action in seeking to tackle the food poverty crisis before acknowledging what he felt was the exemplary work undertaken at a local level in Brent by the Council and voluntary organisations to support residents in need.

As a final contribution, Councillor Gbajumo expressed concern at the impact which the changes in welfare benefits introduced by the Government were having in making food poverty worse and widening food inequality. In highlighting the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on BAME residents in terms of health inequality she felt this had also further exacerbated the gap in terms of food poverty. In fully supporting the motion Councillor Gbajumo stressed the importance of acting to end food insecurity in order to address the food poverty crisis with immediate effect.

As no further members had indicated they wished to speak and Councillor Hack had confirmed he did not need to exercise his right of reply, the Mayor moved on to put the motion, as set out below, to a vote which was declared CARRIED.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

**“A Food Justice Strategy for Brent**

Full Council notes that:

We are seeing a national food poverty emergency borne out of political choices and systemic failings from successive governments since austerity began in 2010. Recent Food Foundation data has recorded 7.3 million adults and 2.6 million children in UK households going without food or physically unable to get food in the past month

- a) Food poverty should never be seen as inevitable: from 1997 to 2010 poverty reduced significantly,<sup>1</sup> showing that with sufficient political willpower these issues can be tackled.
- b) The UK is in the midst of an economic recession, compounded by a cost-of-living crisis as energy bills soar, and the end of the £20 uplift to benefit payments. Food aid organisations are already far busier than before the pandemic, and they are braced for a steep rise in demand in the months ahead.
- c) The result is an increasingly institutionalised food aid infrastructure, effectively now part of the welfare system. This system is subsidised by the public to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds in Brent alone. Food aid organisations act as a critical safety net for anyone unable to make ends meet – including those receiving all the benefits they are entitled to and many who are in work and still experiencing crisis.
- d) The long-delayed Government Food Strategy was lauded as the plan to help address this growing crisis. It was supposed to lay out a vision for how we create, enhance, and protect sustainable food supplies. However, even the government’s own lead advisor Henry Dimbleby, whose review of Britain’s food system formed the basis for the document, said the White Paper did not amount to a strategy and could mean even more children going hungry.
- e) The pandemic disproportionately impacted Black and racially minoritised communities in Brent. It underscored the injustice of food poverty for thousands of residents across the borough who were dependent on food banks and other forms of charitable food aid (including food parcels and vouchers from the council) for their day-to-day survival. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a mushrooming of newly established food banks, and other forms of food support for vulnerable people provided by mutual aid groups, businesses and faith groups many of which still remain active.
- f) Brent Labour stood on a local election manifesto to develop a ‘Right to Food’ pledge to confront spiraling food poverty by bringing together existing food aid organisations, growers, and other stakeholders to address rampant inequalities in accessing affordable, culturally appropriate, nutritious food in Brent.
- g) A Brent Right to Food Summit was held in March 2022 at Cardinal Newman Catholic College with the participation of multiple Borough stakeholders,

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<sup>1</sup> (for instance the Institute for Fiscal Studies notes that the number of children in relative poverty fell by over 1.1 million from 1997-2010)

including Sufra NW London, Granville Community Kitchen, Brent Growers and Brent CVS. The Summit clearly reflected widespread concern over the urgency of tackling the ongoing food emergency, both nationally and locally in Brent.

Full Council also notes the work that is already being done to address food insecurity across Bent, including:

- a) The appointment of Brent Council's Food Justice Cabinet Champion.
- b) The commitment in Brent Council's recent Health and Wellbeing Strategy to 'work with partners on a food strategy' for our Borough.
- c) The identification in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy of potentially positive food-related initiatives, ranging from healthier catering commitment to rolling out Incredible Edible schemes; diabetes prevention programmes, and guaranteeing a fair job for a fair wage across the food sector.
- d) The publication in July 2020 of the Brent Poverty Commission's Report which included sections on food poverty, recommending that the Council 'supports the future sustainability of food aid agencies in the borough including by further developing community garden schemes'.
- e) The continuing efforts by local mutual aid groups, the Brent Food Aid Network, Growing Brent, among countless others to mitigate food insecurity across our Borough.
- f) The celebration in March 2022 of a Brent Food Summit aimed at identifying the various solutions and coordinating effective responses to the food injustices in the Borough.

Full Council therefore resolves to:

- a) Declare Brent a Right to Food Borough, joining other local authorities across the country calling for the Right to Food to be enshrined into national law.
- b) Request the inclusion within a Cabinet Member portfolio of responsibility for co-developing a Brent Food Justice Strategy with representatives of local food security stakeholders, aimed at addressing the structural causes of food poverty and inequality in Brent.
- c) Strive toward a Brent without food banks, where food aid is drastically reduced to an emergency response to crises through 'cash first' solutions such as the scaling up of welfare advice services across the borough, as well as improved access to welfare assistance grants, school meals and supermarket vouchers for anyone in need. We want an end to normalising emergency food aid as a routine form of addressing food insecurity.
- d) Support existing food aid providers through the allocation of land and suitable premises to establish or improve access to urban agriculture, community food gardens, social supermarkets and community kitchens among other initiatives; and ensure market space is available – especially in or near areas of



deprivation – to distribute nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food to local residents

- e) Work towards a ‘Right to Food’ dimension when formulating policy so that food becomes part of the Council’s decision-making equation.”

