

Budget Consultation Analysis 2024/25

Summary of key findings

The Budget Consultation 2024/25 was launched on Brent's online Have Your Say platform on 16 **November 2023** with a closing date of the **31 January 2024**. The online consultation provided supporting documents including, draft budget, savings proposals for 2024/25 to 2025/26 and a budget setting video to ensure residents were fully informed of the budget proposals.

The online consultation asked Brent residents to read the Draft Budget Plan for 2024/25, and asked the following questions:

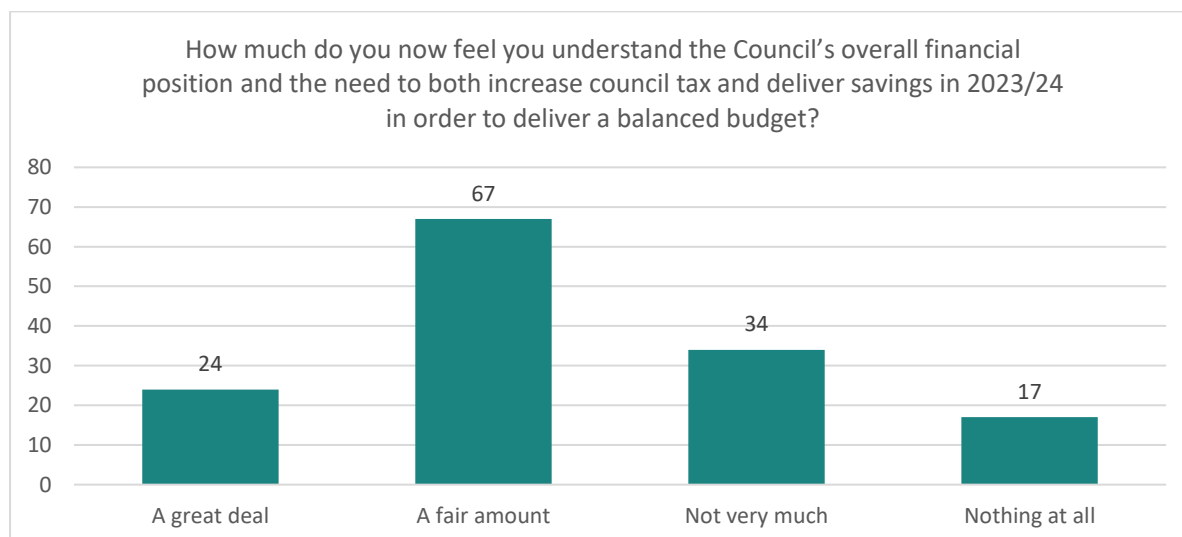
- **Do you have any comments about our draft budget plan?**
- **Having read the draft budget proposals, how much do you now feel you understand the Council's overall financial position and the need to both increase council tax and deliver savings in 2023/24 in order to deliver a balanced budget?**
- **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the budget proposals?**
- **Please provide any other comments you may have on the proposals for the 2023/24 Budget.**
- **If you have any other ideas for ways we could save money, please let us know.**
- **What Council services matter to you the most?**

Consultation responses

As of 25 January 2024, there were 142 responses to the budget consultation survey.

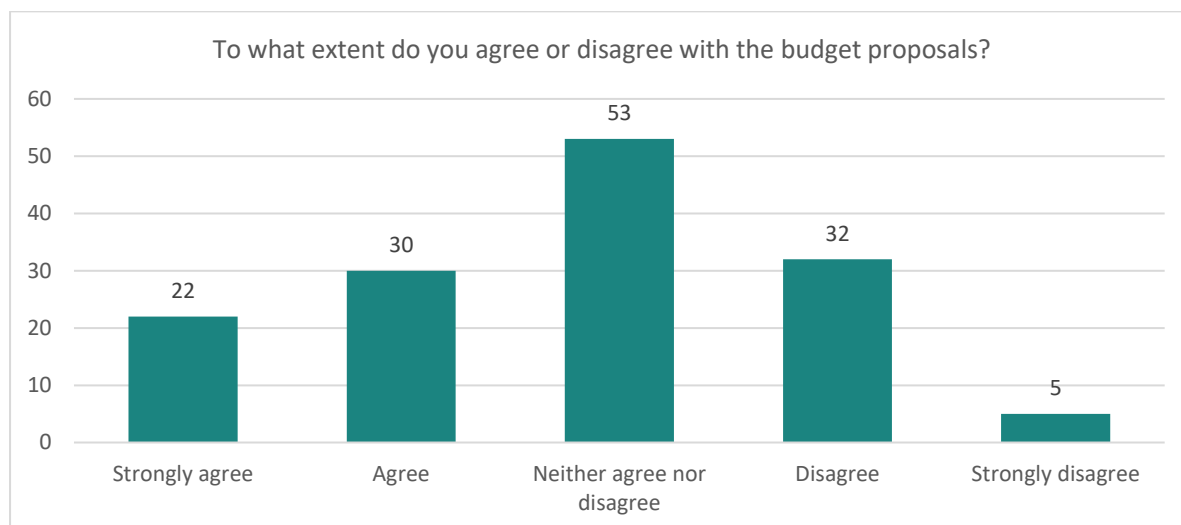
Questions:

How much do you now feel you understand the Council's overall financial position and the need to both increase council tax and deliver savings in 2023/24 in order to deliver a balanced budget?



Nearly twice as many residents felt they understood the council's budget proposals (91, 64%) compared to those that didn't (51, 36%).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the budget proposals?



Residents were most likely to neither agree nor disagree with the budget proposals, with 53 (37%) selecting this option. Of those residents who did give a clear preference, they were more likely to pick 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' (52 residents, 37%) compared to those who selected 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree' (37, 26%).

Cross Reference

		Level of agreement				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Level of understanding	A great deal	4	6	3	5	6
	A fair amount	1	24	26	10	6
	Not very much			17	14	3
	Nothing at all			7	3	7

The chart above compares the number of respondents that agreed with the budget with how well those respondents said they understood it. Most residents felt that they understood the budget a fair amount, and either agreed or neither agreed nor disagreed with the content.

Comments

Do you have any comments about our draft budget strategy?

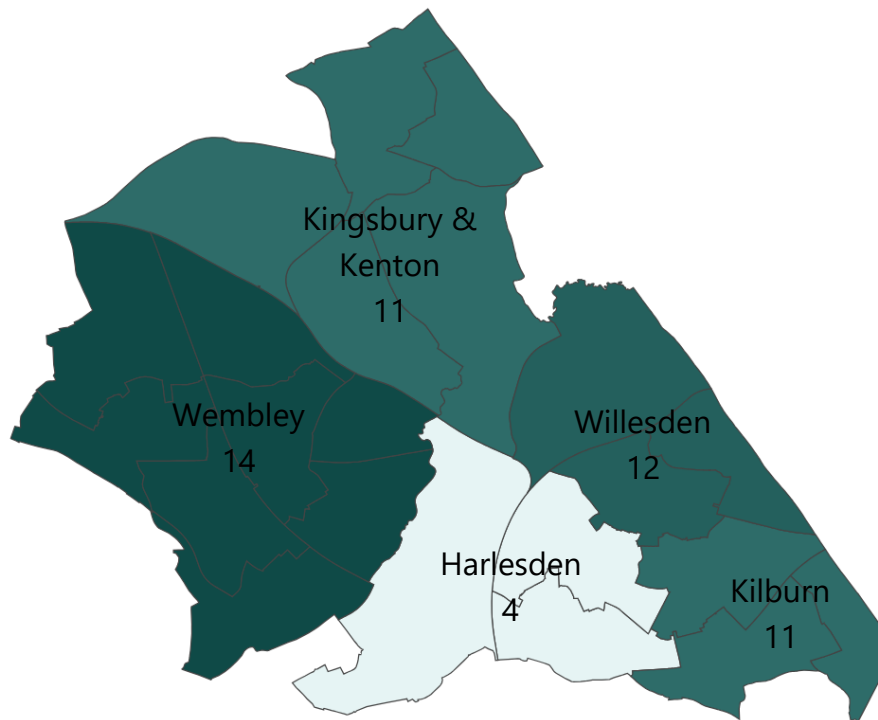
This question received 58 comments. Of these comments, some raised concerns about how the increase of council tax would affect people who were low paid, with two particularly highlighting those who were low paid but not eligible for benefits. One respondent praised the council for its work trying to engage with residents, but another found the documents too difficult to read and understand. Two comments were critical about recent developments of new flats. Other points highlighted in individual comments included homelessness, the NHS, mental health, transport, the climate emergency, and adult social care.

