



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 8 July 2024

1. Question from Councillor Kelcher to Councillor Nerva (Cabinet Member for Community Health & Wellbeing)

Age UK London reported last year that just 13% of Londoners over 60 think the city values older people.

Becoming an age-friendly community consists of eight key themes: 1) Outdoor spaces and buildings; 2) Transport; 3) Housing; 4) Social participation; 5) Respect and social inclusion; 6) Civic participation and employment; 7) Communication and information; & 8) Community and health services.

Our colleagues in the GLA and in London Councils have committed to making London an age-friendly city, with work on community, borough, and city-wide levels. Londoners aged 60 and over make up the fastest growing demographic in the capital, and we know that the cost-of-living crisis is having a disproportionate impact on older Londoners.

Will the Cabinet Member for Community Health and Wellbeing set out some of the measures this council is taking to ensure that Brent can play its part in becoming an age-friendly borough?

Response:

The Council is committed to being an inclusive Borough where everyone feels able to live their best life, including our older communities. As the question points out, the Mayor has committed London to becoming an age-friendly city and Brent is playing an active role in developing our own response to ensure we are an age-friendly Borough, working closely with the Centre for Ageing Better, Greater London Forum for Older People and Age UK London who have all been very supportive and will be a great ongoing resource. Our aim is to secure age-friendly status against the WHO Framework and join the UK Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

Whilst the Council will have an important part to play, it's vital that this work is co-produced with residents and that older people and the organisations that represent them feel able to shape the approach. Below outlines progress to date and the approach planned over the next few months:

- A planning group chaired by Dr Tony Burch is in place and meeting regularly, with support from the Community Engagement Team. The

steering group is currently made up of representatives from Elders Voice; CEO Age UK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent; Greater London Forum for Older People; Brent Pensioners Forum members; and Councillors plus the Corporate Director for Community Health and Wellbeing, Director of Public Health, and representatives from Community Engagement.

- Brent Pensioners Forum have agreed to host the Age-friendly Brent campaign and are exploring finances and fundraising separately.
- The Community Engagement team will this month launch the Age-Friendly questionnaire, designed around the eight themes to aid in understanding the specific issues from Brent residents. This will be shared far and wide to ensure representative views from across the Brent Community.
- Supported by public health, 10 Brent organisations will be leading on an engagement exercise to gain insight from residents, delivering meetings/focus groups with their members with an aim to introduce the concept of an age-friendly borough and encourage discussion of ideas to support the development of the strategy.
- Findings from focus groups, meetings and surveys will be brought together and presented at a 'Coming Together' meeting in early October (date to be confirmed) where all the inputs and community will come together to adopt a strategy, moving towards a plan of action.

We understand the importance of building communities and giving older people a voice so they can contribute to life in the borough and will continue to support this work where possible and I encourage any councillors with a particular interest in this work to get involved. I have invited the planning group to present to the Health and Wellbeing Board in the Autumn to help bring other public sector partners into the discussion and suggest we commit to an annual review on our progress.

2. Question from Councillor Begum to Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Housing):

Councils in London are now spending £90m per month on temporary accommodation for homeless people - up by almost 40% on last year's numbers. New figures suggest that one in 50 people in the capital are homeless, and more and more councils are on the brink of declaring effective bankruptcy without additional government support.

Brent has a strong track record of protecting our most vulnerable residents, despite cuts, but just one individual sleeping rough on the streets of Brent is too many and sadly numbers are on the rise.

Will the Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing set out what work is underway to address the surge in homelessness applications; and detail how we are working with partners on our "Built for Zero" programme to address rough sleeping in Brent?

Response:

The Housing Needs Service in Brent has seen a 12% increase in the number of homelessness presentations received and the total number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) in Brent has increased by 8% over the same period, with the number of families in emergency temporary accommodation having increased by 36%. As at the end of May 2024, the total number of homeless households living in emergency type accommodation has risen to 922, with the service placing an average of 30 households every week.

London Councils share some analysis and benchmarking of peers that help to gauge a position across London. They revealed that Housing pressures are increasing rapidly compared to budgeted levels and that Councils' net deficit on homelessness service spending was projected to be £104.9m (54.2%) higher in 2023/24 than it was in 2022/23. Brent has seen a 259% increase in the deficit between 2022/23 and 2023/24. The gross total monthly TA spend was £65.2m in January 2024 up 28.1% on a year earlier. Across London, the total number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 8.4% and the total number of families living in B&B accommodation rose by 70% when compared to the previous year. Homelessness, therefore, is the most significant pressure area facing Brent Council with rising demand for emergency temporary accommodation, which has been worsened by the cost-of-living crisis. In 2023/24, the Housing service overspent by £13.3m as a result of this pressure and at Q1 2024/25, the service has reported a projected overspend of £10m by the end of the financial year.