#### **17.4 4<sup>th</sup> Motion (Labour Group) – Zero Hours Justice Campaign**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Chan to move the final motion submitted by the Labour Group who began by setting the zero hours justice campaign in the context of the Cost of Living Crisis and highlighting the negative impact on those affected. In highlighting the approach taken by the Administration to recognise and value its employees he was also proud of the stance being taken by the Council to support and encourage other employers to support the right to fair pay, along with the London Living Wage and in challenging the use of zero hours contracts. Recognising the Council’s leadership he urged all members to support the motion in as a means of seeking the necessary employment and financial security for workers, especially for those on low pay given the additional challenges and pressures created by the Cost of Living crisis.

Following the motion being formally moved the Mayor opened the motion up to debate, with the following contributions received.

In responding to the motion, Councillor Maurice whilst recognising what he felt to be the challenges associated with zero hour contracts also outlined how many of these issues were faced by self-employed workers. Although supportive of the efforts being made to challenge and cease the practice of fire and rehire he felt this would be difficult to effectively legislate against and suggested it was important to also recognise the flexibility provider for some workers through zero hour contracts.

Councillor Grahl in fully supporting the motion, disagreed with the comments made by Councillor Maurice and outlined how, in her view, zero hour contracts were often exploited by employers rather than providing any benefits in terms of flexible working.

Councillor Kennelly, also speaking in support of the motion, felt there was a clear need to distinguish between the self-employed and those being employed on zero hour contracts in order to fully understand the need for a new deal for workers rights, including the need to secure fair pay, regular hours of works and a cessation of fire and rehire. As such he advised he was fully supportive of the motion and in the Council working towards zero hours justice accreditation.

As no further members had indicated they wanted to speak, the Mayor then invited Councillor Chan to exercise his right of reply. In responding Councillor Chan thanked colleagues for their support of the Zero Hours Justice Campaign noting the opportunities and aspirations that many Brent residents would benefit from if the motion was fully supported moving forward.

The Mayor then put the motion, as set out below, to a vote which was declared CARRIED.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

## **“Zero Hours Justice Campaign**

Full Council notes:

1. The use of zero-hour contracts has risen over the last decade, meaning there are an increasing number of workers who do not have a guaranteed number of working hours each week.
2. In Brent, it is estimated that of our residents in employment, nearly 30% are in roles which are low-paying and earn less than a living wage.
3. There are very few roles in which zero hours contracts suit the worker. For the majority, such contracts nearly always provide one-sided flexibility in favour of the employer.
4. Workers on zero-hour contracts face financial insecurity as a result of:
  - a. the insecurity of not knowing how many hours they are working from week-to-week and, sometimes, from day-to-day;
  - b. getting too few hours to financially make ends meet;
  - c. spending money to be able to work and then being out-of-pocket when hours are cancelled (travel costs, childcare costs etc.);
  - d. getting hours at the last minute and having to make urgent arrangements for childcare or other caring responsibilities, or cancel social plans; and
  - e. the fear of refusing hours lest it results in fewer hours being offered, or bullying and harassment from the employer.
5. Brent Labour stood on an election manifesto pledge to campaign for a new deal for workers’ rights, including the cessation of fire and rehire and the right to regular hours of work.
6. Brent Council uses the commissioning process to ensure that providers never need to make use of exploitative zero hour contracts. Like most local authorities though we make use of time limited contracts to bring in specialists or agency workers with specific skills when we need to boost our workforce.

Full Council believes:

That despite the government promising on numerous occasion new legislation to provide better security for workers on zero-hour contracts, it has failed to do so. At present, the council is unable to legally enforce against such working practises.

That good work should equal good pay and the right to regular hours of work. As an anchor institution Brent Council is proud to be a local employer that does not and will not use zero-hour contracts.

That this Council should support the work of Zero Hours Justice, an organisation which seeks to end exploitative zero-hours contracts by providing help for workers on such contracts, and supporting businesses and other organisations that either do not use zero-hours contracts or only do so in accordance to minimal criteria.

Full Council therefore resolves:

- (1) To lead by example, reaffirming our commitment to our workforce to provide security, prosperity and respect in our employment; and work towards a zero-hours Justice Accreditation.
- (2) Never to unilaterally impose any zero-hour contracts on our directly employed staff.
- (3) To continue working with our suppliers and providers to ensure employment rights are followed; and discourage any indirect zero-hour contracts via agency or third-party contractor.”

#### 18. **Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items of business raised at the meeting so the Mayor, in closing the meeting, thanked all members for their co-operation and support and advised that she looked forward to seeing everyone again in person at the next Full Council which would be on Wednesday 21 September 2022.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

COUNCILLOR ABDI ADEN  
Mayor