Please provide any other comments you may have on the proposals for the 2023/24 Budget.

Equality Monitoring Questions

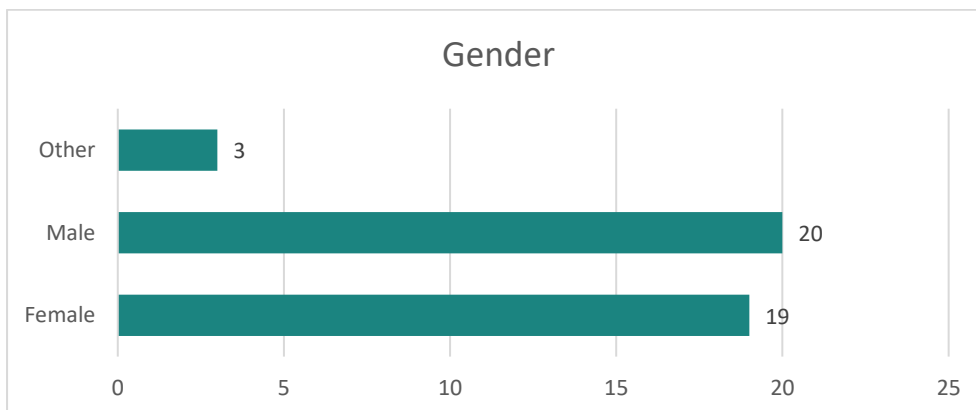
Only 17 of the 142 respondents chose to provide responses to the equality monitoring questions. However, 56 of the 142 residents had equality monitoring questions associated with their CitizenLab (the resident consultation platform) account; this is the data that has been analysed. Because of this low response rate, none of the data is presented as percentages.

Area



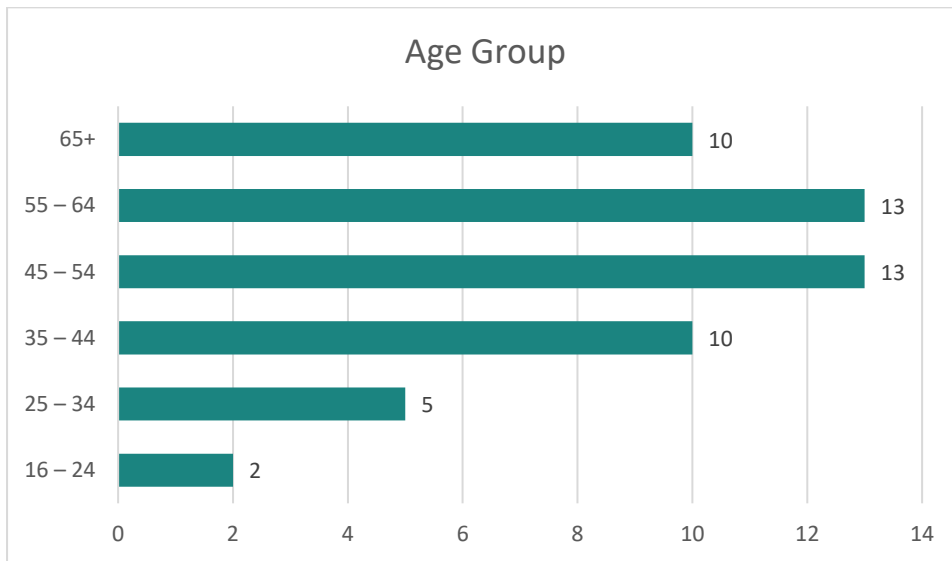
The greatest response was in the Wembley Brent Connects area with 14 responses, slightly over a quarter of the total. The area with the lowest number of responses was Harlesden, with just four surveys completed.

Gender



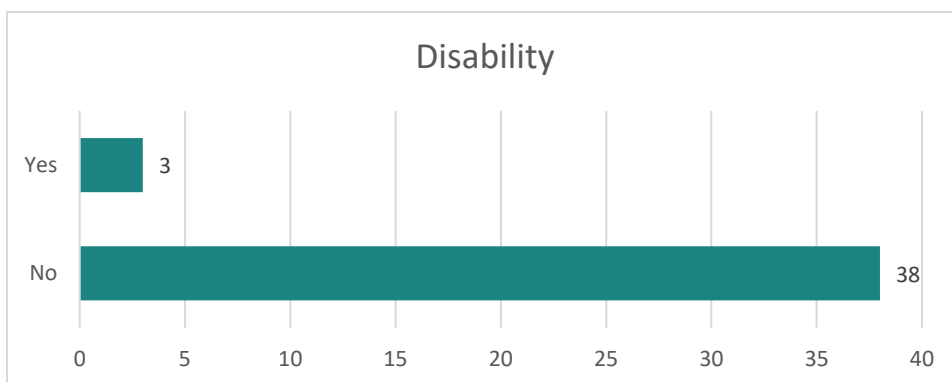
19 respondents identified as female and 20 as male. Three selected other, and 89 declined to complete the question.