In response, the Council has developed a programme of work to focus on containing the projected overspend. Several workstreams covering affordability of Temporary Accommodation and new and alternative supply have been set up. Officers are actively looking to renegotiate prices and identify alternative arrangements that would allow the Council to move some of the most expensive cases with the aim of reducing costs for the Housing Needs service. Officers also

continue to carefully consider and assess the needs of homelessness applications. In 2023/24, 49% of approaches were successfully prevented or relieved.

In 2024/25 i4B is continuing its street property acquisition programme with a target to acquire 25 homes. i4B is a housing company wholly owned by Brent Council set up to acquire, let, and manage a portfolio of affordable, good quality private rented sector (PRS) properties. Properties are let to homeless families at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels. This enables the Council to either prevent or discharge its homelessness duty and therefore reduce temporary accommodation costs whilst also ensuring families have a secure and responsible landlord.

In addition, the council is set to launch a new communications campaign which aims to raise awareness of the deepening homelessness emergency in Brent and the practical realities and life changing consequences this has for homeless households. The *Find a place you can afford* campaign will seek to break the perceived link between homelessness and social housing. For the overwhelming majority of people, becoming homeless does not mean they have a better chance of securing a council home. For most homeless households the most likely sustainable solution to their homelessness will be to find a place they can afford in the private rented sector in a more affordable part of the UK. The council's communications will seek to encourage the growing number of homeless households to realise more quickly that, for the vast majority, their future housing options are all in the private rented sector in an area they can afford.

The council will work with existing homeless families in Brent already living temporary accommodation as well as Brent residents presenting as homeless, and residents facing or threatened with homeless to explain the realities of the homelessness emergency. Despite building the second highest number of new homes in London over the past decade, there are simply not enough available properties in Brent. The council will work closely with a broad range of stakeholders across Brent to ensure that the homeless crisis is more fully understood.

Finally, given it is clear that the system is fundamentally broken, the council will seek to work with and influence policy makers, including appropriate ministers in the new Government, to seek action on a nationwide level to start moving to address some of the longstanding structural policy and funding issues that have created the current homelessness.

Built for zero

The Berkeley Foundation has funded Crisis Skylight Brent to develop place-based work in preventing homelessness in the borough since 2019. Place-based work is 'a long-term approach to identifying, understanding, and addressing social issues rooted in the experiences, expertise and relationships that exist within a recognised geographic area'.

In Brent, this work has been developed in partnership with the Council and the Brent Homelessness Forum and has focused on the borough's rough sleeper population and is an approach designed to eradicate homelessness which has been developed in the USA known as 'Built for Zero.'

Built for Zero is an initiative providing local communities with a proven strategy to measurably end homelessness through data-driven collaborations. The approach works to know each person experiencing homelessness "By Name" based on specific populations. The first phase of the programme has been to develop the data on Brent rough sleeper population. This stage has now been completed and the programme has achieved data quality status. The next phase is to work with rough sleepers and the wider community supporting homelessness in Brent to find sustainable solutions to resolve their homelessness.

3. Question from Councillor Kabir to Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Environment & Enforcement)

Fly-tipping is a criminal activity and a blight on our borough. Sadly, a select few individuals continue to dump their rubbish on our streets, accounting for fines simply as the cost of doing business.

We also know that rogue fly-tippers are exploiting residents, charging them huge sums of money to dispose of their waste and then dumping it illegally. Fly-tipping and littering can be a health hazard, not to mention an eyesore for our residents and costs the council time and precious resource to put right.

While we know that most residents do their best to get rid of waste properly, there is no doubt that we must redouble our mission to keep Brent clean and green.

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Enforcement set out the measures the council is taking to educate residents on how to correctly dispose of waste; and highlight what additional deterrents will be introduced to enforce against illegally dumped waste?

Response:

The Council has an environmental enforcement team that is dedicated to enforcing against waste crimes.

This work is bolstered by the Neighbourhood Managers, the Neighbourhood Patrol Teams, our CCTV function, the daily input from Veolia, and the work of our Waste Education Team.

As always, the task is to blend enforcement with education.

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence. When we find usable evidence, we can issue fixed penalty notices. The courts can also impose:

- fines of up to £75,000 for individuals.
- fines of up to £95,000 for businesses.
- prison sentences of up to five years.
- the seizure of vehicles used to commit fly-tipping offences.

