



## Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

### Full Council – 21 September 2022

**1. Question from Councillor Kelcher to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action**

Air quality is a major concern to residents living in my ward, particularly with an increase in movements of HGVs and delivery vehicles.

Could the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change outline the steps officers are taking to reduce the number of HGVs driving through Harlesden town centre (and other town centres around Brent) to address poor air quality?

**Response:**

We are proposing in the revised Long Term Transport Strategy to develop a Delivery and Servicing Action Plan, which will set out proposals to manage and mitigate the impacts of delivery and servicing activities in Brent. This will require working closely with businesses, freight operators, developers and other key stakeholders to explore the benefits/practicalities of retiming deliveries; introducing freight consolidation initiatives; and moving goods by more sustainable modes of transport, such as electric vans and cargo bikes. The timescale for producing the plan is still to be confirmed.

Part of the issue around Harlesden is due to a weight restriction on a nearby bridge, which means there are limited options for diverting HGV traffic around the Town Centre. This is something that needs to be looked at in more detail including whether any additional restrictions/exclusions could potentially be brought in via the London Lorry Control Scheme.

It is important to recognise that there are, however, delivery and servicing needs for businesses and shops in the Town Centre.

**2. Question from Councillor Molloy to Councillor Mili Patel, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance Resources and Reform:**

Local authorities are important customers for many of their private sector suppliers which gives them power to ensure that these services can be provided in an ethical, socially beneficial framework, including the supplier's tax conduct.

Research shows that between 2014-2019, 17.5% of UK public procurement contracts (worth £37.5 billion) were granted to businesses which use connections to a tax haven to shift their profits and thereby dodge their tax obligations. Recent polling suggests that an overwhelming majority of people believe that a company's ethics and tax practices should be taken into account when awarding public contracts.

Tax justice groups are campaigning to reform the current UK legislation that allows such companies based in tax havens to conceal their true ownership and hide their accounts.

Will Brent Council join the 30 local authorities (including Greenwich and Lambeth in London) that support this initiative by signing up to the Councils for Fair Tax Declaration?

**Response:**

The Fair Tax Foundation's aim is for Councils to collectively do what they can, to encourage fair tax practices amongst supplier companies when buying goods and services, and be given more powers to tackle tax dodging.

Currently there are 24 boroughs that have signed up to the Fair Tax declaration with 4 local authorities in London - Southwark, Richmond, Lambeth and Greenwich.

On becoming a Fair Tax Council, Councils can push for procurement reform at a national level, especially at this crucial time when the new Procurement Bill is advancing through the House of Lords.

The Fair Tax Foundation's main focus will be on Corporation Tax as this is only payable when the business is profitable. As part of any assessment criteria when reviewing suppliers' tax affairs, the aim is not to pick issues with organisations who are making legitimate use of any tax relief and are working in the spirit of the law but by the same token to ensure organisations are not undertaking practices whereby they are designing schemes to encourage tax avoidance.

I will be working with council officers to bring forward proposals for the Council to sign up to becoming a Fair Tax Council.

**Fair Tax Declaration**

This commits us to promoting responsible tax conduct through:

- leading by example and demonstrating good practice in our tax conduct, right across our activities
- ensuring contractors implement IR35 robustly and pay a fair share of employment taxes
- not using offshore vehicles for the purchase of land and property, especially where this leads to reduced payments of stamp duty
- undertaking due diligence to ensure that not-for-profit structures are not being used inappropriately as an artificial device to reduce the payment of tax and business rates
- demanding clarity on the ultimate beneficial ownership of suppliers and their consolidated profit & loss position
- promoting the Fair Tax Mark certification for any business in which we have a significant stake and where corporation tax is due
- supporting calls for urgent reform of EU and UK law to enable local authorities to better penalise poor tax conduct and reward good tax conduct through their procurement policies

**3. Question from Councillor Kennelly to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools:**

We are really proud that in Brent all of our secondary schools are rated by Ofsted as “Good” or “Outstanding” – driven by our family of best-in-class teachers.

It has been well observed that for many students sitting their GCSE or A Level examinations this year, they are very likely to have spent more time at home than at a school desk during the pandemic.

Could the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools share a summary of results for GCSE, A Level and technical qualifications with the council setting out how our pupils have performed against the national average?

**Response:**

*Ofqual advised that ‘in September 2022, overall A Level, AS Level and GCSE results will be lower than in 2021 when grades were awarded by teacher assessment. Grades will be higher than in 2019, when students last sat summer exams, in recognition of the disruption caused by the pandemic.’*

At GCSE, Brent’s provisional results show that performance has increased since 2019 and remains above national averages in the attainment of strong pass grades (9-5), standard pass grades (9-4) and the overall pass grade (9-1).

Overall Brent’s 2022 provisional A level results present a positive picture with an overall pass rate which is comparable with the national average. The percentage of higher A\*/A grades is above the national average, as is the percentage of A\*-C grades. Brent’s performance at Level 3 vocational qualifications (for example BTEC National Diploma) is also comparable to 2019.