Age Group



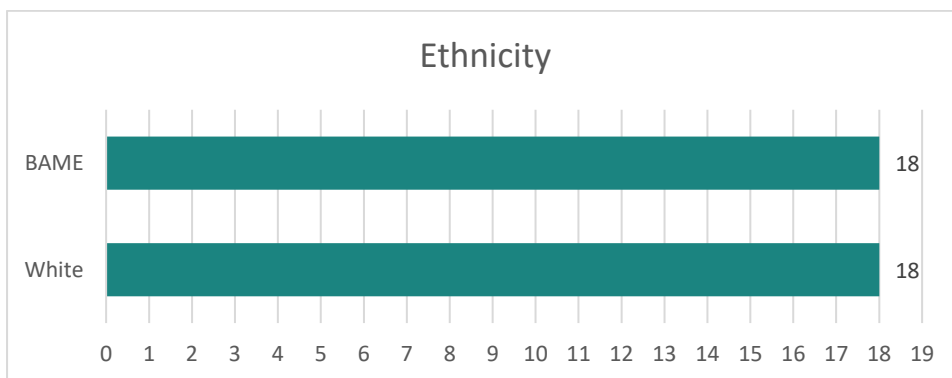
The age of respondents skews slightly older, with the greatest number of respondents (13) being aged between 55 – 64 and 45 – 54. One respondent chose 'Prefer not to say' and 77 declined to complete the question.

Disability



45 respondents completed this question, only three of whom chose to identify as having a disability. Four respondents chose 'Prefer not to say' and 86 declined to answer the question. When asked for additional details, the disabilities was specified as a mental health condition (including anxiety, bipolar disorder and depression), long term illness (including cancer, diabetes, HIV and multiple sclerosis) or Other.

Ethnicity



38 respondents completed this question, the answers of which have been broken down as white/BAME rather than the five major ethnicity categories (Black, Asian, White, Mixed, Other) due to the low rate of responses. Two respondents chose 'Prefer not to say' while 93 declined to complete the question.

Budget Plan – Promotion

Engagement activity	Audience	Dates
Promoted across Brent's Have Your Say platform, Citizens Lab	5,290 registered users	16 November 2023
Promoted in Brent Business newsletter	Over 9,000 subscribers	January 2023
Brent Connects – Winter round	So far residents count is 70	9 January 2024 11 January 16 January 23 January 29 January

Additional representations

The council have received further representations from community organisations, providing their feedback on budget proposals as part of the consultation. Representation from Mencap, Crisis, Suфра and Brent Friends of the Earth have all responded to the consultation, please refer to **Appendix N** (ii) for direct feedback.

- The council's response to Brent Friends of the Earth:

We have significant concerns about the following proposals to make savings.

"To increase the annual subscription price for garden waste collections from £60 to £65, an 8% increase to generate an additional income of £100,000".

The concerns are that more users are put off using the service (which is free in some London boroughs) and are discouraged from gardening, which is an important way that people can individually care for the environment and improve biodiversity. Also that (as identified) this leads to an increase in fly tipping at a time that street cleaning has already been reduced.

It is not envisaged a small increase in the subscription charge will motivate subscribers to leave the service and use less responsible methods of waste disposal. The increase remains modest and reflects the cost of providing this service to those who may have a need for it, and of the significant inflationary pressures that apply with respect to labour, equipment and fuel. The charge represents good value and compares favourably with charges made by other neighbouring authorities, ensures a valuable recycling service can be sustained, and upholds

the environmental principle that the 'producer must pay'. Home composting remains an additional offer, and people may be motivated to seek that as alternative, which would be welcomed.

"A programme of organised cultural and entertainment events to be organised in parks to generate a new income for the service. This can be supported by a review of existing fees and charges".