We ask residents to support this work in reporting instances of fly-tipping. They can provide us with

- the time, date and location.
- registration or description of vehicle(s) involved.
- description of people involved.
- the type and amount of waste dumped.

We will always:

- clear fly-tipping on public land within 48 hours.

- search for anything to identify who is responsible so we can take action against them.

The long-established 'Wanted' Campaign has successfully sought to generate community interest in the issue at hot spot locations. It encourages residents to report offenders on the back of images advertised by the Council.

The council will soon be launching a new campaign "Don't Mess with Brent" and as part of this campaign there will be enhanced targeted communications to residents and businesses educating them on their responsibilities in relation to waste management.

In addition, fines for fly-tipping have been increased and additional patrol officers have been deployed.

4. Question from Councillor Maurice to Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Housing):

As we know the Private Sector Landlord Selective Licensing scheme has been expanded to cover the whole of the Brent with the exception of Wembley Park Ward.

Can the Cabinet Member for Housing explain exactly why Wembley Park Ward has been excluded from the scheme.

Response:

Currently, under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have powers to introduce selective licensing of privately rented homes in order to tackle problems in their areas, or any part or parts of them, caused by:

- low housing demand (or is likely to become such an area) and/or;
- a significant and persistent problem caused by anti-social behaviour;
- poor housing conditions;
- high levels of migration;
- high level of deprivation;
- high levels of crime.

As part of our consideration for the introduction of Selective Licensing in Brent, extensive research was undertaken looking at the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

In essence the only two factors that could be attributed to areas in Brent were poor housing conditions and a significant and persistent problem caused by anti-social behaviour.

In the wards of Dollis Hill, Harlesden & Kensal Green and Willesden Green there was found to be grounds for the introduction of Selective Licensing on the grounds of poor housing conditions and a significant and persistent problem caused by anti-social behaviour and in the remaining wards (excluding Wembley Park), there was found to be grounds for the introduction of Selective Licensing on the grounds of poor housing conditions only.

For the ward of Wembley Park there were no grounds found for the introduction of selective licensing and therefore this ward was excluded from any designation.

5. Question from Councillor Georgiou to Councillor Tatler (Cabinet Member for Regeneration Planning & Growth):

Large scale events at Wembley Stadium, especially when held on three successive days, have a major impact on the ability of thousands of Brent residents to go about their everyday activities.

In 1999, planning permission was granted allowing the Stadium to hold 37 'Large' events, which has subsequently been increased to 46 'Large' events. Now the stadium wants this increased again to 54.

Can the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Growth advise:

1. Will Brent Council hold consultation meetings to hear first hand the impact the ever increasing number of Large-scale events have on the lives of local people?
2. Has Brent Council carried out a detailed impact assessment of how Large Event days affect the lives of local people?
3. Will due regard in the planning officers assessment be given to social impacts on lives of local people and not simply financial benefits for the Stadium?
4. What direct compensation or benefits can local people expect if the changes proposed were to be approved?

Response:

The Stadium has applied to vary a condition on their planning consent to allow them to hold up to 8 additional stadium events each year. They are also applying to increase the threshold above which the event cap applies from 51,000 to 60,000 people and to change the distinction between sporting and non-sporting events.

Events at the stadium been an important feature of Brent life for over 100 years bringing both benefits and impacts to our residents and businesses. There were no restrictions on the number of events at the previous stadium but an "event cap" was introduced for the new stadium. As you are aware, this started at 37 events and is now at 46 events following previous applications to increase the cap.

The Stadium have submitted supporting information with their application which examines the implications and potential impacts of the proposal, and this is available on our website. We are currently consulting on this application, with letters sent to over 50,000 properties in the Wembley Event Day Zone and site notices put up around the stadium. Over 100 comments have already been received and these will all be considered. We are not intending to hold a public meeting prior to the Planning Committee meeting for the application and it's important that comments on the planning application are provided in writing.

Impacts to local residents and businesses are being carefully considered. We do not consider profits for individual organisations such as the stadium, but we do take the wider benefits that a proposal may bring to the local economy into account.

We secure measures and obligations that are required to mitigate impacts of a proposal but are not able to secure compensation for local businesses or residents. We must also look at the difference between what can happen now and what could happen if the application is approved.

We encourage residents and local businesses to let us know what they think about the Stadium's proposal. We are still out to consultation, and it is likely that the application will be considered by the Planning Committee in August.