

Leader of the Council - Councillor Muhammed Butt

Anyone at the Civic Centre lately or our Brent Hubs, will see that the queues are getting longer, as more residents turn to us for help during the winter period. Many of you will have heard me and our Labour Councillors say that every year it gets tougher and tougher to keep services running, as the compound consequences of cuts get deeper and deeper.

I often hear, “well what about my council tax?” My answer remains the same: after 13 years of the Conservatives, with the largest cuts to public spending since the Second World War – council tax barely touches the sides. The yearly funding Brent Council receives from government has decreased in real terms from £272m in 2010 to £91.63m in 2023. What does that mean? It means the government has put its bill on you. Any councillor will explain, council tax doesn’t look at wealth, or your ability to pay – but at your property value in 1991.

When the government chose to impose austerity on public services, it did not think to the future. We’ve seen how cuts manifest, through crumbling infrastructure, spiralling waiting times in the NHS and basic services like dentistry in chronic demand.

Many councils have defaulted on their debts. In Brent we are clear, what funding we do have will always be directed to frontline services and those that provide help, like our Residents Support Fund. But those queues at the Civic Centre are creating an immense financial strain. Our housing team are receiving 150 homelessness applications per week, the highest anyone has ever known it. We are legally obliged, not to mention morally bound – to support anyone asking for help.

With precious few landlords offering affordable properties – and despite building more new council homes – demand is outstripping our supply. Fulfilling our housing duties now means placing more and more residents into Temporary Accommodation like Hotels and B&Bs.

And this has a consequence. Nationally, councils are spending £1.7bn on Temporary Accommodation. For us in Brent, the demand has left us with a financial pressure worth £13m. We are bringing in spending controls to help us balance this year’s budget, but I won’t pretend that it will be easy. I have always said austerity was a political choice, not an economic necessity. I can only hope that funding councils properly becomes an economic necessity and not a political choice left ever again to this government.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Muhammed.Butt@brent.gov.uk

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Reform and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Growth – Councillor Shama Tatler

Top news since my last report:

- 1) The Q2 Financial report was presented to Cabinet on the 16th October 2023 which set out how the current local and national challenges are having a dramatic impact on the councils finances. These challenges are due to pressures faced by the majority of London councils in carrying out their statutory duties.
- 2) Brent's external auditors Grant Thornton have signed off the Councils 2022-23 Financial Statement's with an unqualified opinion. This is a major milestone that gives us external assurance on our accounts. It should be noted that we are 1 of only 10 council's in the country (first in London) that have had our 2022-23 accounts signed off, which is testament to the hard work and dedication by our council officers.
- 3) Cabinet approved SCIL contributions to Alperton Park improvements and South Kilburn Medical Centre.

Other news:

- 1) Brent Works hosted a recruitment event for Wilko staff on 3rd October supporting those at risk of redundancy.
- 2) Brent Start Student Awards took place on November 2nd and were a huge success.
- 3) With regard to the Church End Development Plan, there is successful momentum onto the next phase to find an operator for the operational management of Church End Youth Anchor within the Hornby Court NW10 site over a 10-year term, as well as delivery of services within the future secured space. The Youth Anchor will act as a community hub within Church Road high street, supporting young people and the local community to access tools and resources to help improve their lives.
- 4) The Senior Staff Appointments Sub Committee has appointed a new Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development who will begin in January 2024.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Shama.Tatler@brent.gov.uk

Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Public Protection - Councillor Harbi Farah

Top news since my last report:

- 1) Trading Standards have undertaken a successful prosecution for the sale of lighter fluid (Butane gas) to a person under the age of 18 by Cricklewood Household Accessories. This was the second prosecution after the company sold a knife last year to a 15-year-old boy. The magistrates doubled the fine to £2,000. The director was also fined £500 and both were ordered to pay our costs of £1,000.
- 2) Trading Standards have also participated in London Trading Standards week in order to highlight their work. This included a large seizure of illicit tobacco from a retailer who continues to flout the law, advice on how to avoid being scammed and how to report a scam. The twitter post has had over 2000 views.
- 3) Licensing team are dealing with the renewal of Pavement licences issued under the Business and Planning Act which all expired at the end of September 2023. This part of the Act has been extended again for licences to be renewed until 30 September 2024.
- 4) The Council's Domestic Abuse MARAC training package has been revamped and the first training session was a success.
- 5) We have formed a new partnership with a mental health organisation called Rethink and they will be joining the Exploitation Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) as a service partner.
- 6) The CCTV Unit will be installing 5 mobile cameras with audio functionality to monitor crime hotspots in Brent over the next few months. The cameras were funded by the police as part of the operation Nightingale project.
- 7) The Anti-Social Behaviour Team (CPT) secured Closure Orders on 5 properties at Alexandra Court which were associated with drugs, nuisance, and exploitation of vulnerable residents.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Harbi.Farah@brent.gov.uk

Cabinet Member for Public Health and Adult Social Care - Councillor Neil Nerva

Top news since my last report:

- 1) **Planning for Winter** - The Health and Wellbeing Board on 30th October considered a report on winter planning and community resilience across the local health, social care and wellbeing system.