As stated, a key risk is that more events will "impact the natural fabric of the park". More commercial events in parks will also reduce access to green space in a borough that is already lacking in green space, with attending health impacts for all. Already in Brent 80% of people live in neighbourhoods deprived of green space. <https://groups.friendsoftheearth.uk/near-you/local-authority/brent#nature>

We understand that there is an existing problem of community groups/voluntary organisations being charged rates for running events in parks that they find difficult to meet. This is likely to be exacerbated by competition with commercial providers.

Any enhanced events programme will be properly managed to ensure the natural fabric of our parks and open spaces is fully protected. Large events will be focused on those locations that are able to offer dedicated 'events fields' that can be managed for that purpose and which can be reinstated quickly. Sensitive areas will not be used. Our parks and open spaces are important for nature but they are also important locations for sport, recreation and culture activity, and a vital balance must be struck. A fair and equitable schedule of tariffs will encourage all sectors to come forward with proposals for community events. That income can better support the overall management and maintenance of all our parks and open spaces, and ensure these locations sit at the heart of thriving local communities.

"Rental of Parks' building space".

Parks are public spaces and the more the commercial use of buildings is encouraged, the less accessible they are to potential community initiatives which encourage people of all generations to be more connected to and benefit from the nature that is available in their neighbourhoods.

It is envisaged that any new use of buildings within parks will be fully and properly compatible with the setting. It is hoped that any proposals that come forward will be centred on how the building can be a focus for the park and the community, creating enhancements and other benefits.

"Licensing / sponsorship schemes in Parks"

The marketing of commercial advertising within parks will, again, reduce people's access to and enjoyment of these important nature filled public spaces. We do not go to parks to be bombarded with more advertising, rather to escape and appreciate nature. As well as "visually intrusive" we would describe this as "psychologically intrusive".

It is agreed that any advertising in parks must be minimised, be kept unobtrusive, be in keeping with the natural surroundings, and be prioritised for those more functional or communal locations with the heaviest footfall. This proposal is about creating an improved revenue stream that will further support the management and maintenance of our important parks without detracting from them.

- The Council's response to Brent Mencap

Brent Mencap's priorities

A strategic plan to develop respect for and co-production with voluntary sector partners

Brent Council are currently reviewing recommendations for a new 'Community Engagement Framework' and welcome plans to improve co-production with our voluntary sector partners. The council's community engagement team aim to be accessible and responsive and will continue to look at ways to improve our offer to the community. This includes taking any learning from grant monitoring reports and feeding this into improvement measures.

Brent Mencap Organisational Challenges

The general lack of respect, understanding and recognition shown by Brent Council and the ICP to the income generated, services provided, and contribution made by the Voluntary sector in Brent to the wellbeing and health of Brent people of all ages

Brent Council respects and appreciates the voluntary sector including the broad range of services provided to our communities. We will continue to work to increase trust, respect and confidence with all of our voluntary sector partners.

Children & Young People EIA's

CYP5 - EIAs were completed for both 24/25 CYP05 and 25/26 CYP05

CYP6 - EIA was completed for 24/25 CYP06.

No EIA was completed for 25/26 CYP06 as the assumption is that the statutory functions the LA carries out will not be affected and children and young people would continue to receive the services that are currently offered, funded through a different source. A risk was noted to services if there was no agreement between the Council and health partners to fund these services. Further equality impact work will be carried out in 24/25 if that risk increases.

CYP04 - EIA was completed for 24/25 CYP04

No EIA was completed for 25/26 CYP04. There is no expected impact on children and young people who are current users of the centre. The proposal is to expand capacity, funded through additional income. The emergency respite bed will remain open and available to a Brent child when required.

Willow Nursery – this refers to proposal 25/26 CYP01 and an EIA was completed for this.

CHW01 Technology enabled Care Transformation

The development and use of an improved Tech Enabled Care offer for people using care services is a key aim for Adult Social Care in Brent Council. It is recognised that engagement

work with service users, carers and provider organisations is required if the implementation of a new approach to TEC is to be successfully implemented in the coming years. This will also need a significant culture change for those who work in social care, and benefits will not be delivered without a shared approach to TEC being fully embedded within social care practice.

This work is starting now, and will develop at pace in the coming months in order to clarify Brent's approach to TEC and implement a new approach in the coming years. There are successful examples of similar projects being undertaken in other areas of the country, and Brent will learn from best practice elsewhere to inform the way we address this.