**4. Question from Councillor Hirani to Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Adult Social Care:**

On the 22 June 22 the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), working with the Medicines and Health Care products regulatory agency (MHCA), found Polio Virus collected from London Waterways in North & East London. Further testing of the water outside the initial six boroughs detected Polio Virus in Brent Waterways.

Can the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Adult Social Care therefore advise:

1. From which waterways in Brent were samples taken that indicated the presence of the Polio Virus;
2. What measures Brent Council are putting in place to secure those waterways to help prevent access and reduce the potential for infection;
3. Whether samples of the water flowing in the Wealdstone Brook will be included in the analysis being undertaken by the UKHSA & the Medicines and Health Care products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and, if so, whether these will include both the water flowing in Brent as well as in Harrow;
4. Given the following statement within the UKHSA press release dated 10 August 22 ***“The level of Polio Virus found and high genetic diversity among the PV2 isolate suggests that there is some level of virus transmission in these Boroughs which may extend to adjacent areas. This suggests that transmission has gone beyond a close network of a few individuals”***. What immediate measures Brent Council are taking to monitor whether there is any indication of any individual in Brent showing potential signs of infection from the virus; and
5. What information is being put out, as a result, to Primary Schools within Brent.

**Response:**

- (1 & 3) Samples for the wastewater surveillance which detected polio virus are taken from sewage works not from waterways.
- (2) Due to the nature of our waterways through parks, it is difficult to secure them to prevent public access. However, in general people do not tend to enter our waterways unless they are participating in an organised clean up activity, which will have a suitable risk assessment carried out and protective clothing and gloves provided. We will review available signage from Public Health England and/or the Environment Agency, in case this might be appropriate for installation at certain points in Woodcock Park and Quainton Street, which offer the easiest access to waterways.

- (4) The diagnosis of infection is a matter for the NHS. All clinicians in the borough have been informed of the risk (which is low) and asked to be alert to the possibility of polio. The investigation of any possible cases will be prioritised and fast tracked. The Council's public health team will be informed should there be any possible cases and will form part of the Incident Management Team
- (5) Information is being shared with schools about Polio booster vaccinations to circulate to parents. The information includes a link to vaccination appointments to encourage parents to take up the offer of a booster vaccination.

**5. Question from Councillor Georgiou to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action:**

This summer's extreme heat, threats of drought, wildfires in our own borough, served as a further warning to us all that the climate has changed and that the Climate Emergency is the single greatest threat we face. Without urgent action, things will get a lot worse.

Brent Council's commitment to cut harmful emissions, causing high levels of toxic air in our area, can only be guaranteed if more is done to limit vehicle use and increase participation by a greater number of residents in less polluting forms of travel, like cycling.

The recent news of a Transport for London (TfL)/Department for Transport (DfT) funding settlement is an opportunity to deliver on some of the commitments around active travel that this Labour Administration has made.

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action therefore give an update:

- (a) on the short, medium, and longer-term Active Travel schemes Brent Council is working on, with deadlines for these schemes;
- (b) advise on which schemes these include, thinking about the self-assessment guidelines recently published by Active Travel England (school streets, liveable neighbourhoods, speed reduction, junction upgrades);
- (c) Specifically comment on the progress of the Beresford Avenue (Alperton ward) and Healthy Streets route (Willesden Junction to Wembley); and
- (d) Finally, explain what other barriers, outside of financial constraints, still exist to delivering much needed active travel infrastructure in our borough?

**Response:**

- (a) & (b) Work will commence shortly on the development of a Brent Active Travel Action Plan which will set out the measures and interventions that will be prioritised over the next five years with a view to improving conditions for active travel in the borough and enable more people to walk or cycle. Specific measures are still to be determined, but will likely include plans for new/improved cycling and walking infrastructure; more cycle training; development of school and business travel plans; and implementation of selective vehicle management measures such as school streets and liveable neighbourhoods.
- (c) The Beresford Avenue scheme, which was implemented as part of the ongoing St. George's development, is now largely complete and has resulted in significantly enhanced facilities and conditions for pedestrians and cyclists in the area. In terms of the Healthy Streets improvements between Wembley and Willesden Junction, work is

continuing with TfL on the design of interventions, however, proposals are still subject to consultation, approval and confirmation of funding and no definitive timescale for implementation has yet been agreed.

With respect to Cycle Future Route 23 Wembley to Willesden, discussions continue with TfL and a meeting has been arranged with Will Norman, TfL Cycling Commissioner, to discuss plans. There are some considerations to resolve around the potential impact on Wembley stadium events and TfL, Brent Officers and the FA have met to discuss the impact and any potential mitigations.

- (d) The biggest barrier outside of financial constraints is probably getting the support for schemes from our local communities. As part of the lessons learnt from the early Healthy Neighbourhoods schemes we identified the need to adopt a more collaborative approach to the various stages of design, implementation and monitoring to ensure that interventions bring about tangible benefits to those areas in which they are introduced and don't disadvantage others. However, such inclusive engagement activities are very resource intensive.