Key elements of the Place Plan for Bren included:

- Taking preventative action to mitigate where possible, the impact of illness of individuals, families and the health and care system, through our flu, and COVID immunisation delivery, particularly amongst groups experiencing the highest levels of health inequalities.
- Communication with local citizens to support them to navigate the local health and care offer.
- Support to all residents experiencing homelessness and asylum seekers through on-site vaccination clinics by the Brent Health Matters Teams and / or Find and Treat Team.
- Improving patient flow to free up hospital beds by providing effective, prompt and high impact interventions in and out of hospital care.
- Securing efficient discharge pathways to reduce the length of time our citizens spend in the hospital once medically fit to leave by maximising the use of DHSC funding.

- 2) **Healthy Start** is a national initiative providing a nutritional safety net for families with children under the age of 4. Families in receipt of certain benefits, tax credits, or pregnant women under the age of 18, can receive money onto a digital card which can pay for vegetables, milk and fruit every 8 weeks.

Public Health has been working with local retailers to improve awareness of the Healthy Start card, to encourage residents to use their card when shopping locally at no extra cost to the retailer. This work has been focused in Stonebridge and Harlesden.

- 3) **Oral Health Bus** - Schools being visited in November are as follows:
 - a. 15th Nov – Preston Park
 - b. 22nd Nov – St Robert Southwell
 - c. 29th Nov – Anson Primary School

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Neil.Nerva@brent.gov.uk

Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action - Councillor Krupa Sheth

Top news since my last report:

- 1) **Planned Footway Maintenance** – several footway schemes have been brought forward for progression in advance of the 2023 - 2026 Highways Works Programme report to Cabinet:

North Area (O'Hara)

Ledway Drive, Kenton – Started 18/9/23.

Totternhoe Close, Kenton – Started 28/9/23.

South Area (GWH)

Park Place, Wembley Hill - started 4/9/23.

Oakington Avenue, Wembley Hill – started 4/9/23.

- 2) **Short Sections Carriageway Patching programme** – Following on from the completion of our Winter Resilience programme, consisting of large patch repairs at multiple locations on high trafficked routes, a further £200k programme of large patch repairs on main roads has been issued to our new contractor O'Hara's. In total 41 locations have benefited large from patch repairs.

Other news:

- 1) There are currently 31 school street zones in the borough. The service has secured an additional £117k from available Public Health funds towards supporting active travel. TfL have agreed for equivalent amount of funding to be used towards consultation and implementation of the following new school streets at:

- Carlton Ave East
- Coniston Gardens
- Shaftsbury Avenue
- Okehampton Road

The service is also relocating 6 existing CCTV camera from high compliance locations to existing larger school streets at;

- Crownhill Road (x2)
- Perrin Road
- Slough Lane
- Mora Road
- Dollis Hill Avenue

All sites have been subject to a review of signage and installation of warning signs.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Krupa.Sheth@brent.gov.uk

Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Renters Security – Councillor Promise Knight

- 1) Energy efficiency designs have been completed for approximately 95 properties and works have started on the first 6 street properties.
- 2) The Private Housing Service have been awarded an additional £463,953.00 from DLUHC for the provision of adaptations for disabled residents.
- 3) Brent has joined other local authorities campaigning for additional resources to support the unprecedented demand for Temporary Accommodation.

The letter calls on the government to:

- Raise Local Housing Allowance rates to a level that will cover at least 30% of local market rent and commit to annual uprating.
- Provide £100m additional funding for Discretionary Housing Payments in 2023-24 and an additional £200m in 2024-25.
- Provide a £150m top-up to the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024-25.
- Review the cap for housing benefit subsidy rate for local authority homelessness placements.
- Develop policy to stimulate retention and supply in the privately rented sector.
- Give councils the long-term funding, flexibility and certainty needed to increase the supply of social housing.

Other news:

- 1) **Building safety** – BHM met the Building Safety Regulators timescales and have registered 41 high risk buildings and provided the necessary structural and safety information. BHM are also close to completing communal fire door checks to all high-risk buildings. Inspections to individual flat entrance fire doors are also undertaken when communal checks are completed. Where access is not gained an "importance of fire doors" leaflet is left encouraging residents to report any defects with their doors. We are still in the process of checking our buildings for Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). A desktop exercise was conducted on the properties. Alongside other properties, 34 garages and 38 meeting rooms have also been assessed.
- 2) **Work with London Renters Union** - The Leader and I attended the LRU assembly on 30th. September. I have made a commitment to explore their requests and will continue to work the LRU and others to campaign for renters' rights.
- 3) **Recruitment** - After a successful recruitment drive, we have appointed 8 more compliance officers. These officers will be responsible for inspecting licenced properties in order to make sure that they comply with the license conditions.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Promise.Knight@brent.gov.uk

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools – Councillor Gwen Grahl

Top news since my last report:

1) Pan-London Care Leavers Compact

We have been working with our colleagues at the GLA and across London to improve our current offer to care leavers, for whom we provide support with housing, employment, education and healthcare. The GLA have recently announced provision of half price transport on TFL from January 2024, which our young people have responded very positively to on the Corporate Parenting Committee. They are also working with London councils on a standardised offer led by the voices of young people incorporating six key commitments. As a result we will be looking into provision of a rent deposit scheme, and reviewing or enhancing the other support we provide.