CHW02 Managing demand at the front door, prevention, and early intervention.

We acknowledge the importance of building on the voluntary sector and understand the need for clear evidence supporting the proposed savings.

The points about the necessity of clear investment in prevention activities and addressing the concerns raised by Mencap regarding the impact on Brent residents are well-taken. We recognise the need for more detailed information on the numbers likely to be affected and enhancing advice and information services in the region.

Going forward we would like to commit to working collaboratively with Mencap, we recognise that their expertise is invaluable, and we believe that a joint effort will lead to more effective and inclusive Adult Social Care initiatives.

As a result, we will arrange further dialogue with Mencap to enhance the effectiveness of the implementations of our proposals.

CWH03 Continuing sustainable, long-term care and support.

As stated above we acknowledge the importance of building on the voluntary sector and understand the need for clear evidence to support this work. We commit to developing our dialogue with the voluntary sector going forward.

The concerns raised by Crisis and Mencap, emphasise the need for careful consideration and collaboration in the decision-making process. Of which we will ensure develops in the next phase of this project.

Direct Payments (DPs) are not mandatory. However, it's crucial to balance this flexibility with an awareness of the wider financial pressures faced by the service. DP offer the greatest choice and opportunities for individuals to personalise their support, however individuals will be able to choose how their provision is delivered. Any adjustments will be agreed with people using services and will consider their well-being and that of their carer. If a person choose to have a DP, support to help them manage their DP will be considered in the review.

The learning disability partnership (LDP) is set to be reviewed and relaunched in the new financial year. As part of this process, it's important to identify a clear focus for the LDP going forward, ensuring that the needs and concerns of individuals with learning disabilities along with the Accessible information Standards AIS) are adequately addressed.

In conclusion, the aim will be to work with people using services and their carer ensuring they are fully engaging with proposal and that the impact on them is minimal.

CHW01 Reduction in Building Based services

The consultation on the future of New Millennium has concluded and it has been agreed that the New Millennium Day Centre will remain open. However its use will change as it will become the new location for the community wellbeing project that is currently being delivered from Bridge Park. Further work will be done in the coming months with users at New Millennium to determine how adult social care services will continue to be delivered from the site, using valued resources such as the art room and kiln, but being co-located with the community wellbeing project. A further consultation and engagement exercise will be planned to do this work, and service users will be properly informed of this plan in the coming weeks

CHW02 Housing related support

Due to the council's financial position it is prudent to review contracts across our portfolio of services. Housing related support services play a vital role in homelessness prevention, supporting those fleeing domestic violence and providing floating support for those with low level mental health needs. The review, which is still to be started, will take into account the demand for these services, but will explore ways to deliver services in a different way and to achieve efficiencies from the services if possible. Stakeholders including organisations working in the voluntary sector will be fully engaged in this process when it starts later in 2024.

RSO8 "Less people and more emphasis on digital self-service" idea fails to recognise the needs of people who have a learning disability, other visual or hearing impairments, few digital skills or confidence, people whose first language is not English or those with poor literacy skills.

The Council's approach is to continue to improve digital services for those who find it easier and more convenient to transact online while also ensuring that support is available by phone or face to face for those who need it. Face to face support is available via our network of community hubs. Through our digital inclusion programme we are providing support for people who want to improve their digital skills and confidence. This includes providing access to devices and data through our Resident Support Fund and our network of digital champions. We are always happy to consider other ways we can make our services accessible to everyone via our Digital Inclusion Network.

The cutting of the volunteer platform

Brent council aim to meet the needs of residents, including through commissioning, in the best way possible and with the supporting evidence held at the time. It is unfortunate that the council volunteer platform was unsuccessful, however, we will continue to explore opportunities to better support the voluntary sector and community led platforms.

FR01 Increase in car parking charges

The recommended method of travel to the Civic Centre is by use of public transport. Where this is not possible, Blue Badge holders can park for free for up to three hours, this provision is not proposed to change.

FR02 and GO6 Market rent proposal/solicitor cut

There might be a misunderstanding of the GO6 proposal, there isn't a solicitor cut. This comment may be referring to our change in approach to trainees, where we convert a couple of legal assistant posts (which don't require a qualification) into apprentice solicitor posts.

The Council take's social value into account when setting rent levels. As part of the Council's new property asset strategy, which is currently being developed, there will be more focus on evidence-based decision making, such as ensuring that social value is demonstrated, quantified, tracked, monitored and delivered where rent discounts are requested.

GO1 Reduction to training for councillors and senior staff. It's shameful that more imagination wasn't shown to identify other training and development needed by them that could have been delivered by local vol sector groups e.g., Domestic Violence, Accessible information Standards Regulations, Carers Rights, Learning disability awareness etc.

The member training programme is determined in consultation with councillors and based on an assessment of their individual and collective training needs.

Training is often provided internally by council officers but is also commissioned externally, including from charities and community groups, as appropriate depending on the topic.

Although not specific training, domestic violence's effects on vulnerable individuals, people with disabilities, and carers would have been included in some of the standards, equity, and adult social care mandatory sessions. This was most recently done last summer. There have also been sessions on specific disabilities, such as; autism, neurology, sight, deafness.

- The Council's response to Crisis

Additional Advice & Support for our Voluntary sector partners

Strategy and Partnerships hold four contracts (Healthwatch Brent, Voluntary and Community Infrastructure Support, Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service and Independent Advice and Guidance). Two of three contracts were uplifted during the 2022/23 procurement exercise to reflect current need and inflationary pressures. The Healthwatch Brent contract was not part of the procurement exercise in 2022/23 and has a current end date of 31 March 2025. Improvements are being made to the contract monitoring process to share impact and outcomes more widely.

The Council already works closely with VCS organisations through the Thematic Leads Network, which provides a structure that seeks to improve collaboration. The Council works very closely with CVS Brent on Income Generation for the Sector. The Council continues to work in partnership with CVS Brent to support voluntary organisations to access new funding opportunities.

Improving Equality Impact assessment

The request for a cumulative equality assessment since 2018 will require significant officer resource. Having re-assessed the resource and capacity of the Equalities Team currently and wider service, delivering this recommendation will not be possible now or in the near future.

Delivering this recommendation would require the team to de-prioritise key and statutory activity, such as the development of new EDI Strategy. Additionally, given the budgetary restraints and challenges, it is not possible to secure additional resource to complete this work.

The committee has received a summary report setting out the cumulative financial impact of cuts since 2018 and this can be made available again.

Managing demand at the front door, prevention, and early intervention

We acknowledge the importance of building on the voluntary sector and understand the need for clear evidence supporting the proposed savings. We regret the oversight in not engaging with the voluntary sector in advance and assure you that moving forward, we will prioritise such consultations to ensure a collaborative approach.

The points about the necessity of clear investment in prevention activities and addressing the concerns raised by Mencap regarding the impact on Brent residents are well-taken. We recognise the need for more detailed information on the numbers likely to be affected and enhancing advice and information services in the region.

Going forward we would like to commit to working collaboratively with Crisis and Mencap, we recognise that their expertise is invaluable, and we believe that a joint effort will lead to more effective and inclusive Adult Social Care initiatives.

As a result, we will arrange further dialogue with Crisis and Mencap to enhance the effectiveness of the implementations of our proposals.

Continuing sustainable long-term care and support needs costs that promote independence

We recognise the need for careful consideration and collaboration in the decision-making process. Of which we will ensure develops in the next phase of this project.

Direct Payments (DPs) are not mandatory. However, it's crucial to balance this flexibility with an awareness of the wider financial pressures faced by the service. DP offer the greatest choice and opportunities for individuals to personalise their support, however individuals will be able to choose how their provision is delivered. Any adjustments will be agreed with people using services and will consider their well-being and that of their carer. If a person choose to have a DP, support to help them manage their DP will be considered in the review.

The learning disability partnership (LDP) is set to be reviewed and relaunched in the new financial year. As part of this process, it's important to identify a clear focus for the LDP going forward, ensuring that the needs and concerns of individuals with learning disabilities along with the Accessible information Standards AIS) are adequately addressed.

The aim will be to work with people using services and their carer ensuring they are fully engaging with proposal and that the impact on them is minimal.

Review of housing related support contracts and focus on Care Act duties

Due to the council's financial position, it is prudent to review contracts across our portfolio of services. Housing related support services play a vital role in homelessness prevention, supporting those fleeing domestic violence and providing floating support for those with low level mental health needs. The review, which is still to be started, will take into account the demand for these services, but will explore ways to deliver services in a different way and to achieve efficiencies from the services if possible. Stakeholders including organisations working in the voluntary sector will be fully engaged in this process when it starts later in 2024.