2) Prioritising school safety following events in the Middle East

We have been cooperating with the Community Safety Team to ensure all children and young people in our borough feel safe and reassured following events in Gaza and Israel. This has included liaising closely with headteachers, responding quickly to concerns and receiving frequent updates from the police and other council departments. We encourage any parents, teachers or residents experiencing intimidation or hate crimes to please report these to police immediately.

3) Proposed action published on declining Primary School pupil numbers

The council's plans to ensure the sustainability of primary schools across the borough have now been published and were approved by cabinet on 16th October. Unlike in other boroughs, we do not intend to close any entire schools at the current time but we will be starting an informal consultation on reducing pupil numbers at two schools in the worst affected area – Mitchell Brook Primary School (from 90 to 60) and Leopold Primary School (from 120 to 60). This would entail the phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site at Leopold, originally bulge accommodation opened in 2015. We will be working with the schools as well as ward members and other community stakeholders to understand their views over the coming weeks and months.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Gwen.Grahl@brent.gov.uk

Cabinet member for Customers, Communities and Culture - Councillor Fleur Donnelly-Jackson

Top news since my last report:

1) Community Grants formerly known as NCIL

Applications for Community Grants opened on Friday 5 September (17:00) and closed on 12 November (23:59). Not-for-profit organisations, companies, and schools were encouraged to apply for the Community Grant Fund. A range of on-line support sessions was offered between 18th September to 27th September.

One to one support was available across the borough, and this has been well received by residents; footfall of attendees has been high. Individual support is also being offered by the Community Social Infrastructure Team, particularly to grass root organisations.

Further information can be found at: www.brent.gov.uk/communitygrants

2) New website launched for advice for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

The new website will provide a resource where asylum seekers and refugees and the organisations that support them can find information about available support and other useful details all in one place. Further details here: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/support-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-brent/looking-for-housing>

3) Multi-Faith engagement

I recently met with the Multi-Faith Forum to discuss their ongoing work promote community cohesion during these most challenging of times. Now in its 20th year the Multi-Faith Forum continues to work across all faiths and has recently released a statement regarding the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. This can be read here: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/news-in-brent/2023/october/statements-on-situation-in-the-middle-east>

As part of my work representing all communities, I visited Brent Central Mosque to hear about their longstanding work in the local area and hear about some of their future plans.

Alongside the Deputy Leader I also attended a meeting for the Jewish community given the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and concerns around a worrying rise in hate crimes in the borough.

The council is continuing to plan for the next Holocaust Memorial Day event and I will ensure all councillors receive an invite in due course.

Finally, I wish to remind members of our upcoming work to mark Islamophobia Awareness Month this November. Islamophobia Awareness Month takes place

annually during the month of November to celebrate the positive contributions of Muslims to British society and raise awareness of Islamophobia, with the hope of creating a society free from hate. This year's theme is 'Muslim stories', aiming to build connections among individuals from diverse backgrounds using the transformative power of storytelling to help raise awareness of all forms of discrimination and hatred.

All residents are invited to join an in-person event on 21 November from 6 to 8pm at Brent Civic Centre, Conference Hall, to discover the rich tapestry of Muslim Stories through engaging discussions, presentations, and thought-provoking narratives.

You can read more here: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/news-in-brent/2023/november/brent-marks-islamophobia-awareness-month-this-november>

Other news:

- 1) **Family Food Fund** - At the end of September we have spent £422,400. The number of applications received in September is 560 and 228 have been accepted. The main reason for rejection was the resident was already receiving FSM.
- 2) **Disability Forum** - The next Disability Forum will take place on 7 December 3-5pm. Potential speakers are: Mencap and Andrew Davies on the Adult Social Care Charging Consultation. I met with Mencap's DRaP group and they also had a stall as part of Hate Crime Awareness week.
- 3) **Brent Hubs September Performance** - Total number of enquires for month of Sept – 1568. Total number of fully resolved enquires at first touch – 1501 (96%).
- 4) **Discretionary Housing Payments** - By the end of September we have supported 518 households with £1,001,252. We have spent 62% of our allocated grant so far and are on track to spend it all by March 2024.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact via the following email address. Contact: Cllr.Fleur.Donnely-Jackson@brent.gov.uk