Property Strategy to maximise rental return on council assets

The Council does take social value into account when setting rent levels. As part of the Council's new property asset strategy, which is currently being developed, there will be more focus on evidence based decision making, such as ensuring that social value is demonstrated, quantified, tracked, monitored and delivered where rent discounts are requested. While the Council will provide support, there will be considerable onus on the third and voluntary sector organisations to monitor and demonstrate the social value impact they are having in communities.

This will form part of the evidence base mentioned above. The Council will work closely with local community organisations to establish any adverse equality impact and measures to mitigate.

The asset, once refurbished and remodelled, will accommodate a number of local third and voluntary sector organisations who will serve different parts of the community under a single consortium (Assets for Brent Consortium) to operate a building for the local community.

- The Council's response to Suffra

Advice and Support

The Council does not directly provide debt advice to residents. Nevertheless, the Council recognises the substantial need for such advice across the borough and works with the voluntary sector so that expert debt advisors can provide face to face debt advice to residents from the majority of the Council's hubs and through Citizens Advice Bureau. In addition to support provided by the Council to the voluntary sector the Council is also using social value input from its contractors to further enhance this provision of support to the voluntary sector. In addition, the Council's own staff dealing with those residents who owe the Council may be referred to StepChange online. In terms of monies owed the Council, the Council has in place an Ethical Debt Recovery Policy in which all debt recovery staff are trained, to make sure the individual need of each resident is properly considered. The Council is aware that feedback can never always be positive and so works with its own team and the voluntary sector to monitor the quality of the service provided and is always seeking to understand how any service may be improved. The Council currently delivers face to face services through Brent Hubs across 7 sites around the borough working with over 50 community and voluntary Organisations. Brent Hubs provides the opportunity for organisations to have free access to spaces from which they can deliver their advice services including the NW London Law centre which the Council has provided funds to deliver specialist Immigration advice in the Hubs for residents.

Meals on Wheels

Brent provides a Meals on Wheels service as an emergency provision where required. There is no proposal to remove or reduce this service.

Free School Meals

The Mayor of London has extended free school meals for all pupils in Key Stage 2 for the 2024/25 academic year. There are currently no plans to extend FSMs to children in secondary

schools. The Council does not have funding to provide FSMs to all pupils beyond the Mayor of London's commitment.

Housing & Asylum Seekers

Homelessness is a significant issue not just for Brent, but also across London and nationally, with housing demand increasing rapidly and less supply being available, which quickly widens the gap and creates significant budgetary pressures for Councils.

The Housing Needs Service in Brent has seen a 38% increase in a number of homelessness presentations, whilst the supply of affordable accommodation in the Private Rented Sector has contracted significantly.

The Council receives a Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant from the Government. 100% of this grant is spent on tackling rough sleeping, commissioning services such as the Rough Sleeping Outreach Team, Rapid Assessment Hub and Housing First model. The Council also provides a Winter Shelter, though the cold weather months from January to April. There is also a dedicated service, commissioned through the Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS) to support people who have received a decision on their asylum application under the Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP), to help them to secure accommodation before they are evicted from hotels provided by the Home Office.

However, no additional funding has been provided in the settlement from central government to tackle issues such as homelessness which are causing significant budgetary pressures.

Household Support Fund

Funded by the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of the UK government, the Household Support Fund aimed to help most vulnerable resident to significant rise in the cost of living.

At Brent, between 1 April 2023 and 31 December 2023, this fund provided 13,806 households with a total of £2.5m in support with a further £3.9m expected to be spent by the end of 2023/24.

There is no further support being provided by the government in 2024/25.

Brent has called for urgent clarity as to whether the HSF will be extended beyond 2024. Brent is of the view that the fund must be continued beyond March 2024 for a minimum of a year to help the most vulnerable residents.

- The Council's response to Barry Gardiner, MP for Brent North

Proposal put forward to Brent Council to close the New Millennium Day Centre

The consultation on the future of New Millennium has concluded and it has been agreed that the New Millennium Day Centre will remain open. However its use will change as it will become the new location for the community wellbeing project that is currently being delivered from Bridge Park. Further work will be done in the coming months with users at New Millennium to determine how adult social care services will continue to be delivered from the site, using valued resources such as the art room and kiln, but being co-located with the community wellbeing project. A further consultation and engagement exercise will be planned to do this work, and service users will be properly informed of this plan in the coming weeks.

